

from 8% to 15%, with a break-even point slightly over 2%. Amid these discussions, King sought the opinion of Mona Hirjoi, director of Finance, who expressed torn sentiments, citing increased workload challenges and the difficulty of retaining experienced personnel. Despite the uncertainties, King suggested the option of reverting to self-collection if the chosen approach proved untenable, a sentiment echoed by Town Manager Mike Foreman, who mentioned instances of other municipalities returning to the previous system.

Water Authority participation affirmed, for now

A detailed exchange during the discussion of Resolution No. 59-2023 aimed to affirm the town's participation in the El Paso County Regional Loop Water Authority project. LaKind expressed a desire to extend the resolution indefinitely, prompting Councilmember Kenneth Kimple to seek clarification on the mean-

ing of "participation." Foreman clarified that the town had invested \$250,000 in the project to continue with the design phase. Kimple, however, raised concerns about the lack of definitive answers regarding the project's return on investment and advocated for a decisive move, stating, "It's time to cut the string to ensure our water."

As the dialogue progressed, tensions surfaced as Fiorito also expressed frustration, stating, "We've kicked this can down the road, and we're going to continue drilling wells, [waiting for] a renewable water system.... I want this council to make a decision now." Kronick echoed a sense of frustration, feeling as though the council was being "held hostage." The discussion revealed a diversity of perspectives, with Fiorito advocating for a move toward the Northern Delivery System (NDS) for a renewable water solution, emphasizing its viability within eight months. The eventual vote resulted in a

6-1 approval, with Kimple voting "no," reflecting the complexity and divergence of opinions within the council.

Budget resolutions and tax surplus

All budget resolutions passed unanimously, reporting a 19% tax revenue surplus. Councilmembers acknowledged the hard work of the town staff. Hirjoi and Foreman highlighted the 16.46% reserve and an additional 3% reserve in TABOR, totaling a 19.46% reserve.

Maverik Monument Junction back to Planning Commission

The discussion surrounding Ordinance No. 24-2023, addressing the approval of a planned unit development for Maverik Monument Junction, revealed a debate among MTC members. The proposed 1.5-acre commercial convenience store, slated to open in fall 2024, faced scrutiny over traffic implications and concern for too many gas stations in Monument. Mayor LaKind and Councilmember Kim-

ple raised concerns about traffic inaccuracies and the impact on the town's character, with Kimple expressing worry about emergency evacuation.

The debate escalated when the mayor questioned the absence of the traffic report in the Planning Commission's documentation, leading to a temporary pause in the proceedings. Councilmember Jim Romanello defended the project, emphasizing the necessity of providing options for residents east of town and disputing claims that Maverik would cause excessive traffic.

Tensions flared when traffic engineer responses were challenged, with King expressing concerns about traffic complications. The debate culminated in the decision to send the motion back to the Planning Commission for further review, scheduled for February. The final vote reflected a split decision, with Kimple voting against the motion, asserting that it did not meet the criteria in the first place.

Land acquisition approved for Town Hall expansion

In Ordinance No. 26-2023, the council authorized the purchase of the Brower property. Foreman explained that the land would be used to expand the Town Hall and its parking facilities. The ordinance passed unanimously.

The Monument Council usually meets at 6:30 p.m. on the first and third Mondays of each month at Monument Town Hall, 645 Beacon Lite Road. With both of these Mondays being holidays (New Year's Day and MLK Day), the next meetings are scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 2, and Tuesday, Jan. 16. Call 719-884-8014 or see www.townofmonument.org for information. To see upcoming agendas and complete board packets or to download audio recordings of past meetings, see <http://monumenttownco.minutesondemand.com> and click on Town Council. Chris Jeub can be reached at chrisjeub@ocn.me.

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, Nov. 27

Merger completion expected by November; 2024 budget approved without milllevy certification

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWF-PD) special meeting on Nov. 27, the board heard about the next steps to complete the merger with Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District dba: Monument Fire District (MFD), approved the 2024 budget without certifying the mill levy, set the Board of Directors' meeting schedule, and recognized Lt. Roger Lance Jr. and members of the Local 4319 for helping voters understand ballot initiatives 6A/6B. The board received an update on the station remodels and held a Volunteer Pension Board of Trustees session before the meeting.

Secretary Larry Schwarz and Director Mike Forsythe were excused.

Nov. 7 election update

District counsel Michelle Ferguson of Ireland Stapleton Pryor Pascoe PC law firm, attending via Zoom, congratulated the district on the passing of the ballot initiative 6A/6B and said the district can move forward after the official results are received from the El Paso County Clerk and Recorder. Ferguson said District Attorney Emily Powell had indicated that the election results and a court order for the dissolution of the district would be filed by Dec. 31, and the dissolution would be effective by the end of the year. MFD attorney Maureen Juran will process the merger of the district's boundaries beginning in January 2024 and the process could take about six months to complete, said Ferguson. See www.ocn.me/v23n11.htm#dwfpd.

