

Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, April 20

# Station alerting approved; strategic planning defined

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Black Forest Fire Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) meeting on April 20, the board approved funding for the unbudgeted, long-awaited Fire Station Alerting System and heard about the strategic plan for the district. The two outgoing board directors administered the oath of office during a swearing in ceremony for two probationary personnel.

**Station alerting approved**  
Deputy Chief James Rebitski said the district had received the final quote for the installation of the Station Alerting system.

Fire Chief PJ Langmaid said the long-awaited El Paso County Fire Station Alerting System project had taken seven years to complete, and it was a huge credit to Fire Chief Steve Conner of the Cimarron Hills Fire Department to have figured out how to get around the friction points within the county, and he added:

- The cost of about \$92,000 to install the Fire Station Alerting System in both stations came as a shock to the department.
- The system is not fully budgeted, although \$75,000 was set aside in the Capital Improvement Fund for communications, and the district saved money by cancelling the election, received a grant, and the payment for the Type 3 fire engine is now deferred until the 2023 budget.
- The board will need to provide direction on which pot of money should be used.

Treasurer Jack Hinton said any line item can be moved around within the budget legally just as long as the district does not go over budget by more than 10 percent, and doing so would

mean a revised budget submitted to the state. Hinton recommended using the Capital Improvement Fund and leaving the budget alone.

Vice Chairman Nate Dowden made a motion to reallocate \$43,000 (the first payment on the engine) to the acquisition of the Fire Station Alerting System, and the remaining funds be taken out of the Capital Improvement Fund, with the total expenditure not to exceed \$100,000.

The board unanimously approved the purchase and the reallocation of funds.

**Strategic planning**

Langmaid said he expects the firefighters and officers to think strategically all of the time, one to five years ahead, and the command staff to think grand strategically, five, 10, and 20 years ahead. The region needs to be thinking regionally, but the district is challenged obtaining information from El Paso County for the preparation of the pre-plan maps for wildland fires. There is a friction point, and communication issues continue with the county. The district is building a stronger relationship with the City of Colorado Springs because it is getting things done, enabling the district to work on evacuation planning. He also said:

- The district needs to prepare for wildland fires through training, prevention with mitigation, planning, and that includes the pre-plans already in development, and the addition of evacuation maps using Zonehaven software (an evacuation management and community support tool).
- No agency in the entire country is an island, and the Fire Department of

New York City needed help on 9/11. So if people have their ego in the way, the citizens end up suffering.

- The district is trying to build coalitions, and the executive staff will know what the community will look like in four years. Regionally, the district needs to look from a grand strategic perspective for those years, and to not plan for that is a dereliction of duty.
- The performance piece falls to the line staff, and they will crush everything. The new training officer will need the same aggressive mentality as the rest of the department, and care will be taken filling the training chief position—there are “big boots” to fill.
- The district will be thinking ahead due to the supply chain issues, knowing that apparatus will likely not be delivered until 2024-25.
- A regional renumbering of fire houses throughout the county has begun, and a decision will be needed on how many fire stations the district needs in the future.
- The district ideally needs 80 percent line staff and 20 percent executive staff to function efficiently, and an increase in the executive branch will be pursued in 2023.

**Probationary staff sworn in**

Langmaid announced that Lt. Chad Herdt and firefighter Dustin Courter had completed their one-year probationary period with BFFRPD, and it was time for them to take the oath of office to uphold the Constitution of the United States and the State of Colorado, and to carry out their firefighter duties in accordance with their loyalty to the mission to protect lives and property.

Director Deborah Hoffpauir administered the oath of office to Courter, and Chairman

Richard Nearhoof administered the oath of office to Herdt. Family members of both personnel pinned on the badges during the ceremony.

Nearhoof congratulated both firefighters on becoming permanent members of the staff.

**Finance and administrative report**

Administrative Officer Rachel Dunn said the district received the following notable revenue:

- Ambulance revenue of \$7,976.
- Total tax revenue of \$255,134 (includes specific ownership tax).
- Wildland revenue of \$6,948 was received for deployment to the Caldor Fire in California.
- The district received chainsaws, rescue and wildland equipment totaling \$4,026.

Dunn also noted the following:

- The district held the Second Annual Awards Banquet in March where the Firefighter of the Year was awarded to Acting Lt. Erik Beckstrom, and the annual Emergency Medical Services provider of the year was awarded to volunteer Emergency Medical Technician Madison North.
- Capt. Chris Piepenburg was promoted to deputy chief of operations during the awards banquet. See [www.ocn.me/v22n4.htm#bffrpd](http://www.ocn.me/v22n4.htm#bffrpd).
- The district website and platforms have been reviewed to provide the public with easier access to information and updates.
- Supply chain issues continue, but the district is maintaining sufficient station and medical supplies.

**Logistics/planning**

Rebitski said the following:

- The Mobile Data Collection/Global Positioning System location issues are being resolved, and new double antennas will be

installed on all vehicles.

- Two district employees are registered to attend a CSFD fire investigation class.
- The Pierce Engine is late and expected to be delivered in June.
- Due to the national supply chain shortage, everything the district attempts to order is delayed by six weeks and up to 12 months. The district is searching for new vendors and ordering a little extra to maintain supplies.
- New concepts are being explored to bolster the district’s fuel supply on site if a shortage occurs.
- The Flying Horse North development submitted sketch plans in March, and the Sterling Ranch development continues to grow, with new emergency access approved for Phase 9.
- Multiple minor subdivisions have submitted plans to subdivide acreage to 2.5 acres.

**Community risk—mitigation**

- Rebitski also said:
- The district continues to work on the Community Risk Assessment to develop the Community Risk Reduction Plan.
  - He and Piepenburg attended the spring Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management wildland mitigation meeting to discuss regional mitigation projects.
  - Two of the four temporary seasonal wildland technicians started the season and were immediately deployed to a wildland fire but returned to the district mid-April.
  - Several quotes had been requested for a heavy-duty chipper, but none is available to purchase for at least 12 months.

**Red flag warning days**

Rebitski said the “red flag warning” days had remained fairly constant due to multiple wildland fires throughout the region and the prolonged dry conditions, and the district had moved to Stage 2 fire restrictions. Information on fire restrictions and updates can be found at [www.bffire.org](http://www.bffire.org).

Langmaid said the decision to move to Stage 2 fire restrictions was not due to the deployment of crews to assist with wildland firefighting. The district is not compromised in any way, and staffing levels are being maintained per shift, as normal.

**Operations update for March**

Piepenburg said he will continue to oversee the Training Division until the district finds a suitable replacement, and said the following:

- About 1,429 training hours (including after-dark training) had been completed, exceeding the National Fire Protection Association required monthly minimum of 720 hours by about 708 hours.

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