



Black Forest Fire Rescue El Paso County, Colorado



Needs Assessment

Dan Petersen Consulting and Coaching, LLC
February 2025

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dan Petersen Consulting and Coaching wishes to acknowledge the Board of Directors and District Staff for their interest and cooperation in the development of this report.

Board of Directors

Nate Dowden, Board Chair

Kiersten Tarvainen, Board Vice Chair

Jack Hinton, Board Treasurer

Jim Abendschan, Board Member

Chad Behnken, Board Member

Executive Staff

Josh Bartlett, Interim Fire Chief

David Rocco, Interim Deputy Chief

Rachel Dunn, Administrative Officer

Lisa Emry, Administrative Officer

... and to all District Staff that participated in the stakeholder interviews to discuss the current situation and options available to the Fire District.

INTRODUCTION

The Black Forest Fire Protection District (BFFPD) Board of Directors engaged Dan Petersen Consulting and Coaching, LLC to conduct an abbreviated needs assessment to assist in determining the District's future course of action. The Board is evaluating whether to remain independent, contract some or all services, establish a fire authority through an intergovernmental agreement, or merge with another entity. This study was streamlined due to the urgency of the issues facing BFFPD.

For context, in June 2024, the District received a complaint regarding the Fire Chief, prompting an investigation into its merit. Over the following months, the Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, and Training Captain separated from the District, leading to the appointment of an Interim Fire Chief under a part-time contract.

As the Board of Directors weighed its options, members have engaged in discussions on the advantages and challenges of each potential path, with varying perspectives among the Directors. This study aims to provide Board Members with the necessary insights to help them determine the needs of the District and the best course of action for both the community and the organization.

To support this effort, I conducted stakeholder meetings with all District members and neighboring agencies between February 3 and 13, 2025, along with gathering information from staff to develop key observations and findings. Given time constraints, further discussion of these observations and findings will take place directly with District Staff and the Board of Directors.

February 24, 2025: Community Meeting to receive input from members of the District

- A work session for the Board of Directors to take input from the community on the priorities for fire and EMS service in Black Forest and assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of the BFFPD.

February 27, 2025: Board of Directors Work Session with District Staff

- Dan Petersen Consulting and Coaching, LLC presents his Needs Assessment to the Board of Directors, District Staff and Volunteers during a work session with the intention of providing an opportunity for District Staff and Volunteers to provide feedback to the Board of Directors on the information provided.

February 28, 2025: Board of Directors Work Session

- Work session for the Board of Directors to discuss the options for the future of BFFPD utilizing input from the Community Meeting held on February 24, the work session with District Staff held on February 27 and the needs assessment provided by Dan Petersen Consulting and Coaching, LLC.

March 19, 2025: Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors

- The Board of Directors will discuss and may consider the options available to the District.

CREW MEETINGS

As part of the stakeholder engagement process, I visited each shift at their respective stations. Crews were expecting my visit and were generally prepared. After introducing myself and explaining the purpose of the study commissioned by the District, I invited them to share their experiences at BFFPD and their vision for the future.

The following is a summary, reflecting the sentiments of personnel as of mid-February 2025:

Morale Concerns: Crews generally describe morale as very low, using terms like "discontent" and "grumpiness" to characterize the mood. They expressed frustration with the uncertainty and their perceived lack of transparency surrounding the Board's decision-making process along with the extended timeline for determining the District's future.

Interim Leadership Challenges: While some Firefighters appreciate the professionalism brought by the Interim Chief, many believe that an interim leader cannot effectively guide the organization long-term. Several crews were concerned that the Board might make a rash decision in appointing a Fire Chief. If a new Chief is to be hired, most strongly favor a formal selection process with the ability for both internal and external candidates to apply rather than an internal appointment.

Disappointment with Past Leadership: Many Firefighters felt misled by previous leadership and acknowledged that the Board of Directors was also misinformed. The result of their separation has created tension and conflict among personnel and some distrust of the Board and Administration, which has been exacerbated by the prolonged lack of permanent leadership.

Inconsistent Communication: Crews expressed frustration over conflicting information coming from the Interim Chief, Deputy Chief, and Board Members. For example, they have been told one day that the District is in severe financial distress and the next that everything is stable. Similarly, some Board Members have suggested that a new Fire Chief will be appointed from internal staff, while others have indicated a merger with the Monument Fire District.

Retention Issues: Crews are concerned about Firefighter retention, noting that past leadership and culture have driven away high-quality personnel. Most expressed a desire for a more stable workforce rather than constantly training new employees due to high turnover.

Operational Gaps: Many felt that the District is underdeveloped in several key areas, citing issues such as:

- Lack of standardized uniforms for new employees.
- Absence of clear operational protocols.
- No formal job descriptions.
- No strategic plan outlining the District's future.

Apparatus and Equipment: Crews were pleased with the quality of apparatus and equipment in the District. The District Mechanic received high praise for his expertise but is overwhelmed with work. Concerns include the extended timeframe for completing the Type 6 engines and the Type 3 engine being out of service for an extended period.

Contract or Merger Considerations: Nearly all crew members view a full contract or merger with Monument Fire District as the best path forward for both BFFPD and its residents. A small number of personnel remain neutral on the matter and are waiting to see what decision the Board ultimately makes.

OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

This section identifies the overarching observations and findings in key areas for BFFPD identified during the needs assessment. While there are some operational issues identified, this report does not delve deeply into the operations of the District. Interim Chief Josh Bartlett has conducted a deeper operational review and can provide a more granular view in this area if requested.

Revenue, Expenditures, and Fund Balances

The following figure identifies the revenues, expenditures, and fund balance from 2021 to 2025 from the adopted financial audits and the 2025 budget document.

Figure 1: BFFPD Statement of Revenues, Expenditures, and Fund Balance (2021–2025)

Year Source	2021 AUDIT	2022 AUDIT	2023 AUDIT	2024 Estimated	2025 Budget
Beginning Fund Balance	\$1,055,969	\$1,969,963	\$1,970,914	\$2,349,931	\$3,513,652
REVENUES					
Property Tax Collection	\$3,272,193	\$3,671,947	\$3,731,747	\$4,969,010	\$4,780,815
Charges for Service – EMS	\$224,667	\$186,998	\$136,319	\$198,997	\$190,000
Deployments	\$168,636	\$1,040,838	\$1,127,356	\$0	\$950,000
Other Revenue	\$532,725	\$811,863	\$413,206	\$873,813	\$729,106
Total Revenues	\$4,198,221	\$5,711,646	\$5,408,628	\$6,041,820	\$6,649,921
EXPENDITURES					
Finance and Admin	\$520,090	\$313,269	\$260,171	\$398,525	\$360,916
Wages and Benefits	\$2,147,156	\$2,740,557	\$2,960,797	\$3,362,634	\$4,435,351
Other Expenditures	\$616,981	\$2,656,869	\$1,808,643	\$1,116,940	\$1,853,653
Total Expenditures	\$3,284,227	\$5,710,695	\$5,029,611	\$4,878,099	\$6,649,920
FUND BALANCE					
Change in Fund Balance	\$913,994	\$951	\$379,017	\$1,163,721	\$1
Ending Fund Balance	\$1,969,963	\$1,970,914	\$2,349,931	\$3,513,652	\$3,513,653
% of Expenditures	59.98%	34.51%	46.72%	72.03%	52.84%

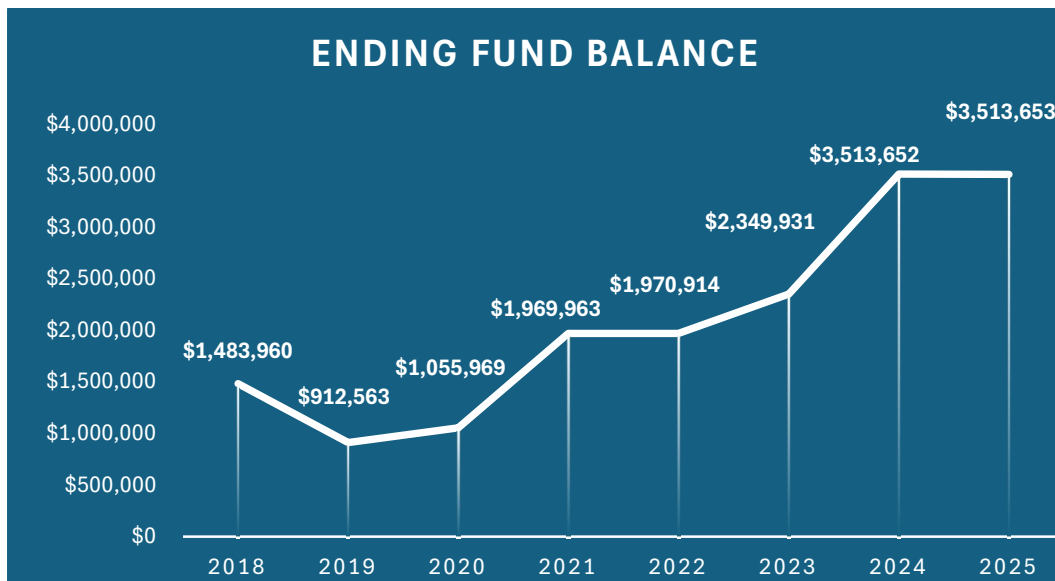
The budget documents available on the website are basic spreadsheets with categories of expenditure. BFFPD would benefit from striving to build a more transparent budget document that meets the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) distinguished budget presentation program. To earn recognition, budget documents must meet program criteria and act as an outstanding policy document, financial plan, operations guide, and communication tool.

