

Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, Oct. 21

County commissioners criticized; proposed 2021 budget discussed

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) board meeting on Oct. 21, the board discussed a lack of cooperation from the El Paso County government causing the district problems, met with a candidate for County Commissioner District 2; and reviewed the first proposed draft of the 2021 budget. Director Jim Abendschan was excused.

District problem-solving

Chairman Rick Nearhoof introduced Carrie Geitner, candidate for county commissioner, District 2, representing Falcon, Peyton, and part of Black Forest. For a district map, see <https://bocc.elpasoco.com/#1518019269958-b15cd39a-1cb9>.

Treasurer Jack Hinton, a former president of the Home Builder's Association (HBA), highlighted some of the problems facing BFFRPD and the El Paso Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and said the following:

- The district has a sizable amount of residential growth, but the commissioners do not want to discuss impact fees to support fire districts. See www.ocn.me/v17n7.htm#epcbocc.
- BOCC consistently ignores fire codes. Classic Homes has constructed a clubhouse at Flying Horse North that is well above the permitted height restrictions. See www.ocn.me/v20n2.htm#bfire.
- BFFRPD had an agreement with Classic Homes to collect an impact fee of \$400 per home. However, impact fees and fire codes have been "blown out" by the county commissioners.

Hinton said the goal of the district is to protect citizens and it is of the utmost importance for firefighters to go home to their families and be best equipped to protect lives and property.

Geitner said that of course firefighter safety and fire protection are important to everyone and if elected, her goal would be to problem-solve the issues and bring all the stakeholders to the table. However, she could not make any promises for the district but would coordinate a meeting for all parties in an effort to move the conversation forward.

Nearhoof said that listening would be a step in the right direction since District 1 County Commissioner Holly Williams has not returned BFFRPD phone calls and 13,000 residents in Black Forest need someone to fight for them.

Geitner said she was already building relationships with City Council members and county commissioners, and it would be no problem if she disagreed with certain policies and will stand up for what she believes is right, and even if nothing can be accomplished, it is important to move neighborhoods forward.

Fire Chief PJ Langmaid said a lack of cooperation and zero accountability with multiple county departments has created a multitude of challenges for the district, however, it's not the boots on the ground. He hopes that reasonable solutions can be found with regard to land development issues, the Sheriff's Office, impact fees, and sourcing water for fire protection.

A state law went into effect specifically after the Black Forest Fire to mandate developers install

30,000-gallon firefighting water cisterns for developments of five or more homes/parcels, but the law is being ignored by the BOCC, Langmaid said. See www.bffire.org/files/641a7ddae/2020+Guidance+document+water+supply+v.2.pdf.

Nothing comes for free and the growth northeast of Colorado Springs will continue and bring property taxes. However, there is no way for everyone to get everything they want, but we should be talking about the lack of water, said Geitner.

2021 proposed budget

Langmaid said the following:

- The draft 2021 budget is almost complete and the board received electronic copies on Oct. 15 for review.
- The budget is zero-based, showing where every dollar is going and is not as simple as adding 3% on every column; each line item is reviewed individually.
- Economists cannot predict what will happen to the economy over the next 18-36 months due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Although Colorado is seeing 7% growth, Denver residents are leaving urban areas and the district is facing its number one threat of loss of territory due to continued annexation of the district by the City of Colorado Springs. That will play a part in available revenue and the long-term sustainability of fire service within the district.
- The district is waiting for the final 2020 projections before making a few minor final adjustments.

Hinton said the draft 2021 budget has an estimated expenditure of \$4.31 million and is based on 14.5 mills as opposed to the previous 12.1 mills. Should Amendment B fail, then measures to prevent future revenue loss from the Gallagher Residential Assessment Rate drop will need to be implemented. See www.ocn.me/v20n10.htm#bffrpd.

The proposed 2021 budget will be open for public comment at the Nov. 18 regular board meeting.

Two engines and a tender sought

Langmaid requested the board approve the publication of two Request for Proposals (RFPs) for two engines and one tender on the district website. See www.ocn.me/v20n9.htm#bffrpd.

Hinton said that although he is not a big fan of lease-purchase agreements, at this point it is a way to get what the district needs. The fire chief is being diligent during the COVID-19 pandemic in protecting district assets, and we have an optimistic proposed budget.

