



Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue

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**FIRE CHIEF
T. MICHAEL BURTON**

**MINUTES
JUNE 21, 2018
STAKEHOLDER TASK FORCE MEETING**

**Held at the Indian Rocks Beach Auditorium
1507 Bay Palm Boulevard, Indian Rocks Beach, FL 33785**

WORKSHOP MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AT 9:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL: Task Force members answering roll call were Fire Chief Mike Burton, Ms. Kelly Cisarik, Mr. John Yackowski, Ms. Brigett Cerce, Mr. Mike Murray, Ms. Katrena Hale, District Chief Jeremy Sidlauskas. Mr. Lynn Rives and Mr. Matt Loder, Sr. were in attendance but arrived after roll call. Commissioner Joe Bruni and Mr. Raymond Piscitelli were absent.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

1. APPROVAL OF JUNE 7, 2018 MINUTES

Discussion: Ms. Brigett Cerce stated that she did not see anything in the minutes regarding the discussion on move-ups. Chief Burton stated that he would write a summary of the discussion on move-ups and bring it forward at the next meeting for approval.

A motion to approve the minutes of the June 7, 2018 Stakeholder Task Force Meeting.

MOTION: DISTRICT CHIEF JEREMY SIDLAUSKAS SECOND: MS. BRIGETT CERCE

All in favor, motion passed unanimously.

2. REQUIREMENTS FOR NOVEMBER BALLOT

Discussion: Chief Burton explained that the deadline for the November ballot is August 21, 2018, meaning it would most likely have to be brought before the Fire Commission in July, as it is their decision to make based upon what the group brings forward. Ms. Cisarik inquired about the requirement for two public meetings, to which Chief Burton responded that he thought the same thing, but he cannot find that requirement identified anywhere. He added that ordinances require two readings, but resolutions do not. Ms. Cerce suggested that a special meeting could also be called, if needed. Ms. Cisarik added that the Commission Bylaws state that official business cannot be conducted during a workshop, and there were some discrepancies on this during the last referendum

3. FINANCIAL MODEL AT \$100 INCREASE

Discussion: Chief Burton explained that the two previous models – \$30 and \$40 – were also included with the supporting documents. The new model illustrates a \$100 one-time increase and the revenue it would generate over the next four years. He explained that, interestingly, at the end of the four years, the \$100 one time generates the same amount of revenue as the \$40 per year for four years model. The one-time increase generates \$1.2 million per year. Ms. Cerce stated that the biggest difference is, at the end of four years, the District will be bringing in almost \$2 million per year. Chief Burton agreed that it does bring money in faster, which would be very helpful. He added that this is probably the biggest item on the agenda, so this can be revisited later in the meeting.

4. DOWNGRADED CALLS AND THE DATA DRIVEN FOCUS GROUP

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that he conducted additional research on the question regarding the data from the Data Driven Focus Group on the District trying to meet the 7 minute 30 second response time, 90% of the time, and if calls that are downgraded to a non-emergency response are excluded from that data set. The Chief confirmed that, ideally, they are excluded, as there is a function key that gets entered, so when the record is searched, it knows to exclude that call due to it being downgraded; however, it is not 100% reliable when a field unit has downgraded the call as opposed to the dispatcher. He mentioned that there was discussion at a previous meeting regarding calls in grid 370A not meeting response time targets, and in doing further research on those calls, some downgraded calls had remained in that data set, so they should have been excluded. He added that another call was during Hurricane Irma, and another was during concurrent calls and the unit which responded came from Clearwater Beach. He explained that there are two methods to verify response times: through the 911 system and the reports it generates, or through GPS positioning which provides a breadcrumb trail identifying a unit's response. Chief Burton mentioned that, in a couple of the cases, the unit did meet the response time target, but did not press the button on their computer to show they were on scene, but the GPS shows they were there. Of the group that exceeded the target, he stated that there are explanations for roughly eight or nine of them.

