

PALMER LAKE (Cont. from 18)

water use rate—that the previous board had passed in 2019 but that had been implemented only for one of those three rates. Those increases are required to service loan payments that will increase in 2024 and to fund future water needs. Collins emphasized that loan payments are being made but asked the board how it wanted to proceed with the increase in rates, specifically does the board want to implement the 3% increase for water taps, use, and base rates the previous board approved after hearing from a water rate consultant in 2019. See <https://www.ocn.me/v19n4.htm#pltc>.

Dawson asked Collins to project the 3% annual increases over 40 years to determine when funds will begin to accumulate.

Bass moved to increase the rates as specified in the existing resolutions. The motion passed with only Stuth voting no.

Collin said the increases would appear in customer bills in April.

Policy for short-term rentals in early stages

At the workshop meeting on Feb. 25, Krob gave the board an overview of short-term rental (STR) policy in other communities. STR policies usually address the number of days and nights that qualify as “short term,” where STR are allowed, and whether the number of STRs is capped. Other issues are how to tax and inspect them. Permits and sales taxes are usually required, he said.

Havenar said she believed there were currently 30 STRs in Palmer Lake and that a bed tax should be required.

Dawson and Stuth said how to handle parking should be covered in the STR policy.

Collins said she would research how other communities handle STRs.

The workshop meeting was adjourned with no specific actions taken.

Traffic enforcement program focuses on Highway 105

At the Feb. 25 meeting, Sgt. Adam Lundy of the Palmer Lake Police Department (PLPD) told the board the department had seen an alarming uptick in traffic accidents since 2017, with crashes increasing from 35 in 2017 to 68 in 2019—a 94% increase. Lundy said the Selective Traffic Enforcement Program, or STEP, had been used across the Front Range and had reduced traffic accidents in six months to a year, encouraging the PLPD to implement it to reduce the number of traffic accidents.

Lundy said the Gap project to improve I-25 was rerouting traffic to Highway 105.

The STEP program will be self-funding, Lundy said, and will put one officer out on Highway 105 once a week to write tickets and enforce traffic laws. Data will be analyzed at the end of the year to track changes. Lundy asked the community to identify problem areas where enforcement would be helpful.

Special event permits approved

The board approved two special event licenses in February: the first for the Palmer Lake Wine Festival and the second for 24 Hours of Palmer Lake, an endurance race.

Matthew Hexter told the board about his plans for a wine festival to be held on Sept. 11, 2021 at the

northwest corner of the Palmer Lake Recreation Area. Hexter said he and Paul Murphy held a successful festival in 2019 but skipped 2020 due to COVID-19 concerns. He told the board he hoped to have 2,000 attendees at the festival.

Bass said he thought the 2019 festival was “really well done.”

Darin Lewandowski requested a special event permit for a running event to be held at Palmer Lake Recreational Area on two consecutive weekends, the first from April 9 to April 11, 2021 and the second from April 16 to April 18, 2021. Runners will try to complete as many laps around Palmer Lake as they can within a 24-hour period, Lewandowski said, adding he expects around 95 runners total, who will be divided into two cohorts divided between the two weekends.

The board voted to approve both special event requests.

Business license granted

The board approved a business license for Master Bilt Homes at 755 Highway 105. Only Padgett voted no.

The Board of Trustees is scheduled to hold three meetings in March, a regular meeting on March 11 and a workshop and regular meeting on March 25. The workshop will be held at 5 p.m. and the regular meetings at 6 p.m. All meetings will be at Town Hall, 42 Valley Crescent. Meetings are normally held on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month. Information: 481-2953.

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Donald Wescott Fire Protection District meeting, Feb. 16

Meeting with firefighters’ union approved

By Allison Robenstein

The Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWF-PD) met Feb. 16 to approve a meet-and-confer agreement and to explain the plans for the search for a new fire chief.

Chief Vinny Burns and Director Charlie Fleece were absent.

The board approved meeting minutes from Dec. 1, Jan. 19, and the executive session Jan. 25.

Meet-and-confer process set in motion

Chairman Mark Gunderman said recently Wescott fire fighters have formed their own union.

Michelle Ferguson, the district’s attorney, said the meet-and-confer resolution is not a recognition of the union, but it outlines a process required by statute to set up meetings between the chief staff, employees, and the union, and when board members can be present.

