



Above: From left, Treasurer Tom Kelly receives a plaque for his dedicated service and leadership from Fire Chief Andy Kovacs on behalf of the district during a recognition of service to the district at Fire Station 1 on Feb. 25. IAFF Monument L4319 President/Engineer Christian Schmidt (not pictured) also recognized Kelly with a commemorative statue depicting a firefighter on behalf of Local 4319. *Photo by Jennifer Martin.*

the property until the rebuild of Fire Station 3 is completed at 17320 Jackson Creek Parkway (north of the Tri-Lakes YMCA). Should the rebuild take longer, the district could continue leasing the station for up to an additional year for not less than \$12 per square foot. The rebuild is expected to be completed on March 15, 2027.

In a 6-0 vote, the board approved the sale and the lease agreement.

Bumgarner said the general contractor for the rebuild of the station will be ready to mobilize on March 9, and a groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled for March 25 at 1 p.m. For further details about the site planning, see the WWSD article on page 13.

Station 1 Training Center update

Bumgarner said public hearings are scheduled for the Fire Station 1 Training Center development with the Monument Planning Commission on March 11 and the Town Council on April 6. Delivery of the tower structure is expected by the end of September or early October and ready for training purposes in November.

Recruitment update

Fire Chief Andy Kovacs said the executive recruitment for the fire chief position was underway by Prothman Executive Recruitment, and he requested the board approve the job description and position profile presented, allowing Prothman to advertise the position on Feb. 26. The candidate interview process will begin in April, followed by the Board of Directors' selection process from a short list of candidates in May, said Kovacs.

The candidate will be ready to join the organization in July/August with a salary of \$210,000-\$235,000 plus benefits. At the October meeting, Kovacs announced his plan to retire from the fire service at the end of 2026.

The board approved the job description for posting.

Financial update

Treasurer Kelly said the district is at 8.3% of the total budget year to date as of Jan. 31, and he highlighted some of the following from the financial report:

- The combined overall income received year to date was about \$263,395. The projected income revenue for 2026 is set at about \$24 million.
- Overall expenses were about \$2.057 million and 9.4% of the projected expense budget set at about \$21.984 million.
- The total checking/savings was about \$33.211 million, with about \$8.287 million in the Operations/General Fund. The balance includes loan proceeds of about \$18.133 million in Bank of Oklahoma financing for the Fire Station 3 rebuild.

Kelly said the district will receive a large input of expected property tax revenue in March, and all 25 electronic transactions were appropriate and within budget. Of note was about \$1.639 million to Land Title Guarantee for the Fire Station 3 land purchase and \$152,000 to PNC Equipment for the annual lease payment on the tower ladder truck.

The board voted 6-0 to accept the financial report as presented.

Board director recognized

Kovacs recognized Kelly for his dedicated service and leadership to the district since 2019 and said, "It was not uncommon for Kelly to sit down and discuss matters in his office on many occasions."

IAFF Monument L4319 President/Engineer Christian Schmidt presented Kelly with a commemorative statue and said, "Kelly's time serving on the board has truly mattered."

Kelly said he hopes that the district "continues to shine." Kelly is moving out of the district. See photo above.

Director updates

President Mark Gunderman welcomed Steve Phillips as the new board director, replacing Kelly. Gunderman asked if any director was willing to take on the role of treasurer, but hearing no offers, said he would ask Smaldino

to consider the role.

Retiree healthcare presentation

In a room well-attended by firefighters and family members, Firefighter Rudi Gillette (with 24 years' service in the district) requested that the board explore options for the potential implementation of an employer retirement healthcare benefit plan for firefighters and spouses. Gillette said the district does not currently offer a healthcare plan for retirees, but most firefighters retire between the ages of 45 and 55 after a tough career on bodies that take a beating up to retirement. Currently, no other fire department offers a retiree healthcare plan in El Paso County; however, Frederick-Firestone Fire District does offer one should the board need a comparison plan, said Gillette.

Kovacs said the district provides 95% of the current healthcare plan costs to all employees, spouses, and dependents, with a 5% employee contribution that includes dental and eye exams while employed by the district.

Vice President John Hildebrandt said, it would be great if we could do it, but the costs would be dictated by the plan provider, with no control by the district for a period of 10 years or more before Medicare "kicks in."

Gunderman said retiree healthcare plans for local government are usually offered to front-line firefighters and police officers, and not for all positions within departments. The board should explore retiree healthcare benefit plan costs at a minimum, if it is affordable and sustainable, said Gunderman.

Gillette requested two members of the board volunteer to explore plan options. Directors André Mouton and Duane Garrett agreed to assist with the request.

Chief's report

Division Chief of Operations Janaka Branden presented the chief's report. The report and the 2025 Annual Report can be viewed at www.monumentfire.org.

The meeting adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

Meetings are usually held on the fourth Wednesday of every month. The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 25 at 4:30 p.m. at Station 1, 18650 Highway 105. For Microsoft Teams virtual joining instructions, agendas, minutes, and updates, visit www.monumentfire.org or contact Director of Administration Jennifer Martin at 719-484-9011.

Natalie Barszcz can be reached at nataliebarszcz@ocn.me.

