

**TRI-LAKES MONUMENT FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**  
 15455 Gleneagle Drive, Suite 230  
 Colorado Springs, CO 80921  
 Bus: (719) 484-0911 Fax (719) 481-3456



Christopher Truty, Fire Chief

**2017 MILL LEVY PROPOSAL:  
 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (v12)**

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**MILL LEVY QUESTIONS**

**1) Why is Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District considering placing a mill levy proposal on the November 2017 ballot?**

Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protect District (TLMFPD) is committed to maintaining emergency services, including response times, protecting its firefighters and paramedics, extending the life of existing facilities and improving emergency communications capabilities. The district has continued to draw down reserves to address its most pressing needs, while balancing its budget. Given the lack of funds, this funding strategy can no longer be pursued.

**2) What are the Fire District's biggest challenges?**

There are two broad areas of concern: (1) the changing community/environment and (2) available funding to address increasing service needs and rising costs.

Changing community/environment

- 1) The District's aging population is placing greater demand on EMS services
- 2) Growth in the Monument area is impacting the District's ability to maintain emergency services district-wide, including response times
- 3) Insufficient mitigation practices are increasing wildfire risk
- 4) Growing wildland urban interface, where homes meet nature, presents an increasing number of challenges

Lack of funding to address growing needs

- 1) Limited funding is available to address necessary equipment/apparatus replacement and critical health/life safety capital improvements
- 2) Staff wages are significantly below average, resulting in increased turnover and difficulty in recruiting firefighters and EMS professionals
- 3) Current staffing does not meet the community's demand for emergency services
- 4) The residential valuation rate will soon be decreasing, negatively impacting the District's revenues

**3) What has the Fire District done to reduce expenses while maintaining services?**

In an effort to live within its means, the District has deferred critical facility maintenance projects, the replacement of outdated firefighting and EMS equipment/apparatus, and the implementation of contemporary wildland response/mitigation units. The District has reduced investment in its personnel, with current pay substantially below that of comparable Colorado fire departments. This has resulted in increased turnover and difficulty recruiting firefighters and paramedics.

**4) Has the Fire District attempted to obtain state or federal grants to temper the proposed request?**

Over the last five years, the District has received \$800,000 in local, state and federal grants. Unfortunately, the availability and reliability of federal and state grants is diminishing.

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**5) How would proceeds of the proposed mill levy be allocated?**

Proceeds of the proposed mill levy would go towards addressing the following needs:

- Replacing outdated breathing apparatus (air packs), rescue equipment (jaws of life) and heart monitors
- Replacing emergency response vehicles and apparatus—including structural fire engines, brush trucks and ambulances—that have reached or are approaching the end of their useful life
- Replacing obsolete communications equipment such as radios and mobile data computers and upgrading 911 notification services
- Addressing critical health/life safety repairs and improvements to existing fire stations
- Attracting and retaining experienced firefighters and paramedics, and strategically adding training, EMS and inspector personnel

**6) What are the key benefits of the proposed mill levy?**

The mill levy would provide many benefits to our residents, businesses and firefighters, including:

- Protecting existing emergency services
- Maintaining response times
- Significantly reducing the potential for equipment failures when responding and rescuing victims
- Dramatically improving communications between firefighters and other first responders
- Improving in-field cardiac care
- Reducing costly firefighter/paramedic turnover
- Reinstating and improving firefighter/paramedic training
- Improving the readiness and health/safety environment of existing fire stations

**7) If a mill levy is not pursued, or voters turn down a mill levy, what are the action steps that must be taken and the impacts?**

- Redirect greater attention from service efficiencies to firefighter safety, as the risk of equipment failures will increase
- Attempt to extend service lives of equipment whose failures or problems impact service abilities to community
- Create increased costs to District (and taxpayers) as equipment prices continue to rise
- Continue to defer addressing fire station maintenance projects, reducing the life of existing facilities
- Continue to put on hold training, creating increased risks to firefighters who may not be as adequately trained and prepared as they need to be
- Continue to struggle with recruitment of firefighters and paramedics, as well as costly employee turnover

