



Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue

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FIRE CHIEF
T. MICHAEL BURTON

MINUTES JULY 19, 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, Ms. Katrena Hale, District Chief Jeremy Sidlauskas, Mr. Mike Murray, and Mr. Matt Loder, Sr. Mr. Lynn Rives arrived after roll call. Commissioner Joe Bruni and Mr. Raymond Piscitelli were absent.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Mr. John Yackowski stated that he attended the Indian Shores Property Owners' Association meeting and discussed PSFRD's situation. He mentioned that Ms. Hale was there, but left to ensure compliance with the Sunshine Law. He explained that most attendees were in agreement that a \$100 increase in the flat fee was reasonable, and a few suggested a combination of a flat rate and millage rate with a cap. He added that most are skeptical, however, based on the issue with the wording on the last ballot. He also discussed the possibility of developing a questionnaire to be handed out at their happy hour with whatever questions the group might be interested in asking, and the same thing could be done in Indian Rocks Beach.

Ms. Hale stated that she also spoke at the Indian Shores Town Council meeting and received similar feedback. She added that they would like to see a budget and are all in favor of an increase in the flat fee.

Ms. Cisarik asked if Chief Burton could give an update from recent meetings with the mayors from the Redington communities regarding the next contract for Station 26. She also stated that she spoke at the recent Indian Rocks Beach City meeting and explained that the Task Force currently has a consensus to pursue a flat rate increase on the March ballot of approximately \$100, and mentioned that commercial properties had not been discussed.

1. APPROVAL OF JULY 5, 2018 MINUTES

Discussion: Ms. Cerce mentioned a typo in the last paragraph of page 5: the sentence reads, "She added

that they should cooperate without neighboring districts,” and the word “without” should be replaced with the word “with.”

A motion to approve the minutes of the July 5, 2018 Stakeholder Task Force Meeting, with the indicated correction.

MOTION: MS. KATRENA HALE SECOND: MR. JOHN YACKOWSKI

All in favor, motion passed unanimously.

2. COMMISSIONER PENSION COMPARISONS AND BENEFITS

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that a comparison of elected officials’ pensions and benefits is included in the agenda packet. He pointed out that all commissioners have the same compensation of \$500 per month, and two districts participate in FRS and two do not. He explained that in order to receive benefits, participants must be age 65 and vested with 8 years of service if they entered after 2011 (prior to that, the vesting period was shorter), which provides \$120 per month in pension. The employer contribution in the elected officers class is set by FRS, currently at 45.5%, and is subject to change each July. Ms. Cisarik stated that she read on the FRS website that the amount of future benefit is determined by a formula based on earnings, length of service, and membership class, and asked if commissioners previously vested in FRS received a special benefit based on their additional years of service in a different class. Ms. Cerce stated that FRS uses the three highest years, which will not be during their time as a commissioner, but it does impact their length of service. Finance Director Dave Martin stated that first responders get high risk, whereas commissioners do not, so FRS would prorate the new category with the high risk. He added that, to find out exact answers, they would need to request that FRS do the calculations. District Chief Sidlauskas also stated that if the person is already retired from FRS and collecting a pension, the new position would be a completely separate pension plan. Mr. Murray added that someone who retires is required to stay out of FRS for one year, and then start the new plan. Discussion ensued regarding different classes and rates. Mr. Rives stated that he does not think the issue is relevant to the group. Ms. Cisarik explained that she thinks if it greatly increases a person’s multiplier by increasing their credible years of service, it might be a motivating factor for them to become a commissioner. Ms. Cerce stated that she agrees that it is a voter issue and has nothing to do with the group. Ms. Cisarik asked if Chief Burton could find out if nearby cities offer pensions to their elected officials as opposed to just special districts, to which Chief Burton stated that he will research it further. Ms. Cisarik added that she feels if it is a small benefit to PSFRD’s commissioners, but is something they would be interested in giving up to be more consistent with other cities and districts, it would be a nice gesture to offer during the next referendum.

3. NON-RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL ASSESSMENTS

Discussion: Chief Burton discussed that the majority of discussions have been about assessments for residential properties as opposed to commercial. He added that commercial properties generate approximately \$241,000 per year for the District. He explained that adding an increase to commercial properties would potentially complicate the ballot language, due to the several categories and subcategories involved. Chief Burton stated that if the same percentage of increase is applied to the commercial side as is to the residential side at \$100, it would generate an additional \$77,000 in revenue. He asked the group if they felt there was merit in pursuing this and if the merit is offset by the risk of

complicating the ballot language. Finance Director Dave Martin explained that businesses are assessed a specific rate for the first 500 square feet, then an additional rate beyond that, as well as charges for kitchens, bars, above ground storage tanks, etc. Ms. Cerce suggested assessing commercial properties at a flat \$100 rate, and Chief Burton explained that would be more than double for some properties, such as parcels with boat slips. Mr. Rives inquired as to how many business owners can vote in the District, and Ms. Hale estimated probably less than 10%. Mr. Loder agreed that a flat amount across the board would affect some business owners more than others, but stated that he feels keeping the language simple is the most important thing, and that paying it is just part of wanting the fire service. He added that if people do not understand the ballot question, they are more likely to vote no.

