

**FORT MYERS SHORES FIRE & RESCUE PROTECTION DISTRICT
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
June 18, 2020
MINUTES**

Call Meeting to Order

Commissioner Apperson called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. In attendance were Commissioners Kimball, Detzel, Ragen, Schneider, and Apperson Also in attendance were Chief Dowaliby, Deputy Chief Rewis, Attorney Pringle, Administrative Assistant Howard, two commissioners from the Alva Fire Department, Captain Burrell, DVP/Firefighter Hunt, and several other members of the department.

Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence

Amendments to the Agenda

1. There will be a discussion of the Millage Cap Increase Election in Old Business.
2. We will discuss a proposed employee buyout in New Business.

Presentations/Awards

The Chief's presentation of the Ten Year Plan and the DVP Hunt's presentation of the Union's view of the District's future needs will be

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for May 2020 were presented for approval. Commissioner Ragen made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Commissioner Detzel seconded and the motion passed.

Treasurer's Report

Bank account balances for the month of May 2020:

The operating account opened with \$ 3,148,814.90. There were deposits of \$ 82,847.53 and expenditures of \$ 296,017.74 for an ending balance of \$ 2,935,644.69.

The impact fee account opened with \$ 1,095,277.68. There were deposits of \$ 19,147.48 and debits of \$ 18,865.00 for an ending balance of \$ 1,095,560.16.

The 4-week C.D.A.R.S. opened with \$ 1,251,439.18. There were credits of \$ 182.40 for an ending balance of \$ 1,251,621.58.

The 13-week C.D.A.R.S. opened and closed with \$ 2,500,000.00.

The 26-week C.D.A.R.S. opened and closed with \$ 2,000,000.00.

The total of all deposits on May 31, 2020 was \$9,782,826.43.

Commissioner Kimball made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report. Commissioner Schneider seconded and the motion passed.

Chief's Report

Items of Interest

- The Declaration of Emergency for the District has expired. We will open the station to the community on July 1st but there are a couple of considerations we should look at. Lehigh Acres has seven personnel who are out, which has caused them to drop one ambulance from service. Lee County is backing them up right now. Some other departments are cutting out some training with the indications of increased COVID 19 cases. We will continue the self-monitoring forms and the checking of temperatures for all employees and visitors. We will give visitors using the meeting room access to masks if they would like to wear them and take their temperature. We will maintain the safety procedures for the on-duty personnel.
- The department is entrenched in disagreement about the organization's future. I will present my vision for what the future needs are of the District. I have invited the Union to present their side.
- We have not heard anything about our Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant application.
- The annual physicals are complete.

- Department anniversaries: Commissioner Ragen (9 years) and Captain Burrell (29 years).
- Birthdays to celebrate this month; Deputy Chief Rewis, Captain Burrell, Captain Jones, Captain Jones' son and youngest daughter, and Captain Clouse's son. Happy Birthday!
- Firefighter Mimbs and his wife celebrated a wedding anniversary this month.

Meetings Attended

- Lee County Fire Chiefs Association
- Monthly Officers meeting

Commissioner Kimball made a motion to accept the Chief's Report. Commissioner Detzel seconded and the motion passed

Attorney's Report

- Verandah property: We are in the inspection period for the property. We have initiated the first of four available automatic 30 day extensions. We are still working on a few items in the contract, but they have been very accommodating so far. We are working on the Phase 1 Environmental Inspection, the title insurance, and the survey has been completed.

Commissioner Detzel made a motion to accept the Attorney's Report. Commissioner Ragen seconded and the motion passed

Fire Prevention Division Report

- Current Construction: Race-Trac, the final inspection is scheduled for next week
- New Construction: Little Caesars Pizza; Eye Doctor's office
- Projects Completed: None to report
- Revenues: The Division billed \$0 for the month.
- Meetings Attended: Lee County Fire Chiefs Association – Remote phone conference; Lee County Fire Marshals and Inspectors Association - Remotely

- Prevention Education: None to report
- Inspections: The division completed 125 various fire inspections for the month. Engineer Simmons and Firefighter Hunt are both doing inspections.
- The Volunteers had a meeting on May 20, 2020 and were allowed to return to volunteer shifts on June 1st.