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**8) How is the Fire District seeking the community's input on the mill levy proposal?**

A 25-member Citizen Task Force, composed of business leaders, civic leaders, major property taxpayers and others, is helping the Fire District define a mill levy proposal that meets the needs of both the Fire District and our taxpayers. Later this spring, a community opinion survey will be mailed to all registered voter households in the district to seek feedback on the proposal. Community feedback will also be gathered at community outreach meetings and at the District's regularly scheduled board meetings. Before making a decision to place a mill levy measure on the November 2017 ballot, and the composition of the proposal (if pursued), the Board of Directors will carefully review the recommendations of the Citizen Task Force as well as public input received via the mail survey and other community outreach efforts.

**9) Why is the Fire District seeking a mill levy rather than a bond issue?**

Voter-approved bond issues are for bricks-and-mortar type projects, including major renovations or new facilities. Voter-approved mill levy measures, on the other hand, provide funding to address operating needs, equipment/apparatus replacement, and repairs/maintenance of facilities.

**10) Has the Fire District factored in the impact of the upcoming reduction in the residential valuation rate as well as the projected increase in property values?**

Yes, a reduction in the residential valuation rate from 7.96% to 7.20% will reduce the District's revenues. At the same time, an increase in property values will help to temper the revenue reduction from the new residential valuation rate. For planning purposes, the District is projecting a first-year decrease in revenues of \$300,000, with that amount decreasing by \$50,000 each year (with break-even the sixth year).

**11) How much will the District's residential property taxes decrease as a result of the reduction in the residential valuation rate?**

Not factoring in market value changes, property taxes on a \$438,000 home (median home value in Monument) going to the Fire District alone would decrease by an estimated \$38.29 annually.

**12) How were the proceeds of the last voter-approved mill levy used?**

As a result of the passage of the 2012 mill levy increase, the District was able to:

- keep a fire station open
- prevent any reduction in its ISO rating by maintaining its current operational levels (helping to maintain the cost of insurance for property owners within the district)
- accept a federal grant to fund six additional firefighters for two years
- restore some vehicle and station maintenance funding

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**13) Why is the District choosing 'now' to go for a mill levy increase?**

Many factors impact the decision to pursue a voter-approved tax measure including, but not limited to, the following:

- Exhaustion of other revenue sources
- Acceptable efficiency reductions
- Level of urgency tied to growth, demographics, age of equipment, age of facilities, etc.
- Health/life safety issues for firefighters and paramedics
- Economic outlook
- The last time the fire district sought voter approval of a tax measure
- The last time the community approved a tax measure
- Competing ballot measures
- Election cycles
- Available resources for proper community engagement

Typically, it's only when all of these items have been sufficiently addressed that a decision is then made to approach the community.

**14) To what extent has the District cut training due to a lack of funding?**

The District used to provide compensated time off for personnel to attend off-site training. This type of training is usually much more focused, in-depth, and longer than in-house training. Personnel must now use their own time off benefits to attend. In addition, while not a training cut, the District has never been able to afford a dedicated and structured training environment outside a shift employee handling responsibilities as a secondary responsibility. For the size organization and the environmental challenges we face, this is a significant inadequacy. Established training processes, credential management, procedure operational procedure development, and accountability to performance standards too frequently take a backseat due to lack of resources.

**15) Do your financial requirements and resulting mill increase take into account projected increased revenue from proposed population growth?**

Yes. The current projections are for property taxes to increase 0% in 2018 (Gallagher Amendment), 3% in 2019 and 2021 (non-residential assessment years) and 10% in 2020 and 2022 (residential assessment years). There is concern amongst Colorado local governments that with the high residential growth in the state, that the Gallagher Amendment could be triggered again in the very near future lowering assessed values and property tax revenues even more.

A second major source of revenue is the Specific Ownership Tax which is very economically sensitive. This may add a few hundred thousand dollars per year over the next few years but has been known to wildly fluctuate with little advance warning.

