

New radios sought

Burns and Ridings are requesting the district purchase 15 radios in 2015 to ensure firefighters are equipped with sufficient radio communication. The department's existing Motorola radios from 2001 are obsolete. Because replacement parts are no longer being manufactured, the district tries to refurbish equipment by reusing old parts until used parts become unavailable. The radios purchased would be equipped with an emergency button that will help locate firefighters based on the location of fire trucks. The department expects a seven-year shelf life of radios before they become obsolete.

Mortgage payment increase for Station 2

As the Build America bond pays less each year, according to Burns, the costs for paying the mortgage for Station 2 is increasing each year by \$3,000 to \$4,000. Ridings reported that the district looked at refinancing the remaining

balance for Station 2, but after considering closing costs and other contract terms, it was decided that switching to a new mortgage would not provide significant savings. The proposed budget expense for the Station 2 mortgage in 2015 is \$150,000.

Where the money goes

In addition to the mortgage payment and radios, the district is also looking to replace or upgrade its network software, server, and tablets. Additional money is also requested for vehicle maintenance expenses, salaries, overtime pay, and vehicle fuel costs. According to the draft budget, electricity costs are projected to decrease in 2015, offset by an increase in the cost for natural gas.

But looking to reduce expenses, the district switched to Wells Fargo as its payroll provider, saving the district a few thousand dollars. The district is also looking to reduce the administrative expense budget by over \$10,000.

Board expected to keep taxes at current rate

The board expects an increase of revenue in 2015 from the general property tax and the special ownership tax. Without raising taxes, the district is expected to receive about \$50,000 more than this year from these two sources. The board currently is not looking to increase taxes.

Financial report

Administrative Assistant Stacey Popovich presented the bank balances as of Aug. 31: Peoples National Bank \$43,059, PNP Colorado Peak Fund \$180,062, Colorado Trust \$439,396 and Wells Fargo Public Trust \$937,184,

for a total of \$1.4 million.

McAllister lamented at the low interest rate of only \$2.09 being received from the Colorado Trust Fund. Fredell asked for additional clarification on the August bank balance report and vehicle maintenance expenses.

Ross hired as legal counsel

By unanimous vote, the board hired attorney Dino Ross, who has experience representing many fire districts including Adams County Fire Protection District, Chafee County Fire Protection District, and Arvada Fire Protection District. Director Hartung asked Ross if there was a conflict of interest with state issues or representing other districts, and Ross replied "Not in this area." Ross also expressed that the legislative work he does, including writing legislation for the state, is not expected to be a conflict of interest, and is usually thought of as beneficial to districts.

The meeting adjourned at 8:56 p.m. The board is expected to continue reviewing the 2015 budget at subsequent meetings.

The Donald Wescott Fire Protection District board schedules its meetings for 7 p.m. the third Tuesday each month at 15415 Gleneagle Dr. The meetings are open to the public. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Oct. 21. Call 488-8680 a non-emergency number for more information, or visit www.wescottfire.org.

Nancy Wilkins can be reached at nancywilkins@ocn.me.

Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District, Sept. 24

Draft budget presented; fee to be assessed on Palmer Lake

By Lisa Hatfield

On Sept. 24, the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD) board saw Chief Chris Truty's draft of the 2015 budget, voted to levy a \$75,000 annual EMS assessment fee on Palmer Lake to continue providing ambulance service to the town, and agreed it was time to look for new space to lease for a district administration building.

Treasurer John Hildebrandt was absent.

Draft 2015 budget presented

Truty presented the specifics of the proposed budget for 2015. It will be discussed again at the October meeting, at a public hearing Nov. 12, and approved at the Dec. 10 meeting. The overall problem is that, "Property taxes do not increase at the same rate as expenses for the district," he said.

At the August TLMFPD meeting, Truty outlined various possible five-year strategic plans for the district that could include mill levy increase requests to voters in November 2015 (from 0.6 to 1.5 mills or more if the board chose) depending on what vision the board decided to pursue. He also explained how the mill levy increase that voters already approved in 2012 was insufficient and calculated incorrectly.

At that meeting, he described possible consolidations with other districts and needs for expanded staffing, personnel development, wildland firefighting capability, the support structure for the district, increased safety for firefighters, better long-term financial planning, and setting money aside for capital improvement projects. See www.ocn.me/v14n9.htm#t1mfpd0827 for more information about his August presentation.

Overall, the proposed 2015 budget projects a revenue decrease of 3 percent for a total of \$5.2 million due to the

conclusion of two-year SAFER grant temporary payroll support, and a 3.3 percent drop in total expenses that would total \$5.1 million.

Some of Truty's comments about the 2015 draft budget included:

- The operating fund goal of 90 days of reserves could not be funded.
- The capital improvement fund goal of 5 percent of the operating budget could not be funded.
- The emergency fund statutory goal of 3 percent of operating budget could be funded, and the surplus would be moved into the operating fund.
- The district will pay almost \$400,000 overall in interest payments on leasing three vehicles. He recommended proactive funding for capital improvement so the district could pay cash for engines, ambulances, and trucks next time.
- The loss of the SAFER grant revenue will be reflected in a 3.3 percent decrease in overall revenue, but he intends not to lay off any firefighters.
- Staffing levels on some equipment is dropping below the regional standard and well below the national standard. "We will have two engines that have three people and one engine that has two. Regional non-city standards are three and national standards say we should have four."

Truty said that retention and recruiting of personnel has been adversely affected by the relatively low wages paid by TLMFPD compared to "non-metro-Denver districts with budgets between \$5 million and \$10 million." He said wages are 13 percent below previous year averages for districts of comparable size. His goal is to raise wages step by step each year to catch up, with a 1.25 percent raise in 2015, and to work on developing the promotions system so the difference between lieutenants and captains is more clear.

Significant increases in expenses projected for 2015 include these line items:

- Workers compensation
- Overtime specially designated for training, meetings, and promotions.
- The district's new deputy chief, Randy Trost, who will start Oct. 15, will earn \$89,100 in 2015.
- Capital expenses and impact fee dollars set aside for new vehicles and for building a new facility in the future.

Director Larry Smith, Secretary Mike Smaldino, and other board members asked if there were some way to shorten the proposed five-year time frame for station maintenance so that firefighters would not have "deplorable" living conditions. Truty said it depended on what the board wanted to approve for capital improvements and

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