5. CALL ACTIVITY BY TIME OF DAY, DAY OF WEEK

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that he gathered the requested data on call activity by the hour of the day and day of the week. He mentioned that it had been determined previously that the months are consistent, so the attached document includes data from January through May, and that data was annualized. Ms. Cisarik stated that the raw data might be more helpful, and Ms. Cerce explained that even if the data wasn't extrapolated over twelve months, the ratio would still look the same. Chief Burton added that there is not enough variation by the day of the week to consider a different deployment model. Regarding calls by hour of the day, the Chief explained that the busier hours of the day are during 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning and drifts off around 8:00 or 9:00 p.m., and this is the case across the country. Ms. Cisarik said that she would have expected that data to look differently on a monthly basis, such as in June since it remains daylight later. Ms. Cerce stated that, from a dispatch perspective, the busy times are from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. every day, year round. Additional discussion ensued regarding the call data and call volume.

6. REDINGTON BEACHES FACILITY UPDATE

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that he received an e-mail update regarding the new Redington Beach public safety facility project. He read: The project has been through conceptual design, and feasibility plans have been done. The project is now one of the many capital projects that will be included in the County's capital improvement plan proposal for consideration in the budget approval process in the coming months. It was considered at a budget workshop last week and there were no questions on it. The County held an initial meeting between the mayors of the Redington communities, the County real estate management, and the Assistant County Administrator, to do an update on the project. The next phase of that, assuming the County budget is approved, will likely be a request for proposal from a design build contractor, along with anticipated operational and ownership stakeholder meetings that are associated with this type of multifunctional project. The facility will be a public works lift station, a law enforcement substation, and some type of fire and EMS station. Assuming everything goes smoothly and funding is allocated by the County, the project could begin before the end of the year, but anticipated completion is not until late next year. He added that the approval process for the County is multilayered and takes a considerable amount of time to do. Ms. Cerce mentioned that there used to be a Station 26 in the Redingtons, and they used to have an independent fire department, but they closed it, and asked what has brought this back to the table for them. Chief Burton stated that he was unsure of that, but does know there were concerns decades ago about the facility they were in, and so the department was closed and contracts were made with Madeira Beach and Seminole. Chief Burton added that at some point in the last two to three years, there was a study performed by Optima on response times, and the question asked was along the lines of: "Is EMS service in the Redingtons better served by a station located in the Redingtons or in Indian Shores?" He said the question was not, "What is best for the Gulf Beaches region?" The Chief stated that he will share a copy of the study with committee members, but he found the research question very tightly defined, as the conclusion was in the question. District Chief Sidlauskas stated that when Redington Beach's fire department closed in 1998, three personnel were hired by the then-Indian Rocks Fire District. He added that EMS was always done by Indian Rocks, so the paramedic was always there. He said that once the building came into question, the Indian Rocks Fire District decided to pull their paramedics out since it was unsafe, which is how Rescue 26 came about. The Redington Beaches Fire Department then decided they had to do something and could not hire all of those people, so at that point they disbanded. As part of the agreement, Indian Rocks took control of the fire department for a contracted period of time, and hired the three firefighters, and it later went to Seminole and Madeira Beach. Chief Burton said the key element in the update is the request for proposal, along with the anticipated operational and ownership stakeholder meetings. Once decisions are made, the impact it has on the District operationally, particularly in Indian Shores, is very important. Ms. Cerce said that her interpretation is that the new facility is most likely being built, with an anticipated one-year timeframe. Chief Burton stated that it is in fact likely, but he feels that timeframe is optimistic and possibly closer to two years. Ms. Cisarik stated that she believes the funding for that project is from the last Penny for Pinellas which ends in 2018. Chief Burton said that she is correct – it is Penny funding from the two Redington cities and the County. Ms. Cerce stated, from a County perspective, it would be redundant if PSFRD kept its Station 26 where it is. Chief Burton stated that he does not have any reason to believe that the County would provide EMS funding for a facility in Indian Shores and also in Redington Beach, as the volume does not support it, so the question will become, "which one?" He added that he does not know the answer, but it is a big issue. Ms. Cisarik stated that it is also mentioned in the settlement agreement.