EMS (ambulance) calls are a third source of revenue. And while these revenues may increase due to an increase in call volume, diminishing reimbursement rates can dramatically reduce the amount of monies collected. The District will need to closely monitor changes in healthcare, which could further impact reimbursement rates.

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**16) What services are you not providing?**

Other services that we could be providing to the community include:

- Response teams
  - Low and High-Angle Rescue (used for cliffs, steep embankments, etc.)
  - Water rescue (Substantial risk due to 5 large lakes plus neighborhood ponds within the district)
  - Hazardous materials (currently rely upon county or state technical experts subject to availability)
  - High-risk medic (Medics enter “hot” zone where extreme danger is still present, such as active-shooters)
- Seasonal wildfire response crews
- Wildfire/property mitigation crews
- Building plan/reviews
- Disaster planning
- Aging population services
- Extended community/school education
- Structured training program rather than a secondary responsibility
- Structured emergency medical program rather than a secondary responsibility
- Formal training site

**17) What is the District’s current overtime budget and how has it been affected by low staffing?**

For the 2017 budget year, the District’s operational overtime budget is \$485,000. The District has set a minimum staffing level of 14 firefighters or paramedics per day but the District has no daily supplemental response personnel which are required to maintain a minimum response standard when employees are off. That means when an employee calls in sick or takes vacation, the District must pay overtime to cover the position versus having a cushion of two or three personnel per shift to absorb the time off. We currently have none consequently all time off requires overtime. In addition, when employees leave, other than reducing response staffing, the District has no alternative but to fill the vacant position with overtime. A hiring/on-boarding process, especially with multiple vacancies or higher turnover, can take an overtime toll on other response staff.



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**18) Can you identify how many employees have left since 2013 and where they have gone?**

Since 2013, the District has lost about 25% of its first responders to other fire districts, including some of our most experienced firefighters and paramedics.

Date of Departure	Rank	Destination	Years of Service
March 2017	FF/Medic	Littleton FD	7 Years
March 2017	Engineer	Littleton FD	13 Years
August 2016	Lieutenant	Self-Employed	12 Years
August 2016	Engineer	South Metro FD	10 Years
March 2016	FF/Medic	Kansas County Comms	12 Years
February 2015	FF	Poudre FD	4 months
February 2015	FF	Boulder FD	3 Years
July 2014	FF	Dillon FD	2 Years
February 2014	FF	CSFD	1 Year
June 2013	FF/Medic	Red, White, & Blue FD	3 Years
January 2013	FF	Boulder FD	2 Weeks

**19) What will this mill levy increase cost me?**

Market Value	Assessed Value (7.2% of Market Value)	Annual Difference	Cost Per Month
\$100,000	\$7,200	\$40.94	\$3.41
\$250,000	\$18,000	\$102.35	\$8.53
\$300,000	\$21,600	\$122.82	\$10.24
\$350,000	\$25,200	\$143.29	\$11.94
\$400,000	\$28,800	\$163.76	\$13.65
\$450,000	\$32,400	\$184.23	\$15.35
\$500,000	\$36,000	\$204.70	\$17.06
\$550,000	\$39,600	\$225.17	\$18.76

\* - Previous year's residential assessment rate at 7.96%

**20) What are the types of emergency equipment that must be replaced, and what is the urgency of this need?**

Radios have reached the end of their serviceable life. We cannot get parts to replace them and will be required to purchase used radios to cannibalize parts to keep them operating.

Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (AirPacks) will be at the end of their serviceable life *within* the next 5 years and will require replacement due to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) industry standards.

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**21) Can the District reduce its request at all?**

District staff have been meeting since early 2015 to discuss how to manage anticipated financial shortfalls while at the same time dealing with increasing demands on services.

The original list of needs developed by District staff, which took into consideration growth and services currently not provided by the District, would require a property tax increase of over 9 mills. District staff felt this would be an unreasonable size request, and would likely receive limited community support. After several rounds of cuts, the proposal now stands at 6.9 mills. The proposal has been whittled down to the District's absolute highest priority needs.

