

**DESTIN FIRE CONTROL DISTRICT**  
Tentative Budget Hearing of the Board of Fire Commissioners  
**Main Station**  
848 Airport Road  
Destin, Florida 32541

September 8, 2015

**Minutes**

Commissioners present: Tommy Green, Rick Moore, Mike Buckingham, Jack Wilson, and Bob Wagner

Staff present: Chief Kevin Sasser, Division Chiefs Ron Gerdeman and Joe D'Agostino, Kathryn Wagner

Present: Dawn Stuntz

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairman Tommy Green. He stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the 2015-2016 millage rate and budget. He stated that the Destin Fire Control District, a state taxing authority, proposes a millage rate of 1.0000 which is 5.35% greater than the rolled-back rate of 0.9492 mills. The floor was opened for public comments concerning the millage rate.

Colleen Ward of Sunsail Circle asked what this is based on. Tommy Green stated it was concerning the millage rate of 1.0000. Colleen Ward asked what the millage rate was last year. Tommy Green stated 1 mill.

With no additional public comments, Rick Moore made a motion to adopt a millage rate of 1.0000 which is 5.35% greater than the rolled-back rate of 0.9492 mills. Mike Buckingham seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Tommy Green stated that the Destin Fire Control District proposes a budget of \$6,368,811 for the 2015-2016 fiscal year, which is a 20.63% increase from last year's budget. The floor was opened for public comments concerning the proposed budget.

Patty Defrenza of Sunsail asked if this was a 2.63% increase from last year. Tommy Green stated a 20.63% increase.

Patty Defrenza asked if a new budget summary could be created to itemized personal services and professional services. Kathryn Wagner stated a budget summary is what is used for the tentative budget hearing, a complete line item budget is posted on the website per state statute. Jack Wilson asked if the detailed budget that the Board had been working with during all the budget workshops was available on the website. Kathryn Wagner stated yes.

Deborah Thurman of Kelly Plantation asked where the budget is on the website. Kathryn Wagner stated under documents / budget. Patty Defrenza asked if the budget on the website will list all the items under personal services and supplies. Kathryn Wagner stated yes. Patty Defrenza asks what kind of supplies cost \$71,932. Rick Moore stated it is broken down online.

Tommy Green stated this is a tentative budget hearing, a final hearing will be held September 17, 2015 at 5:30 pm, which will give everyone time to gather their information for that meeting.

Chief Sasser reminded everyone once the millage rate is set it can only be decreased.

Colleen Ward asked if the budget is put to public vote. Tommy Green stated no. Colleen Ward asked how anyone protests the amounts. Rick Moore stated by coming to the meetings.

Colleen Ward asked for additional information as to why there is a 20% increase. She asked why the Board thought the City got a 20% raise and what is that used for. She stated it was her understanding the total budget is divided by the millage rate, which gets the tax rate, which in turn gets multiplied by the property values. Colleen Ward asked when the property tax assessments were done. Tommy Green stated the Property Appraisers' office appraises property which determined the basis for the District's millage rate.

Colleen Ward asked what Capital Outlay was. Chief Sasser stated capital outlay is capital acquisitions and if we were to take out those large purchases the 20% increase in the budget would be reduced to 8.67% and if we took out the addition of 3 firefighters through the SAFER grant the increase would be reduced to 5.17%, but because we are looking to purchase a new truck and add 3 fireman that number bumped up.

Jack Wilson stated the 20% increase was misleading the way it was presented. He stated he had the detailed budget and was able to go through and see with much more granularity. He further stated with the exception of capital outlay and miscellaneous most items had a negligible or negative increase. He asked if there was a clearer way to present the budget. Kathryn Wagner stated no. She stated this is the format required by the TRIM process.

Jack Wilson stated to clarify; this is not a 20% increase in operating expenses but the purchase of a \$500,000 truck.

Tommy Green stated, if you are not familiar with the revenue sources, the beach safety numbers can be misleading as well since they are funded by the TDC and the City. He stated the District's only revenue sources are ad valorem taxes, \$100,000 from the City, \$600,000 from the TDC, and grants.

Chief Sasser stated 20.63% is not an increase in the millage rate.