7. EMS SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN PSFRD AND PINELLAS COUNTY

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that the premise of the lawsuit was that the District believed that it had been underfunded for a number of years from an EMS perspective. It was not determined if funding was proper or improper, but this is the settlement agreement that came from the lawsuit. A contingency in the agreement was if the Penny for Pinellas vote passed, and it did, so that part has been accomplished. The Chief stated that there is a clause in the agreement that if, in the event that funding for the current Indian Shores station is no longer provided by the County, funding would be lost, but it would never fall below two units, which is a unique feature compared to all of the other providers in Pinellas County. He added, however, losing the Indian Shores station would be a detriment to the District. Ms. Cisarik said that she feels that opens the door for some sort of cooperative arrangement, because funding is guaranteed for two firefighters and possibly another half. She asked if two positions are guaranteed or two and a half? Chief Burton stated that three positions are currently funded, and next year will be two and a half. He added that the other variable is if the District is not the provider in the Indian Shores and Redington Beach area, then the funding only falls off by a half, which, financially, is helpful, but service-wise is not. Ms. Cerce stated that it is helpful to look at it as if Station 28 is fully funded, Station 27 is fully funded, and Station 26 in Indian Shores is treading water in anticipation of the new facility, rather than 28 being half funded. Chief Burton mentioned that the agreement states that the County will accept input from PSFRD on that station project and who operates it, but it does not compel the County to do anything. Ms. Cisarik asked about the status of reimbursement for the ladder truck, to which Chief Burton responded that they have met formally, he has requested funding from the County in the amount of \$1.2 million, and they have confirmed receipt of that letter. He added that it is tentatively considered for Penny 4 funding, which is for the year 2020, but there is hope that the District may be able to get some of the funds ahead of the 2020 cycle. The truck was purchased with a down payment of \$500,000, and seven equal payments of \$98,000 on a lease-purchase agreement and the District will own the truck at the end. He continued that the he asked if the County would reimburse the District for the down payment and at least two annual payments before 2020. The request to the county was for an additional \$65,000 in loose equipment, which combined with the apparatus and the original \$60,000 in loose equipment, comes to the \$1.2 million total. Chief Burton stated that Penny money is very competitive, but it will be prominently discussed that PSFRD's request is part of a settlement agreement. Ms. Cisarik asked when County begins taking 2020 funding requests, to which Chief Burton stated that he believes they have already begun, but he will find out for sure. He added that the other two projects, the boat and fire station, have not yet been worked on. Mr. Murray asked if there was any discussion regarding buying another engine and postponing the truck until the Penny money was received, to which Chief Burton stated that he was unable to answer, as that decision preceded him. Ms. Cisarik stated that she is concerned that, per the Charter, impact fee funds were not supposed to be used to replace vehicles, to which Chief Burton stated he will get clarification on that. District Chief Sidlauskas stated that the new truck will improve the service level by having a 100 foot aerial as opposed to the current 75 foot aerial. Ms. Cisarik asked if there have been discussions regarding Station 28. Chief Burton stated that he has been looking into it, but locating enough land in that area is challenging; however, some early data has been run regarding general areas where the station would be operationally sound and eliminate the Station 28 and Station 31 dispute. He added that the County has asked how it could best meet regional needs, and the ideal location would be the Walsingham area between Hamlin and Oakhurst. Mr. Rives stated that he thought the County owned property in that area, to which Chief Burton replied that they do. District Chief Sidlauskas stated that if Station 28 were to be moved north and west, then Station 27 would also have to move. He added that the County has offered property in the past, but that has never come to fruition. Regarding the agreement, Ms. Cerce asked if

\$150,000 is a feasible amount to replace a boat. Chief Burton stated that it is not. He explained that amount is for the boat used in the intercostal, and he will pitch the argument that the additional funds from the reduced cost of the ladder truck (under the allotted \$1.4 million) could be redirected to the boat. Chief Burton added that the rapid deployment boat for the Gulf of Mexico also needs to be replaced. District Chief Sidlauskas added that PSFRD is the only department with a boat that can launch off the beach. Ms. Hale stated that she feels that a boat that can be launched from the beach is vital to the District.

