

opers of the level of service provided with the current staffing, he said.

Rebitski said:

- The executive staff had been working closely with FHN from nearly the day they broke ground.
- He and Langmaid had met with Classic Homes' executive staff numerous times, and the district had outlined the water requirements to provide fire protection for the plot submittals through the El Paso County Planning and Community Development Department.
- Through those meetings, a Fire Department connection was installed at the FHN Pump House, and a fire hydrant was installed to protect the clubhouse.
- The district defaults to the International Fire Code, and all fire inspections for commercial properties are automatically reviewed by the Colorado Springs Fire Marshal's Office. District staff members attend those reviews.
- Commercial development is required to meet the minimum fire codes determined by the fire service, and those codes benefit the Fire Department.

Hinton said the county commissioners need to be notified in writing about the district's capabilities to provide adequate fire protection services, and it should include the plans for building the fire station on the lot designated at FHN off of Black Forest Road before it reaches the county planning commissioners.

Rebitski said Langmaid discussed the potential for a fire station large enough to house a ladder truck close to the hotel at FHN with Doug Stimple, chief executive officer of

Classic Homes. The notes will be discussed with the chief, said Rebitski.

Dowden said it is the applicant's duty to provide the necessary documents to the fire district executive staff on how they propose to conform with the applicable requirements. He agreed with Hinton and said it's a "dicey area" if they are not showing final construction plans and only looking for preliminary plat approval. Once they cross that hurdle and it is established that construction is OK, then the county and the district have to figure out how to meet the demands. The district cannot comment if there is an absence of detail sufficient to comment on, if that is the case, said Dowden.

Hinton said someone will have to pay for the new station on the land donated by Classic Homes, and there are only two ways to accomplish that: with a bond or with a station built by the developer to the district's specifications. See www.ocn.me/v22n2.htm#bffrpd.

Ladder truck delayed

Rebitski said the 2005 used Pierce aerial mid-mount ladder truck will be delayed until January after leaks were found in the water way (fire hose supply line pipe). It is not a cheap fix, but the installation of an all-new water way will be covered by Pierce Manufacturing.

Note: OCN could not hear Hinton clearly for the first 10 minutes of the meeting during part of the financial report and his comments on the discussion with Williams. The Zoom meeting operator did respond to OCN's request, asking Hinton to "speak up" for the benefit of the Zoom attendees, but only after the 10 minutes had elapsed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, Oct. 18

Mill levy adjustment approved, residents voice multiple concerns

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) meeting on Oct. 18, the board approved a mill levy adjustment for 2023 and addressed multiple concerns raised by the residents from the Sun Hills area of the district.

Fire Chief Andy Kovacs was absent.

2023 mill levy adjustment

Division Chief of Operations Jonathan Bradley requested the board consider approval of the 2023 mill levy adjustment recommendation, allowing the district to capture lost revenue that will occur after the state Legislature passed a temporary Residential Assessment Rate (RAR) reduction to 6.95% for 2023. The reduction will continue for 2024 and the rate is set to return to 7.15% for 2025. See www.ocn.me/v22n10.htm#dwfpd.

President Mark Gunderman said if he knew for sure that the merger with Monument Fire (MFD) was a done deal, the district would not be asking for the lost revenue. The merger is not signed, sealed, and delivered, even though the district is 80% through the process. Should the merger prove unsuccessful, the \$77,386 annual lost revenue could go toward the salary for a fire chief, said Gunderman.

District attorney Emily Powell of Ireland Stapleton Pryor Pascoe PC law firm said:

- Waiving the right to collect the authorized mill levy adjustment is not recommended, although a nice break for the residents, recapturing the revenue at a later date has never been tested and could prove legally difficult.
- TABOR dictates that a local government cannot certify a mill levy above that in a prior year without an election.
- If the district waives the right to an authorized mill levy increase and attempts to certify it later, someone could challenge the district for increasing the mill levy without an election.
- The scenario has never been tested in the courts, apart from a similar school district case, but it would not be good for the district and its taxpayers to be the test case.

Gunderman said if the 2023 election is successful, and the merger is completed, the district mill levy will go down about 3 mills and match the MFD mill levy of 18.4 mills.

Vice President Larry Schwarz said he would vote to bypass the opportunity to implement the adjustment. Even though the reduction is a small amount, the residents are suffering from inflation and higher property taxes, and the residents should have the opportunity to enjoy the lower RAR.

Powell said residents would see about a \$22 reduction in 2023 on a home valued at \$600,000.