A review of the adopted 2025 budget document identified presentation issues related to reconciling the 2023 audit with the actuals for the 2023 budget year, as well as inconsistencies in the presentation of fund balances across the three years included in the budget. The budget presented in this report includes adjustments to address these discrepancies.

Fund Balance Trending

The following figure displays the ending fund balances from 2018 to 2025 based on corrections to the 2025 adopted budget as described in the previous section.

Figure 2: BFFPD Ending Fund Balance (2018–2025)



Since 2019, BFFPD has taken deliberate steps to increase its ending fund balance, placing the District in a strong position to support sustainable service delivery for the community and to withstand short-term financial challenges.

For 2025, the ending fund balance is projected to remain consistent with 2024. The 2025 budget includes an increase in staffing costs of over \$1 million, alongside an anticipated \$950,000 in revenue from deployments—despite the absence of deployment revenue in 2024. These factors introduce a level of risk to the District's long-term financial sustainability if BFFPD chooses to continue funding the staffing and programs introduced in 2025.

Taxable Value, Millage Rate, and Property Tax Collection

The following figure identifies the taxable value, millage rate, and property tax collection from 2021 to 2025. Additional observations for this figure are broken out for further discussion with additional figures showing trends back to 2018.

Figure 3: BFFPD Taxable Value, Millage Rate, and Property Tax Collection (2021–2025)

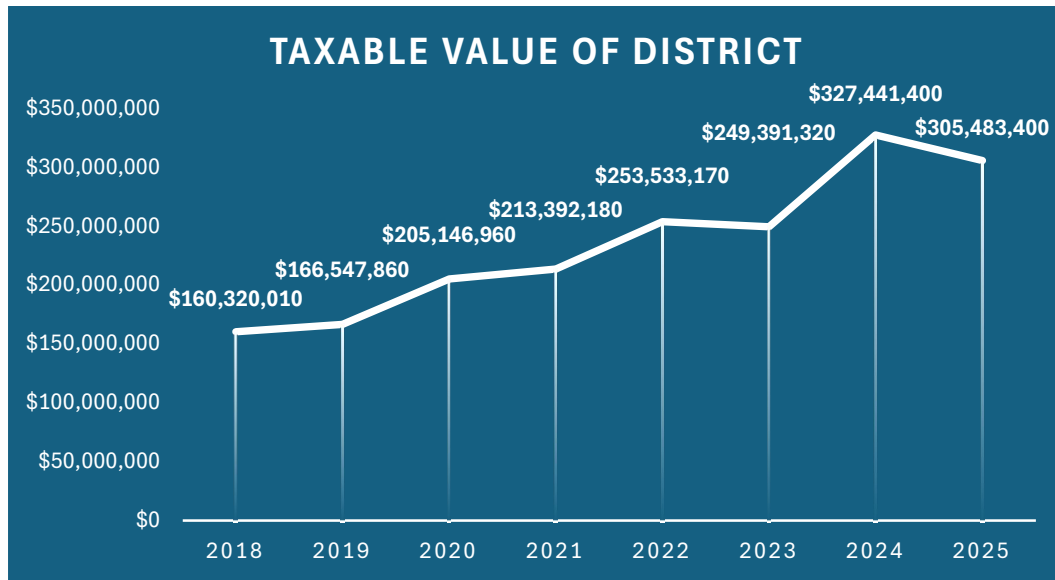
Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Source	AUDIT	AUDIT	AUDIT	Estimated	Budget
Taxable Value	\$213,392,180	\$253,533,170	\$249,391,320	\$327,441,400	\$305,483,400
Change from Prev Year	\$8,245,220	\$40,140,990	(\$4,141,850)	\$78,050,080	(\$21,958,000)
% Change from Prev Year	4.02%	18.81%	-1.63%	31.30%	-6.71%
Millage Rate					
Millage Rate - Ops	14.500	14.500	14.951	14.951	15.650
Millage Rate - Debt Service	0.639	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total Millage Rate	15.139	14.500	14.951	14.951	15.650
Change from Prev Year	2.590	(0.639)	0.451	0.000	0.699
% Change from Prev Year	20.64%	-4.22%	3.11%	0.00%	4.68%
Property Tax Collection	\$3,272,193	\$3,671,947	\$3,731,747	\$4,969,010	\$4,780,815
Change from Prev Year	\$641,564	\$399,754	\$59,800	\$1,237,263	(\$188,195)
% Change from Prev Year	24.39%	12.22%	1.63%	33.16%	-3.79%

Taxable Value

BFFPD has experienced a steady increase in taxable value over the past several years, with the largest growth occurring in the 2024 budget year, which saw a net taxable value increase of \$78 million.

The following figure displays the taxable value of the District from 2018 to 2025.

Figure 4: BFFPD Taxable Value of District (2018–2025)



On the south end of the District, approximately 900 homes in the area between E. Woodmen Road (south), Black Forest Road (west), Forest Meadows Avenue (east), and slightly north of Cowpoke Road (north) have been paying fire protection taxes to both BFFPD and Colorado Springs since approximately 2005. This area was excluded from BFFPD taxation on January 1, 2024.

To mitigate the impact of this revenue loss, the City and BFFPD entered into an agreement to phase out the reduction of taxable value to BFFPD over three years, concluding in 2026:

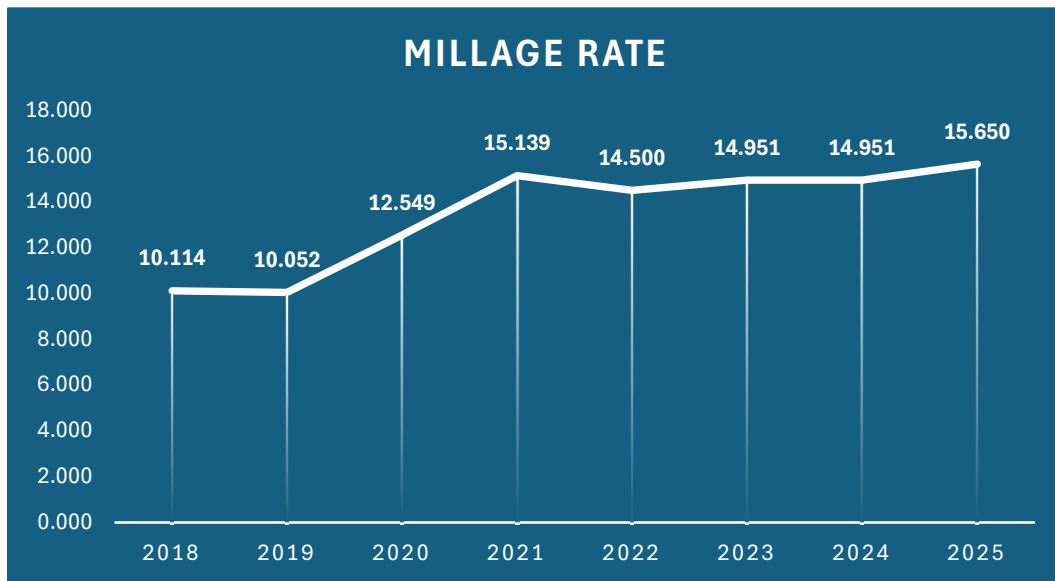
- **2024:** Despite the exclusion, the District gained significant taxable value (\$78 million) from the development in other areas of BFFPD, more than offsetting the first year of the transition.
- **2025:** Development in other portions of the District were insufficient to fully offset the lost taxable value from the exclusions, resulting in a net reduction of \$22 million in taxable value for BFFPD district wide.
- **2026:** Board Treasurer Jack Hinton estimates the last year of transition of these exclusions will reduce tax collection by an additional \$500,000, or an estimated reduction in taxable value of \$32 million computed at the current millage rate.

Millage Rate

Until 2021, BFFPD operated with both a debt service millage rate and an operations millage rate. The operations millage rate was set at 9.215 in 2018 and 2019, increasing to 11.896 in 2020 and 14.500 in 2021. When the debt service millage rate expired, the District maintained the operations millage rate at 14.5, resulting in an overall millage rate reduction of 0.639 mills, or 4.22%.

The following figure displays the millage rate for the District between 2018 and 2025.