Commissioner Schneider made a motion to accept the Prevention Report. Commissioner Kimball seconded and the motion passed.

Public Input on Agenda Items

None

Old Business

1. The Emergency Declaration expired on June 17th.
2. Discussion of Millage Cap Increase Election:

Commissioner Kimball: This year we are going to have a big increase in revenue due again to FPL's tangible taxes, so the commissioners are sure to receive calls from the media. He suggested that the Board designate the Chief as their spokesperson for this item. Chief Dowaliby asked if it is appropriate for him to be the media contact for the Commissioners since they are his boss and if that would be a conflict in any way.

Attorney Pringle said that it is appropriate for the Board to appoint him to be their spokesperson for this issue if they choose to do so. He also said that the Fire Chief is the Chief Administrative Officer of the District and he has the most direct knowledge of the budget and planning for the District. He noted that it is often better to have one point of contact rather than five, who while they understand the issue, may explain it in different ways, which may be interpreted differently. There was discussion of the question and the Commissioners agreed that they would like to officially appoint the Chief to be their spokesperson for the issue of the ad valorem and millage rate increase election.

Commissioner Ragen made a motion to appoint Chief Dowaliby as the Board's spokesperson on the specific issue of the millage cap increase ballot question.

Commissioner Schneider seconded and the motion passed.

Commissioner Kimball: Should still hold the election for a millage cap increase in August or would it be better to postpone it. Commissioner Ragen: We are not asking to increase the millage right now; we are asking for the ability to increase it in the future. The tangible increase this year is substantial, but there is no guarantee that it will not go down just as substantially in a future year. Chief Dowaliby asked Mr. Pringle if we are even able to change what we have already sent to the Supervisor of Elections. Mr. Pringle said that we have initiated the process to place it on the August ballot and he is not sure if we would be able to change it at this point. Commissioner Kimball is not recommending that we remove it from the ballot, just asking if it is still the best time to do it. Mr. Pringle gave his personal, not legal, opinion that the timing of the August ballot would enable the District to use the higher millage rate, if necessary, in this election or at least to have more information for future planning. The District has some large projects in the ten-year plan and will need the information to help decide on funding for those projects and how much debt we need to accumulate to accomplish them. Commissioner Detzel: My opinion is to let the question remain on the August primary ballot. The other Commissioners agreed so there was no action necessary.

New Business

1. Personnel Buyout: Captain Burrell is in the DROP, with a final date of June 30, 2021. He has proposed a buyout of \$75,000.00 to the Chief that would allow him to go a year early, although he is completely willing to finish out his DROP term if the Board is not in support of the buyout. We have run some financial comparisons to make sure this is fair to both parties and found that it will cost the District slightly less (about \$13,000) to give Captain Burrell the buyout and bring in a new firefighter than for him to complete his DROP. We could promote the next Captain and Engineer, who are on the list from previous tests, and hire a new firefighter. Commissioner Ragen has personal experience as a recipient of a buyout and he is in favor of it for several reasons. It makes sense

financially because the promoted and incoming personnel will be less expensive to the department than Captain Burrell. Even though we are a small department with only two positions promoting it still gives those personnel and the new hire some new opportunities. He said he has no problem with it except that he does not want to see Captain Burrell go. Commissioner Apperson also understands that young employees are waiting for the opportunity to move up. Captain Burrell said that he wanted to make sure it does not cost the District any more money. Commissioner Apperson said she appreciated the way it was presented, and she is in favor of the buyout. Commissioner Schneider is in favor, saying that he thinks that promotions are a positive thing for the District right now. Commissioner Kimball is also in favor and he said he will miss Captain Burrell. Chief Dowaliby said that the union will still have to agree to the deal, but they will make this the first item in union negotiations and then the Captains will have to vote on it. The Chief said that the process is just a formality but there is no disagreement about it and the union has done these types of agreements before. Attorney Pringle said that the formal process must be done because there is no provision for buyouts in the contract. The Board will be able to take formal action to approve it in the July meeting after that process has been done.