8. EMS FUNDING BY CITY/TOWN/AREA

Discussion: Chief Burton said the supporting documents for this item illustrates what the EMS millage generates in each area of the District. This is calculated by taking the taxable value of the property and multiplying it by the .9158 millage rate.

9. PARCEL CLASSIFICATION (INDUSTRIAL AND HOTEL/MOTEL)

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that hotels and motels are classified as “non-residential” and the District does not currently have any industrial parcels.

10. EXEMPTION INFORMATION

Discussion: Chief Burton said there are a very small number of properties within the District that are completely exempt from paying taxes. He continued that there are a series of exemptions residents can apply for, and a bulleted list has been provided. He explained that there are currently two homestead exemptions, and they are the most common exemptions. He added that for the upcoming November election, there is a proposed amendment to the State Constitution that will apply a third homestead exemption to properties greater than \$100,000, which greatly affects agencies that impose an ad valorem tax. Chief Burton explained that if the District implemented an ad valorem tax, some properties may end up paying nothing with their exemptions as opposed to the \$260 flat rate they pay now. He added that property values can also plummet virtually overnight, which has an impact on ad valorem taxation, and can only recover at 3% a year. Chief Burton stated if something like this were to happen, the way the District’s Charter reads is that the rate cannot be adjusted without going to referendum. He then reviewed supplemental documents showing random properties and their exemptions and taxes.

11. LEGAL OPINION ON TAXATION OPTIONS

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that he received a legal opinion on the ability to set different ad valorem rates within the District. The response he received was that any plan where members of the District are not taxed equally across the board is not acceptable. The second question he asked was if the District could implement an ad valorem tax with a cap. The response he received is that State law does not allow a cap, but usually such caps are set as to a percentage increase of the assessed value, but they were not able to find any location in Florida that has employed an ad valorem rate with a dollar value cap. They had no definitive answer if it is legally permissible, and the issue would require additional taxation research, which comes with billable hours to the District. If the group wishes, the Chief stated that he could look into this further. Ms. Hale stated it seems like it might be the easiest solution to increase the non-ad valorem assessment by \$100. Chief Burton asked if anyone would like him to pursue acquiring more information on the possibility of setting an ad valorem with a cap. There was no response.

GENERAL REMARKS FROM THE AUDIENCE: None.

At this time, Fire Chief Mike Burton stated that if the Task Force is wishing to pursue the November ballot, it may or may not be the right choice, but there is enough time to get it on the ballot; however, the question is if there is enough time to get the information out to the voters.

Mr. Rives stated that delaying it until March would not have any significant effect, as the revenue in either situation would not be collected until the following year. He added that he thinks the members should go back to their cities to gain support ahead of time. Chief Burton agreed that, either way, the revenue generated will be collected at the same time. He added that he feels that there is only one shot to do this, and March allows more time for everyone to do their due diligence and make sure the residents understand what the issues are and what they are voting for, as well as to prepare amazingly clear ballot language.

Ms. Cisarik asked if the March election is for cities and the County, to which Chief Burton stated that he believes it is only the beach towns and cities, and added that there will be a cost to hold a special election in the unincorporated area. Ms. Cisarik stated that a special election means lower voter turnout, but the residents who vote are usually well-educated on the issues. Mr. Rives stated that voter information and statistical data can be obtained through the Supervisor of Elections website. Ms. Cerce stated that she is concerned about the potential voter turnout on the mainland in a special election, especially because the mainland voters carried the last referendum.

Chief Burton stated to move forward, a motion and a second will be needed, as well as discussion, on a funding model to pursue; then, a separate question, which may or may not be today, on the timeline and approach. He added that he does feel the Supervisor of Election data would be useful.

Mr. Rives stated, from a Belleair Beach point of view, if the representatives from each city went to the next commission meeting and approached this proposal and gained feedback, he feels it would be beneficial to bring back to this group to move something forward. District Chief Sidlauskas asked if the group is looking for a band-aid for the overall problem or a final solution, because he feels that with the one-time increase, the District will be back in this situation in a few years. Chief Burton stated that the one-time \$100 increase generates \$1.2 million a year that the District currently does not have, but with time, the value of that amount does go down. He said that his own opinion is that there is work that needs to be done to the Charter, but now is not the right time to address that.