The Colorado Firefighters Safety Act, part of Senate Bill 13-205, “grants professional firefighters the ability to collectively bargain upon approval by the voters of a political subdivision.” There was previously no such agreement about the rules. The board is obligated to meet and confer at the request of the firefighters or their organization. This process does not require voter approval. The act reads, “Under this process, the parties are to discuss policies and other matters related to employment, including safety and equipment, but not compensation.”

Ferguson said the union or employees put in motion the process by which to set up a meeting. A board member or two may be present at the meeting, which hasn’t been scheduled yet.

The resolution was unanimously approved.

Chief search discussion

Gunderman said the board was going to hold a special meeting Feb. 18 to discuss moving forward with replacing Chief Vinny Burns, who is retiring this year.

- Initially, Gunderman said the board made a decision to look externally for an interim fire chief, because that gives the district flexibility. He said the board wants executive leadership to stay where they are for now and lead the projects they are leading.
- Ferguson and Gunderman clarified the board has not made an official motion to hire an interim chief.
- The board cannot make a decision in executive session, but they can vote when in public session at a special meeting once back in public session.

Exhaust system, committees, and protective armor

Battalion Chief Shannon Balvanz said the station exhaust system installers are “two feet away from completing the project.” All three stations will have the systems installed. Last month, he told the board Station 3 would need an electrical panel to handle the new system at a cost of \$8,500. The board didn’t agree to it. See www.ocn.me/v21n2.htm#dwfpd. The installers realized the existing panel would work after all. The installation should be done by Feb. 19. Then every truck exhaust pipe will be retrofitted to use the system which hooks to the tailpipe, keeping exhaust out of the station.

There was board consensus for approval of Gunderman’s idea to establish committees on compensation and strategic plan/capital improvements in 2021.

Early in 2020, the district received a \$5,000 donation from a resident to be used for personal protective armor. See www.ocn.me/v20n3.htm#dwfpd. Lt. Curt Leonhardt said all the ballistic equipment has been delivered except the helmets. Because fire personnel are going into active shooter scenes much earlier now, they need this protection. The idea is to get in quickly and haul people out to stop the bleed.

Public comments on safety

Resident and former DWFPD board member Dennis Feltz said he received an anonymous letter that makes serious accusations against senior leadership of the district, which various members of the community received and which he forwarded to the whole board. He asked that the board investigate the allegations to ensure the safety of the community and the firefighters themselves.

Ferguson said there were no allegations that either district operations or citizen services were being impacted. “We are not at liberty to speak about personnel matters,” she said, noting the board has taken the remedial actions necessary to address the complaints they received and that the letter included inaccurate information, according to the board’s investigation.

Gunderman said anonymous letters often include half-truths, refusing to make it a discussion item. Director Joyce Hartung agreed, saying they should not react to anonymous letters. She invited the writer to come forward and address the board directly.

Resident Mary Gunderman said she loves the new website because it provides a lot of good information.

The meeting adjourned at 4:59 p.m.

The next Donald Wescott fire district meeting is scheduled for March 16 at 4:00 p.m. If the meeting is held in person it will be at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Dr. For a virtual meeting, the phone number is 669-900-9128, and the meeting code is 980 378 2073. Meetings are usually on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. For information, call Executive Administrator Stacey Popovich at 719-488-8680 or see www.wescottfire.org.

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Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, Feb. 17

In-person attendance only—despite storm and COVID-19

By Natalie Barszcz

The Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) board met in person at Station 1 on Feb. 17 to discuss the proposed agenda that is available on the BFFRPD website. Due to a heavy regional snowstorm, OCN was unable to attend in person and record the public meeting.

OCN made a request for a recording or remote joining instructions before the board meeting, but BFFRPD was unable to meet the request since no conference call was arranged, and BFFRPD could not

provide a recording of the public meeting.

Note: On this date, the COVID-19 Status of El Paso County Public Health Department was Level Yellow “Concern,” which recommends “minimize in-person meetings when possible and provide remote alternatives.” The January BFFRPD meeting, when the county was at Level Orange, was also in-person only. For more information visit: www.elpasocountyhealth.org.

For updates, current financial information, board agendas, and meeting minutes, district residents

should refer to: www.bffire.org.

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 is scheduled for March 17 at 7 p.m. For updates, visit www.bffire.org.

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