

Monument Fire District, Oct. 25

Fallen firefighter remembered; fire academy development underway

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Monument Fire District (MFD) meeting on Oct. 25, the board received the second presentation of the proposed 2024 budget addressing executive staff changes and station staffing, and the board heard about the coordinated development of a regional fire academy program.

President Mike Smaldino led a moment of silence before the pledge of allegiance in memory of Driver/Engineer Bobby Keese after his sudden off-duty passing. Keese served with the Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) for over 30 years.

Director Tom Tharnish was excused.

Second presentation of the proposed 2024 budget

Fire Chief Andy Kovacs said almost three years had passed since he joined the district, and part of his promise was succession planning to avoid any future leadership void. He recommended a few organizational changes to prepare the department for future leadership of the district, and said:

- The proposed organizational chart for 2024 would create an executive battalion chief position to learn the budget and administration skills under the direct supervision of the fire chief for a year. Battalion Chief Micah Coyle will be the first to fill this role.
- Division Chief of Operations Jonathan Bradley will move to the position of division chief of Community Risk after learning fire marshal skills.
- The workload of Division Chief of Administration/Fire Marshal Jamey Bumgarner needs to be divided. Bumgarner would still be responsible for fleet, logistics, communications, and information technology for the district.
- The position of EMS battalion chief will be eliminated and Battalion Chief Sean Pearson will return to shift commander, replacing Coyle.
- Battalion Chief Shannon Balvanz will be the Training and EMS battalion chief.
- A two-year rotating administration assignment is proposed for the training lieutenant position. See www.ocn.me/v23n10.htm#mfd.
- The EMS clinical coordinator position will be filled by Paramedic Stephanie Soll.
- A hiring process will be conducted to fill the EMS educator position.

Vice President John Hildebrandt said the department had undergone many changes in the three years under Kovacs' leadership, to include the consolidation with Wescott. At the threshold of blossoming a whole lot more, the transformation is quite incredible, he said.

Kovacs said it is important to get the right people in the right positions and allow staff to excel. The department has a long line of folks ready to assume leadership responsibilities. A couple of additional pickup trucks are budgeted and will be needed for the additional positions in the organization.

Smaldino said he echoed Hildebrandt's comments on the direction of the district, and it is good to develop the organizational chart, but staff coming up underneath to reach the appropriate level is the whole goal.

Kovacs said it is important to build the infrastructure and great emphasis is needed on providing enough firefighters and paramedics to improve health and safety for all staffers.

Bradley said the district station staffing plan had undergone several iterations, but the Master Plan conducted by Emergency Services Consulting International in 2019 recommended over-staffing of 1.22 persons per shift. In 2023, each shift had 21 staffers plus two additional per shift. With training, retirements, resignations, and sick and annual leave, the 23 per shift is not maintained. In 2024 the district is budgeting for two staff members to attend Paramedic School. From 2025 to 2029 the district may add additional line staff per shift incrementally. It is not easy on the existing staff to onboard a large number of newly trained firefighters all at once, he said.

Smaldino asked about the timeline for opening a sixth station, and said the district would require temporary over-staffing, and the apparatus purchases would

need to be made several years in advance to facilitate opening on time.

Kovacs said the district is operating out of five stations and responds to about 4,000 calls annually. Pursuing a sixth station will depend on call volume, growth within the district, and the ability to meet the standard response times in all areas of the district. Those timings will be established through the accreditation process. A sixth station in the next five years is unlikely due to signs of a recession, with homes being purchased at a lower rate than five years ago, along with less competitive over-bidding to purchase a home. There is a steady decline for both commercial and residential permits, he said.

Bumgarner said developers are proposing to build in Monument but more significantly multi-family units and commercial development are being planned rather than single-family homes. The Eagle Rock Distribution Center undergoing construction in the Falcon Commerce Center will be the single largest building within the district. A 400-unit apartment complex is planned north of the Woodmen Valley Chapel, and a family entertainment park is proposed north of the apartment complex. Growth is not consistent, so the full development may not happen for a while. A sixth station will not be required until further development begins on the west side of I-25, he said.