**22) Can the District reduce costs by sharing services with other fire departments?**

Yes and we do where and when we can. However, districts need to have enough money to even offer a share of the funding.

**23) Do other emerging fire districts have in place equipment- and vehicle-replacement programs?**

Yes, most growing fire departments/districts in Colorado set aside funds to replace equipment and vehicles when they reach the end of their reliable life.

**24) When would the District return to voters with another mill levy request if voters support a measure of approximately 6.9 mills?**

There are many factors that would contribute to when the District returns to voters with another tax proposal, including: population growth, commercial development, call volume, assessed valuation, further changes in residential valuation (impacting revenues), future assessed valuations, the availability of state and federal grants, among others. However, the District would only return to the public when all other financing options and service efficiency options have been exhausted.

**25) Where can residents learn more about the Fire District's proposal?**

[www.tlmfire.org/mill\\_levy](http://www.tlmfire.org/mill_levy)

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**DISTRICT PROFILE QUESTIONS**

**26) What are the boundaries of the fire district?**

- NORTH - County Line Rd
- SOUTH - Baptist Rd (ext. east to Roller Coaster Rd)  
Hodgen Rd (east of Roller Coaster Rd)
- EAST - Black Forest Rd
- WEST - Rampart Range mountains/Palmer Lake

**27) What is the geographic size of the District? - 52.1 mi<sup>2</sup>**

**28) What is the population the District serves? - 33,000 (est.)**

**29) What are the number of homes and businesses in the district?**

- Residential - 9,652 households (est.)
- Businesses - 418 businesses (est.)

**30) What are the location of stations and how are your resources deployed?**

- Station 1 - 18650 Hwy 105
  - Ladder Truck w/Pump - (1 Officer, 1 Engineer, 1 Firefighter)
  - Ambulance - (1 Paramedic/1 Firefighter)
- Station 2 - 18460 Roller Coaster Rd
  - Engine - (1 Officer, 1 Engineer, 1 Firefighter (approved))
  - Ambulance - (1 Paramedic/1 Firefighter)
- Station 3 - 1855 Woodmoor Dr
  - Engine - (1 Officer, 1 Engineer, 1 Firefighter)
  - Shift Supervisor - (1 Battalion Chief)

**31) What is the Districts average response time?**

7 minutes:16 secs (emergency calls)

**32) How much staff does the District have?**

The District currently has a total approved shift staffing of 42 firefighters and paramedics. (3 shifts of 14). The District also has 4 administrative personnel.

**33) What "should" the District's staffing be?**

According to National Fire Protection Association standards, over the last 30 years, career fire departments have averaged 1.7 firefighters per 1,000 population. Our current average is 1.2. In addition, a recent Colorado State Fire Chiefs Association survey, identified an average of 9 support staff for an organization our size. We have 4.

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**34) What makes up a unit’s response time and how can it be improved?**

Response times are generally broken down into three segments:

- Call received → Call dispatched

IMPROVEMENT: How fast information can get entered into system and handled appropriately

- Call dispatched to unit enroute

IMPROVEMENT: Allowing firefighter/paramedics to be at maximum readiness which includes their physical and mental health, efficiency of alerting systems, proximity within station to vehicles, and equipment donning time.

- Unit enroute time to unit arrival time.

IMPROVEMENT: Proximity from station (or vehicle locations) to call locations. Stations that are inadequately positioned relative to demand and hazard will have increased average response times. Travel speed is usually not a direct correlation as most apparatus proceed at the maximum safe speed limit.

**35) Is the District’s call volume increasing?**

The Fire District’s call volume increased by 12% from 2015 to 2016, with an average of 6.88 calls per day.

**36) What percentage of the District’s calls are EMS-related?**

Consistent with national trends, approximately two-thirds of District responses are EMS.

