

ELECTION: Fire district contest has turned into a battle

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in the face of simmering controversies. He told *The Nugget* that, if re-elected, he intends to serve out his term.

Directors Cindy Kettering and Keith Cyrus are not up for election.

Critics of the incumbents have questioned their management and oversight of construction and the surplus-sale of a fire engine.

Longtime board member and former board president Keith Cyrus told *The Nugget*, "I am concerned with the lack of board oversight. I was criticized by the other board members when I chose to abstain in the vote to approve purchase of two \$400,000 fire engines because we had not yet seen the specifications... The south station is being designed with six bays in spite of our 20-year plan that calls for only five bays. At the north station, three small bays will be replaced with two larger bays, thus reducing the number of apparatus that can be housed in the north end of the district... The board has yet to meet with the architect and my requests for a

community oversight committee have repeatedly fallen on deaf ears."

The critics, in turn, are being challenged by a citizen who believes they are distorting the record.

Challenger Rob Malone took issue with the surplus sale of Cloverdale Engine 644 in a Letter to the Editor of *The Nugget* last week, saying "A few years ago, the district purchased a piece of equipment for \$100,000. In the current budget that unit is to be surplus and resold for something between \$50,000 and \$80,000. For a district the size of Cloverdale to take even a \$20,000 loss in only two or three years, to me, is quite concerning."

Cloverdale district resident David Hiller took issue with Malone's characterization and sought clarification from the district. Hiller, a career diesel mechanic and engineer, is a former Cloverdale firefighter and still provides the district with mechanical assistance and advice when requested.

The engine was purchased used to replace a brush engine that had been destroyed by a vehicle fire (not on operations). The engine represented an upgrade in capability.

The district reported that the cost of Engine 644 was

\$99,050. Of that, \$75,603 was covered by insurance from the Type 6 engine that burned. The total out-of-pocket cost to the district, including delivery of the engine was \$27,822. Fair market value of the engine currently is estimated at \$89,000. If the district is able to sell it for \$50,000 to \$80,000, the roughly \$20,000 to \$50,000 difference between the sale price and the out-of-pocket expense would go back into the coffers of the district. From Hiller's perspective, that is appropriate management of equipment resources and certainly not a loss.

"You come up with a positive number, not a negative number," he said. "It's that perception in the district that I don't think is fair."

Malone, for his part, is sticking to his guns.

"The source of the money is not the issue; whether it's an insurance settlement or

tax revenue, \$99,050 was spent on the engine," he said. "Resale will net less than was paid for it therefore, by nature there will be a loss. To spin it as a gain is disingenuous at best. The point is the money should have been more wisely spent on a piece of equipment that would not have been surplussed at a loss only a few years after acquisition. More forethought in the process could have easily ended with a decision that spent the money in a better manner."

Hiller says that there has been thorough and ongoing review of the status of equipment, which, he notes, is reflected in meeting minutes and available to anyone with an interest in looking into the matter.

Critics have also pointed to the need to break out and repair a foundation for a new fire building as evidence of a lack of adequate oversight

on projects. The district has responded with a detailed explanation of how that situation developed (*see page 2 column*).

Hiller feels that critics are painting such issues in a fashion that is inaccurate and unfair to the current district directors.

"This nonsense about oversight and who's minding the store is just not true," Hiller says. "There shouldn't be innuendos out there — it should be 'what's true folks?' I just felt that this was not fair to the department. It makes a perception that's not fair to the district."

Ballots are in the hands of Sisters voters. They are due May 19.

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