Fire academy program development

Kovacs said that in the past the district had relied on sending recruits to gain fire academy experience at a larger organization, but unfortunately placements are not available in 2024. The district is quickly establishing a fire academy program to begin in January 2024 in partnership with Black Forest Fire Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) and Pikes Peak State College (PPSC).

Bradley said that it was gracious for the Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) Fire Academy to host the district firefighter recruits for the past two years, but the district has vacant positions and cannot go a year without sending staff and new hires to a fire academy. PPSC has three CSFD professional firefighter instructors to instruct and replicate the tuition. The district is partnering with BFFRPD and PPSC to run the 600-hour, 16-week fire academy. Spots will be open to self-pay students, and smaller career agencies within the county have been invited to send recruits. The anticipated minimum attendance is eight to 10 students per academy but 15 placements are expected with a cap at 18 per academy, he said.

Kovacs said initially the new fire academy may not be perfect, but in the future it will be comparable to other academies when the district develops the 14-acre training center at Station 1. Kudos to Bradley, BFFRPD and PPSC for developing the academy at short notice after receiving word in September that access to the CSFD academy would not be available in 2024, he said.

Firefighter hiring in process

Coyle said 56 potential firefighter recruits completed the written portion of the application process and interviews for 47 of those applicants have concluded and the recommendations will be made by the end of October.

Bradley said the district has two existing vacancies, will hire six recruits, and a district EMS/Medic has requested attending a firefighter academy, for a total of seven students from the district attending the fire academy in January.

Proposition HH

Hildebrandt said that if Proposition HH passes, the district will still have control over the mill levy, but not over the \$50,000 assessed reduction in property tax assessments.

Kovacs said the mill levy will need to be adjusted to absorb the loss of about \$750,000 in revenue for the combined districts in 2024. He does not anticipate receiving any backfill to compensate for lost property tax revenue from the state due to the residential and commercial growth in the district, he said.

Note: The board adopted a temporary increase in the mill levy from 18.4 mills to 18.83 mills in property tax collection for 2023. The mill levy adjustment was approved to offset a loss of revenue that occurred due to the state Legislature's temporary drop in the Resi-

dential Assessment Rate for 2023. See www.ocn.me/v22n12.htm#mfd. The mill levy certification can be found under transparency at www.monumentfire.org.

Hildebrandt said the wording for ballot questions 6A/6B for the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District residents is unfavorable, suggesting an increase in taxes rather than an actual decrease.

Kovacs said a Gleneagle Safety Association has been formed to educate the Gleneagle residents on Ballot questions 6A/6B. A 51% vote in favor of the dissolution process is required to pass the measure on Nov. 7. Passing the measure will increase the level of service to the residents of Gleneagle, coupled with a drop in the mill levy for those residents. The mutual agreement between the district and CSFD for the small southern enclave (an area without fire hydrants at the southern end of Voyager Parkway) will need to be revisited after the election, he said.

Note: The notice of public hearing and proposed 2024 budget is available for viewing at www.monumentfire.org. The public hearing will be held on Nov. 15 followed by final approval by the Board of Directors.

Chief's report

Kovacs said the following:

- Two firefighters suffered minor to moderate injuries during a working garage fire on Sept. 13.
- A contract is under review by the legal team for American Medical Response (AMR). The regional partners are requesting AMR contact special districts to provide mutual aid to AMR only when all CSFD EMS units are exhausted. The district responded to 11 requests to AMR in September. It was an unusual spike, and those responses remain at the discretion of the shift battalion chief. The priority is to always ensure ambulances remain available for district residents.
- Staff completed a district-wide Courage Under Fire leadership training and lithium ion and electric vehicle training.
- The district anticipates receiving the Type 3 Wildland Engine and an ambulance in November, and another ambulance in the first quarter of 2024.
- The remodel of Station 5 is underway and is expected to be completed in late December.
- During October Fire Prevention month, staff attended 17 first-grade classes to talk to students about cooking safety.