Colleen Ward asked how the numbers are generated and how do you determined what you need. She stated for example, does the police department come to you to hire more policeman based on a crime rate increase. Mike Buckingham asked if Colleen Ward was asking how we hire more firefighters. Colleen Ward stated no, the question was how you arrived at the budget numbers and do the entities come to you requesting funds.

Rick Moore asked what entities. He stated we are a special Fire District and not a part of the City of Destin. Tommy Green stated we are not involved in tax base either; we are only

responsible for the fire department. He further stated we are listed on the property tax bill just like the school district and others, but we operate with our own budget.

Mike Buckingham stated we are not the County or the City.

Colleen Ward stated on the proposed property tax bill a public information meeting was scheduled at this address. Tommy Green stated this meeting is concerning the Destin Fire Control District. Colleen Ward stated the County had a hearing in Crestview; the school taxes in Ft. Walton, Destin Indian Bayou had a meeting at the same time as this meeting. Colleen Ward asked why those were scheduled at the same time in different locations. Tommy Green stated we have no control how everyone else set up their meetings, we have our meetings the second Tuesday of every month.

Colleen Ward asked since the District has proposed hiring 3 additional firefighters has there been an increase in fires in the Destin area. Tommy Green stated no. Colleen Ward asked if they would be used as paramedics. Tommy Green stated it would depend, because 7 firefighters voluntarily separated last year we are undermanned.

Colleen Ward asked why 3, why not 2. Chief Sasser stated as a result of the bad economy, we are down 9 firefighters which affect how we are able to get our job done. He stated by reducing the staffing it affects overall operations.

Colleen Ward asked what the average response time is. Chief Sasser stated 5 to 6 minutes. Colleen Ward stated that was an excellent response time.

Colleen Ward asked what determined the need for 3 firefighters. Chief Sasser stated an increase in call volume every year. He stated due to cut backs we have had to call in assistance from neighboring districts to help handle our call volume which is a burden to their taxpayers.

Colleen Ward asked if the other districts are paid when they are called in to assist. Chief Sasser stated no. Colleen Ward asked what budget is being offset by hiring additional firefighters when other districts assist for no charge. Chief Sasser stated no budget was being offset, but if we continue to burden their taxpayers with assisting us they may not want to continue to help us.

Colleen Ward asked if we are called to help those other districts. Chief Sasser stated yes, through a mutual aid agreement. Colleen Ward stated she does not understand why there has to be an increase in 3 firefighters. Chief Sasser stated the standard staff on a structure fire would be 15 firefighters; right now at our current staffing level a fully staffed truck would have 9. He stated the goal is to get to that standard in order to do the job more effectively. Chief Sasser stated we have had budget workshops where presentations were made to the Board detailing the need for additional firefighters and methods to offset the cost.

Tommy Green stated Colleen Ward might be better served to meet with Chief Sasser so he can answer these questions in more detail.

Patty Defrenza stated the Beach Safety budget is not fully funded by the TDC since the expenses listed on the budget are higher than the contributions. She asked if the Beach Safety Division

Chief will receive a pension even though the job is seasonal. Tommy Green stated the Beach Safety Division Chief is a full time employee. Patty Defrenza asked if the Division Chief comes to duty when the season ends in September. Tommy Green stated yes.

Patty Defrenza stated the Beach Safety Program is not fully funded and tax money is paying for the Beach Safety Program as well.

Chief Sasser stated Beach Safety is funded within \$9,000 and Division Chief D'Agostino will receive a pension, as he is a certified firefighter and works for a fire district recognized by the State of Florida. He stated the TDC pays for Division Chief D'Agostino's retirement contributions instead of the District which is a benefit to the District. He further stated the \$9,000 difference is the cost of adding lifeguards to patrol Crab Island which we hope to receive funding for.

Patty Defrenza stated the Commissioners asked the public twice for a millage rate increase and a cap rate increase which failed twice at a cost of \$44,000 each. She stated we are down 7 people from the voluntary separation program due to budget constraints in exchange you are hiring inexperienced, out of fire academy firefighters who are not required to have any medical training.

Rick Moore stated that is not necessarily true, we could hire an experienced firefighter with paramedic and EMT certifications. Patty Defrenza stated Chief Sasser said the 2 that were hired were entry level firefighters. Chief Sasser stated no.

