



Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue

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FIRE CHIEF
T. MICHAEL BURTON

**MINUTES
APRIL 20, 2021
WORKSHOP AND REGULAR MEETINGS**

**St. Jerome Parrish Hall
10895 Hamlin Blvd., Largo, FL 33774**

**WORKSHOP MEETING CALLED TO ORDER
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

ROLL CALL: Commissioners answering roll call were Chair Joseph Bruni, Vice Chair David Ardman, Secretary/Treasurer Lawrence Schear, Commissioner David Gardella, and Commissioner Louis Snelling. A quorum was present with Chair Joseph Bruni presiding. Attorney Jeff Albinson, Chief Mike Burton, and Finance Director David Martin were also present.

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS: None.

SERVICE PINS – Fire Chief Mike Burton presented Lieutenant/Paramedic Douglas Higley and Firefighter/Paramedic Matthew Zeiner with five-year service pins.

OATH OF OFFICE – Firefighter/EMT Christopher Barnes took his Oath of Office.

GENERAL REMARKS FROM THE AUDIENCE: None.

DISCUSSION ITEMS: None.

ADJOURNMENT – The Workshop was adjourned.

REGULAR MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO AGENDA: None.

MONTHLY BUSINESS:

1. Approval of Minutes: March 16, 2021 Workshop and Regular Meetings

Discussion: Vice Chair David Ardman identified two corrections to the minutes.

A motion to approve the minutes of the March 16, 2021 Workshop and Regular Meetings with the identified corrections.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER SCHEAR SECOND: COMMISSIONER ARDMAN

All in favor, motion passed unanimously.

2. Treasurer's Report: March, 2021

Discussion: Secretary/Treasurer Lawrence Schear stated balance sheet accounts have been reconciled as of March 31, 2021. Consolidated government funds, assets, and liabilities are \$4.7 million; the investment program in accordance with District policy is \$4.5 million; current liabilities are within normal end-of-month limits, at \$93,700; the capital projects fund revenues total \$64,100; the new E-26 is scheduled for a December delivery. The remaining capital purchase plan for the fiscal year includes an air compressor for Station 27, one utility vehicle (PS-900), and two apparatus support vehicles (DC-27 & PS-600). 71% of the PS-600 replacement vehicle cost will be funded by EMS. General fund cost recoveries include \$28,900 for Hurricane Michael and \$338,400 for COVID-19. Total operating costs are projected to be \$31.5k (0.5%) less than the amended budget. Projected ending ratio remains slightly ahead of GASB recommendations at 28.0%, but is far less than the Commission's 45% objective. The projection does not include FEMA cost recoveries for Hurricane Sally.

Vice Chair David Ardman asked for clarification on impact fee statement; Finance Director David Martin explained.

A motion to approve the March, 2021 Treasurer's Report.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER GARDELLA SECOND: COMMISSIONER SNELLING

All in favor, motion passed unanimously.

3. Correspondence: None.

GENERAL REMARKS FROM THE AUDIENCE: None.

REPORTS:

1. COMMISSION: Secretary/Treasurer Lawrence Schear discussed his research on potential property locations in Indian Shores. He also discussed beneficial classes through FASD for the Commissioners and requested that Vice Chair Ardman be offered the opportunity to attend. There was concurrence among the Commissioners.

Finance Director David Martin mentioned new legislation that is likely to pass requiring Commissioners to participate in four hours of ethics training each year.

2. ATTORNEY: Attorney Jeff Albinson discussed an employee issue he has been working with Chief Burton on in which a District Chief was paying a Lieutenant to work some of his shifts.

3. CHIEF'S REPORT: Chief Burton stated that he attended the Indian Shores Town Council meeting last week to present on the Optima report. He added that he will meet with the Town Administrator on Monday to attempt to develop a resolution of support for the Optima study as it relates to the potential station in Indian Shores.

Chief Burton announced the following:

- District Chief Ray Norton has retired from District.
- Promotional processes for Lieutenant and District Chief will take place April 28th and 29th at St. Jerome's.
- Final offers of employment have been extended to Firefighter/EMTs Spencer Finkhousen and Logan Emry. Both will begin on May 3rd.

Chief Burton stated that a purchase order has been submitted for an electronic fire inspection records management system that will replace the current, antiquated paper-based system.

Fleet Mechanic Tom Bruno, Assistant Chief John Mortellite, and Firefighter/EMT Pat Schwab will travel to Pierce Manufacturing in Appleton, Wisconsin the first week of May as part of the Squad 26 replacement apparatus assignment.

The Chief stated that District staff continues to support COVID-19 vaccination efforts on an overtime basis which is reimbursed by the County.

Chief Burton also mentioned that the annual audit process is underway this week.

Last week, the Chief stated that he assisted St. Pete Beach Fire Rescue in their District Chief promotional process. This week, Assistant Chief Mortellite and District Chief Williams are helping East Lake Fire Rescue with their Lieutenant promotional process.