For additional information, see the DWFPD article on page 10 or visit www.monumentfire.org.

EMS supplies donated

Kovacs said the Denver Metro fire chiefs are collecting EMS supplies to donate to Israel. EMS coordinator Soll identified expired supplies within the district and a point of contact from CSFD will deliver the supplies to Denver for transportation to Israel. The district is proud to be part of the effort, and those supplies will be saving lives during the conflict, he said.

The meeting adjourned at 8 p.m.

Correction

In the October edition, under "Community paramedic proposal," the last sentence of the first paragraph should have read: "The Colorado Springs Fire Department and South Metro Fire Rescue already have robust programs, and the district calls for fall assistance are about 15% and about 11% for mental health assistance of the total EMS call volume." *OCN* regrets the error.

Meetings are usually held on the fourth Wednesday of the month. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 15 at 6:30 p.m. at Station 1, 18650 Highway 105. For Zoom meeting instructions, agendas, minutes, and updates, visit www.monumentfire.org or contact Director of Administration Jennifer Martin at 719-484-9011.

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Monument Town Council, Oct. 2, 16, and 19

Councilmembers scrutinize traffic report, proposed investments, park development, and resolution opposing Proposition HH

By Chris Jeub

Two regular meetings and one special meeting took care of many issues in Monument in October. These included water management, streetscape redesign, traffic safety, investment strategy, and community park development.

Monument traffic study

Councilmember Ken Kimple expressed his dissatisfaction with police Commander John Lupton's traffic study, which Kimple had specifically requested. Lupton's presentation provided insights into how the Police Department tracks traffic citations, accidents, and citizen complaints. He made it clear that the study aimed to provide objective data to enhance traffic safety. However, Kimple was not entirely satisfied and referred to it as "a good start."

Kimple raised concerns during the presentation, emphasizing that he had asked for studies in areas where he had personal experiences, including near-miss incidents involving himself and his wife. He particularly highlighted issues near Jackson Creek Parkway, where he believed speeding cars were a major concern. He sought more comprehensive solutions to mitigate speeding and improve safety in these areas.

Commander Lupton responded by underlining his extensive 32 years of experience in conducting

traffic studies. He explained that the Police Department's role was to use data for objective decision-making and to respond with changes and enforcement measures. He also clarified that certain traffic issues, like the implementation of speed bumps, were under the jurisdiction of the Planning Department, not law enforcement. Despite Lupton's explanations, Kimple continued to express doubts and the need for more comprehensive actions to address traffic problems in his neighborhood.

Wells Fargo investment strategy criticized

Rachel Brown from Wells Fargo addressed the Monument Town Council, shedding light on an investment strategy involving the money market fund specifically designed for government entities. This initiative aimed to allow the town to maximize the interest on funds held in its bank accounts, potentially boosting revenue. Brown explained that when the town's daily balance exceeds its target amount, the excess funds are transferred into an omnibus account overnight and invested the following morning when the financial market opens. Conversely, if the balance falls below the target, provisional credit is extended to bring the town back to the desired level, and funds are redeemed the next morning when the market reopens.

Mayor Mitch LaKind asked for assurances regard-

ing the protection of taxpayer money and expressed concerns about issues such as fraud and fines that had been imposed on the bank in recent years. Brian Scott, managing director for Wells Fargo, specializing in government clients, responded by acknowledging the bank's troubled history, notably the fines imposed in 2016. He clarified that it had been a disappointing chapter in the bank's history but reassured the council that the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) rating for the bank had returned to the highest rating of "outstanding" status by 2020. Despite Scott's explanation, LaKind remained unsatisfied and pressed for further safeguards to protect the town's money from any potential misconduct by bank employees.

Kimple inquired about Wells Fargo's motivation for the initiative, to which Scott responded that they aimed to provide excellent service to the town as a client. Councilmember Jim Romanello countered the dissent by first referencing his financial advisor experience of over 30 years, then sharing insights about money markets, emphasizing the relatively low level of risk associated with them. He encouraged the town to take advantage of the current high interest rates.

MONUMENT (Cont. on 14)