

(Tri-Lakes Monument Fire from page 1) be provided to the town, and no separate EMS assessment fee would be charged to Palmer Lake.

"Pending approval of the ballot language," the board agreed to wait until its September meeting to vote on the EMS assessment fee. President Jake Shirk

said, "We would hold off on charging [the town] an EMS assessment fee as long as they are moving forward toward inclusion [into TLMFPD], but if that is not successful by a vote of the people, or if it fails at any point of their process, then we would charge them the money."

**Chief's annual performance review approved**

The board unanimously approved Chief Truty's pay raise "as already outlined in the budget," retroactive to May 13, 2014, his one-year anniversary with the district.

The board has been discussing Truty's annual review for several months and wanted to vote on it earlier, but the union requested time for its own input. See [www.ocn.me/v14n8.htm#tlmfpd0723](http://www.ocn.me/v14n8.htm#tlmfpd0723) for more details.

Firefighter Mike Keough, vice president of Local 4319 of the International Association of Firefighters union, said that labor management meets with Truty every other month. Shirk and Director Bruce Fritzsche said the board needs to receive information on critical union concerns throughout the year, not just at the end of the year.

**Five-year budget information workshop**

In preparation for September's 2015 budget presentation, Truty presented a five-year budget outline explaining his strategic vision and his reorganization of district finances into more specific categories to follow state statutes and do purposeful financial planning instead of just using "one big pot of money." Truty then explained why the district may need to con-

sider asking for another mill levy increase soon.

On Nov. 6, 2012, district voters overwhelmingly approved a mill levy increase from 8.5 to 11.5 mills. Campaign materials as well as spokespersons from the district noted that a "yes" vote would keep fire Station 3 open, allow the district to accept a federal Staffing for the Adequate Firefighting Emergency Response (SAFER) grant to help pay for hiring additional firefighters and paramedics, maintain current staffing to retain the district's Insurance Services Office (ISO - [www.iso.com](http://www.iso.com)) rating for district property owners, and restore both operational reserves and vehicle and fire station maintenance funding.

Truty said the district was at least "\$225,000 in the red by 2012 and needed the mill levy increase, which was the right thing to do at the time."

However, Truty said that he and accountant Frances Esty researched past TLMFPD financial records this month. Their research indicated that the 2012 mill levy budget decisions were made without complete information and anticipated more mill levy revenues than they should have. He said the district appears to have not accounted in its budget for its existing debt in 2012 and also overestimated its ability to continue to pay \$400,000 for six SAFER employees after the initial two-year federal grant ended; in 2014, three of those six positions are being kept open. See [www.ocn.me/v12n12.htm#tlmfpd](http://www.ocn.me/v12n12.htm#tlmfpd). Truty told the board it appeared that in 2012 there was \$800,000 in escalating operations costs that were not addressed, overall.

Truty said the district needs to come up with about \$150,000 in new dollars each year just to maintain operating expenses, which increase at about 3 percent a year. The majority of expenses are personnel-related, and since TLMFPD wages are "some of the lowest in the state for a district our size, long-term solutions for a fiscally sound district lie mainly in revenue enhancements, not expense reductions," Truty said.

In a budget scenario where no extra money is designated toward the operating fund balance, capital improvements, or emergency reserves, the district could run a \$66,000 deficit by 2019.

"We have decisions to make," he said. For the district to plan for the future, the four broad fund categories would be:

- Operating fund, which in January was \$727,000 or 15 percent of the total budget. Goal should be \$1.2 million or 20-25 percent to allow the district to operate for the first three months of the year despite annual delays in receiving property tax revenue from the county.
- Capital improvement, which is at \$379,000 now. Goal should be 5 percent of annual operating budget or \$271,000, so the extra money will be reallocated.
- Impact fees, which are \$345,000 now. These are designated to meet growth of the district such as for a new station or administration building, not for general capital improvement.
- Emergency reserves, which are \$317,000 now. Goal should be 3 percent or \$210,000, so the district will move \$107,000 to the operating fund at the end of this year.
- Vehicle replacement fund is a possible fifth category in the future.

Truty discussed various new expenditures he anticipates in the next five years. For the operating budget, he projected one-time expenses of \$500,000 and ongoing expenses of \$500,000 a year, including increases in staffing and training. He outlined \$2 million in projected capital improvements including six vehicles, assorted specialized equipment, and building repairs.

Truty stated that if the district meets these planning goals, but does not increase revenue, the deficit could be \$431,000 by 2019.

He doesn't expect any future possible consolidations with other fire districts to have a direct cost-saving effect on expenses for any of the districts but instead create new "operational efficiencies" al-

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