

Community Fire Meeting Minutes 3-14-16

At least 35 community members attended this meeting.

Meeting opened with a discussion of fire safety in the home and offering information pamphlets. The Fire Service is looking into a community bulk buy of fire extinguishers from Jerry's, in order to make them more affordable and available to the community.

Discussion of annexing the area above the 3 mile marker into Swisshome-Deadwood Rural Fire District: Property owners in the SHDW Fire District currently pay \$2.15 per \$1000.00 of assessed value. By annexing into the district, property owners in the proposed annexation area would pay the same rate to be part of the district. Residents currently in the district would see no change in tax rate. The current ODF tax would remain unchanged. The proposed area is about 2,600 acres, consisting of 102 properties with total assessed value of approx. 9 million. This would generate roughly \$19,500.00 per year for fire protection at \$2.15/\$1000.00. The current system of voluntary donations (\$1.00/\$1,000.00 suggested) for our volunteer fire service is not sustainable as it typically generates only about \$3000.00 per year – barely enough revenue to pay the bills (insurance and utilities) and not enough to give us an operating budget.

The most inexpensive way to move forward in the annexation process is by petition. If a simple majority of voters in the annexation area are in favor, AND owners of more than half the total acreage (2600 acres total proposed area) in the annexation area are in favor, we can submit an application for a petition to Lane County. There is a \$9,000.00 “administration fee” paid to the county for this process. Once the petition had all the signatures and the endorsement of SHDW Board of

Directors, it would go before the Lane County Commissioners at a public hearing. If the County Commissioners find that the proposal meets all Lane County requirements, the annexation would be approved.

Our Fire Chief, Greg H. has been talking to Greg Linsey, Chief of SHDW FD. According to Greg L. the BOD of SHDW has a majority in favor of annexing our area. Greg H. plans on attending the April board meeting of SHDW FD to discuss annexation with the board.

There may be grant funding available for the \$9000.00 petition application fee, and Greg H. is exploring other funding possibilities.

Question: What would annexation look like for us?

Our current volunteer station would become another station in the district. It would be the responsibility of SHDW FD to supply the station with equipment which meets the requirements of a legitimate fire service. We would also need at least 3 or 4 volunteers from our area to commit to completing Firefighter 1 training, to staff the station and to respond to incidents throughout the district.

Our existing equipment would remain the property of the community (DCS) unless it was included in negotiations for annexation.

Negotiations would be discussed and decided by DCS with input from the community.

Question: what would annexation gain for us?

We would get training, updated equipment, and insurance protection for our volunteers, who are currently unprotected from injury when responding to incidents. Also, legal liability would shift to SHDW FD.

Legal liability currently falls on the BOD of Deadwood Creek Services, which being a small non-profit run by volunteers, doesn't have much in the way of assets or liability insurance.

For homeowners with property insurance in the proposed area, annexation will likely bring significant insurance savings with improved fire ratings. How much depends on specifics of individual properties. Our Fire Chief, after talking to his insurance agent, would see a reduction of more than 50% in premiums, from \$2,200.00 down to \$800.00. Greg encouraged interested people to call their insurance agents to find out for themselves what they could save.

Additionally, being part of a legitimate Fire District would increase the availability of grant funding opportunities, and would benefit the current Emergency Preparedness effort, since emergency networks use the chain of command existing in rural fire districts. These groups would be more inclined to work with us and more funding/equipment may be available.

We would also be included in "mutual aid" agreements that SHDW FD currently has, where other districts contribute resources and personnel in the case of a large incident beyond our capabilities.

Question: How this might affect the interest and dedication to the fire service from the "next generation" of Deadwood Valley residents?

Two of our "younger people" responded that having updated equipment, real training, insurance protection, and reduced personal liability (with annexation) would make them much more motivated to volunteer than the way things currently stand.

There was recognition of all the legwork that went into gathering this information and networking with other fire departments. Thanks Greg! Big thanks also to Rock for his generous donation of time and materials to get/keep the trucks running.

Question: What are the next steps to take to move forward with annexation?

The next steps to take in this process are gathering all the required information for the petition and finding the funding to apply. Someone mentioned that the folks who attended this meeting were mostly the usual cast of characters who participate in community events, and questions were raised about all the other folks who live here, and what their opinions might be on this subject. One neighbor had the excellent suggestion that folks at this meeting who know some of the folks that don't usually attend meetings talk to them about annexation to get their input. There was talk of obtaining the list of voters for the area and polling them by phone to get a realistic idea of the support for annexation.

There was a brief discussion about the upcoming school bond vote, and how these two issues together could affect the choices of the voters and taxpayers. There was a comment that taxes never seem to be lifted, and that owning property didn't mean folks weren't struggling to make it financially. Several people asked if Greg would suspend polling voters by phone on the annexation issue until after the school bond election, and he agreed. The meeting broke apart as the conversation began to drift to the school bond issue, but it was pretty much done anyway.