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The I-70 Scout

# The I-70 Scout

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Searching for news in Watkins, Bennett, Strasburg, Byers, Deer Trail and Agate

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

## Funding questions plague Bennett School

by **Steven Vetter**  
Managing Editor

**BENNETT** — Funding uncertainties not only have Bennett Schools officials concerned about the increasing shortage of classroom space but also about paying enough to hire and retain staff, particularly teachers.

During certified staff salary schedule discussion at the May 26 school board meeting, Bennett Superintendent Robin Purdy said that uncertainty about changes to the state's education funding formula has raised concerns about the revenue side for 2025-26 and, as a result, she reluctantly proposed a 1.9% salary increase for the teachers.

"Would love to do a 30% increase, because our

teachers and staff more than deserve it, but very nervous right now," said Purdy, noting the new school funding formula is much different than its previous iteration. "It's still almost 2% more (than this year), which is keeping up with the cost of living (increase). That moves our base

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## Car bursts into flames on I-70

by **Steven Vetter**  
Managing Editor

**BENNETT** — A fiery inferno along westbound I-70 between Bennett and Manila Road the evening of March 26 claimed one vehicle but no one was injured and other collateral damage minimized.

At about 7:15 p.m., the Colorado State Patrol and Bennett-Watkins Fire Rescue were dispatched near mile marker 301 of westbound I-70 on report of a possible hit-and-run that left a silver Subaru Crosstrek disabled on the shoulder of the thoroughfare.

Upon arrival, the vehicle's front end was found engulfed in flames with the male driver, also the sole occupant, standing outside the wreckage uninjured.

In addition to quickly extinguishing the SUV, firefighters doused the surrounding foliage, limiting the burn area to a 50' x 100' area.

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CALEB CONNOR/Bennett-Watkins Fire Rescue

DOUGLAS CLAUSSEN/The I-70 Scout

A Subaru Crosstrek is engulfed in flames about halfway between Bennett and Manila Road on westbound I-70 March 26. Officials said the car caught fire when a loose wheel (see inset) from an unknown vehicle going east crossed the highway into the path of the Crosstrek and became lodged beneath it.

## Bennett FPD battles for better Sky Ranch facilities

by **Steven Vetter**  
Managing Editor

**BENNETT** — "Pursuing it full steam ahead."

That's the sentiment from Bennett-Watkins Fire Rescue officials concerning efforts to build a new fire station on the far western edge of Bennett Fire Protection District boundaries.

During the March 13 fire board meeting, Bennett Fire Chief Earl Cumley and Assistant Chief Caleb Connor indicated they anticipate bringing forward a scope of work and a contract concerning design of an all-inclusive firehouse in the Sky Ranch subdivision next month.

Earlier this year, Cumley reiterated the need for a facility that could house apparatus in addition to personnel. The current setup at Sky Ranch has the fire department occupying a residential unit without indoor parking

or storage.

"We don't have an immediate fire response. I need a fire truck there and the fact we don't right now is hurting us," Cumley said during the Jan. 9 board meeting. "Right now, we're having to drive to the station (in Watkins). Just not a really good second option right now."

Among the obstacles faced is the requirement from Arapahoe County to hire an architect for the construction project, which is currently projected to cost the fire district approximately \$7 million.

While Cumley was open to board questions earlier this month about other options, including a metal building closer to the \$1 million range, he was unsure whether the county would allow anything but a brick-and-mortar structure.

"That's why we're in the situation we are," he said. "That's something we started with and the county said

no."

### OTHER BUSINESS

Connor said that final data for the district's ISO evaluation was recently turned in and that, while an overall improvement in scoring is expected, a category improvement is unlikely.

"A couple of things dinged us," said Connor, referring to town and county code adoptions being older than five years and town of Bennett hydrant painting not meeting requirements. "Probably waiting two to three months for final status."

ISO fire ratings indicate a district's or community's ability to respond to fire emergencies and are used by insurance companies to determine property insurance rates. Class 1 is the best rating, while 10 is the worst.

Connor also reported that, through the date of the meeting, year-to-date call volume of 265 was 27 fewer than the same time frame last year.

"Just under four calls per day, which is what we've been doing most of the time," he said. "I still feel like we're going to see an uptick. We're staying plugged in with [the town of] Bennett about the next nine months when it comes to houses popping up."

Of February's 98 emergency calls, 70 were EMS, six involved fires, and seven were false alarms.

The board unanimously approved moving forward with a policy setting a specific set of procedures concerning financial hardship requests and patients' inability to pay EMS bills.

"Just trying to set up a standard process," said district legal counsel Kathryn Winn.

Cumley reported that a paramedic/firefighter recently quit and a search for a predecessor is ongoing.

The board next meets in regular session at 7 p.m., Thursday, April 10, at the district's administrative offices, 355 Fourth St.