



Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue

304 FIRST STREET
INDIAN ROCKS BEACH, FLORIDA 33785-2587

(727) 595-1117 FAX: (727) 250-0111
www.psfrd.org

FIRE CHIEF
JEFFREY DAVIDSON

MINUTES DECEMBER 9, 2024 SPECIAL MEETING

Belleair Beach Community Center
444 Causeway Boulevard
Belleair Beach, FL 33786

SPECIAL MEETING CALLED TO ORDER PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Commissioners answering roll call were Vice Chair Elizabeth “Betsey” McKenna, Secretary/Treasurer Heather Fleming-Koskinas, Commissioner David Gardella, Commissioner Mark Bolling, and Commissioner Jacob Knighton. A quorum was present with Vice Chair Betsey McKenna presiding. Attorney Jeff Albinson, Fire Chief Jeffrey Davidson, Division Chief Louis Stoneburg, Division Chief Patrick Schwab, and Finance Director Erin Brooks were also present.

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS: None.

ELECTION OF BOARD OFFICERS – Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary/Treasurer

Commissioners voted for board officers via paper ballot. Votes were tallied by Attorney Jeff Albinson, who read the winners of each position as follows:

Chair – Elizabeth “Betsey” McKenna (3 votes)
Vice Chair – Mark Bolling (4 votes)
Secretary/Treasurer – Heather Fleming-Koskinas (4 votes)

GENERAL REMARKS FROM THE AUDIENCE: None.

ACTION ITEMS:

24-44 Investigation Report on Agenda Items #24-26, #24-27, #24-30
Milton Collins, Esq. – Independent Investigator

Discussion: Attorney Albinson stated that while the report was received this afternoon, he had hoped to have it earlier but understands how much time and effort Mr. Collins has put into putting it together. He added that the Commission may not yet feel prepared at this point to recommend any action be taken. Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of scheduling an additional meeting, but Attorney Albinson reminded the Commission they can decide to take any action they choose tonight. Mr. Collins stated that if a special meeting is set, he will attend in person as he feels it is important for him to see through the end.

Mr. Collins recapped that he was tasked with investigating three complaints. He determined that Assistant Chief David Karpinecz's complaint included legitimate concerns but did not meet the elements of being protected under Florida's Whistleblower Act. He determined that Division Chief Louis Stoneburg's complaint against Assistant Chief Karpinecz indicates that, while it seems that there are deep-seated interpersonal conflicts between Chiefs Stoneburg and Karpinecz, Chief Stoneburg is not found to be in a protected class and the complaint does not meet the thresholds to be classified as a Hostile Work Environment claim. Mr. Collins stated that he spent the most time on the complaint made by the Union against Fire Chief Jeffrey Davidson. He continued that he interviewed the entire workforce and that the members of the department were unfiltered in raw in the concerns they shared. Mr. Collins stated that he made an intentional decision to not include many concerns in the report as he did not want to inflame the situation. Mr. Collins stated that he believes the sentiment of their consensus is in the report: There is a severe lack of esprit de corps, they are undervalued, they are underpaid, and they are being subjected to an environment that is untenable to them, and he stated that he wanted to make sure the Board understood that. Mr. Collins said the bottom line is there is a loss of morale, a loss of trust, and a loss of confidence in Chief Davidson by a vast majority of the members. He added that in talking to Chief Davidson, Chief Stoneburg, and Chief Schwab, they believe there are Union / management gamesmanships going on and believe a lot of the statements to be overblown and hyperbolic. Mr. Collins stated that there were statements regarding positive things that have also been accomplished by this administration, so he tried to counterbalance some of the negative things with some of the positive. He confirmed that he has sustained two charges relative to Chief Davidson's conduct and leadership and, while not egregious charges, it is the spirit of the SOPs and the District's mission and values that are on trial. Mr. Collins stated that there are factions in the department and the vast majority of personnel believe a change is needed and that the situation is not repairable. Mr. Collins stated that it is the Board's decision to determine how possible or probable that is and, while he stated that he has some other thoughts as it relates to this after speaking to all of the members, he is here to answer any questions the Board may have when making their decision.

Commissioner Gardella told Mr. Collins that he has not been able to read the report yet, but he appreciates his overview.

Secretary/Treasurer Koskinas asked if Mr. Collins believe this is a Union versus non-Union issue, to which Mr. Collins replied that he believes that is a big part of it.

Secretary/Treasurer Koskinas asked if the last paragraph on page five, which discusses the perception of favoritism and promotions and a lack of procedural processes for non-bargained employees is referring to Division Chiefs Schwab and Stoneburg, which Mr. Collins confirmed it is. Secretary/Treasurer Koskinas asked if the animosity is also geared toward Chiefs Stoneburg

and Schwab, to which Mr. Collins stated that there was criticism of them, but Chief Davidson is who drew most of the ire, and that Chiefs Stoneburg and Schwab were essentially following orders from Chief Davidson.

