

equivocally, how the new organization will provide great service to the citizens and the internal staff with strong data, no questions asked.

- It shows all the response areas and how DWFPD Station 1 will fit into the new organization.
- The unification will provide financial stability into the future, and that alone shows the study was worth the money.
- The study provides a good road map of how to combine the districts operationally and use the station areas.
- The possibility of fire service ambulance coverage in the Wescott area as early as the first or second quarter of 2022, will be an increased service for residents. American Medical Response currently operates an ambulance at Station 1.
- A third ambulance would allow the new organization to capture ambulance revenue that is currently going into the private sector.
- Station 2 (located on the northeast corner of Stagecoach Road and Highway 83) is not always in service due to a lack of staff. The unification would rectify the staffing issues, and next spring could be much different.
- The study also made a recommendation to increase the data collection capability in both organizations and add an administration position and increase the line staff by six personnel.
- The new combined organization will be able to meet many more of the international standards for performance, becoming a five-station department with 20 people on duty. TLMFPD is currently a three-station department and has not reached accreditation yet, but Kovacs has plans for the process in 2022.

Financially, the Donald Wescott end-of-year balance is declining annually and although able to provide services in the future by ourselves, some changes would be needed, and fully staffing two stations will be really difficult, said Jones.

- Jones also said: Both district's attorneys have drafted a contract for services to begin in 2022 and the merger would be completed at a later date once the mill levies have been addressed.
- The bridge to the merger is a Fire Authority, however another option could be a partial contract for service where all employees would become TLMFPD employees.
- We are almost there, and we do not know which direction each board wants to go, but after both boards have met in

executive session, within 48 hours the path forward will be clearer. (See the joint special meeting article on page 11).

Chairman Mark Gunderman said ESCI did a good job presenting the study and we are getting to the point of finding the next logical step, and hopefully trying to make it happen, but the board questions will be kept for the district attorney in executive session.

Gunderman asked Kovacs if he was aware of the accreditation issue before he arrived and was it something important that he wanted to do for TLMFPD?

Kovacs said the following:

- The philosophy of accreditation is two-fold, both organizationally and personal. It's for professional growth, and as an advocate of lifelong learning and a huge advocate for providing employees the opportunity to reach higher education goals.
- With any organization I am fortunate enough to lead, the accreditation process constantly makes you reflect on how you are doing business and we can always strive to do better.
- TLMFPD is investing \$237,000 in software to begin data mining all the information to meet the national standards at the beginning of 2022.
- The process is a heavy lift, and requires an incredible amount of time and energy, but there is value in it, and it is a "badge of honor" for any department to achieve accreditation.
- The first step has already been made, with the five-year strategic plan that the TLMFPD board approved. That document is available on the district website at www.tlmfire.org.
- The process will be reviewed and adjusted as needed when the organization moves from a three-station department to a five-station department.
- A combined administration workforce with an accreditation manager in the new organization will create the remaining two foundational documents: Standards of Coverage and Community Risk Assessment. The documents are the next steps toward achieving the accreditation process.

Gunderman thanked Kovacs for his explanation.

Note: The board may hold a special meeting to discuss the unification, in addition to the regular meeting in early Dec., for updates see www.wescott-fire.org.

2022 budget proposed

Jones said the district has to build a budget as a fully independent agency regardless of the unification process. The projected property tax revenues for 2022 is a little over

\$3.3 million, with a 13 percent increase in assessed value for the 2022 budget year, and he said:

- Specific ownership taxes are projected conservatively due to the lack of vehicle availability at dealerships.
- The district is not anticipating any grant revenue, but maybe another round of COVID-19 reimbursements.
- The total revenue increase for 2022 will be about \$128,236 or about a 4 percent overall increase.
- The district has revenue over expenditure of about \$119,000 and \$50,000 of that is dedicated to the starting fund balance to begin re-building the reserves, as previously directed by the board.

The budget is still carrying a fire chief salary, but an amendment can be made should the partial contract for service go ahead in January, and if the merger does not happen, one or two budget amendments will be needed to make the budget work in 2022, said Jones.

Jones suggested the following:

- A 4 percent salary increase across the board that matches TLMFPD and that will continue to implement the 20-step plan pay system.
- An increase in the communications budget for the purchase of Mobile Data Communications (MDCs), a mounted lap

top computer. Currently, DWFPD relies solely on radio contact when responding, but TLMFPD does have MDCs. During a recent mutual aid call a TLMFPD responding Battalion Chief had to relay sensitive information to the Wescott crew engine via cell phone.

- A move to Microsoft Office 365, the same information technology system as TLMFPD, would be beneficial instead of using a number of different applications.

Pay scale adoption Jones said the following:

- In the past the pay plan has just been referenced in the budget, but district counsel Emily Powell of Ireland Stapleton Pryor Pascoe PC law firm, has advised that the board does not have to adopt a pay plan annually if the budget allows for the pay increase.
- TLMFPD has a five-step pay plan which is more common and most organizations have not used the 20-step plan since the 90s.
- It is important for a governing body to control the number of personnel positions and if you do not have that the fire chief can do things you might not like.

Jones suggested the board adopt the number of staff positions and the pay scale in the pay plan.

Gunderman said the

board should adopt the pay plan and continue on the assumption that we are operating as a separate entity.

The proposed 2022 budget will be available for public review on the district website and the public hearing will be held virtually at the next board meeting. See www.wescottfire.org.

2021 budget status


Jones said the district continues to watch the ending fund balance after discovering in July during the budget review that reserve funding has been spent down over the past couple of years. The district should be seeing a \$1.3 million ending fund balance to roll over into the 2022 budget year, but it will be in the high \$900,000 range, said Jones.

Jones also said a budget amendment in Jan. 2022 for about \$20,000 to \$30,000 will be needed to cover funding for issues that have accumulated over the past several years. The amendment is not nearly as much as previously thought (about \$150,000) due to the district receiving additional wildland deployment reimbursements. See www.ocn.me/v21n11.htm#dwfpd and www.ocn.me/v21n9.htm#dwfpd.

October financial update


Administrative Assistant Stacey Popovich read the financials as of Oct. 31 and said the following:

- The Community Bank of Colorado Fund has a balance of \$227,579.
- The Wells Fargo Public Trust Fund has a balance



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(Services will run about 1 hour and 15 minutes.)**

There'll be fun for the whole family with carols, candlelight and engaging teaching from the Bible.

Kids activities (birth - kindergarten) are available at every service or have the family attend the services together.

A program for kids and adults with special needs at the 3pm service.