Ms. Cerce stated that she does not feel that a purely ad valorem model tax tied to property values is the best idea, as she feels the economy is about to enter a recession. She explained that, statistically, we are on a 12-year increase, and that has never happened before, so it is inevitable that property values are going to decline. She added that she feels the combined model is the right choice, but too complicated to pursue right now. She said that she feels that the District needs \$100 right away, but is concerned about it being too cumbersome to owners of lower-valued properties.

District Chief Sidlauskas asked if the square footage or fire flow model was still being looked at, to which Chief Burton replied that the challenge to a square foot formula is turning it into a 75 word or less ballot question, but it does help offset the "waterfront tax" concern of some residents. Ms. Hale said that she feels this model is fair for everyone, and it could work if voters were educated prior to the election.

Ms. Cisarik stated that the immediate funding needs are known, but there is still the big unknown issues surrounding station replacement. She added that she would be agreeable to pursuing a flat rate increase in either November or March, and a few years later going back to the voters to ask for an ad valorem tax and ratcheting back the flat fee.

District Chief Sidlauskas asked if there was a consensus on the one-time \$100 flat rate increase. Ms. Cerce stated that she does not feel that it is enough. Mr. Murray stated that he feels that asking for \$100 would be fine, then going back to referendum in a few years. He said that he is concerned, however, how the homeowners on the mainland will feel about \$100. Ms. Cerce added that if people are very against it, they may vote just to make sure that it does not get passed, but if they are indifferent or feel that it is reasonable, they may not show up. Discussion ensued regarding the \$40 per year increase for four years versus the one-time \$100 increase. Ms. Cerce explained that both generate the same revenue at the four year mark; however, beginning in the fifth year, the \$40 per year increase has totaled \$160 and brings in \$1.9 million as opposed to \$1.2 million every year. Mr. Rives said that he feels an increase every year for four years is a harder sell for people, and Ms. Cerce agreed, stating that she does not feel it is the right solution, but she thinks the end number of \$160 is closer to where it needs to be. Mr. Rives said that he thinks asking for \$100 is too much, and Ms. Cisarik agreed that, psychologically, perhaps even asking for \$90 might be a better idea.

Chief Burton stated that the idea of moving forward with the \$100 to gain some stability, then coming back in a few years and introducing a small ad valorem and dialing back the flat fee is an important concept.

Ms. Cisarik stated that she knows Chief Burton has taken some cost-saving measures since he's come to the department and she would like to hear a run-down of what some of those measures are. She stated that she is also interested in finding out information on take-home vehicles, as well as the Commissioners' pension plans. Chief Burton stated that the cost-saving measures have been underway for many years and, as mentioned previously, he is unable to see where the District has a spending problem. He added that he has only been with the District for six months and he is amazed by the amount of work that is accomplished by such a limited staff.

Chief Burton stated, in an effort to move forward, he asked if there was a motion for group members to go back to their constituent groups to get their feedback. He added that if the group is wishing to pursue a November election, a recommendation will need to be made in the near future, so that he is able to bring something tentative to the Fire Commission. Ms. Cisarik asked if Chief Burton is asking for a motion to place a flat-rate increase on a future ballot? Chief Burton stated if that was the will of the group. He added that is concerned about the timeline, but that is only relevant for a November ballot – if it is going to be March, there is no need for concern. Chief Burton stated that if any member needs additional information to make a recommendation or to support a motion, to please let him know so he can get that information for them. Mr. Rives stated that he feels it is important for group members to go back and speak to their commissions and stakeholders and, at the next meeting, the group can make a motion based on that.

