

ervoir Access Road, such as Ice Cave Creek Trail, Swank, Balanced Rock, and others, but please do not approach any Reservoir Trail work that is going on.

Wider issues and the scope of the problem

If you avoid peak times for hiking, you probably don't know how bad the crowding and parking can be. Hundreds of people descend on Palmer Lake to hike the trails, and the town is not equipped to handle the crowds. By and large, these people do not generate increased revenue for the town, so it is inaccurate to say the town is making money off them while simultaneously wanting them to stay away.

Folks who've studied the same problem in Manitou Springs have found that the majority of hikers do not have dinner or shop in town after they finish their hike. They hike and, in the case of Palmer Lake, visit the lake and they leave. This results in significant stress on infrastructure with no offsetting revenue for the town.

Before parking restrictions were implemented, 100 to 150 cars commonly were parked at the trailhead area. The trailhead parking lot has 16 designated spaces and no other facilities. The cars block driveways and streets and impede access. This also presented a significant fire hazard when cars were parked in grassy areas. Parking fines have had a marginal impact. It's also hard to get towing companies to come to Palmer Lake, so that is not a viable option. The town budget supports only two full-time police officers. They are supplemented with four officers on weekends to deal with the crowds, but that's yet more money out of a limited budget. More



enforcement against bad actors is not as easy as it would seem.

Trash and waste (dog and human) get left along the trails and at the trailhead.

Another issue facing the town is at the lake, where the shoreline is littered every weekend with discarded fish bait and lost fishhooks. Kids wading in the water there are at risk of tangling their feet with old fishhooks lost in the mud around the shoreline. As the lake gets more crowded, people drag their kayaks and paddle boards across marsh areas that are supposed to be protected and further erode the shoreline.

What needs to happen

As Christensen puts it, "I think a first step is educating everyone on the magnitude of the problem so more people are motivated to get involved in constructive ways instead of just complaining."



Above: Workers repair a retaining wall along the Reservoir Access Road. Photo by Steve Pate.

Metered parking could be a wise and necessary first step, even though it means having to pay to hike. Several members of the PLBOT are resistant to (or just hesitant about) visitors paying to park for a variety of reasons. If you support this idea, then let your voice be heard and encourage the board to act. That could generate much-needed rev-

enue to enable other initiatives (install trash cans at the trailhead, perhaps a bathroom, etc.) to help protect the trails and protect access to them.

For additional information, visit www.townofpalmerlake.com.

Steve Pate can be contacted at stevepate@ocn.me

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, June 16

No money approved for requests, including increased retirement benefits

By Allison Robenstein and Janet Sellers
During an in-person June 16 meeting, the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District board heard requests for money but made no decisions. A roof replacement is needed for Station 2 and a year-long debate on retirement increases continues. The public relations representative requested money for a website update and for electronic signs. The board is considering a ballot issue to de-Gallagherize their revenue. Joyce Hartung was noted absent.

Roof replacement

Chief Vinny Burns asked the board to approve money for a Station 2 roof replacement citing extensive wind and hail damage from 2019. The cost for the replacement is \$60,000, but insurance will cover \$42,000 of that.

There is no itemized budget for this project, nor is it part of the district's strategic plan.

Although numerous bids were received, some were itemized while others were not, so the board asked for each to be more specific as a way to compare each equitably.

Pension fund vote postponed yet again

The board discussed increasing the monthly pension for retirees after putting it on hold at the last meeting.

Background: During the September 2019 pension meeting, Lt. Bryan Ackerman and Lt. Tim Hampton asked the board to consider increasing the monthly payment to their 13 retirees. An actuarial study shows a variety of increases that the board could approve. For example, to increase the current monthly payment from \$400 to \$450, the fund would need to receive an annual increase of \$6,583. See <https://ocn.me/v19n10.htm#dwfpd>.

After a short discussion, the board decided without a formal vote to table the decision until budget time. Newly seated Director Charles Fleece said,

"Let's see what plays out."

Public relations and website update on hold

Battalion Chief Sean Pearson, who is the district's public relations representative, gave the board an update to the website update efforts and community relations initiatives. A committee led by Pearson has identified several possible initiatives including chipping days, teaching classes to residents, and an auxiliary program.

Pearson said the committee has also been reviewing costs for the website update. Costs range wildly from \$10,000 for a commercial website builder down to \$1,000 for a local small business to create the site. In the meantime, the district is creating weekly, educational Facebook posts. See <https://www.facebook.com/wescottfire/>.

He asked the board to approve \$16,000 for electronic signs at each of the stations, but the board tabled the decision until they review the 2021 budget.

Possible election to de-Gallagherize

Chief Vinny Burns said the Colorado State Fire Chiefs is encouraging local fire departments to put de-Gallagherizing language on the November ballot.

Background: The Gallagher amendment is a voter-approved measure requiring 45 percent of the state's total property tax burden to be paid by residences in order to relieve the increases in residential property taxes. The other 55 percent is paid by nonresidential (commercial) property. Because of TABOR, the tax rate can never increase. Fluctuations in the residential tax directly affect the district's budget.

A ballot initiative to de-Gallagherize would mean the district is unaffected by the changes to the residential tax rate in order to maintain a consistent cash flow.

If the board were to create such an

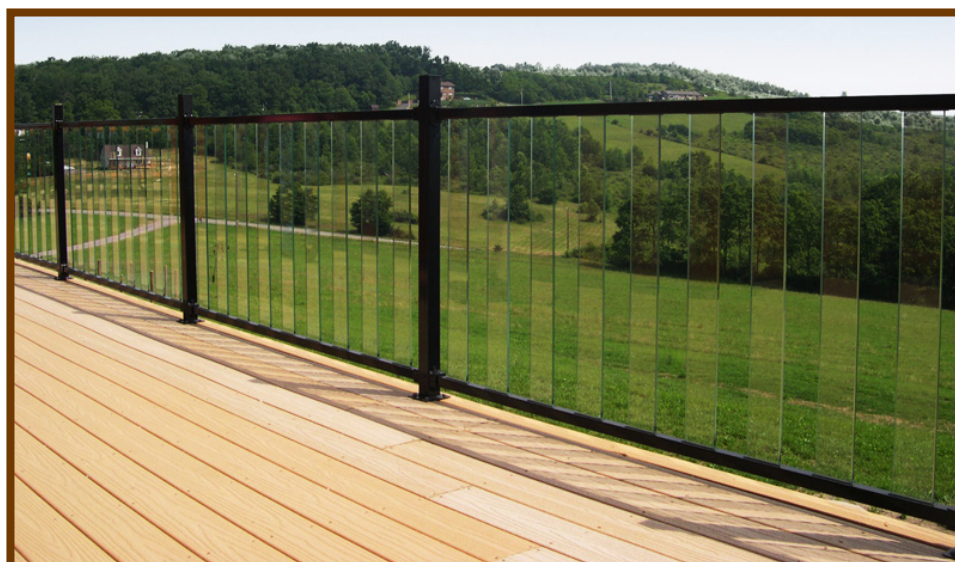
DWFPD (Cont. on 16)

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