Langmaid said the following:

- If the quotes received are perceived outrageous, a request for a retrofit of the existing apparatus has also been requested.
- Engines 712 and 763 could potentially be sold for a combined total of about \$440,000.
- Engine 712 does not fit into the district's standardized apparatus operational response model and would better suit a mountain department for its value and capability.

- Minor injuries have occurred due to the unnecessary height of Engine 712, which was placed into service in 2019, thus resulting in an increase of workers compensation.

A motion to publish the RFPs on the district website was approved, 4-0.

Fire chief's report

Langmaid gave the following updates:

- Calls for service, specifically EMS calls, have been lower than normal but there has been a noted increase in positive COVID-19 patients within the Black Forest community.
- Firefighter/EMTs Dustin Courter, Ky Emmons, Derrick Forn, KM Kuhlman, and Chris Oldham have recently joined BFFRPD to fill the vacant career positions.
- The orientation of volunteer EMS staff members has begun. It will assist with daily staffing and make career firefighters available for firefighting tasks.
- BFFRPD has been rotating crews on deployments to assist the state with the Cameron Peak Fire.
- The district responded to a couple of brush fires during October, and radio communications were successful.
- The Sheriff's Office is investigating possible arson and requires fire districts to perform origin and cause investigations. The new approach is in development in coordination with the area's fire investigators and local law enforcement.

Training update

Langmaid said crews are often contacted via the paging system with a reported "Structure Fire" as part of unannounced fire training. Crews are notified to respond non-emergent, and then realistic challenging scenarios are thrown at them in the community. Crews have continued training in water supply and wildland firefighting, and multi-agency drills will commence in November.

SHIELD616 goal met

Langmaid said the SHIELD616 fundraiser in conjunction with KOAA had been successful in meeting its goal of raising \$48,500 to provide each staff member with a \$2,200 full armor package, which includes a protective vest. SHIELD616 will present BFFRPD with the equipment in November.

Executive session

The board moved into executive session at 9:09 p.m. to determine positions relative to matters that may be subject to negotiations, developing strategy for negotiations, and instructing negotiators. No comments or actions were made when the board returned to the regular session.

The meeting adjourned at 10 p.m.

Meetings are usually held at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month at BFFRPD Station 1, 11445 Teachout Road, Colorado Springs. The next regular board meeting is scheduled for Nov. 18 at 7 p.m. For updates and minutes, visit www.bffire.org.

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Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District, Oct. 28

2021 budget changes presented; fire chief search progressing

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD) board meeting on Oct. 28, the board met via Zoom teleconference and in person to discuss the draft 2021 budget, which will be available for viewing

on the district website at www.tlmfire.org. The public hearing of the 2021 budget will be held at the Nov. 18 regular board meeting. The board also received an update on the progress of the fire chief search.

Treasurer Jason Buckingham was excused.

Draft 2021 budget discussion

Fire Chief Christopher Truty noted the following changes to the draft 2021 budget:

- Due to COVID-19 and the state of the economy, the projected property tax revenue assessment has dropped about \$6,000 and the EMS Supplement has increased by \$25,000 for a total increase of about \$20,000, bringing the total revenue to \$11.43 million.
- Operational expenses decreased by \$20,637 from \$9.13 million to \$9.11 million.
- Capital outlay remains at \$2.70 million.
- Specific Ownership Tax revenue is conservative-

ly projected to be about \$900,000 but could be 5% above the previous year and up to \$925,000.

Capital expenditures—building

Truty said with the purchase of the property next to Station 1, the district has gone back to the drawing board on the remodel/addition. The development of the site plan would include initial surface work and storage to the rear of Station 1 and is budgeted for \$95,000, which would be part of the full site plan. In addition, a four-bay apparatus apron repair at Station 1 is budgeted for \$100,000, and it's possible that could be wrapped into the remodeling project. The total budgeted for the Station 1 remodel is \$1.9 million for 2021. See www.ocn.me/v19n10.htm#tlmfpd.

Station 3 is budgeted at \$200,000 for a day room/kitchen remodel after the discovery of water damage to the outside walls of the kitchen. In addition, \$100,000 is budgeted for Station 3 concrete driveway



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