Figure 5: BFFPD Millage Rate (2018–2025)



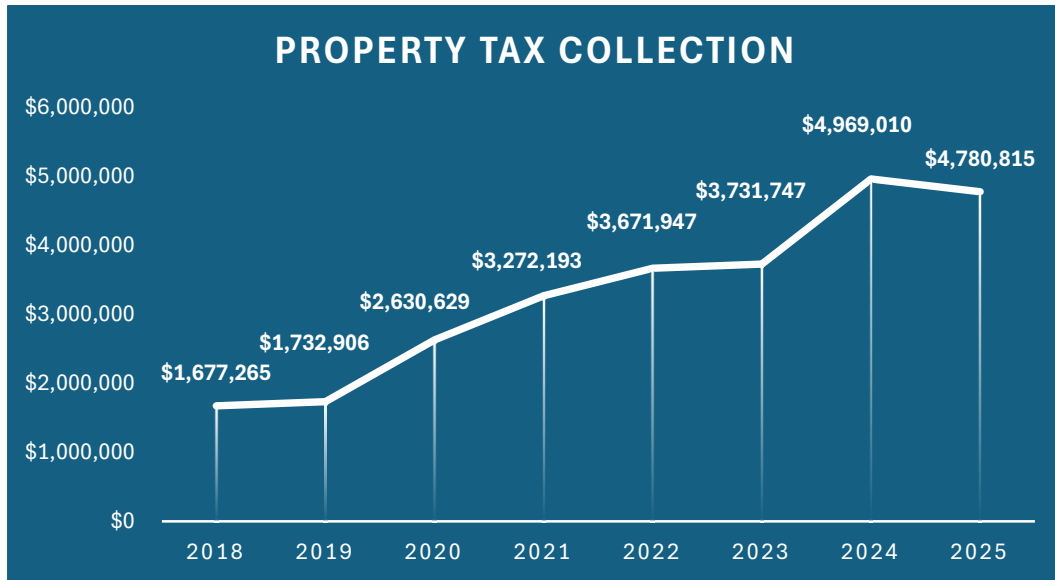
Looking ahead, the District has opportunities to increase the millage rate to support the desired level of service for the community. However, statutory limitations in Colorado restrict the extent of such increases. The attorney for the District remains the best resource for guiding BFFPD in navigating the desire to increase the millage rate.

Property Tax Collection

BFFPD has seen significant growth in property tax revenue, driven by increases in both taxable value and the millage rate. The largest increase occurred between 2023 and 2024, with property tax revenue rising by slightly over \$1.2 million, a 33.2% increase.

The following figure displays the property tax collection from 2018 to 2025.

Figure 6: BFFPD Property Tax Collection (2018–2025)



In 2025, the District experienced a decline in property tax revenue due to the exclusions on the south end of the District. This resulted in a reduction of \$188,000, or 3.8%. The impact of this loss was mitigated by an increase in the millage rate, which rose from 14.951 to 15.650. Without the increase of the millage rate, the District would have faced an estimated property tax revenue loss of \$345,000 in 2025.

Impact of the Black Forest Fire

The Black Forest Fire, which occurred from June 11–20, 2013, was the most destructive wildfire in Colorado history at the time. The fire burned 14,280 acres and damaged or destroyed 489 homes within the BFFPD.

Since then, a significant number of these homes have been rebuilt, often as higher-value properties. According to an analysis of building permits and certificates of occupancy data, approximately 400 homes have been reconstructed, while an estimated 90 lots remain undeveloped.

Future District Taxable Value and Property Tax Collection

For 2026, the Board Treasurer estimates the loss of \$500,000 from the final year of exclusions and an estimated increase of taxable value of \$200,000 from other areas of the District for a net loss of \$300,000. The Treasurer projects an additional \$200,000–\$250,000 reduction in property tax revenue due to the impact of SB233, **bringing the total estimated property tax loss for 2026 to approximately \$550,000.**

Looking to the future, at least four major developments are in various stages of progress within BFFPD. While the timeline for these developments remains uncertain, they represent increased taxable value for the future. Interim Chief Bartlett and Firefighter Holladay assisted in this analysis, providing much of the information for the new developments in BFFPD.

Sterling Ranch

The Sterling Ranch development is on the south end of BFFPD adjacent to the recent annexation by the City of Colorado Springs. The project is estimating over 5,000 remaining developable units in the community. Most of this development is being built out to City specifications with curbs, gutters, and hydrants. However, based on the Colorado Springs Annexation information website, it appears that the parcels in this development are excluded from potential annexation to the City since districts other than Colorado Springs Utilities provide water and wastewater.

Timber Ridge

The Timber Ridge development on the south end of the District has an estimated 121 additional lots left to build on. The average residential assessed value per home is estimated at \$800,000. A significant number of homes in the Timber Ridge development are built out to city specifications with curbs, gutters, and hydrants. However, based on the Colorado Springs Annexation information website it appears that the parcels in this development are excluded from potential annexation to the City since districts other than Colorado Springs Utilities provide water and wastewater.

Flying Horse North

Flying Horse North (filings 1-5) has an estimated 137 lots that are approved for construction with another 774 lots that are part of their master plan. The average residential assessed value per home is estimated at \$1.7 million.

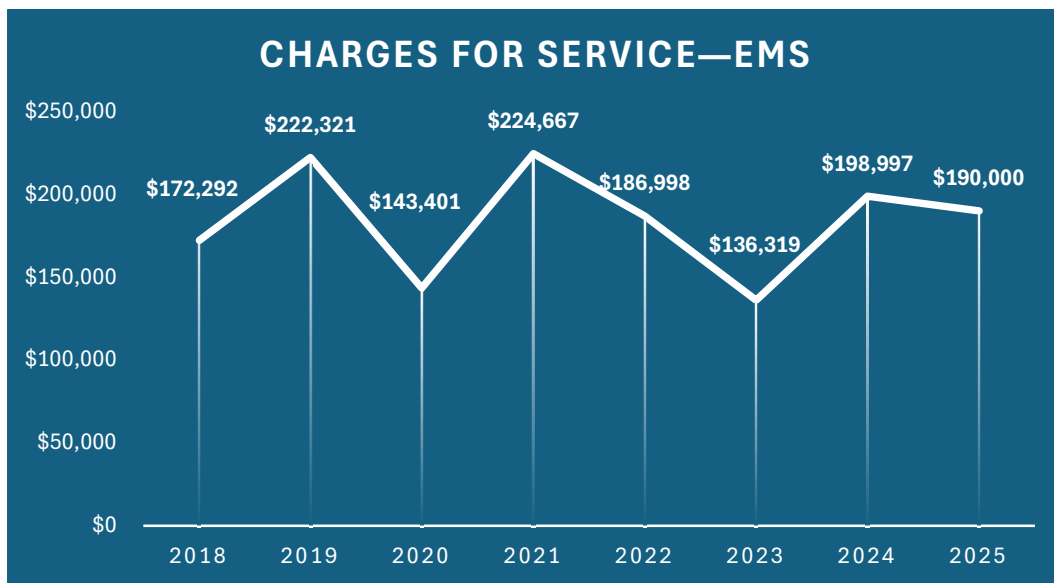
Sanctuary in the Pines

This Planned Unit Development was authorized by the Board of County Commissioners in 2007; however, development has not yet started. The property was impacted by the 2013 Black Forest Fire and the current developers have been cleaning up and preparing the site for several years. The development plan projects 390 high end homes on 2.5 acre lots with a 2.5-acre lot designated for BFFPD Fire Station/Sheriff Substation at Shoup and Frontier Ridge Lane. The average residential assessed value per home is estimated at \$1.5 to 2.5 million.

EMS Transport Revenue

The following figure shows the historical collection of EMS transport revenue since 2018. 2018 to 2023 are the actual collections, 2024 is estimated and 2025 is budgeted.

Figure 7: BFFPD EMS Transport Revenue (2018–2025)



The scope of this report does not allow for a comprehensive analysis of EMS billing for BFFPD. A thorough evaluation would typically include a review of several key factors, such as the breakdown of Basic Life Support (BLS) and Advanced Life Support (ALS) transports, utilization of GEMT billing opportunities, payer mix, the number of EMS incidents where District staff did not transport a patient, and the collection rates of the District's billing agency.

Recently, Firefighter Lucas was assigned to address EMS billing. During our discussion, he noted that the absence of a Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI) program within BFFPD may be leading to missed opportunities for accurate billing. He is currently reviewing the District's existing billing arrangement with Quad Billing and has identified concerns related to collection rates, data ownership, and the potential costs of transitioning to a new billing agency.