Secretary/Treasurer Koskinas stated that the recommendation is that Assistant Chief David Karpinecz be reinstated and asked Mr. Collins if he feels that they will all be able to sit in a room together and talk out their differences. Mr. Collins stated that he believes Chief Karpinecz has shown him that he has wanted to mend the relationship with other members of the administration. He added that he did not ask Chief Stoneburg that question but stated the other members in administration did not allude to the situation being unrepairable and believes they are all professionals who, over time, do want it to work.

Secretary/Treasurer Koskinas asked if any suggestions were made by personnel regarding any “out of the box” suggestions to come to a resolution. Mr. Collins stated that there were not, and explained there were essentially two camps: One that believes administration needs to be changed, and another that there needs to be extensive training and people being held accountable to continue. He added that he believes the only options with fire rescue departments, in his experience, are to either proceed with the current administration, or don’t.

Commissioner Knighton stated that most of recommendations revolve around rebuilding a bond or somehow back in line with each other. He asked if there is a timeframe and a metric in which the Commission can use to determine if those efforts are working. He added that these issues have taken up a lot of time from the District’s administration as well as the citizens’ tax dollars. Mr. Collins stated that he would work with the Board to develop a performance improvement plan, which is an option if it is determined the situation is salvageable.

Commissioner Knighton asked if the Commission would receive the supplemental report. Mr. Collins reiterated that there were a lot of things that he left out of the initial report as he did not know how constructive it would be to include them when he was tasked with investigating the three specific complaints; however, there more than a dozen ancillary issues brought up by members that he believes are important to reviewed. He stated that report can be produced if the Board would like it.

Public Comment:

Aleksandra Hott – Address Confidential – Mrs. Hott stated that her biggest concern with the report is some of the opinions that were included, as she said that she is unsure whether it is the factfinder’s place to “counterbalance criticism with praise.” She added that the report did deviate from the three complaints under investigation and feels that the report may read more biased than she feels it should have. Mrs. Hott said that the report suggested statements were made that the Union is contributing to morale issues by encouraging members to adopt certain positions, but she feels it is a more realistic consideration that it is the first time the Union has an Executive Board that is not afraid to speak up and refuses to accept manipulative and destructive behavior. She continued that a culture has been curated in this department in which members are afraid to speak up or challenge administration in fear of retaliation. Mrs. Hott stated that, should a righteous decision not be made following this investigation, she fears the impact on the staff and that there

will be a mass exodus of employees.

Hannah Davidson – 10065 Addison Way, Seminole, FL – Ms. Davidson stated that she has known many great firefighters through her life due to her father being a firefighter since before she was born. She continued that both previous and existing firefighters have come to her praising her dad's leadership. Ms. Davidson stated that she believes the change happened when the firefighters did not get their way and started acting childish, as seen in the last meeting. She stated that her dad is making the best decisions for the future of the department and that, after 37 years in the fire service, she said she believes he knows best. She added that the administration does not make decisions lightly, and makes every decision with endless effort, research, and time. She stated she does not feel the behaviors demonstrated by the firefighters are those of professional firefighters and it is embarrassing to the fire service. She said that everyone needs to do better for the community they serve.

Kayla Zeiner – Address Confidential – Mrs. Zeiner stated that this situation has been deeply affecting her family. She recapped text messages that were sent by Chief Davidson stating that he wanted to fight her husband. Mrs. Zeiner stated that her husband could hardly enjoy his time on a recent cruise taken by their family due to several members calling him on the phone, expressing they were upset and considering resigning due to how administration is treating them. She said that they have been trapped in this situation and hopes they can start fresh because they are unable to take much more.

Attorney Albinson asked Mr. Collins how the District could obtain the supplemental report. Mr. Collins stated that he has already done the work, so he will just need to reduce it to a format that can be read and digested.

Union Vice President Matthew Zeiner stated that he believes since Assistant Chief Karpinecz is still on administrative leave, he believes the other members of administration should also be put on administrative leave. Vice President Zeiner stated that Mr. Collin's recommendation is to reinstate Chief Karpinecz and he believes that he is more than capable of running the department in the interim.

Secretary/Treasurer Koskinas asked about the cost for supplemental report. Mr. Collins stated that it is included in the work he has already done, and if the Board would like the report, he will ensure they receive it with sufficient time to review.

