

Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, April 13 and April 17

# Board considers policy solutions; discusses long-range planning; approves by-law changes

By Natalie Barszcz

The Black Forest Fire Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) board held a workshop on April 13 to discuss the policy-making authority, financial policies, long-range planning, and asset management planning. At the regular meeting on April 17, the board approved changes to its by-laws and considered a proposal from Lexipol to develop the district policy manual. The board discussed the long-range planning and asset management/maintenance plan policies and a proposal to engage a consultant to develop a district master plan. The board also discussed the sale of the reserve tender.

Fire Chief PJ Langmaid was unavailable during the April 17 meeting.

## Board of Directors by-law revisions

Chair Nate Dowden thanked the directors, Langmaid, Logistics and Planning Officer Rachel Dunn, and this reporter for attending the workshop on April 13, and as discussed during the workshop recommended adopting multiple revisions to the board by-laws:

- The vice chair shall preside in the absence of the chair.
- The board may appoint an additional director to the Budget Committee. In the past the committee consisted of the

executive staff and the board treasurer.

- The Budget Committee shall be responsible for drafting the annual budget.
- The board shall adopt the overall budget and make a resolution to do so.
- Another director may be appointed to the permanent Annual Audit Committee.
- The recording secretary shall keep the district seal.

The board unanimously approved the changes to the board by-laws as presented.

Dowden said the district's attorney, Linda Glesne, confirmed that no restrictions are imposed when moving line items within the overall total approved annual budget.

## Lexipol proposal

Dowden said the board directors had received the Lexipol proposal for consideration in the 2025 budget, should the board believe there is a need to develop a district policy manual. Lexipol provides a standard service to craft policies in accordance with applicable industry and regulatory standards. A considerable amount of time would be involved for staff to develop district policies, said Dowden.

Treasurer Jack Hinton said that after reading the Lexipol proposal three times, it presents as "boiler plate," and he voiced concern about

not receiving a tailored set of policies and would prefer incorporating the district's existing policies. He wondered if the extensive Lexipol policies would then need approving by Glesne, further increasing the cost. The Lexipol cost for start-up is \$17,802 with \$10,856 for the annual subscription and additional attorney fees for 2025. He asked if something else presents during the year and the district needs another policy, would an additional fee be incurred. For example, the operation of the training trailer and the development of a policy for best practices regarding service animals, he said.

Vice Chair Kiersten Tarvainen said it would be beneficial to have the representative present via Zoom at the May meeting to answer the board's specific questions.

Dowden said it makes no sense to continue writing the policy manual if the district decides to contract with Lexipol, and it would be useful to know if Glesne would need to provide additional review.

A Lexipol policy representative joined the meeting via Zoom at 8:03 p.m. and confirmed Lexipol employs retired firefighters that are knowledgeable about the Colorado Revised Statutes, state legislation, and any applicable federal laws, and said:

- Lexipol can help develop content for additional policies and incorporate nuanced district policies, but ideally the district would adopt the standard policies in compliance with industry standards.
- The district could receive guidance on how to write and draft additional procedures, but Lexipol would not advise as a lawyer.
- The average district typically does not change more than 15%-20% of the content provided by Lexipol, but the district is more than welcome to restructure the language provided.
- Revisions and updates are made quarterly.
- New procedures can be made during the initial development of the district policy manual.
- Lexipol can help build and organize procedures into the system but cannot review, verify, or validate whether it is constitutionally sound.
- The district could pro-rate the subscription from July through December for about \$5,428 and pay the start-up costs and the annual renewal when the budget resets in January.
- Daily two-minute training bulletins and rapid interventions are included in the Lexipol subscription and are available to the district firefighters online and through the mobile app.

Hinton requested the executive staff find funding in the current budget to reallocate for a pro-rated subscription through 2024 and allow Lexipol to begin developing the district policy manual.

## Long-range planning

During the board workshop, Langmaid said the district cannot hire additional line staff without additional revenue due to a lack of accommodation at both stations, and he recommended hiring a consultant to develop a master plan. Once the maximum exclusion of properties is reached at the southern portion of the district, a property tax revenue loss of about \$500,000 will occur for 2025. See [www.ocn.me/v24n1.htm#bffrpd](http://www.ocn.me/v24n1.htm#bffrpd). The district needs to know what the future will look like in the next five to 10 years and may need to look at partnerships beyond mutual aid and explore a fire authority, said Lang-

maid.

At the regular meeting, Dowden said the board and the executive staff had a difference of opinion on where the district needs to be on long-range planning, and he asked about the genesis of the consultant proposals from Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) and AP Triton presented to the board at the workshop.

Dunn said the executive staff began discussing engaging consultants last October and solicited the consulting options. Both companies are experienced in assessing the size and scope for large to small districts and can help project the revenue needed. The consultant firms can pull all the data, a task that would take district staff much longer. ESCI conducted master plans for Palmer Lake Fire Department and Monument Fire District (MFD), and AP Triton performs similar work, said Dunn.

Director Jim Abendschan said he experienced three master plans during his fire service career and the process is only valuable if the district has the means to act on the recommendations, otherwise it is a waste of money. The only three issues that could affect the district in the future are:

- The development at Flying Horse North.
- How much of the district the City of Colorado Springs might annex.
- The possible creation of a Fire Authority with another department.

Other than those changes, a master plan would not have a big effect on the district's long-range plan, said Abendschan.

Hinton said he seems to have opened a quagmire requesting a long-range planning tool. He wanted to keep it simple so the district can predict facility upgrades and apparatus and equipment needs in the future. He did not anticipate spending \$20,000 hiring consultants to generate a master plan, just a simple document, a tool to provide solutions on when to make large purchases and renovations, said Hinton.

Dunn said she had begun a massive spreadsheet for equipment replacement, tasking the lieutenants to assess the station needs. A spreadsheet was created for each item, such as radios and the cost of extractors for decontaminating bunker gear, to include the depreciation value. If the district wants to hire additional staff, the existing 11 bedrooms between both stations will need to increase. After working through the procedure with Langmaid, they thought hiring a consultant to predict the districts future needs could be beneficial, said Dunn.

Hinton said the board does not know the time periods for when equipment is likely to expire, and it is often an educated guess but necessary for the budget development, but he did not mean the tool to become a full-blown master plan and a complicated mess, he said.

Dowden said the directors are looking heavily at proposed policies 400.11—Asset management/maintenance plan and 600.01—Long-range planning, and as discussed at the workshop the consensus of the board was to focus there. There was no appetite to engage in a 10-to-20-year strategic plan to know where Black Forest could be heading with proposed developments in the north and south of the district.

The board does not need that level of information today, and he recommended the staff focus on developing the spreadsheets for asset and equipment needs and depreciation. The board needs additional

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