Chief Burton stated that he had a Zoom meeting with County Commissioner Gerard on March 27th, and another Zoom meeting today with County Commissioner Seel, to apprise them on the District's history, its efforts to rebuild community trust, cooperative efforts that are underway, the planning process, and the District's unmet needs. The Chief stated that he feels encouraged by both of those meetings and is awaiting a response from the other two County Commissioners he reached out to.

The Chief also stated that he had a Zoom meeting today with Safety and Emergency Services Director Jim Fogarty and EMS Director Craig Hare to discuss EMS staffing for Station 28, the proposed EMS budget, and the requested funds for Station 28 in the Pinellas County CIP.

ACTION ITEMS:

21-05 Assistant Chief Employment Agreement

Fire Chief

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that the Assistant Chief employment agreement is not dissimilar to the Fire Chief agreement. He continued that the premise is to try to work on succession planning, and discussed that once an employee moves beyond the District Chief position, they no longer have protection from the bargaining unit. Chief Burton stated that Assistant Chief Mortellite did not request this, and further explained that he is doing this on behalf of the District for all future Assistant Chiefs, as it provides some definition of due process, working conditions, and offers some job security, with all final decisions resting with the Commission. The agreement only includes existing benefits and just provides a method of defining them. Commissioner Snelling asked if the Assistant Chief has any protection in the event the position is eliminated; Chief Burton stated that he does not have an answer for that question.

A motion to adopt the Assistant Chief's Employment Agreement.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER ARDMAN SECOND: COMMISSIONER SCHEAR

All in favor, motion passed unanimously.

21-06 Letter to Pinellas County on EMS Funding for Truck #28 Fire Chief

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that this letter is in accordance with the annual EMS budget submission and includes a request for Truck 28 to be funded at 100%, which the Board passed by resolution at last month's meeting. Chief Burton discussed his Zoom meeting on the subject.

21-07 Letter to Pinellas County on Station #28 Funding Fire Chief

Discussion: Chief Burton stated that he recently received notice that there was a very hard deadline to submit a request for Penny for Pinellas funding and had approximately a 24 – 48-hour window to submit a request on behalf of the District, and therefore did not have an opportunity to gain concurrence from Commission. He continued that he made the request for \$4 million for construction of a new facility, and \$600,000 for property acquisition and design. He added that he felt very encouraged by today's discussion on the subject. Chief Burton explained his reasoning for the amounts requested, and added that Penny for Pinellas funding is to build fire stations, so any additional funding required for fire administrative offices would be at the expense of the District. During today's meeting, there was discussion on the option of cash flow, conceivably in the upcoming fiscal year for land acquisition and early design phases, with funding for the station in FY23, which Chief Burton stated he feels is very reasonable. He added that the most appealing property currently available is County-owned and he will begin working on finding out more on that. Vice Chair Ardman discussed the weaknesses in the Optima study and its use of response times as sole justification for station locations.

21-08 Letter from Pinellas Suncoast Professional Firefighters' Association Fire Chief

Discussion: Chief Burton apologized as he does not typically choose to read from paper, but wanted to ensure that he clearly addresses each one of President Grantham's allegations in his letter and provide clear responses to the Commission. [Chief Burton's written response will be included as an addendum to the minutes.] Vice Chair Ardman thanked Chief Burton for the time he took to address and communicate this information to the Commission. Commissioner Gardella asked what happens at this point. Attorney Jeff Albinson stated that the letter indicates it was sent to the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, United States Department of Labor, and the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and, therefore, if any of those agencies find any reason to do so, they may open an investigation. Mr. Albinson also stated that Chief Burton had consulted with him on the aforementioned Lieutenant and District Chief trade issue. Mr. Albinson stated that the District Chief earned approximately \$850 per shift, but paid the Lieutenant \$300 per shift to work for him, which is one reason Mr. Albinson had some concerns on the matter, including opening the District up to legal liability if it was discovered it had knowledge on the issue but took no action. Mr. Albinson conducted research on similar cases and learned that firefighters had being criminally charged in the same situation in the past, so he reached out to

someone at the State Attorney's office for guidance who advised that the District should contact the Pinellas County Sheriff's office economic crimes unit, so that there was a third-party independent investigation on the matter to determine if there was a criminal element in an effort to protect the District later. Some additional discussion ensued. Chair Bruni asked if there were questions or comments from anyone in the audience, which there were not. Mr. Albinson added that if the Association feels that there should be any further third-party investigation conducted then it should be their responsibility to move forward with that. Mr. Albinson also gave some additional information on making a report versus filing a criminal complaint.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned in due form.

APPROVED:



Joseph V. Bruni, Chair

ATTEST:



Kimberly G. Fugate, Executive Assistant

5/18/21

Date Approved