2024 budget and district mill levy

Ferguson said the property tax reduction and backfill structure (some special districts will be eligible for state funding to make up for lost revenue from the

property tax assessment reduction) put in place by Senate Bill 2022-238 will remain in effect for 2023, and in addition for 2024, as a result of the special state Legislature session held after Proposition HH failed, the residential assessment rate will drop to 6.7% and the amount of redemption on property tax value increased from \$15,000 to \$55,000 for 2024. The district will see a slight drop in revenue, but it can adjust the mill levy to recoup lost revenue through the de-Gallagher measure that was voter approved. The certificate of assessed valuation from the El Paso County Assessor that the district usually receives on Dec. 10 is extended to Jan. 3. The district must adopt the budget and certify the mill levy before filing with the state by Jan. 10. The board has three options:

- Proceed with the budget hearing and know that if the certificate of assessed evaluation results in a change to the budget, an amendment can be made one time without penalty.
- Open the public hearing and have as much discussion as needed, and vote to continue the hearing until the board is ready to adopt the budget in early January.
- Postpone the entire hearing until early January.
- The board cannot certify the mill levy before receiving the certificate of assessed evaluation, because the mill levy cannot be adjusted after it is filed with the state, and the district could lose revenue. See www.ocn.me/v23n12.htm#mfd and the MFD article on page 11.

Fire Chief Andy Kovacs said he had spoken to the El Paso County Assessor's Office that morning and it is scrambling to provide the

new property value assessments for 2024. Fire districts will receive 100% backfill according to HB23B-1005 Sections 6 and 7. The district should not have to adjust the mill levy, because the backfill will take care of the loss in revenue. Not all special districts will see backfill, but fire districts will, he said.

Ferguson said the backfill will happen, but some districts do not trust the state with regard to the backfill and the process is unclear.

Kovacs said the state imposed the decision, and the district does not want to look like the bad guys and raise the mill levy; it is upon the state to backfill the lost revenue.

Director Charles Fleece agreed the board should

move ahead and approve the 2024 budget minus certifying the mill levy.

President Mark Gun-

derman opened the public hearing on the 2024 budget, heard no comments and confirmed that the district

Now Open!

MVEA BOARD NOMINATIONS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ One Member. One Vote. Your Voice Matters. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

During the Annual Meeting on June 6, 2024, held at the El Paso County Fairgrounds in Calhan, three directors will be elected to the Mountain View Electric Association, Inc. Board of Directors from the following districts:

District 1: Limon, Karval, Genoa and surrounding areas (*incumbent Joseph D. Martin*)

District 4: Calhan, Peyton, a portion of Black Forest and surrounding areas (*incumbent Milton L. Mathis*)

District 6: Falcon, Cimarron Hills, a portion of Black Forest and surrounding areas (*incumbent Barry R. Springer*)

The "Procedure for Director Elections and Member Voting" is available on MVEA's website at www.mvea.coop/annual-meeting. To view a territory map with districts, visit www.mvea.coop/territory-map.

Are you interested in being an MVEA Board of Directors candidate? A candidate must be an MVEA member and reside in the district where there is a vacancy. Visit MVEA's Annual Meeting web page at www.mvea.coop/annual-meeting for additional candidate requirements. Click on "By-laws" and go to Article III, Section 2. A member interested in nomination should contact the MVEA Board Nomination Information Line at (719) 494-2528 and leave a message. You will be contacted to verify your membership, district, and to begin the nomination process. A member may seek election by nomination by the nominating committee or nomination by petition.

- To be nominated by the nominating committee, please contact the MVEA Board Nomination Information Line at (719) 494-2528. If seeking election by nomination through the nominating committee, a candidate questionnaire must be received by MVEA to be submitted to the committee by 5:30 p.m., Thursday, March 14, 2024.
- To be nominated by petition, you must have the petition signed by 15 MVEA members. Petitions and procedures will be made available by contacting the MVEA Board Nomination Information Line at (719) 494-2528. The petition, along with a completed candidate questionnaire, must be received by MVEA by 5:30 p.m., Thursday, April 4, 2024.

A candidate questionnaire must be completed for either nomination by the committee or nomination by petition. If you have questions, please contact the MVEA Board Nomination Information Line.

Nominating Committee

District 1: Steve Burgess • District 4: Al Kobilan • District 6: Carolyn Brown

MVEA Board Nomination Information Line
Tel: (719) 494-2528
Email: candidate@mvea.coop

www.mvea.coop • (800) 388-9881

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