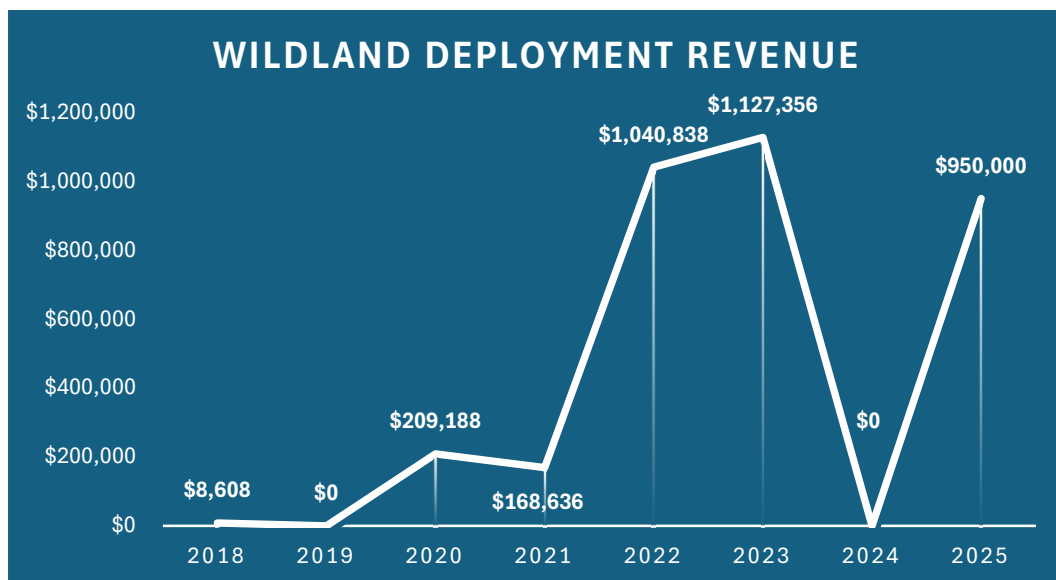
While FF Lucas estimates that BFFPD could generate up to \$400,000 annually in transport revenue, I recommend conducting a comprehensive evaluation of EMS transport billing and collections before assuming such a significant increase. This analysis would provide a clearer understanding of potential revenue opportunities and any necessary operational adjustments to optimize billing efficiency.

Wildland Deployment Revenue

In 2022, BFFPD placed a strong emphasis on reimbursable wildland deployments outside the District. This program utilizes a Type 3 engine staffed by a mix of career Firefighters and wildland technicians, with the State typically covering the backfill costs—ensuring BFFPD maintains regular staffing levels when personnel are deployed.

The following figure displays the revenue received for wildland deployment since 2018 based on the financial audits and the current adopted budget.

Figure 8: BFFPD Wildland Deployment Revenue (2018–2025)



In 2024, the Type 3 engine was out of service and unavailable for deployment resulting in the District not collecting any revenue for this program that year. The resource requests for wildland fires typically prioritize Type 3 engines over Type 6 due to their operational capacity. While a Type 3 engine requires higher initial investment and increased maintenance costs, it offers a better return on investment, since there is a higher demand and limited availability of Type 3 engines. Type 6 engines are not as desirable and there is a significantly greater supply of Type 6 engines available.

The overhead costs associated with the Wildland Deployment Program include:

- A portion of the Type 3 engine's expenses.
- Wildland Technicians' salaries.
- Administrative Officer time for billing and program management.

When not deployed, Wildland Technicians are assigned to regular shifts within BFFPD, enhancing the District's response capacity.

For 2025, the program is projected to generate \$950,000 in revenues and identified \$857,606 in expenditures. However, the additional costs for the Type 3 engine maintenance, Type 3 capital replacement, and the percentage of time one of the Administration Officer spends on billing are not captured in the itemized section of the budget. General fund ending fund balance has \$400,230 reserved as "Deployment Ops ending fund balance". The full cost of Wildland Technicians is part of normal district wages and benefits and is not itemized in the deployment ops line item. When deployed, their costs are transferred to deployment ops.

Beyond revenue generation, the program provides several key advantages for BFFPD:

- **Enhanced Training & Experience:** Firefighters gain valuable experience handling large, complex wildland incidents that they would not typically encounter within BFFPD.
- **Firefighter Recruitment and career advancement:** The Wildland Technician position serves as an entry-level pathway to a full-time firefighting career, allowing BFFPD to recruit from an internal pool of known personnel.
- **Overtime Opportunities:** Firefighters have the option to deploy with the engine or provide backfill coverage at the station, offering additional income opportunities.

The greatest challenge of a wildland deployment program is its dependency on wildfire activity. In years with few or no major fires, the program will incur overhead costs without generating revenue, which could impact BFFPD's financial stability for that fiscal year when the budget is balanced with the assumed wildland revenue, which is budget at \$950,000 for 2025.

Drawing from experience managing a large wildland deployment program at Unified Fire Authority, we found it prudent to establish a dedicated "Wildland Fund" to improve financial tracking and sustainability. This fund would:

- Isolate all program-related costs and revenues in a separate fund. BFFPD has isolated most of the costs as part of the 2025 budget, but it does not appear all costs have been captured.
- Maintain a reserve balance sufficient to cover at least one year of overhead expenses in case of low deployment activity.
- Sweep excess revenue from the Wildland Fund into the General Fund after meeting reserve targets, typically for the next fiscal year.
- During years with limited deployments, allow the General Fund to provide an intra-fund transfer to the Wildland Fund with a policy to reimburse the General Fund once revenue is restored.

Implementing this financial structure would enhance transparency, financial stability, and long-term sustainability for BFFPD's Wildland Deployment Program with limited negative impact to the service delivery for BFFPD residents should there be a low deployment year.

Sales Tax Revenue and Impact Fees

Colorado permits Fire Districts to implement sales tax as a revenue source and Impact Fees for new developments. If BFFPD wishes to explore these options, the District should consult with legal counsel to understand the regulatory requirements, approval process, and potential value for revenue generation.

Scope of Emergency Services

The BFFPD website states that the Operations Division is an all-hazards response organization that is prepared and trained to mitigate emergency incidents such as:

- Emergency Medical Services (Advanced Life Support response and transport)
- Motor Vehicle Accidents/Extrication
- Physical Entrapments
- Fire Suppression
- Wildland Fire
- Odor Investigations
- Gas Leaks
- Hazardous Materials
- Technical Rescue:
 - Water Rescue (Surface)
 - Ice Rescue
 - Trench Collapse
 - Building Collapse
 - Confined Space
 - Rope Rescue (Low and High Angle)

Emergency Incidents (2022–2024)

The following figure identifies the total volume of incidents by situation found from 2022 to 2024. The breakdown is based on the scope of emergency services described on the BFFPD website. This data was gathered through ESO, the records management software for the District. The coding of incidents is filled in by the person completing the incident report and is only as accurate as the categorization of the emergency by the person completing the report.

Figure 9: BFFPD Total Volume of Incidents by Situation Found (2022–2024)

Incident Type	2022	2023	2024	Yearly Average	Monthly Average
EMS	567	563	563	564	47.0
Motor Vehicle Accidents/Extrication	0	3	1	1	0.1
Physical Entrapments	0	0	0	0	0.0
Fire Suppression	20	17	25	21	1.7
Wildland Fire	7	11	13	10	0.9
Haz Mat/ Odor/Gas	26	25	9	20	1.7
Technical Rescue	0	0	0	0	0.0
Other Emergencies	61	55	62	59	4.9
Total Emergencies	681	674	673	676	56.3
Public Assist	44	48	45	46	3.8
False Alarm/No Emergency Found	148	136	155	146	12.2
Dispatched - Canceled En Route	102	139	154	132	11.0
Total Non-Emergencies	294	323	354	324	27.0
Total Incidents	975	997	1,027	1,000	83.3

Based on the actual needs of the District, BFFPD's primary focus should remain on EMS, fire suppression, wildland fire response, and operations level hazardous materials incidents (including odor and gas leaks), as these are the most frequent types of emergencies within the District.

While motor vehicle accidents requiring extrication may occur less frequently, maintaining a basic level of preparedness for these time-sensitive incidents is reasonable. However, physical entrapment and technical rescue require specialized training and equipment, and BFFPD has not responded to any incidents requiring these capabilities in the past three years.

Meanwhile, the Colorado Springs Fire Department has trained crews specializing in technical rescue, including a full-time Heavy Rescue Company capable of responding to such incidents. These resources are available to assist BFFPD through an existing mutual aid agreement.

Given this, BFFPD should consider adjusting its approach:

- Maintain awareness-level training for physical entrapment and technical rescue.
- Discontinue technician-level capabilities for technical rescue.
- Reallocate resources to better align with the community's needs and BFFPD's core mission.

This strategic shift would ensure that resources are focused on high-priority emergency response areas, while still allowing for mutual aid support in specialized rescue situations.

Staffing

The total FTE staffing approved in the 2025 Budget is 40 full time, 6 Wildland full time, and five Volunteers. The breakdown between administration, operations, wildland, and volunteers is outlined below, including current approved FTE and actual positions filled for each position as of February 2025.