Schwarz said from the public's perspective, the adjustment is an increase. When the district is asking the residents to approve ballot questions in November 2023, this slight mill levy match could be a consideration. With all the increased commercial, residential, and multi-family growth bringing in additional revenue, the \$77,000 will be quickly absorbed, and in MFD the growth is everywhere. The dollars the district is saving by approving the adjustment may not mean a lot, but the perception of the voters may be very important. The board needs to show it is budgeting well during these times, he said.

Gunderman said there is no right or wrong, but the adjustment would provide a safety net if the merger does not go through.

The board approved the administrative staff to implement the RAR stabilization, 4-1.

Public comments—residents voice concerns

Resident Steve Simpson said allowing public comments at the beginning of the meeting and not at the end may deprive citizens of a chance to give feedback on the board decisions made during the meeting.

Gunderman said the public comment session at the beginning of each meeting is to allow the public to comment on the agenda before board action is taken, and a second public comment session is not usually needed.

Simpson also said:

- Last month, the board discussed the sale of 1500 Sun Hills Drive (formerly DWFPD Station 3) in executive session, and it is not a bad idea to get rid of it since the board has been discussing the sale for seven years.
- The board should defer taking action to engage an agreement with a broker and allow input from the community.
- The public is unaware of the full details, but maybe a letter explaining the facts could be provided to the residents.

Gary Nelson, board president of Emergency Incident Support (EIS) said EIS provides food, hydration, and safe haven to all the El Paso County Fire Departments and other first responder units, to include neighboring counties, and would like to return to using 1500 Sun Hills Drive as its base of operations.

Resident Fred Workman said there is concern from the neighbors with regard to the potential for an outside buyer building a residential property on the site, which doesn't meet the minimum lot size in the Sun Hills covenants. He urged the board to revert the property back to the original owner for a fair price and not put it on the open market.

Resident Jerry McLaughlin said the board should not sell, but allow Fleece (the adjacent property owner) to purchase the property or donate the building to EIS, and not allow a greedy realtor to "pounce on it."

Sun Hills property sale

Gunderman said the 1500 Sun Hills Drive (formerly Station 3) property appraisal had valued it at \$390,000, and Powell and real estate attorney Kelly Duke of Ireland Stapleton Pryor Pascoe PC law firm had examined the historical data to determine how the property could be sold. The findings determined the property can only be sold to another fire protection district or for private residential use, said Gunderman.

Duke confirmed the parameters of the property sale and said:

- In 1981 the district purchased .44 acres from MOR-MAC Inc. to construct a fire station.
- The property was located in the A-4 zoning district, now equivalent to RR-5 zoning, requiring a parcel minimum of 5 acres.
- The district requested a variance from the El Paso County Board of Adjustment provided a special use permit was obtained, and the property be platted in accordance with certain sub-division regulations.
- A special use permit and an exemption from subdivision regulations were approved by El Paso County in 1982, and the emergency facility was built in 1984.
- In November 2016 the district reconsidered the use of the station and decided to place the property on the market in January 2017.

Meetings are usually held on the third Wednesday of the month at Station 1, 11445 Teachout Road, Colorado Springs. Meetings are open to the public in person or via Zoom. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 16 at 7 p.m. For joining instructions, updates, agendas, minutes, and the chief's and treasurer's reports visit www.bffire.org or contact Administrative Officer Rachel Dunn at admin@bffire.org or call 719-495-4300.

Natalie Barszcz can be reached at nataliebarszcz@ocn.me.

Woodmoor Handyman
 Remodels • Electrical • Plumbing
 No job too small
 Call for an estimate today!
(719) 640-5751 (office)
(719) 650-7252 (cell)
1-719-568-2957 (cell)



Specializing in Residential Cleaning *A Gift of Time*
 Overwhelmed?
 Want your home spic and span?
Call Stacy today!
(719) 930-2178
www.agiftoftime.us
 Weekly • Bi-weekly • Monthly • Move-outs • Move-ins.



ELIZABETH BRYSON INSURANCE GROUP
Medicare help now available!
Have this card?



Give me a call today, and I will help you understand Medicare and the options available.



Elizabeth Bryson
 719-418-9350
 325 2nd Street #M,
 Monument, CO 80132
www.ebinsurancegroup.com

We do not offer every plan available in your area. Any information we provide is limited to those plans we do offer in your area. Please contact Medicare.gov or 1-800-MEDICARE to get information on all of your options.

FACINELLI MOTORS



TIME FOR A ROAD TRIP CHECK?
QUALITY AUTO REPAIR
 SUBARU • HONDA • TOYOTA
CALL TODAY 488-6729
 706 Westward Lane, Palmer Lake
 Mon.-Fri. 7:30 am-6:00 pm
 Call for appointment. We book up quickly.

