

Palmer Lake Town Council, Dec. 11

# 2015 budget approved; public comment limited

By James Howald

In December, the Palmer Lake Town Council departed from its established schedule of holding its meeting on the second Thursday of the month, opting instead to hold meetings on Dec. 4 and Dec. 11. Town Clerk Tara Berreth published the agenda for the Dec. 4 meeting by email on Dec. 3, but provided no explanation in the email for the additional Town Council meeting or the short advance notice for it. OCN was not able to cover the Dec. 4 meeting.

## Budget for 2015 approved

At the council meeting on Dec. 11, the only topic was the proposed budget for 2015. Roads Trustee John Russell moved to approve the budget, and the council voted unanimously to approve it.

## Public comment limited to budget discussion

The meeting on Dec. 11 introduced another new twist to procedure, as one of the three agendas published by email specified that the public would not be allowed to comment

during the meeting. That decision was not abided by at the meeting, however, and the public was allowed to speak, but only on the topic of the proposed budget. The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

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The next meeting will be at 6 p.m. Jan. 22 in Town Hall, 42 Valley Crescent. Meetings are normally held on the second Thursday of the month. Information: 481-2953.

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Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, Dec. 2

# State forms firefighter off-duty medical trust fund

By Nancy Wilkins

On Dec. 2, Donald Wescott Fire Protection District Directors Greg Gent, Harland Baker, Bo McAllister, Joyce Hartung, and John Fredell reviewed state legislation that adds additional firefighter health coverage, approved the district tax levies, passed the 2015 budget, requested a formal appraisal of Station 3, and appropriated \$84,000 for healthy forest fire mitigation. Also, Baker asked Fire Chief Vinny Burns and Assistant Chief Scott Ridings to determine future priorities concerning storage and training facilities.

## State forms new firefighters trust

Burns, Ridings, and Administrative Assistant Stacey Popovich informed the board of state legislation that creates a trust fund for firefighters. Known as the Firefighter Heart and Circulatory Malfunction Benefits Act, the new legislation protects firefighters who incur a heart or circulatory injury from work on off-duty time. Burns said that if a firefighter fights a fire, doesn't feel well, finishes his shift, goes home and has a heart attack and dies, everyone knows the firefighting caused the heart attack, but because the firefighter died off duty, he or she might not be covered under the old guidelines.

Ridings said he talked with the district's insurance agent Dec. 2, and all Wescott health insurance policies will be reviewed to ensure the district meets or exceeds compliance with the new state statute.

To receive benefits, full-time firefighters must be employed five years. But firefighters who smoke a tobacco product within five years of a firefighting work event may

have their benefits reduced by 25 percent. The new legislation becomes effective Jan. 1 and can be viewed at [http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2014a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/91A7EBF0006A05C087257C9F0057320A?open&file=172\\_enr.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2014a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/91A7EBF0006A05C087257C9F0057320A?open&file=172_enr.pdf). Ridings said heart attacks are the leading cause of deaths among firefighters.

## Wescott continues partnership with AMR

American Medical Response (AMR), the emergency ambulance company servicing Wescott, pays the district to staff the ambulance. Fredell asked Burns and Ridings about this arrangement. Ridings said, "Initially we shortened our response time by being able to have an ambulance" and, "The ongoing arrangement with AMR has been a model for other fire districts." AMR's projected payment to Wescott of about \$80,000 in 2015 is additional income for the district.

## Board passes budget with net taxable property value at \$252 million

Before passing the 2015 budget, the board waited for the county Assessor's Office to determine the district's taxable assessed property value. The board took the county's net assessed taxable value of \$252 million and multiplied this number by 7 mills to project the district's operating revenue of about \$1.77 million. Burns said Wescott's estimate of the county's assessed value was very close, so the board only needed to make last-minute adjustments before passing the 2015 budget.

## Board approves tax levies, votes to keep balanced budget

The board unanimously voted to approve the certification of tax levies of 7 mills, unanimously voted to keep a balanced budget, and also unanimously voted to approve the lease payment of Station 2.

## \$84,000 starts healthy forest mitigation

The board approved an expenditure of \$84,000 as reimbursement for 43 acres of land to be mitigated for fire safety. Surrounding Benet Hills monastery, in Black Forest opposite the High Forest development on the west side

of Highway 83, the fire mitigation efforts should leave a "healthy forest" of various sizes of trees. The work is funded through the \$250,000 state grant awarded earlier this year. Ridings said about 33,000 working hours are needed to complete the project, which is expected to be completed in May or June.

## Gent withdraws from Station 3 discussion, vote

At the November board meeting, Gent announced an in-law was offering \$81,700 to purchase Station 3. Gent volunteered to recuse himself from any discussion of the sale, and also said he would not participate in any vote on this issue.

## Baker announces second offer to purchase Station 3

Baker informed the board of a second offer to purchase Station 3. The second offer was obtained from a resident who owns adjacent property to Station 3. Although Baker said the second offer of about \$40,000 is significantly lower than the other offer of \$81,700, Baker expressed his wish to inform the resident of the higher purchase offer and said, "But I want to figure out if we want to sell it first."

## Storage, training needs complicate decision to sell Station 3

Station 3 is Wescott's oldest station. Located at 15000 Sun Hills Drive, the station is currently being used for storage and has been used in the past for training. With the possibility of selling Station 3, Burns looked at the cost of alternative storage space and provided a quote of \$185 per month, and said, "I'm not excited on spending money on storage."

Ridings said he contacted possible contractors for building an alternative facility, but did not hear back. "Apparently, the building business is so good no one calls you back." Ridings was trying to get an estimate for building a facility with equipment storage and possibly truck storage, bathrooms, and a classroom. Adding to the discussion, McAllister suggested the possibility of extending a bay with additional room at fire Station 2.

## Moving ahead with appraisal, quantifying needs and priorities

Baker said, "Maybe we look at the needs of the district, and base our decision on that. So if the need of the district is to have a training facility of a certain size or shape, we need to look at the cost of that, and then decide.... Maybe this is two separate items."

Fredell said, "I think we should first decide if we want to sell the property ... get a formal appraisal done ... advertise, and get bids to obtain the highest price for the district. And we ought to get as much money for the district as possible."

Ridings said, "It's the cost versus the benefit, and moving 10 or 20 years ahead to see what is best for the district." The board decided to move ahead with getting a formal appraisal, but has not determined if Station 3 should be sold.

## Board approves 2015 schedule

Most Wescott board meetings will still be held on the third Tuesday of the month: Jan. 20, Feb. 17, April 21, May 19, June 16, July 21, Aug. 18, Sept. 15, Oct. 20, and Nov. 17. The board will meet on the second Tuesday on March 10, adjusting the schedule for St. Patrick's Day and the school district's spring break. The board also agreed to meet on the first Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2015. The pension board meetings are scheduled for April 21 and Aug. 18.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10.

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The Donald Wescott Fire Protection District Board of Directors' next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Jan. 20 at 15415 Gleneagle Dr. Please call 488-8680, a non-emergency number, for more information, or visit [www.wescottfire.org](http://www.wescottfire.org). The district is also on Facebook.

Nancy Wilkins can be contacted at [nancy.wilkins@ocn.me](mailto:nancy.wilkins@ocn.me)

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