**37) What is a "mutual aid" call and how does it work?**

‘Mutual Aid’ is a formal or informal arrangement between two jurisdictions where one agrees to provide assistance to the other when insufficient resources of a stricken jurisdiction to handle an incident(s) exist. The other type of aid is ‘automatic aid’ which is usually a formal arrangement between two jurisdictions where one jurisdiction will automatically dispatch resources into a neighboring jurisdiction as part of an initial response.

**38) How many “mutual aid” calls per year does the district respond to? – 9%**

**39) What is the Fire District’s annual budget, mill levy and other sources of revenue?**

2017 budget - \$6,021,416

Property taxes -	73.3% (11.5 mills)
Ambulance billing -	13.1%
Specific Ownership tax -	7.7%
Impact fees -	3.7%
Other revenue -	2.2%

**40) What is the District’s ISO rating?**

3/3y

**41) What is the projected population growth in the District’s service area?**

The District’s population is projected to grow at a rate of 5-7% annually which translates to a total population in 5 years of approximately 40,000 people. This analysis is made based on a 3% projected growth within Lewis-Palmer District 38 and a 7.5% growth rate determined by the El Paso County Assessor’s office for our area.

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**42) How will call volume be impacted by the two long-term care facilities that will be opening within the District?**

It is expected that the two long-term care facilities will add about 180 calls per year or an increased call volume of about 8%.

**43) What is the expected growth of the senior population within the District?**

The Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging predicts the over-60 population in our region will increase by 62% from 2010 to 2020 and an additional 42% between 2020 and 2030.

**44) What percentage of the time are there simultaneous or overlapping calls for service?**

In 2016, about 40% of the time the District received an emergency call while there was at least one other call occurring. This represents about 1,000 calls out of a total of 2,544.

**45) How many businesses are in the District?**

Excluding home businesses that generally do not require approval or inspection, there are 422 businesses in the District.

**46) Who are the District's current Board members and their term expiration dates?**

Jake Shirk (President)	- 2018
Roger Lance (Vice-President)	- 2020
John Hildebrandt (Treasurer)	- 2018
Mike Smaldino (Secretary)	- 2018
Tom Tharnish	- 2020
Jason Buckingham	- 2020
Terri Hayes	- 2020

**47) Is there a formula to calculate population growth and the need for additional personnel/equipment?**

There is no formula because expanding an emergency services organization is more tied to achieving/maintaining a level of service than it is population. For example, 2,000 people may be added to the District but if the service demand from the addition is low, there may be no reason for additional resources. On the other hand, if only 1,000 people are added but they are an older population at the far outskirts of a response area which ultimately affects average response times, it could warrant additional resources. (Currently, the District is experiencing both).

**48) What is the percentage of home-owners versus renters in the District?**

Approximately 90% of residential units in the District are owned versus rented

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**49) How do District wages compare to others around us?**

Position	TLMFPD	Colorado Springs FD	Castle Rock FD	West Metro FPD	South Metro FPD
Fire Chief	103,760	176,258	***	***	***
Deputy Chief	92,231	136,391	141,044	***	162,585
Battalion Chief	89,828	113,323	128,856	***	126,180
Captain	71,862	93,192	110,760	105,488	103,995
Lieutenant	66,848	84,036	104,652	97,436	92,776
Engineer	59,479	76,440	92,518	89,383	85,536
Firemedic	61,479	79,788	92,476	86,525	85,536
Firefighter	53,479	70,212	76,980	80,525	79,035
Position	TLMFPD	Fountain FD	Brighton FD	Frederick Firestone FPD	Canon City FPD
Fire Chief	103,760	140,456	130,520	124,814	***
Deputy Chief	92,231	***	113,496	112,816	***
Battalion Chief	89,828	104,811	101,336	100,819	***
Captain	71,862	93,832	87,669	82,822	***
Lieutenant	66,848	85,108	84,500	76,824	***
Engineer	59,479	***	74,354	***	***
Firemedic	61,479	76,099	72,530	72,424	***
Firefighter	53,479	61,900	67,530	64,826	***

\*\*\* - Data unavailable

Fountain, Brighton, Frederick-Firestone, Canon City are peer organizations with equal comparisons. We then compare ourselves as well to Colorado Springs and Castle Rock at 75% of their value. South and West Metro districts we also compare to as they are attractive go-to organizations within the state.

