

- The district has found a way to save money if employees can show proof of alternative primary medical coverage on a year-by-year basis during the open enrollment season or when joining the district. About six employees may opt out of district medical coverage, and that could save about \$24,000 per year, beginning in 2022.
- Elizabeth Fire Protection District sent a recruit class to the district training center for a day of live fire training and sent a check for \$2,500 to offset costs.
- The recent commercial projects in Black Forest have been moving forward, and the Flying Horse North hydrant has been approved for the temporary Clubhouse.

**Supply chain issues**

Vice Chairman Nate Dowden asked if any authorized equipment purchases have been held back in the budget. Langmaid said the following:

- The department has made purchases but held back on some due to supply issues.
- The district could not buy gym equipment last year due to supply issues and we are just getting notifications that items are now available.
- Bunker gear could be delayed up to nine months, and an order placed in July would not be delivered until March 2022.
- Some vendors are delivering within days, and

the district has purchased and received new boots for wildland firefighting.

- The district has purchased and received 10 Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA's) for \$25,000 and is now working on locating additional SCBA bottles.
- Replacement tires will be a separate line item in the 2022 budget, and the district is considering purchasing tires now for 2022 to ensure availability.
- Medical supplies are still in high demand, and the goal is to order well in advance to keep a six-month of operational supplies in stock.

The district will need to choose which items for firefighting and rescue operations need to be prioritized until the amount of medical equipment and supplies needed for the COVID-19 response can be determined, said Langmaid.

**Bi-annual equipment inspection**

Dowden requested the August agenda include an equipment inspection that has not taken place yet in 2021. See [www.ocn.me/v19n9.htm#bffrpd](http://www.ocn.me/v19n9.htm#bffrpd).

Langmaid requested the inspection take place the first week of August before the budget process begins. Nearhoof and Hinton confirmed they would perform the inspection together in early August. The meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, July 20*

**2021 budget tight; staff promoted**

*By Natalie Barszcz*

The Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) board met in person and remotely via Zoom on July 20 in an effort to minimize COVID-19 exposure to emergency responders. During the meeting, three staff members were promoted, and the board received a mid-year review of the 2021 budget. The board heard about the potential for a 2021 November Ballot Initiative that would seek to permanently decrease residential and commercial property assessment rates. The board also heard about a request for a cell tower lease agreement.

Treasurer Duane Garrett and Director Joyce Hartung were excused.

**2021 mid-year budget review**

Interim Fire Chief Warren Jones said that he, Administrative Assistant Stacey Popovich, and Battalion Chief Scott Ridings were involved in the 2021 budget mid-year review process with Garrett participating virtually. Jones said the following:

- The district has increased its current revenue by \$116,368, mostly from the reimbursement of COVID-19 expenses.
- The negative gap between current revenues and current expenses is 5% of expenditures at \$149,388. Not a stable situation, but manageable.
- There are reserves of \$152,705 available to help bridge the gap between current revenue and expenditures.
- Reserves in 2021 are adequate to provide for TABOR and the 25% cashflow reserve for 2022.
- Expenditure increases of \$305,003 (primarily for salary and legal) is projected to be spent through the end of year.
- The district underbudgeted for overtime last year.
- Staff members have identified about \$39,247 that can be saved in the operating budget.

Jones said the district is not in a hole yet, but it has to do something if it keeps spending at the level it is spending now. The projected 2021 end of year balance is \$989,970, of which the district is required to reserve \$96,000 for TABOR and carry 25% of the 2021 annual revenue (about \$740,265) for cash flow for the first quarter of 2022, before property taxes are received again next March, said Jones.

Jones also said he is confident the district could increase revenue with wildland fire deployments and then close the negative spending gap by reducing expenditures with the following:

- Minimizing staff to reduce overtime.
- Reducing or eliminating radio replacement.
- Reducing or eliminating external training.
- Using reserve funds to fill the gaps.
- Using a combination of all the above.

The budget will be out of overtime revenue before the end of the year, and it is unlikely that committed expenses in the 2022 budget will be funded, he said.

Director Charlie Fleece said he trusted Jones to send staff to wildland fire deployments, but he does not like leaving the reserve fund low and is curious

to see what will happen next year. He agreed with Chairman Mark Gunderman and Secretary Larry Schwarz on maintaining staff levels and the safety of personnel, which they agreed must be given priority over new equipment, safety measures permitting.

Gunderman said the district should order replacement radios and figure out training, and implement a combination of the measures suggested.

**Tax rates set to decrease**

Legal Counsel Emily Powell of Ireland Stapleton Pryor & Pascoe PC law firm in Denver updated the board on future property tax revenues and said the following:

- Even though the district de-Gallagherized in 2020, and the Gallagher Amendment was repealed at the same time, it is not the only legal means of affecting the way property tax is assessed in Colorado. See [www.ocn.me/v20n10.htm#dwfpd](http://www.ocn.me/v20n10.htm#dwfpd).
- The proposed Ballot Initiative 27 is currently collecting signatures and, if enough are received, the question will be placed on the November election ballot. The Initiative will ask voters to lower the Residential Assessment Rate (RAR) of 7.15% to 6.5% and the commercial assessment rate from 29% to 26.4%.
- The initiative will be appealing to homeowners, and it is widely assumed that if placed on the ballot it is likely to pass, but it will have a significant impact on the fire service and schools, and since fire departments rely on property taxes it would be impactful.
- Senate Bill 21-293 passed into law on June 8 and will include different tax rate reductions for different classifications of property and a two-year temporary reduction in RAR's and Commercial Assessment Rates for assessment years 2022 and 2023.
- The proponents of Ballot Initiative 27 believe that Senate Bill 21-293 thwarts their efforts to reduce taxes, and nobody can predict what will happen next.
- The potential changes will not affect the budget for 2022, but it will require a change for the 2023 budget unless there is a massive change in legislation.

Powell also said that the wording on the ballot when the district de-Gallagherized in 2020 was written very broadly and stated that if there were changes in the method of calculating assessed valuation of one or more property class, including but not limited to changes due to the Gallagher Amendment or for any other reason, such as action by the Legislature, then the mill levy can be adjusted to match and offset the negative effects of any loss in revenue, without additional voter approval.

Jones said any changes will need to be factored into the future revenue projection during the feasibility study for the unification process with Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District. The changes for the 2022 tax year might be a "moot point," because

**Correction**

In the BFFRPD article in the July issue of OCN, "Spartan Vacuum Industrial (SVI) Co." should have read "Super Vacuum Industrial (SVI) Co." OCN regrets the error, which occurred during the editorial process.

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Meetings are usually held on the third Wednesday every month at Station 1, 11445 Teachout Road, Colorado Springs. The next regular meeting is rescheduled for Wednesday, Aug. 25 at 7 p.m. For updates, agendas, and minutes, visit [www.bffire.org](http://www.bffire.org) or contact the district Administrative Officer Rachel Dunn at [admin@bffire.org](mailto:admin@bffire.org) or call (719)-495-4300.

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