

Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District, Dec. 10

EMS per-call fee adopted for Palmer Lake

By Lisa Hatfield

On Dec. 10, the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD) board approved the 2015 budget, replaced the annual Palmer Lake Emergency Medical Services (EMS) assessment fee they had approved in September with a per-call fee to include only certain calls, heard presentations from Palmer Lake representatives about possible progress toward its inclusion into TLMFPD, and went into executive session to discuss personnel issues.

Different Palmer Lake EMS fee approved

After a long discussion, the directors voted unanimously to approve a Palmer Lake EMS assessment fee based on a per-call basis, rather than the \$75,000 annual assessment they had previously approved Sept. 24. For more background, see www.ocn.me/v14n10.htm#tlmfpd0924.

Chief Margo Humes of the Palmer Lake Volunteer Fire Department (PLVFD) explained that her total operating budget for 2015 was "only \$100,000," so they could not afford to pay \$75,000 of that to TLMFPD off the top for ambulance service. So on Dec. 3, she said PLVFD had signed an agreement to receive EMS services from American Medical Response (AMR), since this would not cost PLVFD anything. However, since the nearest AMR ambulance is housed at the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District's Station 1 on Gleneagle Drive, she requested permission from TLMFPD to work out details for assistance from TLMFPD's ambulance just for critical (Code 3) calls.

When and how the TLMFPD ambulances would be requested by PLVFD EMTs would still need to be determined. Ambulance service is not included under the mutual aid agreement between PLVFD and TLMFPD. Secretary Mike Smaldino suggested that "automatic triggers" be used to help identify those critical calls. TLMFPD Chief Chris Truty estimated a fee of \$500 per requested call to Palmer Lake and will work with Humes to develop a plan to implement the details, with the approval of the Palmer Lake Town Council at its January meeting.

Director Bill Ingram said it was not fair for the taxpayers in TLMFPD to give any further

free support to Palmer Lake, "as it has for years," since TLMFPD has its own expenses and is considering a request for a mill levy increase in 2015. Humes said, "I have told Palmer Lake citizens we need to stop standing there with our hands out expecting others to give you what you think you deserve. It's time for a new day. It's time for Palmer Lake to grow up," she said.

Note: If Palmer Lake voters approve inclusion into TLMFPD in November 2015, then they would receive ambulance coverage from TLMFPD automatically, since the costs to cover its overhead would be paid for by the associated mill levy that would accompany inclusion.

Palmer Lake could vote on district inclusion in 2015

Palmer Lake resident Judy Harrington spoke on behalf of the Palmer Lake Town Council asking TLMFPD for help explaining to Palmer Lake voters how important their vote is on inclusion into TLMFPD. In the past, "Palmer Lake has never voted to raise taxes," she told the directors. "We are stuck. We need to work to get the word out (to residents) how important this is."

She said the proposed advisory vote on the inclusion issue was pulled from the November 2014 county ballot "because of a misunderstanding." The next opportunity for the town to vote could not occur until November 2015, according to the rules of TABOR tax amendment.

Humes agreed it would be "fabulous" if Palmer Lake would vote to be included into TLMFPD so that they could have both automatic ambulance and fire coverage, "but we at least have to get it on the ballot next year."

Palmer Lake Fire Trustee Rich Kuehster said that the advisory inclusion survey that should have gone to all Palmer Lake residents accidentally excluded residents of Forest View Estates, who live inside the Palmer Lake town limits but already pay a mill levy to TLMFPD. However, he said, they did receive the survey in their water bills in December so they could then voice their opinions.

At the Jan. 8 Palmer Lake Town Council meeting, the board planned to use those survey results to make further decisions about the three future

voting options.

2015 budget approved

The directors voted unanimously to approve the 2015 Final Budget, the Certification of Tax Levy at 11.5 mills, and the necessary budget appropriations to put the money into the line items.

Financial report

Treasurer John Hildebrandt presented the financial report as of Nov. 30. At 91 percent of the way through the year, the district had received 102 percent of budgeted revenue (not including impact fees), including:

- Property tax revenue – \$4.02 million (99 percent of budgeted amount)
- Specific ownership tax – \$395,772 (123 percent)
- Ambulance revenues – \$540,067 (102 percent)
- Impact fees – \$198,666 (265 percent)

Hildebrandt said that expenses, not including capital purchases, were on track overall, at 89 percent of budget or 2 percent below budget year-to-date. However, expenses for medical, administrative, and fire vehicle repair and maintenance, which "you cannot budget for very well," were about \$15,000 instead of the \$7,500 budgeted.

As of Nov. 30, the total cash assets of the district were \$2.5 million, spread among five accounts. The directors unanimously accepted the financial report.

Benefit added

The directors unanimously approved a resolution authorizing its participation in the Colorado Firefighter Heart Circulatory Malfunctions Benefits trust bill. It is designed to provide benefits for firefighters who meet certain eligibility criteria, which is still under discussion at the state level. Because the state Legislature is currently funding this trust, premiums paid by the district would be reimbursable unless grant money is exhausted.

Chief's report

Truty's comments included:

- TLMFPD will provide residents with a district firewise mitigation form for their property showing whether it is compliant with international Firewise standards.
- All major repairs have been made to the fleet, which is back into preventive maintenance.
- The oldest ambulance, with

165,000 miles on it, will be replaced.

- A chicken coop fire on Beacon Lite Road on Dec. 10 killed eight chickens and destroyed a \$1,000 coop.
- Station 3's Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) compressors are broken and ought to be replaced in 2016 for \$60,000. Meanwhile, air bottles will be refilled at Station 1.
- The district will hire a temporary firefighter to replace one who is on leave of absence.
- The district signed agreements with AMR for mutual aid and with the El Paso County Emergency Services Authority Board to obtain benefits available.

Truty said assessed property value has not increased since the recession. He would like the district to pre-determine what assessment value levels would trigger a need for the board to consider asking for a mill levy increase in 2015. This would allow time to educate the public before an election, he said.

The meeting went into executive session to discuss personnel matters at 7:36 p.m.

After the executive session,

Local 4319 of the International Association of Firefighters was allowed to make a statement to the Board:

"In regards to the executive decision made by fire Chief Chris Truty to hire an external battalion chief, the Monument professional firefighters are highly disappointed with the disregard of current policy and lack of consideration for growth and promotion within the ranks of the organization. Our constant goal has been to work together towards consistency and improving the overall department. This decision is reminiscent of past practices that we have all strived to leave behind us."—Franz Hankins, Local 4319 president

There were no comments about the statement from the board, and the meeting adjourned after the statement.

The next meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 28 in the Monument Town Hall at 645 Beacon Lite Road. Meetings are usually held the fourth Wednesday of each month. For information, contact Jennifer Martin at 719-484-0911.


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