Ms. Cisarik asked for clarification on hotels and motels, as well as commercial properties with kitchens, dining rooms, and bars. Mr. Martin explained that each unit in a hotel or motel is considered a single residence, assessed at \$260, and there is an additional \$385 for areas such as bars or dining rooms in common areas of the commercial property. Chief Burton added that there are a total of 25 bars, 33 kitchens, and 36 dining rooms in the District.

Mr. Loder stated that he feels that it is important to do an evaluation to make sure all properties are being charged accurately, and not being either overcharged or undercharged. Mr. Martin added that the information comes from the Property Appraiser's Office. Ms. Cerce added that responsibility of going from business to business would be one of the Fire Marshal position, but that position has been deferred for some time.

Mr. Rives asked what effect \$100 per room, across the board, would have. Chief Burton added that the \$100 could be assessed only to the first 500 square feet. He also stated that there is approximately \$200,000 in revenue generated from general commercial properties on a square footage basis. Ms. Cerce inquired as to how many hotels other than the Holiday Inn or Belleair Beach Motel are more than just a few units, to which everyone agreed there were not many. Ms. Hale also mentioned that motels are typically labeled as such due to having an exterior door to the outside from the room, whereas hotels have rooms with exits to an interior door of the property. Ms. Cisarik requested further clarification on hotel categories for assessments, and Mr. Martin confirmed that PSFRD does not categorize between hotels or motels. Ms. Cisarik stated that she would like to know how many parcels are categorized as either hotels or motels. Ms. Cerce said she feels that there is consensus that a flat number would be easiest to understand on a ballot. She agreed that it is also important to know how many hotels will be impacted, as well as how many total commercial units there are. Ms. Cerce also said she is interested to see what the \$77,000 looks like when it is a flat rate rather than a percentage.

Chief Burton stated that he will try to research a better breakdown of commercial properties and if the \$100 was applied to the commercial base, what that would look like in terms of revenue, and he will try to bring forward a couple of models to look at. Mr. Martin added that the living units per parcel are determined by the Property Appraiser and given to the District, with no indication of whether it is a hotel, motel, or a house, but he will contact the company the District works with to see if they would be able to differentiate them. Ms. Loder said that if the \$100 increase equates to a 38% increase for commercial properties, then that should be taken to an attorney to put in to ballot language which is easy to be understood, without getting into categories and subcategories. He said if the group feels like this is reasonable, it should be moved forward.

4. MARCH 2019 ELECTION COSTS

Discussion: Chief Burton explained that the Supervisor of Elections provided the District with an estimate for a similar process they developed for the City of Safety Harbor, and the total cost for a special election in March, while piggybacking off the cities' elections already taking place, would be approximately \$19,000, assuming that there will be contested seats in the beach communities. He added this estimate includes ballot kits, equipment, poll workers, administration costs, etc. Mr. Rives asked if there was a mail ballot option. Chief Burton stated that the estimate included 5,500 mail ballot kits at \$0.91 each. Ms. Cerce added that it could be held as a standalone election as well. She stated that she would be interested in how many ballots are sent out and what their rate of return is. Chief Burton stated that, for the 2016 referendum, 5,600 of the votes were from mail ballots, 3,200 were regular election day votes, and 1,200 were from early votes.

5. REDINGTON STATION UPDATE

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that he met with two of the Redington Beach mayors, but he does not have any further information on the fire protection plans for the new station. Ms. Cisarik asked if the Redington Beach mayors have given any indication if they will let PSFRD bid for staffing at that station, and Chief Burton stated that he did not know. He added that, when the contracts are set to expire, he does not know if they will then be open and competitive. He also stated that it would be impossible to staff the station full time with the existing financial arrangement in place.

OTHER DISCUSSION:

Ms. Hale stated that, in a conversation with the Indian Shores Town Council, she learned that they would like to see a clear and concise budget, as they are somewhat distrustful of the fire department after the last referendum. Ms. Hale added that she feels Stakeholder Task Force members should be knowledgeable on the budget as well in order to sell an increase. Ms. Cerce agreed, and said that she feels it would be insightful to provide the budget at the time of the last referendum and the cost increases since that time.

Mr. Loder asked what the District is doing regarding community relations. Chief Burton stated that the District has been making better use of social media and always looks for opportunities to get out and interact with the public, as well as participating in public education and community events. Mr. Loder said that he will have his marketing person get in touch with us, as he would like to sponsor an open house at some of the fire stations and do free coffee and food. Ms. Cerce said that she feels it would be advantageous for some of the committee members to be present to talk to the public.

District Chief Sidlauskas stated that our community relations and public education problems are due to funding. The District only has two inspectors, and when they are out at events, they are unable to perform inspections. He added that Fire Prevention Week is coming up and that is typically packed full of educational activities for kids and schools. Chief Burton thanked Mr. Loder for his offer. Ms. Cisarik stated that, if the District decides to do mailers again, to be very careful of the language in them. Chief Burton stated that he hopes this group will still be available to be an advisory group on how to move forward with materials like that.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:14 a.m.

APPROVED:

 8-22-18

Fire Chief Mike Burton, Chair

Date

ATTEST:



Kimberly G. Fugate, Executive Assistant