Woodmoor Water and Sanitation District, Feb. 17

Board asks for help with water piracy

By James Howald

At its February meeting, the Woodmoor Water and Sanitation District (WWSD) board heard a report from Operations Superintendent Dan LaFontaine regarding the theft of water by subcontractors. LaFontaine asked the community to help spot water being taken from fire hydrants without required permits.

Board Treasurer Dana Franzen provided a financial report closing out the 2025 fiscal year. District Manager Jessie Shaffer explained an easement agreement between WWSD and the YMCA on Jackson Creek Parkway that will allow Monument Fire District's proposed Station 3 to use an existing sewer line on the YMCA's property. The board heard a report on the Joint Use Committee (JUC) from Franzen and operational reports from district staff. The meeting ended with an executive session.

Help prevent water piracy

LaFontaine told the board that district staff have recently caught multiple companies stealing water by connecting to fire hydrants without having a permit to do so. In addition to a permit, LaFontaine said a water meter and a backflow prevention device are required whenever a connection is made to a fire hydrant for commercial purposes. Lack of a backflow device can lead to contamination of the water that district customers drink.

LaFontaine asked the public to report anyone other than firefighters connecting to a fire hydrant by calling the WWSD office at 719 488 2525. He noted some customers have helped the district investigate water piracy by allowing it to review footage from their doorbell cameras, and invoices have been sent to companies that pirated water. Three companies are installing fiber optic cables in the WWSD service area, which requires directional drilling, and some of their subcontractors may not be following proper procedures or may be unaware of the permits required, LaFontaine said. He estimated up to half a million gallons of water could have been lost to theft.

2025 finances presented

Franzen summarized the district's 2025 financial year, which ended on Dec. 31. The net income for December was \$20,000, giving

the district a net income for the year of about \$570,000. The audited net income for 2024, including tap fees, was about \$5 million. Franzen said the 2025 numbers might be adjusted during audit.

The annual revenue for 2025 was \$12.4 million, compared to a working budget of \$13.1 million, Franzen said, a shortage of \$700,000 resulting, mostly from delayed tap fees. He noted the district billed customers for 24 million fewer gallons of water than it did in 2024.

Annual expenditures for 2025 were \$14.2 million against a working budget of \$17.2 million. \$4 million of costs for work on Highway 105 were delayed from 2025 until 2026, Franzen said, while \$1.4 million for the Loop water reuse project was moved from 2025 to 2026. He said expenditures were well managed, as most line items show spending less than the working budget.

Franzen said the district planned to spend about \$4.1 million from reserves in 2025 but spent only \$1.8 million, leaving strong reserves of \$24.1 million. The 2026 budget anticipates spending about \$5.4 million from reserves, according to Franzen.

Easement agreement facilitates fire station move

Shaffer told the board that Monument Fire District's timeline to move Station 3 from its current location on Woodmoor Drive to a site just north of the YMCA on the west side of Jackson Creek Parkway had created a challenge regarding the sewer service for the new station. He said the problem had been solved by an agreement that would allow the new fire station to use an existing sewer line that belongs to the YMCA.

WWSD would purchase 400 feet of sewer line and two manholes from the YMCA, along with an easement, for the cost of \$10, Shaffer said, enabling the new fire station to use the line. Under the agreement, the YMCA would be responsible for one year of maintenance on the line and asked WWSD to waive a \$6,000 bond. The board voted unanimously to authorize Shaffer to sign the agreement with the YMCA.

JUC signs up for opioid study

Franzen, who is WWSD's representative on the

JUC, told the board that the JUC had agreed to participate in a study by C.E.C Innovations that will measure the amount of opioids present in the wastewater flowing into the Tri-Lakes Wastewater Treatment Facility, which the JUC operates on behalf of the Towns of Monument and Palmer Lake and WWSD. The study will be done over one year, at no expense to WWSD. The information collected will only be communicated to the Environmental Protection Agency or the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment in aggregate to protect privacy, Franzen said. Colorado Springs, Fountain, and two municipalities in Teller County are also taking part in the study.

Operational reports

LaFontaine said the water level in Lake Woodmoor was 3.6 feet higher than it was on June 1, 2025. He said that the district was receiving unexpectedly large flows from Monument Creek despite the lack of snow. He noted that the meter replacement effort was going more slowly than planned because some electronic components were backordered. Only new homes are getting the new meters, LaFontaine said, adding all replacements were due to be complete by the end of 2026.

In her Engineering Report, District Engineer Cydney Saelens said the elimination of a lift station on Lost Arrowhead Drive was expected to begin in late March, and the district would reach out to nearby homeowners to let them know what to expect. She reported that El Paso County is planning to put a traffic roundabout at the intersection of Deer Creek Road and Woodmoor Drive, and WWSD was assessing the utilities that could be affected by the county's plan.

Executive session

The meeting ended with an executive session for the board to receive legal counsel regarding potential agreements with El Paso County, Monument Fire District, Rex Colorado Corp., Tallgrass, Atlantica Sustainable Infrastructure, Monument Junction Metropolitan District, No. 1, Quantum Group and La Plata Communities. No action was taken following the executive session.