2. Presentation of Long-Range Plan.

Chief Dowaliby reviewed the draft version of his Ten-Year Plan: The original draft of the plan included a few items that have been changed somewhat due to a lack of support among the personnel.

I originally had a paramedic program in the plan but there is no support for it right now in our department. I have decided to wait to move forward with it only when it is employee driven.

We have been talking about consolidation with Alva since I was here the first time, but there is disagreement with my vision on that, so I am also tabling that until it is employee driven.

There is also disagreement about the training facility. I have delayed it in the plan until 2025. If it becomes employee driven, we can move it up in the timeline. Either way, I think a training tower is an essential thing for the region if not for just Ft. Myers Shores. Fiscal year 2020/2021: We are going to hire 3 new personnel. If we get the SAFER Grant, there is no cost for base pay and benefits for the first year. There will be about \$13,000 of expense in equipment and training plus any overtime for each new employee, so \$39,000 for all three for the first year, and for the next two years, it will be about \$18,000 each year. Three new personnel for the first three years would be about \$75,000 with the SAFER Grant.

If we do not get the SAFER Grant, we will still hire three personnel for a total of about \$225,000 for the first year including all benefits.

My original plan was to bring in some outside training but there has been some disagreement about that. The captains are confident that they can handle the training so I am going to give them a total of \$18,000 to bring in whatever training they want, and we will see how that works out.

We are going to start the planning for a new engine but will not order it until the fiscal year 2022 for delivery in fiscal year 2023 as we move toward getting the second station built.

Commissioner Kimball asked if we will be retiring an engine. Chief Dowaliby said that we need another engine to open the second station not to replace any of our current engines.

We plan to replace the 2006 F-250 utility truck in fiscal year 2021.

We have budgeted \$525,000.00 out of the operating account in fiscal year 2021 for the development order, permits, civil engineer, architect, and attorney fees for Station 2.

Fiscal Year 2021/2022: We will put the millage cap increase on the ballot in the general election in 2022 if it does not pass this year.

We will order and pay for the new engine so we can get the pre-payment discount of about 8%, or approximately \$60,000 on a \$750,000 engine. We will not take delivery

until the following fiscal year when we are closer to completing Station 2. We will be able to pay for the new engine with Impact Fees since it will be for Station 2. We need to plan for Station 2 so it will be adequate for what we estimate will be a 50-year operational lifetime, so we do not have the same situation we have at Station 1. Station 1 was built about 48 years ago and has been completely remodeled once. Last year the guys remodeled their living quarters and did an awesome job. We still have no storage and we can only buy one real fire truck because we two of the bays will only fit smaller engines. We will build to hurricane category 3 standards at minimum. We will use \$2,000,000.00 from reserves in this fiscal year for the substructure, traffic light access, on-site hydrants, FPL transformer, the Construction Manager, and the beginning of construction. We anticipate borrowing \$2,500,000.00, which will cost about \$215,000.00 in interest over four years and if possible, we would pay off the loan at that time. However, we also can continue the payments if we experience a downturn or less growth that we have estimated. That will allow us to keep adequate reserves for our other needs. We estimate that we will still have about \$6,700,000.00 in reserves at the end of fiscal year 2022.

Fiscal Year 2022/2023: I would like to move the Deputy Chief to Assistant Chief this year to put him in line to become the next Chief. I think he deserves it because he has performed admirably over the last couple of years.

We plan to hire three more personnel so when we open Station 2, we will have adequate staffing.

We plan to promote the Captains to Battalion Chiefs and promote three Engineers to Lieutenant at Station 2 and three Firefighters to Engineers. The Battalion Chiefs would continue to run the shifts, but they would also have the ability to join the Strike Teams and gain that experience.