Tommy Green stated we are here to discuss the budget not hiring or firing practices.

Patty Defrenza asked why not have Battalion Chiefs, which are already being paid for, respond to calls until the shortfall in personnel is made up. She stated she had asked for Battalion Chiefs' salary and received a group number. She further stated we are down to limited EMS response due to budget constraints and many citizens are not aware of.

Patty Defrenza asked why we are taking everything away from the tax payers to give it to tourists and Crab Island. She stated 7 miles out is County territory. She stated the TDC made \$14,000,000 let them handle it as a private entity. Mike Buckingham stated Crab Island is Destin, in his opinion. Tommy Green stated if someone drowns at Crab Island the papers will list Destin as the location. He stated we are here to discuss the budget and the millage rate.

Deborah Thurman of Kelly Plantation asked when we will know for sure if we have received the SAFER grant. She asked if it will be by September 30, 2015. Chief Sasser stated they do not have a hard date. Deborah Thurman stated the FEMA website said the grant will be awarded by September 30, 2015.

Chief Sasser asked if Battalion Chief Urenda knew when the SAFER grant will be awarded, since he was in charge of the grant. Battalion Chief Urenda stated the award date has been changed many times.

Deborah Thurman asked if we had been awarded the SAFER grant. Battalion Chief Urenda stated the SAFER grant has not been awarded yet.

Deborah Thurman asked what the District will do if the grant is not awarded. Chief Sasser stated this has been addressed in all the previous budget workshops. He stated if the grant is not awarded the firefighters will not be hired, but because of the budgeting process that is required the expense must to be budgeted for now.

Colleen Ward asked if you do not get the \$250,000 in SAFER grant you would not hire the firefighters. She asked if the District would take the funding from somewhere else. Chief Sasser stated no, there would be no funding to take from somewhere else. He stated if the District had the funding to add 3 firefighters he would have asked the Board to allow him to add 3 firefighters then applied for the SAFER grant to add 3 more.

Colleen Ward asked if the \$250,000 is not included in the budget. Chief Sasser stated yes it is included. Colleen Ward stated we are here to talk about people being hired as part of the budget. Tommy Green stated the money would be set aside to hire people.

Colleen Ward asked the difference between Personal Services and Professional Services. Tommy Green stated Personal Services are the firefighters and the staff in the office. Colleen Ward stated it does not say Personnel. Kathryn Wagner stated that is the verbiage that has been used and has not been changed.

Colleen Ward asked what Contract Services included. Kathryn Wagner stated Contract Services includes central dispatch, cell phones, medical director, and service on the heart monitors, network administrators, radio access fees, and traffic control device interlocal agreement. Colleen Ward asked if Destin does not have its own switchboard. Kathryn Wagner stated Okaloosa County handles dispatch.

Colleen Ward asked if we pay Okaloosa County for that service. Kathryn Wagner stated there is no charge for the service, but we budget \$500 in case we have to change our routes.

Colleen Ward asked what the miscellaneous category is. Kathryn Wagner stated miscellaneous included training and per diem, advertising, hazmat, and dues and subscriptions.

Deborah Thurman stated in the audit that was done by CRI it stated that they could not determine the liability of the 2 wrongful termination lawsuits against the District. Dawn Stuntz stated the Board could not comment on legal actions in this meeting.

Colleen Ward asked if there was a process to protest the amounts in the budget. Dawn Stuntz stated the budget process included several special meetings, budget workshops, where budget line items were discussed and we are now at the budget summary where there are 2 hearings to adopt the budget. She stated we are passed the point in the process where the budget is discussed item by item.

Tommy Green suggested Colleen Ward put her protests in writing and present them to the Board so they could look them over before the Final Budget Hearing.

Colleen Ward stated she was trying to understand the budget process since the budget is not presented for public vote. Dawn Stuntz stated the public elected the Commissioners who approve the budget.

Rick Moore made a motion to adopt the proposed budget of \$6,368,811 for the 2015-2016 fiscal year, based upon taxable value of real property totaling \$5,083,925,285. Bob Wagner seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Tommy Green opened the floor to public comments stating that members of the public may not address the Board concerning items not on the agenda.

With no other discussion to be heard, the meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m.