

Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, Feb. 15

Audit officer search continues; replacement firefighters hired

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Black Forest Fire Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) meeting on Feb. 15, the board approved the hiring of a new auditor and heard that replacement firefighters had been hired. Some of the logistics duties performed by recently retired Deputy Chief James Rebitski could be handled out of district. Also, the board learned that the scarcity of parts for the 2005 Pierce mid-mount aerial ladder truck had further delayed delivery.

Director Kiersten Tarvainen attended via Zoom.

2022 audit officer update

Administrative Officer Rachel Dunn said she had contacted several audit companies last week and is waiting for price quotes.

Treasurer Jack Hinton said the district budgeted \$10,000 for the audit, but it is getting "kicked down the road" for larger audit jobs by Schilling CPA. Over the past three years, the district's audit has consistently been late, and it was pushed back two months last year. Schilling was unable to visit the district staff last year, but after Hinton complained about the audit delay, the audit was presented at short notice by Dawn Schilling at the September board meeting, he said. See www.ocn.me/v22n10.htm#bffrpd.

Fire Chief PJ Langmaid said there had been a litany of excuses from Schilling, to include moving the business and the hiring of personnel that did not prioritize correctly. The audit needs to be completed by September to allow the district to establish the fund balance before developing the next budget, he said.

Hinton said the district ideally needs an auditor at the beginning of the year and cannot wait until the March board meeting to hire a new auditor. He requested the board approve a cap of \$12,000 to conduct the 2022 audit, and after the district receives price quotes, permission for himself, Langmaid, and Dunn to conduct interviews with potential auditors, with selection and hiring to be completed before the next board meeting.

The board unanimously approved the hiring of a new auditor.

Replacement firefighters hired

Langmaid said the entry-level testing had been completed in January, and three new employees were hired to replace the three who had left the department. The district received 54 applicants, but some applicants were not qualified to take the test and others did not have the opportunity to test. The district keeps a list of applicants that have completed testing for future offers of employment, but the firefighters at the top of the list are usually unavailable when positions become available, he said.

Deputy Chief of Operations Chris Piepenburg said there are many firefighting jobs available nationwide, and it is not like the fire service that he knew 28 years ago. The job search was tight when he entered the profession, he said.

Chairman Nate Dowden said he recently read a report that firefighters and emergency medical technicians are the second happiest people in their jobs, with physical therapists occupying the top position.

Vacant position undecided

Vice Chairman Jim Abendschan asked if the district would be filling the deputy chief of logistics position.

Langmaid said that he had not decided on the right course of action. The district is looking at all possibilities, and other agencies had approached the district about partnerships. Monument Fire District (MFD) has two full-time EMS staff that could place medical supply orders, reducing duplicated efforts. BFFRPD have an asset with Administrative Assistant Brooke Reid and could reciprocate by providing public relations support to MFD. The district is looking at the true pay scale for some of the tasks that Rebitski carried out. The fire marshal responsibilities on the development side could be handled by the City of Colorado Springs with the current memorandum of understanding in place, he said. See MFD article on page 14.

Note: Rebitski retired from the fire service in January after serving over 32 years. See www.ocn.me/v23n2.htm#bffrpd.

Financial report

Hinton said the district had about \$2.298 million at the end of January (includes four reserve funds totaling about \$704,000). The district received about \$64,600 in combined revenues. The district is in good shape and remains below the predicted budget expenditure for January, he said.

The board unanimously accepted the financial report as presented.

Dunn said the district received \$16,275 in ambulance revenue and paid \$69,461 for the annual liability insurance policy coverage.

Department liability coverage

Dowden asked how much general liability insurance coverage would be provided should a claim of negligence be made against staff rendering aid during duty.

Langmaid said the district has four separate policies, and all district personnel are covered, including the medical directorate and the board directors. He said he is fairly confident the district is fully covered, and by law the district is required to have coverage, he said.

Dowden said he is overly sensitive to litigation

against staff performing their duties, and the district must have protection against frivolous lawsuits. He requested that over the coming months the executive staff ensure the existing policy provides adequate legal protection.

Abendschan asked how many district firefighters were members of a local chapter of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), indicating another avenue for legal protection.

Langmaid said none of the BFFRPD firefighters were members of a local chapter. In order for a Local chapter of the IAFF to step in and help a member during a legal process, the community would have to recognize a local chapter and allow for a labor law, instead of the current compliant law, he said.

Fleet and facilities update

Langmaid said the following:

- The 2005 Pierce mid-mount aerial ladder truck is further delayed at Brindlee Mountain Fire Apparatus of Alabama due to the undelivered parts needed to complete the replacement waterway. According to district fleet mechanic Gavin Smith, the parts should take only one day to install. See www.ocn.me/v22n12.htm#bffrpd.
- The district had not heard any further information on the Ford chassis production. See www.ocn.me/v22n11.htm#bffrpd.
- The cabinets for the training room will probably be delayed, but he is doing a lot of the work on the renovation project for the training room at Station 1. The project is expected to be completed in April or May.

Operations and training update

Piepenburg reported that staff had completed 1,453 hours of training in January and said:

- The district responded to three working fires (two with Falcon Fire Protection District and one within the district).
- The department responded to a total of 104 calls for service in January.

Board director election update

Dunn said the district had received one nomination for the May Board of Directors election.

The meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

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, March 15 at 7 p.m. For joining instructions, updates, agendas, minutes, and reports, visit www.bffire.org or contact Administrative Officer Rachel Dunn at admin@bffire.org or call 719-495-4300.

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Monument Fire District, Feb. 22

Community outreach/public information officer position approved

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Monument Fire District (MFD) meeting on Feb. 22, the board approved a new staff position and heard the fire technician position would be filled. The board requested a review of snow removal costs and received a presentation on three future station remodels and an update on the district training center. It also received an update on the ambulance service agreement with the Town of Palmer Lake.

Directors Terri Hayes and Tom Tharnish did not attend.

Community outreach/public information officer position

Fire Chief Andy Kovacs said the executive staff had been evaluating all the administrative needs as the organization grows, and future needs such as a mechanic, a data analyst to assist the ac-

creditation manager, fire prevention staff, and an additional training officer. The community outreach/public information officer position would help the department be more efficient as an organization and allow executive staff to focus on primary tasks. The district identified a potential candidate for the position during the fire technician position interviews, but the position will also be open within the department.

Kovacs requested the board approve a community outreach/public information officer position and said a portion of the unused allocated wages from the recently vacated full-time administrative assistant position was available in the budget, and that position will not be filled, he said. See www.ocn.me/v23n1.htm#mfd.

The board approved the new position, 4-0.

Fire technician position update

Division Chief of Administration/Fire Marshal Jamey Bumgarner said the district received six applications for the newly created fire technician position. However, only four interviewed, but all were outstanding, and an offer of employment has been extended.

Kovacs said the position is designed for an entry-level person interested in pursuing a career in the fire service, and it is intended to be a revolving-door position. The fire technician is due to start on March 15, pending a background check and physical exam, he said.

Financial report

Treasurer Tom Kelly presented the January financial report and said:

- The overall revenue year to date was about