- **4 Administration Positions:** 3 positions currently filled
 - 1 Fire Chief, vacant
 - 2 Administrative Officers, Both filled
 - 1 Mechanic, 1 filled
- **36 Operations Positions:** 27 positions currently filled
 - 3 Captains (Budgeted at BC pay grade), vacant
 - 6 Lieutenants, 4 filled
 - 27 Firefighters, 23 filled
- **6 Wildland Technicians:** 3 filled
- **Volunteer EMS:** 5 positions filled

Note: Personnel in an acting position are counted in their regular rank, not the acting position and the Interim Chief and Deputy Chief are not captured in this list. The Deputy Chief and Captain (Training) were not funded for 2025.

Observations on Staffing

The level of service provided to the community must align with the revenue generated for service delivery. Greater financial resources allow for a higher level of service, while budget constraints necessitate adjustments to maintain long-term sustainability.

With the known reduction in property tax revenue for 2025 and the anticipated decline in 2026, BFFPD may need to explore cost-reduction strategies to remain sustainable. The following considerations are based on my professional experience and analysis:

Administrative Positions

The current personnel costs for Administrative positions approved in the 2025 budget are identified in the following figure.

Figure 10: BFFPD Administrative Wages and Benefits

Position	Total Compensation
Fire Chief	\$214,920
Battalion Chiefs (3)	\$428,611
Fleet Manager	\$127,296
Admin Officer (2)	\$228,438
Total	\$999,265

The District did not fund the Deputy Chief and Training Captain positions and added three Captain (Battalion Chief) positions, going forward in this report, they will be called Battalion Chiefs. The Battalion Chief positions are intended to work on shift from a command vehicle, however, these positions are not currently filled. If filled, they should be assigned major program responsibilities, such as operations, logistics, and EMS.

Maintaining constant staffing for a Battalion Chief position would require extensive use of overtime. If BFFPD is desiring these positions to be on duty and provide consistent coverage, the District will need to capture the cost for overtime and/or acting in capacity for the time Battalion Chiefs are on leave (sick/vacation). This can be as many as 20-25 shifts each year, or 60-75 shifts for all three.

If the Battalion Chief positions were eliminated, BFFPD could restore one or two sworn administrative positions (Deputy Chief/Battalion Chief/Captain) to oversee operations, training and EMS. While two positions would be helpful, a single person could perform these roles in a small district like BFFPD with some assistance from line personnel while on duty or with overtime funds.

The current staffing of two Administrative Officers provides an operational advantage by distributing responsibilities across finance, administration, logistics, and wildland billing. One of these officers also deploys with a wildland Incident Management Team (IMT) and manages wildland billing. To optimize funding, the proportion of time spent on wildland-related tasks should be allocated to the wildland fund, reducing the burden on the general fund.

Observations related to the Administrative Officer positions:

- **Finance Expertise:** Currently, neither Administrative Officer has a background in government finance. Consideration should be given to developing the existing staff or hiring an experienced finance professional with a government finance background to manage fiscal responsibilities effectively.
- **Potential Staffing Adjustments:** If Officers or Battalion Chiefs assume additional administrative responsibilities, it may be feasible to reduce the number of Administrative Officers to one without compromising operational efficiency.

The Fleet Manager / Mechanic is an essential role for the District, but expectations should be carefully managed. Key observations:

- **Preventative Maintenance:** The mechanic should primarily focus on preventative maintenance, minor repairs, and coordinating contract services for heavier maintenance needs.
- **Apparatus Construction:** While the in-house building of the Type 6 engines is ongoing, it may not have been the most efficient use of the mechanic's time. Future apparatus builds should be evaluated to determine whether spending the funds to purchase a fully operational unit is a more cost effective and timely option.

Operational Oversight

If the Battalion Chief positions are eliminated as outlined in the previous section, the Lieutenant position at Station 1 could be upgraded to a Captain position with the added responsibility of overseeing daily operations for the District. Given BFFPD's current emergency response volume, this structure should be manageable for the Captain while maintaining operational oversight. Opportunities with this restructuring are as follows:

- **Clear Chain of Command:** The Lieutenant at Station 2 would report directly to the Captain at Station 1 under this model, ensuring streamlined leadership and decision-making.

- **Expanded Officer Roles:** The District could delegate administrative responsibilities to these officers, such as hazardous materials coordination, logistics management, and assistance with training programs.
- **Incident Command Support:** For larger incidents requiring additional command oversight, a Battalion Chief from Monument Fire District (MFD), Falcon Fire Protection District (FFPD), or Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) is available through automatic aid agreements.
- **Duty Officer System:** A "Duty Officer" notification system could ensure that BFFPD sworn command staff are alerted and available to respond as needed, providing additional leadership support during significant incidents.

This structure balances operational effectiveness with financial sustainability, leveraging regional partnerships to maintain strong incident command capabilities.

Operational Staffing

There are 33 authorized positions for staffing engines and ambulances in the 2025 budget with 27 positions currently filled. The District maintains a minimum staffing of six per day.

- 33 positions provide the opportunity to occasionally staff an ambulance while still maintaining two engines in service.
- Increasing the minimum staff to eight per day would provide the opportunity to consistently staff two engines and one ambulance and would be reasonable with 33 total authorized positions.

In evaluating future budget constraints, key observations include:

- BFFPD could retain the existing minimum staffing of six per day and reduce the authorized positions in Operations from 33 to 27, providing an additional three positions per day to cover vacancies (9 FTE per day).
- Overtime could be leveraged to cover staffing gaps on days when more than three personnel are on leave due to illness or vacation.

Wildland Staffing

The 2025 budget currently includes six full-time wildland technicians. BFFPD could consider reducing this number to three or transitioning these roles back to seasonal positions without health benefits to improve cost efficiency. In addition, consideration should be given to assign at least a portion of their costs to the Wildland Program.

Fire Stations

Station 1 is centrally located within the District, while Station 2 sits on the border between BFFPD and the Falcon Fire Protection District (FFPD), with the Monument Fire District (MFD) boundary nearby.

Evaluating the effectiveness of station locations for BFFPD falls outside the scope of this study, a formal Standards of Cover analysis would provide valuable insight into effectiveness of station location and staffing levels.

Based on observations, it is assumed that Station 2 covers a significant portion of rural FFPD as part of its first-due area. A few crews at BFFPD Station 2 estimate that 30–40% of the stations calls occur within FFPD's jurisdiction.

In the mid-2000s, there were discussions about a potential cost-sharing agreement for a joint station between FFPD and BFFPD. However, FFPD received legal advice against sharing the cost of a capital asset. As a result, BFFPD proceeded with the independent construction of Station 2 in 2008. The area of FFPD near Station 2 remains very rural and, as of now, not an immediate priority for FFPD to staff a station to cover the region.

BFFPD could consider exploring a staffing partnership with FFPD for Station 2, where FFPD would cover one shift and BFFPD the remaining two. A similar model has been successfully implemented by the cities of Portland and Gresham in Oregon.

An overview of the two fire stations serving BFFPD is highlighted in the following figure.

Figure 11: BFFPD Fire Stations

	Station 1/Admin	Station 2
Address	11445 Teachout Road	16465 Ridge Run Way
Year Constructed	2003	2009
Age	22	16
Condition	Good	Fair
Auxiliary Power	Yes	Yes
Total Bays	4	4
Maximum Sleeping Capacity	9	5
Bathrooms	5	3
Shower Facilities	3	2
Dedicated Exercise Room	No (Bay)	No (Basement)
Training/Meeting Room	Yes	No
Sprinklered	Yes	Yes
Apparatus Exhaust System	Yes	Yes
Maximum Daily Staffing	6	6
Minimum Daily Staffing	3	3

Fleet

The following figure highlights the primary response apparatus for BFFPD.

Figure 12: BFFPD Primary Response Apparatus

Type	Call Sign	Year	Age	Condition	Mileage	Status
Type 1 Engine	711	2022	3	Good	25,942	Frontline
Type 1 Engine	712	2019	6	Good	50,922	Frontline
Type 1 Engine	8591	2006	19	Fair	122,846	Reserve
Type 1 Engine	7629	1993	32	Poor	116,290	OOS
Aerial Truck	731	2005	20	Poor	25,681	OOS
Ambulance	781	2020	5	Good	24,808	Frontline
Ambulance	782	2020	5	Good	26,500	Frontline
Type 3 Engine	746	2013	12	Fair (needs frame crack repair)	63,009	Frontline (OOS)
Type 6 Engine	608	2023	2	Excellent	110	Build process
Type 6 Engine	1609	2023	2	Excellent	110	Build process
Type 6 Engine	741	2015	10	Good	49,758	Frontline
Type 6 Engine	742	2006	19	Good	39,000	Frontline
Type 6 Engine	703	1999	26	Fair	45,302	Reserve
Tender	761	2024	1	Excellent	5,824	Frontline
Tender	9081	2006	19	Good	20,890	Reserve

The frontline Type 1 engines, ambulances, and Type 6 engines (currently under construction) are in good to excellent condition. Previously, the Board of Directors operated under the assumption that frontline engines must be replaced every 10 years. While this is a common recommendation, replacement timelines should be based on apparatus activity levels, operating condition, and the quality of maintenance provided rather than a fixed timeframe.