**DISTRICT SERVICES QUESTIONS**

**50) Does the District sponsor any wildfire mitigation programs?**

The District does not “sponsor” any mitigation programs, however, the District does participate, educate, encourage, and advocate for:

- National Fire Protection Association’s Firewise program
- International Fire Chiefs’ Association ‘Ready, Set, Go’ program
- A multi-coalition program called “Fire Adapted Communities”

In addition, the District encourages each subdivision/HOA to develop its own Community Wildland Protection program. District assistance is available to the community for this.

The District also works with El Paso County, the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control, and the Colorado Springs Fire Department to share resources and support the community.

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**51) Does the District offer fire protection seminars?**

A fire prevention presentation by a member of the District staff is available throughout the year. Each October, which is Fire Prevention month, the District offers a fire safety presentation to all schools within the district. The District also promotes smoke detector safety and provides smoke detectors to elderly residents within the community.

**52) How else does the District communicate with constituents?**

In addition to social media (Facebook, Nextdoor, Twitter and the District's website), the District also makes presentations to civic organizations, HOAs and other groups within the district.

**53) How can we lower our vulnerability to forest fires?**

The common contributing elements in all wildland fires—which holds true for both forest fires and grass fires—is fuel, weather, and topography. Two of those elements, weather and topography, are not within our control. Fuel, however, is within our control. And the less fuel, the less burn ability. Mitigation of every sort, coupled with a rapid response by emergency crews, are the primary weapons against catastrophic wildland fires.

**54) What are the pros/cons of “owning” versus “renting” ambulance services?**

There are a number of pros and cons of private ambulance service versus fire based EMS delivery models. Of the most important is our ability to maintain our current standards of Advanced Life Support and transport in the pre-hospital setting.

What we cannot control is the possibility of a private agency going “out of business” without notice. The result of a private ambulance contracted by TLM Fire going out of business or abandoning services without prior notice compromises public safety when it comes to our ability to deliver emergency services. Current healthcare system uncertainties make this possibility very real. These types of situations have occurred in cities as large as New York City with as little as two days notice. To guarantee Advanced Life support care and transportation at our current level of service we resist moving into a privately contracted service. As one of only 4 ALS transport agencies in El Paso County we have control of our current service levels of Advanced Life Support and transportation.

**55) What are the challenges with training an employee on newer equipment at third party fire academies and then having to retrain them on older equipment currently in use by the TLMFPD?**

Outdated equipment has a normal life expectancy and should be replaced once it has exceeded its expectancy. The cost of maintenance is only one compelling factor in a replacement program. Our crews must stay current on the newest technology in place and our equipment will change based on those changes in technology. Crews must train on equipment that is reliable and has the capability to meet changes in our environment. When we lag behind replacing outdated equipment we risk being handicapped in accomplishing the best outcomes. Training on the newest state of the art equipment keeps crews sharp and knowledgeable on our abilities and limitations. Without state of the art equipment our crews are attending trainings on the most current practices and equipment and have the knowledge of the current practices but return to outdated equipment that does not allow them to put those practices in place.

**TRI-LAKES MONUMENT FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

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Christopher Truty, Fire Chief

**56) How does growth affect the District's services?**

Growth affects the District's services in a number of ways including:

- More requests for service (i.e. more fire and EMS calls)
- Greater toll on vehicles and equipment which either increases maintenance costs or decreases life expectancy
- Increased likelihood of nearest vehicle being unavailable
- Slower response times if infrastructure does not grow simultaneously
- Slower response times due to increased traffic
- Increased property insurance rates if infrastructure does not grow simultaneously
- Requiring more personnel
- Depending on where growth is located, could require additional fire stations and/or equipment
- Increased demands on community risk education
- Increased demands on fire protection in wildland urban interface (where homes and forest come together)