This year (2022) the Commissioners up for election are Apperson and Ragen.

This year we have the lowest personnel cost to ad valorem of any year in the ten-year plan. Our reserves should go up to around \$6,750,000.00

Fiscal Year 2023/2024: This year we start to plan for the replacement of Engine 82. We have to decide at that time what kind of apparatus will best serve the District. We have estimated the budget for a ladder truck, but if a heavy rescue truck or a different type of engine better fits our needs, we will make that change.

This year (2024) will be the next time we can put the millage cap increase on the ballot. We estimate our reserves, including Impact Fees to be about \$7,300,000.00 at the end of the year.

Fiscal Year 2024/2025: This year is when the new apparatus will be paid for and we estimate it will be between \$700,000.00 and \$1,400,000.00. We will also start thinking about a heavy rescue/pumper so we can use a smaller vehicle on most of the medical calls.

This is the year we will start working on the substructure for the training facility. For the next five years or maybe six, we plan to invest \$250,000.00 per year from Impact Fees into the training facility.

This year three Commission seats are up for election: Detzel, Kimball, Schneider. We estimate that our reserves at the end of the year will be \$6,970,000.00.

Fiscal Year 2025/2026: We project to add three more personnel bringing each shift to eight personnel and allowing the Battalion Chief to be in his own response vehicle when we are fully staffed. At this manning, we could keep minimum manning at six, which would allow two people to be off at the same time.

We project buying the rescue/pumper this year for an estimated cost of \$230,000.00 and we will put another \$250,000.00 from Impact Fees into the training facility.

The millage cap increase will be put on the ballot (2026) if it has not passed in the prior elections.

At the end of this year we anticipate having reserves of \$7,600,000.00.

Fiscal Year 2026/2027: The Chief retires and either the Assistant Chief becomes the Chief or somebody else comes in. This is the year to hire a CPA and start preparing for the Administrative Assistant's retirement.

This year we have planned to pay off the construction loan of \$1,573,000.00.

We will spend another \$250,000.00 from Impact Fees for the training facility.

Reserves are estimated at about \$7,300,000.00.

Fiscal Year 2027/2028: We have several considerations this year: Do we need to hire a Fire Marshal? What do we need to do about replacing Station 1?

We will invest another \$250,000.00 in the training facility from Impact Fees.

This year we estimate having reserves of over \$9,000,000.00.

Fiscal Year 2028/2029: We plan to add three more personnel, still with two off per shift.

This year the Battalion Chief would be in his own vehicle at all times. This would be the first time we could have four personnel at Station 2 when we are fully staffed.

We need to start thinking about possibly having a Training Captain, because the Battalion Chiefs may be at the point where they have too many other duties to be able to continue doing the training.

The development order and substructure for replacing Station 1 is estimated to be \$750,000.00.

We will have invested \$1,250,000.00 in the training facility by this time and it should be fully operational.

We estimate our reserves at over \$9,800,000.00 at the end of the year.

Fiscal Year 2029/2030: We are estimating about \$7,000,000.00 for the new Station 1 and we will have to decide at that time exactly what we need and how we want to fund it.

Reserves are estimated to be over \$11,000,000.00 at the end of the year.

We did the projections at a moderate increase in the 6% to 8% per year range. If we get an unexpectedly large decrease in revenues, we are confident that we could maintain personnel unless something truly catastrophic were to happen that effected more than just the fire departments.

The outlook for the District is positive, so the next question is why we need to increase our millage cap to 3.0 mills. The answer is to be able to maintain our personnel and lever of service if there is a downturn. If Alva consolidation or a paramedic program would come to be, then we would have more to maintain than what is in the plan.