After consulting with the District Mechanic, it appears that BFFPD's frontline engines could remain effective for 12–15 years, given their current condition and maintenance practices.

The primary reserve Type 1 engine, now 19 years old, has continued to perform well in its reserve role. However, the District Mechanic suggests that it is approaching the end of its useful lifespan and should be considered for replacement soon.

For ambulances and Type 6 engines, the District should closely monitor their condition and begin replacement planning at least two years before they reach the end of their frontline operational lifespan. The District Mechanic will provide the most accurate timeline for replacement based on actual needs.

The Type 3 engine, used both within the District and for wildland fire deployments, can experience significant wear due to the nature of its deployment assignments. Currently, it appears to be time for its replacement. The value and operational necessity of Type 3 engines for wildland deployment are discussed in greater detail in the Wildland Deployment section of this report.

The Aerial Truck, recently purchased for \$250,000, is 20 years old, rated in poor condition, and currently out of service. According to the District Mechanic, it would require approximately \$400,000 in repairs to be brought back into service—with no guarantee that it would pass certification after repairs.

Given:

- BFFPD's primarily rural residential nature, where driveways and terrain challenge ladder truck access,
- The high cost of repair or replacement,
- Extensive training required to operate the apparatus, and
- Its limited operational value to the District,

It may be prudent for BFFPD to surplus the aerial truck and remove it from the apparatus inventory. In the unlikely event that such equipment is needed, both Colorado Springs Fire Department and Monument Fire District operate ladder trucks and could provide mutual aid.

Recruitment and Retention

BFFPD has faced significant challenges with Firefighter retention in recent years. Among the 27 career Firefighters currently assigned to operations; the average tenure is just 3.4 years as a career firefighter at BFFPD (Some Firefighters were hired with previous career experience as a “lateral hire”). The breakdown of career firefighter experience at BFFPD within shift operations is as follows:

- 0 Firefighters with 8 or more years
- 4 Firefighters with 5–7 years
- 16 Firefighters with 3–5 years
- 8 Firefighters with 2 or fewer years

The decision for a Firefighter to leave a fire agency is highly individual and personal, but organizations like BFFPD often struggle with retention due to:

- Lower wages compared to larger departments.
- Limited opportunities for promotion.
- Fewer emergencies, reducing opportunities for experience.
- Limited access to training and professional development.
- Concerns over District sustainability and growth potential.
- Challenges with leadership and organizational culture.

Many of these factors were identified by crews as reasons Firefighters have left the District in recent years. Additionally, several current Firefighters expressed that they are actively considering other opportunities and may leave if a better position becomes available.

In evaluating the wages for BFFPD, I compared three local district wage scales to BFFPD and found the District is significantly behind all three at every rank. The following figure shows the wages for three other local districts compared to BFFPD.

Figure 13: Top Step Wages Comparison for FF–Captain, 2025 Wage Scales

	BFFPD	Monument	Falcon	Cimarron
Captain	\$102,412	N/A	\$109,484	N/A
Lieutenant	\$92,713	\$126,932	\$104,271	\$119,450
Engineer	N/A	\$108,502	\$90,670	\$103,424
FF Paramedic	\$81,034	\$108,502	\$91,745	\$103,424
Firefighter	\$76,549	\$92,155	\$82,427	\$89,341

NEIGHBORING AGENCIES

BFFPD is adjacent to two fire districts and one city fire department. The District has automatic and mutual aid agreements with all three, including a response by their Battalion Chiefs for larger emergency operational leadership.

Monument Fire District

The Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District d/b/a Monument Fire District (MFD), operates under the governance of a seven-member Board of Directors, elected by the community. The district operates five fire stations with 21 Firefighters on duty each day providing fire, rescue, and EMS first response and transport. The Fire fighters are represented by IAFF Local 4319.

MFD's boundaries extend from the Rampart Range and Palmer Lake to the west, Northgate Boulevard to the south, Black Forest Road to the east, and County Line Road to the north. In addition to these areas, MFD also serves the City of Monument.

MFD is adjacent to BFFPD on BFFPD's northwest boundary. MFD Station 5, located on Highway 83 at the entrance to Flying Horse North, is approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the BFFPD boundary.

In January 2022, Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District and Donald Wescott Fire Protection District entered into a partial services contract, marking the first step toward unifying the two agencies. This agreement evolved into a full-services contract by July 2022 and a full merger by inclusion by December 2024 with the dissolution of the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District.

The following figure represents the financial overview of the MFD for the 2025 budget year.

Figure 14: Monument Fire District Financial Overview for the 2025 Budget Year

Monument Fire General Fund	2025 Budget
PROPERTY TAX (Certification of Tax Levies)	
Taxable Value	\$981,124,980
Millage Rate	18.400
Property Tax Collection	\$18,052,699
GENERAL FUND (2025 Budget Document)	
Beginning Fund Balance	\$7,132,573
REVENUES	\$23,928,427
EXPENDITURES	\$18,763,918
Transfers out (Other Funds)	\$7,659,988
Change in Fund Balance	(\$2,495,479)
Ending General Fund Balance	\$4,637,094
OTHER FUNDS ENDING BALANCE	
Capital Reserves Fund	\$729,200
Fleet Capital Fund	\$1,626,998
Emergency Reserve Fund	\$565,850
Contingency Fund	\$1,789,911
Impact Fee Fund	\$644,066
TOTAL ENDING FUND BALANCE (ALL FUNDS)	\$9,993,119

I met with MFD Chief Andy Kovacs to discuss the relationship with BFFPD. The Chief expressed that the collaboration with BFFPD has been positive, and the dropped border operational response—sending the closest resource regardless of jurisdiction—has been working effectively.

Chief Kovacs is open to exploring options for collaborative services between MFD and BFFPD. However, he emphasized the importance of BFFPD determining what is in its best interest before entering into any formal discussions. The Chief anticipates that MFD's Board of Directors will want to thoroughly assess the financial stability of BFFPD before considering any long-term plans for a full merger. MFD would need to ensure that such a merger provides clear benefits for both districts.

Falcon Fire Protection District

The Falcon Fire Protection District (FFPD) operates as an independent fire district under the governance of a five-member publicly elected Board of Directors. FFPD operates five fire stations with three stations staffed 24/7 by career Firefighters providing fire, rescue, and EMS first response and transport.

FFPD serves an estimated 66,000 residents with borders extending from Peyton Highway on the east, to County Line Road on the north, to one-half mile west of Marksheffel Road on the west and one mile north of Colorado Highway 94 on the south.

FFPD is adjacent to BFFPD on BFFPD's eastern boundary, wrapping around BFFPD partially on the north and south side of BFFPD.

The following figure represents the financial overview of the FFPD for the 2025 budget year.

Figure 15: Falcon Fire Protection District Financial Overview for the 2025 Budget Year

Falcon Fire General Fund	2025 Budget
PROPERTY TAX (2025 Budget Document)	
Taxable Value	\$748,768,590
Millage Rate	14.886
Property Tax Collection	\$11,146,169
GENERAL FUND (2025 Budget Document)	
Beginning Fund Balance	\$7,102,175
REVENUES (Operating and Non-Operating)	\$12,482,169
EXPENDITURES (Ops and Capital Outlay)	\$8,393,670
Transfers out (Other Funds)	\$4,300,000
Change in Fund Balance	(\$211,501)
Ending General Fund Balance	\$6,890,675
OTHER FUNDS ENDING BALANCE	
Capital Projects Fund	\$1,015,054
Ambulance Transport Fund	\$3,153,718
TOTAL ENDING FUND BALANCE (ALL FUNDS)	\$11,059,447

I met with Deputy Chief Jeff Petersma to discuss the relationship with BFFPD. He shared that the relationship had been strained over the past 5–6 years but has “flourished” in recent months following the appointment of Interim Chief Josh Bartlett.

Chief Petersma explained that in previous years, BFFPD had reduced its focus on ambulance response and rural firefighting, which diminished its value as a mutual aid partner for FFPD. This lack of reliable support led FFPD to expand agreements with smaller neighboring entities such as Ellicott Fire Protection District and Peyton Fire District to ensure desired tender responses that were previously available from BFFPD.

BFFPD Station 2 is located near the border of FFPD and BFFPD. In the mid-2000s, there was discussion about sharing the cost of a joint station in this area, but FFPD received legal advice against sharing in the cost of a capital asset. BFFPD ultimately proceeded with construction in 2008. The FFPD area near Station 2 remains very rural and is not currently forecasted to have an FFPD station built in the immediate area. There has also been no serious discussion about sharing staffing for BFFPD Station 2.