District Chief Sidlauskas asked if the consensus of the group is a \$100 one-time flat fee increase? He said that he feels it is important to have a recommendation to bring to the stakeholders and commissions. There was some discussion on the potential \$100 increase, and Chief Burton clarified that it is a one-time increase which would raise the assessment from \$260 to \$360, and the assessment would remain at \$360 each year thereafter. Ms. Cerce made the suggestion of asking the groups openly the threshold they would

consider, as she still does not think that \$100 is enough. Mr. Rives stated that there are a lot of unknowns over the next year, to which Ms. Cerce agreed, but, as an example, Station 26 costs virtually nothing, but provides EMS funding the District is potentially going to lose. Mr. Rives asked what would happen if the County decides to not fund Station 26, to which Chief Burton stated that decision is up to the Board of Fire Commissioners, but it is a \$590,000 loss in revenue that the District is not prepared to handle. The Board would have the option to maintain the same level of service and continue operating Station 26, but they would need the funding to do so. Finance Director David Martin interjected and explained that, legislatively, the District is not allowed to use reserve money for operating expenditures, other than in an emergency situation. He continued to explain that reserves are for capital expenditures only, so if the District loses one half million dollars in funding, it would need to cut one half million dollars in operating expenses, which means salaries. Ms. Cisarik asked how much of a reduction in EMS revenue would happen if the District lost one half of a position. Chief Burton explained if the County made the decision to stop funding Station 26 in Indian Shores, the District would go down to two positions as opposed to one and a half positions due to the settlement agreement. Finance Director David Martin stated that one half of a position equates to approximately \$260,000.

Mr. Loder asked if going back to the communities would take too much time, as it will already take a considerable amount of time to sell whatever decision the group comes up with. He stated that if the group thinks \$100, for example, is the right amount, he feels that decision should be presented to the Fire Commission, and if they approve it, the group members can then go back to the communities to educate them and sell it.

Chief Burton reiterated that it is only time sensitive if the group is aiming for a November ballot, as the deadline for that is August 21st. Finance Director David Martin explained that, while he is unsure of the exact number, but there are significant costs associated with holding a special election process outside of the normal election dates. He said that he believes the cost for all of the communities was around \$15,000, so it would probably be less without the municipalities.

Mr. Loder stated that he would think if the question was on the general election ballot, it might be easier for citizens to vote "no" to an increase, especially if they were not fully knowledgeable about it. He continued to explain that, during a special election, there would likely be a positive voter turnout from residents who care about the fire department, and it is based on the number of people who actually vote, not total potential voters.

Mr. Yackowski stated that he feels that increasing the flat fee is the best option. He explained that he does not know what the right amount is to ask for, but he feels that closer to \$90 is probably the best idea. He added that there is always the option of going back to referendum in a few years, if necessary.

Chief Burton asked if there was consensus for a flat fee increase, in an amount yet to be finalized, and that the group feels they have insufficient information to determine the best election approach at this point in time. He stated that he will get additional information on the different election options as well as voter participation history. Mr. Rives added that group members also need to have discussions with their communities. He said that he feels if the District gains the support of the elected officials, they will likely have a better chance of gaining the support of their constituents.

Ms. Cerce asked if any available information on the various homeowners' associations could be sent to her.

**A motion to pursue a flat rate increase for the March election,
in an amount to be determined at the next meeting.**

Discussion: Ms. Cerce stated that she would be hesitant to commit to the March election if November is possible, as well as without knowing the cost of it. She confirmed that she is not opposed to committing to a flat rate increase at this point as a band-aid.

MOTION: MS. KELLY CISARIK SECOND: MR. LYNN RIVES

YES – 8

NO – 1

Motion passed.

Chief Burton confirmed that group members were available to attend the next meeting, which will take place on July 5, 2018. The majority of members stated that they were available to attend.

Mr. Yackowski stated that he feels the group should look at cost savings options and ways to save money in the budget. He said that the group needs to look at cutting money as opposed to only raising money. Ms. Cisarik stated that the auditor did not indicate any red flags in the most recent CAFR. Chief Burton stated that cost saving measures can be revisited.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:02 a.m.

APPROVED:

 7-10-18

Fire Chief Mike Burton, Chair

Date

ATTEST:



Kimberly G. Fugate, Executive Assistant