

East Side residents, elected officials square off over North Summit Fire District

The 4-hour meeting became heated at times as community members and county staff debated the future of fire services

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The Summit County Courthouse.
Park Record file photo

Summit County staff members hoped to provide the community an update on the [future of the North Summit Fire District](#) on Thursday, but the conversation shifted as increasing tension came to a head when East Side residents, and their elected officials, voiced their discontent.

Dozens of community members, with around [100 others participating online](#), attended the special meeting between the Summit County Council and the Administrative Control Board of the North Summit Fire District. Elected officials from Coalville and Henefer were also present, as well as Park City Fire Chief Bob Zanetti.

The meeting's purpose was to provide an update on fire services in North Summit with county staff presenting information on possible staffing and governance models for the Fire District after the county suspended the volunteer firefighting crew due to allegations of insubordination. But when the meeting was opened for public comment, residents were quick to air their grievances regarding the suspension of the firefighters and share concerns regarding their community's safety – specifically in the Tollgate Canyon area.

Mariana Mavor, a Tollgate Canyon resident, told county staff that, while she appreciated their presentations, they should be putting in the time to fix the North Summit Fire District's current model rather than focusing efforts on replacing it.

Bryan Thompson, another resident of Tollgate Canyon, told the Summit County Council that he's a qualified EMT who was fired for trying to help his neighborhood. He said the roads in the area are "crap," with complex neighborhoods that make it challenging for people unfamiliar with the layout to navigate. The [Park City Fire District has taken over services in North Summit](#) on a temporary basis while officials chart a path forward for the North Summit Fire District.

Thompson also slammed Summit County management, which he characterized as corrupt, and said that many first responders in Tollgate Canyon just want to help but are prohibited from doing so under the North Summit Fire District's model.

Volunteer firefighters in the North Summit typically hold an emergency medical responder designation, which is one of the lowest emergency medical service certifications in the state. The designation permits firefighters to perform basic life-saving techniques such as CPR and first aid. Even if a North Summit Fire District firefighter holds a higher certification, they are not allowed to perform duties above the EMR designation while working for the Fire District, according to Summit County Manager Tom Fisher.

The majority of calls received by the North Summit Fire District are medical in nature with firefighters called to assist medical responders. Many community members expressed concerns that firefighters are not allowed to provide advanced medical services while responding to emergencies, but Fisher said the volunteer crews also have other roles, like securing the scene and helping to lift patients.

Tollgate Canyon resident Roy Parker echoed Thompson's concerns regarding the prospect of responders who are not as familiar with the roads responding to emergencies, calling it a "perilous situation." He also criticized county officials for not taking

accountability or examining their leadership as they advocate for change within the Fire District.

“You do not have control over the situation,” Parker said.

Kamas resident Sarah Sargent is most concerned with services on the East Side. As someone who has worked on an ambulance, she said there needs to be more focus on emergency medical services to address discrepancies in response and care.

Summit County Council Chair Chris Robinson agreed that emergency medical services appear to be a “sore spot” on the East Side and a large source of the disagreement.

Another speaker, Erik Mandeen, said that the most significant issue has been the breakdown of communication among firefighters, county staff and community members. He spoke of the need for a representative to act as a liaison between firefighters and elected officials and promote a checks-and-balances system. Mandeen also emphasized the need for firefighters to have a role in selecting the next fire chief to rebuild trust because they have been “beat down” by the Administrative Control Board.

Coalville City Councilor Phil Gary also blasted the Administrative Control Board, saying the members need to show more respect for the firefighters. He continued that there’s a need for guidance and leadership rather than dismissing the volunteers.

Robin Riches, a member of the Henefer Town Council, also emphasized the need for improved communication and said she found out about the alleged insubordination from news reports rather than county leaders.

Lotta Clark identified herself as the wife of a volunteer firefighter and expressed concern that the Administrative Control Board has stopped listening to volunteers. Megan Franz, another Tollgate resident, urged the board to reinstate all of the volunteers.

Glenn Wright and Roger Armstrong, both members of Summit County Council, disagreed with the idea of reinstating the volunteers over concerns of a “boycott” that Administrative Control Board members said left just 44% of North Summit Fire District shifts filled.

Wright stated that anyone who “went on strike can’t be trusted.”

“I will tell you I have never seen a situation as bad as what’s been reported to me in the past month. You folks have been unprotected for a significant portion of the year,” Wright said. “As far as the folks who did a work stoppage and precipitated this crisis, if I have anything to say about it, they will never come back to the department. Don’t let the door hit you in the ass, folks, that was irresponsible.”

Dissatisfaction among firefighters was sparked in November after the firing of the previous North Summit chief, but Armstrong said the volunteers were meant to meet with county officials to voice their concerns late last year and never did.

Just one member of the public, Brittany Hammond, expressed sympathy for county officials. She seemed disappointed in how the community has responded to the situation and said that “accountability goes both ways.”

Members of the Administrative Control Board expressed their frustrations regarding rumors and “slander” they claim has been circulating in the community, particularly on Facebook. Melanie Bosworth said she understands the frustration of firefighters but said they never came to the board with their concerns. Mike Novak, who’s also on the board, hoped that firefighters would attend the meetings to help the group understand the problems.

Bosworth said that, regardless of any problems, firefighters are expected to respond to emergencies without excuses. Member Jim Reeves agreed, stating that there is a correct way to do things without endangering the community.

County officials unanimously agreed that there need to be more conversations moving forward. Fisher said that this issue is currently the highest priority and they are going to keep working to resolve it by gathering information and working to hire a new fire chief.

They also hope to receive more input on the staffing models that were presented by Kathryn McMullin, Summit County emergency manager. McMullin proposed several ideas including continuing with volunteers, where firefighters are paid a stipend for when they’re on call with an hourly wage if they are dispatched; switching to a part-time framework; or a hybrid model combining the two methods. The models could cost anywhere from \$188,000 to \$507,000 annually.

Armstrong suggested considering a new tax levy for the North Summit Fire District, which has a budget of \$200,000, since the previous one was passed in 2008.

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