However, FFPD expressed concerns from a belief that BFFPD had been encouraging FFPD residents near Station 2 to leave FFPD and annex into BFFPD. This perception added strain to the relationships despite previous attempts to establish additional collaborative responses to the area. During my discussions with BFFPD crews, one member mentioned that one value of operating Station 2 was to entice FFPD taxpayers to annex into BFFPD. This suggests that previous BFFPD leadership may have pursued this strategy to justify staffing the station.

Despite past challenges, Interim Chief Bartlett's leadership has led to positive changes, including improved relationships and collaboration. For example, BFFPD quickly implemented the closest ambulance response policy after discussions with FFPD, an initiative that had stalled under previous administrations.

Regarding the future of collaboration, Chief Petersma emphasized that while FFPD is open to continuing mutual and automatic aid discussions, they are not interested in exploring cooperative service beyond maintaining a strong partnership. FFPD is focusing on managing rapid growth in other areas of its district and remains committed to serving those priorities.

Chief Petersma concluded by stating that the relationship with BFFPD is valued and important to FFPD. He expressed optimism about working with BFFPD's new leadership and looks forward to finding areas of mutual benefit under the leadership selected by the Board.

Colorado Springs Fire Department

The Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) is a large metropolitan fire agency serving a population of approximately 500,000 residents. CSFD operates 24 engine companies, 6 truck companies, 3 medical squads, 1 hazardous materials company, and 1 heavy rescue company, covering a developed area with hydrants throughout its jurisdiction.

CSFD borders BFFPD on the south. The area between E. Woodmen Road (south), Black Forest Road (west), Forest Meadows Avenue (east), and slightly north of Cowpoke Road (north) has been dual assessed (and served) between Colorado Springs and BFFPD. As of January 1, 2024, most of this area has been excluded from BFFPD taxation. According to the Board Treasurer, BFFPD and the city entered into an agreement to transition the loss of funding over three years, ending in 2026.

CSFD Station 24, located just south of InterQuest and Powers, should be open by July of this year and will provide closer back up coverage to the east side of Black Forest. In addition, CSFD has plans to construct Station 26, which would provide coverage for the newly annexed areas on the south end of BFFPD.

I met with CSFD Chief Randy Royal to discuss the department's relationship with BFFPD. Chief Royal described the relationship as positive, noting that CSFD has been happy to assist BFFPD operationally. Currently, an on-duty Battalion Chief is dispatched for multi-unit responses within BFFPD. While Chief Royal is open to discussing collaborative service opportunities, he acknowledged that BFFPD's rural firefighting operations differ significantly from CSFD's urban-focused operations. He also expressed uncertainty about whether the Black Forest community would welcome a permanent presence from Colorado Springs in their area.

Chief Royal emphasized that he values the partnership with BFFPD and remains committed to helping whenever possible.

CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the observations and findings identified in this report, the following are considerations for the two primary options for BFFPD: Remaining an independent fire agency and contracting / merging with another agency. At this point in time, it does not appear that a Fire Authority with several regional partners would be a timely option for BFFPD.

Remaining Independent

Remaining independent allows BFFPD elected officials to maintain exclusive control over Fire and EMS services in Black Forest. Based on my review of the District, this is a feasible option, but there are several challenges that must be carefully evaluated.

Sustainability:

BFFPD must align its level of service with available revenue to ensure long-term sustainability. While the District currently maintains a healthy fund balance and anticipates some growth, the pace of development remains uncertain.

Key financial considerations include:

- **Budget Constraints:** BFFPD is projected to expend all revenue collected in 2025 and anticipates a \$550,000 reduction in property tax revenue for 2026. Without new revenue sources, such as an increased millage rate or a sales tax initiative, expenditure reductions will be necessary for 2026.
- **Future Growth Uncertainty:** While BFFPD is surrounded by other agencies and has seen taxable value growth, a slowdown in development could create funding challenges in maintaining service levels.
- **Community Support for Independence:** A key unknown is whether the community values retaining a local, independent fire district. If independence is a priority, challenges such as firefighter wages, staffing, and administrative capacity could be mitigated through public support for increased funding.

The following considerations pertain to retaining independence and explore potential cost-saving measures to address budget constraints while maintaining operational effectiveness:

Fire Chief Selection:

If BFFPD remains independent, strong leadership will be essential. The Board must recruit a professional Fire Chief/CEO with the ability to engage effectively with the community, work collaboratively with the Board, and lead the organization through complex challenges

To ensure the best leadership, the Board should conduct a thorough executive search, considering both internal and external candidates. Simply appointing an internal candidate without a structured selection process is not recommended.

Retention of Firefighters:

The District may be able to increase wages to compete with neighboring agencies, however, a small organization like BFFPD may never be able to overcome the limited opportunities for promotion, low call volume, and limited access to training and professional development.

Exploring shared staffing of Station 2:

BFFRPD could explore a shared staffing model with FFPD as described in the station section of this report. That would reduce the total FTE necessary by three to four operational positions and make station 2 a viable location for both BFFRPD and FFPD.

Administration:

As an independent entity, BFFPD is required to provide the necessary administrative services such as finance, HR, and logistics. Small districts either end up with a larger percentage of the budget to provide those services or under fund them and find increased risk and liability by not managing these critical areas well. Currently, BFFPD has budgeted just under \$1 million for administration and shift supervision for 2025.

Key considerations include:

- Replace the three budgeted Battalion Chiefs with one or two sworn staff officers
- Upgrade the Lt at Station 1 to Captain for shift oversight along with additional administrative assignments
- Allocate a percentage of one Administrative Officers time to the Wildland Program and/or reduce staffing to one Administrative Officer.

Operations and Wildland:

BFFPD could reduce the FTEs from 33 to 27 and maintain minimum staffing of 6 per day and reduce the wildland approved positions from six to three.

Contract/Merger with Another Agency

Establishing a contractual agreement with another agency is a viable option for BFFPD. Based on my observations and findings, if BFFPD determines that this approach provides value, a phased transition toward a full merger would be the most strategic course of action. While the District could pause at any stage, the greatest benefits would be realized through a complete merger. A phased approach to this option is defined here.

- 1. Enter into a Management Services Agreement:** This initial step would allow BFFPD to contract for executive leadership and administrative oversight while maintaining operational independence.
- 2. Expand to a Full-Service Contract:** BFFPD would contract all fire and emergency medical services from the partner agency, reducing administrative burdens and potentially increasing operational efficiency.
- 3. Pursue a Full Merger by Inclusion and Dissolution of BFFPD:** If deemed beneficial, BFFPD could formally integrate with the partner agency, dissolving as an independent district.

To assess potential partnerships, I met with leadership from the three agencies adjacent to BFFPD to discuss their interest and organization. Cimarron Hills Fire Protection District was not considered due to its lack of a shared border with BFFPD and its smaller size.

- Monument Fire District (MFD) has expressed a willingness to discuss a contract or potential merger with BFFPD.
- Falcon Fire Protection District is not currently interested in pursuing an agreement.
- Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) operates in a vastly different service area but would be willing to offer contract services to BFFPD.

Given these factors, this section focuses on MFD as the most viable option.

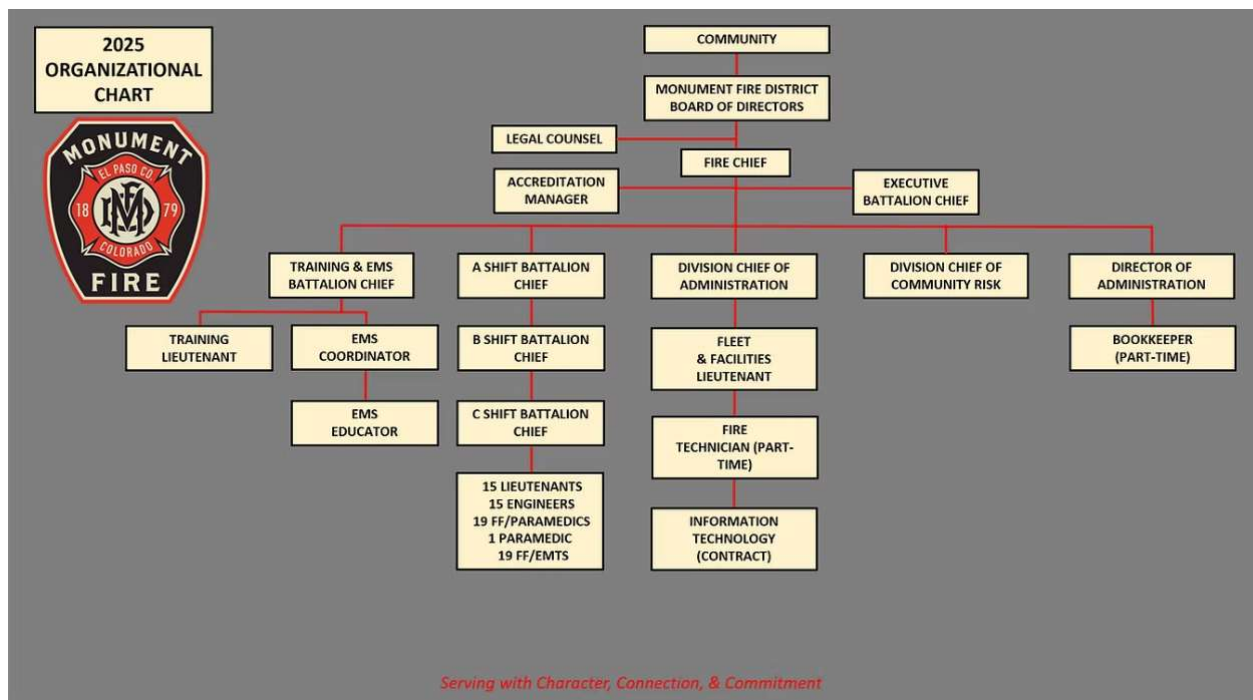
Monument Fire District Overview

MFD recently completed a successful merger with the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District through a process like the one described previously. BFFPD personnel regularly collaborate with MFD on emergency incidents and hold MFD Firefighters and leadership in high regard.