Chief Davidson thanked the Commission for conducting the investigation as he had requested of them during the September meeting. Chief Davidson stated that the report confirms that he has done nothing illegal, nor has he committed any acts he was accused of. He continued that the report does identify room for improvement and that he will do his best to address those items moving forward. Chief Davidson stated that he has to make all of his decisions in the best interest of the District, and that leaders are leaders because they have to make difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions. He said that his goal has always been, and still is, to make PSFRD a premiere fire and rescue agency offering the best salary, benefits, and working conditions, while providing top fire and rescue and life safety services to the citizens it protects.

There was a consensus among the Board to table this agenda item and schedule a Special Meeting for 5:15 p.m. on Thursday, December 19, 2024, for continued discussion on this item. It was also agreed that the Workshop & Regular Meeting scheduled for December 17, 2024 will be rescheduled to immediately follow the Special Meeting.

24-45 Legislative Appropriations Representation

Discussion: Chief Davidson stated that the Board authorized the hiring of legislative representation to lobby on the District's behalf to request legislative funds to rebuild Station 27. He continued that last year, the District asked for \$7 million and was awarded \$1 million. The cost last year was \$15,000 and the District's received a \$1 million return. He stated the cost this year will be \$20,000. Chief Davidson stated that he believes entering into this agreement again with Manson, Bolves, Donaldson, and Tanner will help the District obtain the remaining funds for the renovation of Station 27. In response to Commissioner Bolling asking, Chief Davidson stated that around \$10 million will likely be requested this year. He added that Station 27 is not a healthy fire station for the District's personnel and is not ADA compliant.

A motion to engage with MBDT for the 2025 legislative session to seek funding for the District under the terms outlined.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER BOLLING SECOND: COMMISSIONER KNIGHTON

All in favor, MOTION PASSED unanimously.

Secretary/Treasurer Koskinas asked if she could briefly discuss an item not on the agenda. She said that she received an email with a complaint regarding short-term rental inspections and asked what the status of that complaint is. Attorney Albinson stated that he will provide an update at the upcoming December meeting, but, while the email was not originally sent to him, he has since reached out to the lawyer who sent the letter and has asked the Chief to conduct an investigation. Attorney Albinson stated that the group "Friends of Indian Rocks Beach" had suggested that at least one short-term rental property in Indian Rocks Beach had not been properly vetted. He stated that a follow-up email suggested that there are as many as 27 other short-term rental properties that had also not been properly inspected. He then summarized the inspection process for the Board. He stated that as soon as he is provided with the reports from District administration, he will be able to speak with some knowledge on the issue to that attorney. Attorney Albinson stated that he would hope a lawsuit does not come of this, as it is his understanding that all inspections have been conducted properly. He added that once he speaks with the lawyer, the carrier will need to be notified, but he will let them know that it is being handled in-house so that we do not incur any expenses. Chief Davidson told Attorney Albinson that he will get those numbers to him tomorrow morning. Chief Davidson added that he was notified that the State Fire Marshal has already received a copy but assured the Board that the District works hand-in-hand with the City of Indian Rocks Beach, and only short-term rentals that have a business license and that have registered with the City are inspected.

Commissioner Knighton asked if the Chief would be out of town beginning tomorrow. Chief

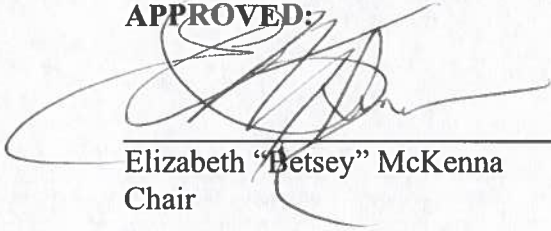
Davidson stated that he will be leaving as soon as the meeting is over and plans to be back over the weekend. He confirmed that he would have his cell phone and computer, but that Chiefs Stoneburg and Schwab could be reached at any time.

Vice President Zeiner asked the Board what Chief Karpinecz's status is, considering he is still on paid administrative leave and Mr. Collins' recommendation was to reinstate him. Attorney Albinson stated that there is no answer to that question and it is not an agenda item.

ADJOURNMENT

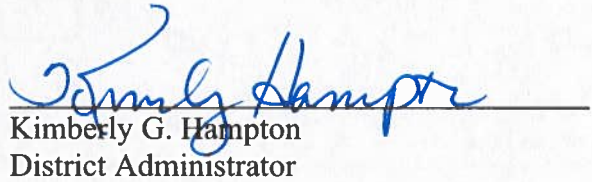
The Special Meeting was adjourned in due form.

APPROVED:



Elizabeth "Betsey" McKenna
Chair

ATTEST:



Kimberly G. Hampton
District Administrator

12/19/24
Date Approved