Commissioner Detzel asked about the plans for the training facility. Chief told him that as soon as we get the land, we earn 8 points from ISO and when we have a fully functional facility, we will get the full 20 or 25 points. We were only 3 points away from a Category 2 on our last ISO rating, so just having the land should put us at a 2 except in the east side of the District until we have Station 2 open. The training facility will also give us the opportunity to bring more training in for our personnel and surrounding Districts. It should also be fully or partially self-sustaining because we can rent it out to other Districts or trainers to hold classes if we choose to do so.

DVP Hunt presented the Union's view of the District's future needs:

Everybody is on board with building Station 2 to suit our needs today and designing it so that it can be built out in the future as our needs change. Initially Station 2 could be staffed with a Lieutenant, Engineer, and Firefighter. We do not think that Station 2 will give the guys at Station 1 any relief if it takes guys from the busier station to staff Station 2.

With the addition of the new property at Station 1, the guys would like to see it built out so administration stays at Station 1. We would like Station 1 to have room for six paid personnel, with enough space to add personnel and for volunteers so people are able to stay overnight without sleeping in recliners.

Station 2 would add safety to the District and give the guys promotional opportunities, which is important to us to promote from within. It creates a stronger department if people have the opportunity to promote within the department and not bring people in. Everybody is on board with a training tower, but we have mixed opinions of the location. We feel that it would be utilized more if it were at one of the stations.

We agree on replacing Engine 81 and Engine 82 sometime in the near future, but we know that is in the plan. We are all on board with purchasing new, quality equipment. We also have mixed opinions about consolidation with Alva. Currently the majority does not want a consolidation and we all agree that it should not happen until we get an increase on our millage cap.

Commissioner Ragen asked what some of the pros and cons of merging with Alva are because he was not involved in any previous discussions of the possibility. DVP Hunt said that from the Union's standpoint it offers a larger District with more future promotional opportunities within the department. We are concerned because we do not want a situation where a consolidation with Alva puts such a strain on the District's finances that our guys lose pay, benefits, promotions, or even their jobs. Chief Dowaliby added that the Economic Development Council shows how much State Road 80 is set to grow in the future. He thinks that a consolidation would be an advantage to both districts in the future. He is also concerned from a safety standpoint and thinks it would aid our personnel if we were able to better staff that area. Eventually either Ft. Myers Shores or Lehigh Acres will likely take them over and Ft. Myers Shores would probably be a better fit. We agree that it would not be fiscally responsible to do anything without a millage cap increase, but we can have conversations about it. DVP Hunt said that the union is also concerned by the amount of money it will cost the District to bring the Alva personnel up to our pay and benefit level. They also do not want any Ft. Myers Shores personnel to lose their positions to Alva personnel, or be passed over for promotion to guys without the same experience or time in service. For those reasons the union does not think this is the right time to support a consolidation. Chief Dowaliby said that the best-case scenario would be for the Alva community to decide to properly fund their own fire department, but of course that would take a big investment.

The union does like the idea of hiring three new personnel in October. We would rather not have their hiring and retention based on whether we get the SAFER Grant because we want them to know they will be retained after three years.

Our position on the Operations/Training Chief position is that we do not feel that it is the time for it and we would like to see Station 2 opened and fully staffed first.

We would like to see the budget determine our future plans so we don't jeopardize any of our personnel's pay, benefits, or future promotions. We want to make sure our people have the opportunity for full careers with the District.

Commissioner Apperson thanked the Chief and DVP for their presentations.

Public Input on Non-Agenda Items:

None

Union Report:

DVP Hunt said there is nothing new. The normal training has not been possible with the COVID restrictions.

Comments from Commissioners:

Commissioner Ragen – Good job everyone: Commissioner Detzel – Thanks to everyone, be safe: Commissioner Schneider – Thanks: Commissioner Kimball – Good luck to Jimmy, we are going to miss you. I think this plan is a good outline of where we can go: Commissioner Apperson – Thank you to both Chief Dowaliby and DVP Hunt, it is good to hear from the employees as well as the Chief. We appreciate you all working as a team and staying professional even when you do not agree on everything.

Adjourn

Commissioner Kimball made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Detzel seconded and the motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.