The MFD Fire Chief brings significant leadership experience, having started his career at Orange County Fire Authority in California (a large fire authority serving multiple cities and unincorporated areas), advancing to the Division Chief rank prior to assuming the Fire Chief/CEO position at MFD. Under his leadership, MFD successfully navigated its recent merger and appears to have the trust and respect of both personnel and the Board of Directors.

MFD operates five full-time career fire stations with 21 Firefighters on duty each day. The following organizational chart outlines the structure of all 82 career personnel (Firefighters and civilian staff) within the district. The average firefighter assigned to operations has 9.3 years of experience with MFD, with the most senior employee working 27 years.

Figure 16: Monument Fire District Organizational Chart



Key Considerations for Contracting or Merging with MFD

Administrative Capacity:

MFD appears to have the necessary administrative capacity and experience to manage BFFPD's administrative services. Currently, BFFPD allocates just under \$1 million annually for wages and benefits for administrative staff, including the shift Battalion Chiefs. In addition, BFFPD has expenditures for records management software, IT systems, and other support services. Given MFD's existing infrastructure, it is unlikely that all current BFFPD administrative positions would be required, resulting in potential cost savings.

Operational Capacity:

If BFFPD and MFD were to operate as a single agency, they would operate seven career fire stations, significantly enhancing the ability to handle major incidents and manage routine emergency call surges. Additionally, MFD provides 24/7 shift supervision, ensuring a higher level of operational oversight. Maintaining 33 operational FTEs or reducing the FTEs to 27 as previously identified with a minimum staffing of six per day can be a priority in the discussions with MFD.

Shared Station Staffing:

MFD staffs a station at the entrance to Flying Horse North on Hwy 83 and BFFRPD staffs' station 2 on the border with FFPD. Conducting a Standards of Cover analysis would help identify the value of either or both stations in the system, however, these two stations could provide opportunities to share in the operational cost of mutually beneficial station locations between all three Districts.

Property Taxation Considerations with Merger into MFD:

Should BFFPD wish to pursue a full merger into MFD, the electors of BFFPD will need to approve inclusion into MFD and dissolution of BFFPD as a separate taxing district at an election held for this purpose. The effect of such inclusion on property taxes is that the community would then pay taxes at the current mill levy rate in MFD in future property tax years (i.e., if an inclusion was approved by the voters in 2025, such inclusion would increase their current millage rate from the current BFFPD mill levy of 15.650 to MFD's current millage rate of 18.400. This equates to an additional \$840,000 in total property taxes levied against BFFPD properties using 2025's taxable assessed value.)

The Board could incrementally seek increases to the BFFPD mill levy rate at initiated TABOR election(s) as an interim step toward inclusion, which could lessen the mill levy rate differences between BFFPD and MFD at the time of inclusion. The technical details of this process and inclusion elections should be discussed with District counsel.

Firefighter Retention:

A merger with MFD could help address several key retention challenges previously identified in this report: MFD's average operational firefighter has 9.3 years' experience at MFD, compared to 3.4 years for the firefighters at BFFPD.

- **Lower wages compared to larger departments** → MFD offers significantly higher wages.
- **Limited opportunities for promotion** → MFD has five stations, a dedicated Engineer rank, and more officer positions. A merger would expand promotion opportunities from 6 officer positions (BFFPD) to 21 officer and 21 Engineer positions (combined agency).
- **Fewer emergency incidents, limiting experience** → MFD responded to 4,000 emergencies in 2024. Combined with BFFPD's 1,000 emergencies, the merged department would handle 5,000 calls annually, increasing exposure to real-world incidents.
- **Limited access to training and professional development** → MFD has a dedicated training and EMS team, including a Training Battalion Chief, Training Lieutenant, EMS Coordinator, and EMS Educator.
- **Concerns over district sustainability and growth potential** → MFD is experiencing significant growth, with an estimated \$19 million in property tax revenue in 2025.
- **Challenges with leadership and organizational culture** → BFFPD crews have expressed a positive perception of MFD's culture, leadership and Fire Chief.

Firefighter Wages:

MFD has increased their wages for firefighters over the last several years and offers significantly higher wages than BFFPD. The wage gap between MFD and BFFPD presents both opportunities and challenges for BFFPD.

- Higher wages would help improve firefighter retention for BFFPD.
- Aligning BFFPD wages with MFD's pay scale would come at an estimated cost of over \$470,000 for the existing 27 staff.

A comparison was made on wages only, it does not include the cost of health or other benefits provided. The following chart outlines the projected cost impact of transitioning BFFPD employees to MFD's wage structure.

Figure 17: Impact to BFFPD of matching Monument Fire District Wages

	BFFPD	Monument	Difference	BFFPD Positions	Impact
Battalion Chief	\$113,239	\$151,178	\$37,939	0	\$0
Captain	\$102,412	None	N/A	0	\$0
Lieutenant 1	\$92,713	\$126,932	\$34,219	0	\$0
Lieutenant 2	\$92,713	\$122,051	\$29,338	0	\$0
Lieutenant 3	\$92,713	\$117,356	\$24,643	0	\$0
Lieutenant 4	\$92,713	\$112,842	\$20,129	4	\$80,516
Engineer 1	None	\$108,502	N/A	0	\$0
Engineer 2	None	\$104,162	N/A	0	\$0
Engineer 3	None	\$99,996	N/A	0	\$0
Engineer 4	None	\$95,996	N/A	0	\$0
FF Paramedic 1	\$89,071	\$108,502	\$19,431	0	\$0
FF Paramedic 2	\$85,046	\$104,162	\$19,116	2	\$38,232
FF Paramedic 3	\$82,972	\$99,996	\$17,024	1	\$17,024
FF Paramedic 4	\$79,007	\$95,996	\$16,989	1	\$16,989
Firefighter 1	\$76,549	\$92,155	\$15,606	4	\$62,424
Firefighter 2	\$72,524	\$88,470	\$15,946	8	\$127,568
Firefighter 3	\$70,450	\$84,931	\$14,481	7	\$101,367
Firefighter 4	\$66,485	\$81,533	\$15,048	0	\$0
Sub Total				27	\$444,120
Estimated net cost to convert 6 senior BFFPD FF positions to Engineer 4					\$26,700
Total					\$470,820

Notes for Figure 17

- Monument top step is 4, Black Forest is 1.
- 2 BFF Firefighters are acting as Lieutenants, they are represented as FFs on this chart.
- 2 BFF Lieutenants are Paramedics, they are captured here without their premium pay.
- BFFPD does not have steps for Lieutenant, all BFFPD Lieutenants are entered on this spreadsheet at bottom step of Lieutenant to compare to Monument.
- BFFPD pays \$12,552 for Primary PM, PM 1-4 is FF-1-4 plus the \$12,552 for PM Cert.
- Monument staffs an Engineer position for each engine, BFFPD would need to convert six Firefighter positions to Engineer in the event of a merger.

Maintain a Local Feeling:

For community members concerned about losing their local fire department, lessons can be drawn from the success of the Unified Fire Authority (UFA), which has strived to maintain a local fire department identity while serving 15 cities and unincorporated areas of Salt Lake County. Strategies that could be adopted to preserve a community-centered feel for the Black Forest community include:

- Active participation in local community events as a top priority
- Fire stations displaying the Black Forest name
- Fire apparatus at Black Forest stations featuring dual branding (MFD and Black Forest)
- Firefighters working at Black Forest stations wearing MFD patches on one shoulder and Black Forest patches on the other
- MFD could allow firefighters to bid for their work assignment. This provides the opportunity for firefighters to serve in the communities they care about, fostering a sense of local connection

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