GOLDEN GATE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
P.O. BOX 843, GOLDEN, COLORADO 80402-0843

April 2006

The purpose of this special District newsletter is to correct allegations made in recent community mailings.

The responsibility for adoption of fire codes is specifically assigned to fire district boards by Colorado State law. The adoption of the current fire code by the Golden Gate Board was the culmination of many meetings and discussions by the fire marshals and fire chiefs working in cooperation with code officials from Jefferson County. The Golden Gate Board supported the recommendation of the fire marshals and fire chiefs when we adopted the fire code. The adoption of the District fire code was then reviewed and approved by Jefferson County. The code adoption process was entirely legal.

All codes are subject to interpretation. The fire chief has the authority by State law to interpret and apply the fire code. State law specifies that any code interpretation by the fire chief is subject to review by the district board. This is a built-in appeal process that allows each citizen the right to come to the board with specific concerns over fire code interpretation or enforcement. This process protects the rights of citizens and offers checks and balances in the application of fire codes.

Some members of our community have concerns about details of the fire code. That is why the Board requested the formation of a committee, open to all citizens of the district, to review the code in detail and make recommendations to the board. This group has been meeting regularly. One of the district board members (Paul Trost) is serving on the committee. Another district board member (Pat Madison) has donated his time and money to create and administer a website for this code review committee (www.goldencrc.org). Please check out the website if you wish to join this committee. As of this writing, the committee has not made any specific recommendations to the board for review.

The recent mailing refers to a fire inspection letter dated June 29, 2005. Fire inspection letters are not reviewed by the board. This is because the board is required by State law to remain neutral on specific code interpretation so that they may serve as an appeal body. This letter was reviewed and rescinded and a corrected letter was sent by the fire marshal. The property owners have subsequently met with the fire chief and have a signed agreement with the fire district.

There are many steps to the building permit process in Jefferson County. The District does not grant or deny building permits. Although Jefferson County controls the driveway standards and permits, the District is required to comment on any driveway that does not meet Jefferson County compliance. In many cases, the District can help landowners obtain a road standard variance with the County if we can find a cooperative way to mitigate safety concerns arising from a road plan. In the recent mailing, an example of a cooperative agreement reached between the fire district and a landowner (Befort) is cited. This agreement supported the landowner's desire to get a building permit that would otherwise be denied by Jefferson County because the access road exceeds County road grade standards. The landowner was not required to make this agreement with the fire district and has not filed any subsequent complaint or concern about the negotiated agreement. It is simply false to characterize this cooperative agreement as extortion.

The Concerned Citizens have frequently brought up the subject of home sprinkler systems. The fire code includes a requirement for residential sprinklers on large homes (greater than 3600 square feet). However, this requirement is in conflict with Jefferson County code standards and cannot be a basic fire code requirement by the fire district. Insurance companies grant discounts for home sprinkler systems. Residential sprinklers are recommended by fire professionals for homes built in regions with high fire danger such as Golden Gate Canyon.

The recent mailing states that the fire board "sold fire engines to themselves". This is false. The fire trucks in question were transferred to Front Range Fire Apparatus as trade-ins toward the purchase of a newer truck. The District obtained trade in value in excess of the true value of these trucks. This was a good deal for the taxpayers. Front Range Fire Apparatus then sold the trucks, but that transaction had nothing to do with the fire district. The Concerned Citizens have requested and been given district documents which completely explain this transaction. These documents include a full legal review of the sale that was conducted based on an earlier taxpayer concern. The legal review determined that there was no conflict of interest in the transaction.

District board meetings have always been open to the public and held on a regular schedule (currently they are the third Wednesday of every month). It has always been an easy matter to contact a board member or firefighter and check this schedule. Because of the recent citizen interest in the board meetings we have been holding meetings at the Grange hall to accommodate more people. We regularly send out information newsletters and we have created an award-winning information website (www.goldengatefire.org). Last year we distributed a questionnaire to all residents of the district to request your input on fire district issues. Last year we also held the first-ever citizen's fire academy for residents of our district. It is incorrect to state that the board operated in secret and has not sought resident involvement.

The Concerned Citizens report on an email sent from a resident regarding land sale issues. Follow up emails with the resident explained the role of the fire district in the fire code process. After receiving this information, the resident expressed thanks for the clear explanation of the issues. When asked for the name of the realtor referred to in the letter, the resident declined to provide a name. In general, land values continue to increase in the District. The Tomahawk Ranch (about 900 acres) is currently on the market for $6,000,000. In fact, from an insurance standpoint (as covered below), an argument is made that fire codes increase property value.

Ms Carole Walker, President of the Rocky Mountain Insurance Institute, states that affordable fire insurance is dependent on (1) defensible space around your home, (2) a quality fire department with modern equipment and training, and (3) adoption of modern fire codes. Call your own insurance company and ask them what they think about reducing or eliminating fire codes. If you cannot obtain affordable fire insurance for your property it is very difficult to get financing for a building project.

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