

DESTIN FIRE CONTROL DISTRICT

Regular meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners
Main Station
848 Airport Road
Destin, Florida 32541

May 13, 2014

Minutes

Commissioners present: Tommy Green, Jack Wilson, Mike Buckingham, Rick Moore, Hillary Anderson

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

Present: Dawn Stuntz

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Tommy Green.

Public Comments:

Patty DeFrenza of 259 Chipola Cove – asked why doesn't the County reimburse Destin for support services for EMS and why isn't the TDC contributing because tourism drives the EMS/fire calls and response. She also asked if we needed to have a vote. She inquired about the three seats which were up for election. Tommy Green stated that we have approached the County and talked about the situation but nothing has been offered. He stated that in regards to the Commissioner the seats for Mike Buckingham, Jack Wilson, and Hillary Anderson were the up for election.

Patty DeFrenza asked what do we have to do to get these funds reimbursed from the County. She stated that they are getting tax money for EMS and they are billing patients for services. She asked if it needs to come to a vote or election to separate from the County so that these funds stay in the Destin Fire protection district. Jack Wilson stated that it does not require a vote in the fire district for EMS funding, but would require the County to realize a way to service the citizens of Destin. He stated one option is to reimburse us or they can up their game by putting more EMS vehicles here. He stated it may be more cost effective for the County to decide simply to defray our costs but that is their decision not ours and maybe that is a question which you should ask a County Commissioner.

Shane Stewart of 306 Primrose Circle – stated that there were changes being made in EMS. He stated that if the County gives this department money what are they going to do with the other fire districts who also provide an ALS service. He stated that these departments having ALS is the reason the County has been able to keep the smaller amount of ambulances in this area.

Jack Wilson stated that this has evolved over a period of years and there has been a cooperation agreement between the County Public Safety and all the fire departments who are dispatched, where they all agreed to support and help each other on fire and medical related things. He stated that we have taken the first step and we did not sign an agreement related to public health and medical with the County. He stated that we as a Commission need to take a step either in our budget or with some public intent that this is how we are going to solve our financial problem.

Kitty Amonds of 306 Primrose Circle – commented about the first and second time the fire district went to the taxpayers.

Review of the minutes:

Minutes for the regular meeting of April 8, 2014 were presented. Rick Moore made a motion to approve the minutes of April 8, 2014 as presented. Jack Wilson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Review of the financial report:

The financial reports for the month ended April 30, 2014, were presented. Kathryn Wagner stated cash remained steady but will now begin to decline until we begin to receive next year's ad valorem taxes. Account receivables are inline however high for the month due to two outstanding invoices from the TDC for beach services. Liabilities have been adjusted for normal accruals and payables are inline. She stated that it was a quite month and expenditures were normal. She stated that the budget was adjusted from last month due to mid-year adjustments and our target percentage after completing our seventh month is approximately 42% and we are right where we need to be for the total budget. Hillary Anderson made a motion to approve the report. Mike Buckingham seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business:

1. Budget and Restructuring of the Department

Chief Sasser stated that there have been several meetings with the Union President. He said we have provided a lot of information and we discussed doing an impact study with the retirement plan. He stated a voluntary separation program would bring people in under the tier 2 system would, in the long term, save the District funds.

Chief Sasser reviewed the document presented and the effects a voluntary separation incentive program would have on our projected deficit. He stated that through his discussions with the Union President there are several employees who would consider a voluntary separation program. He reviewed an example of the memo which would be provided to the employees explaining the program. He stated that anyone who is vested, which is seven years of employment here, would be given a minimum of \$50,000 and an additional \$1,000 per every full year of employment over the vested period for accepting voluntary retirement.

Chief Sasser stated that if we had five employees who were to take the voluntary separation incentive program next October we would balance our budget with a positive impact of approximately \$165,000. He stated that the cost during the current year of five employees taking this would be around \$213,000 and with the changes which were employed with the staff at the beginning of the year, this year's savings are approximately \$137,000 which leaves a remaining cost of approximately \$76,000. He asked that this amount come from the unrestricted fund.

Chief Sasser stated that when we have used our reserves in the past it was for temporary fixes. He stated that this voluntary separation incentive program provides a permanent fix to our deficit issue. He stated that in the future years, once we have the positive impact enough to cover the hiring of three employees and the housing market can support it, he would ask the Board to do that.

Chief Sasser stated it is unfortunate that we find ourselves in a position that we cannot afford to maintain what we have. He stated this is a permanent fix to the issue and the other option to this is to have layoffs. He stated it is the staff's recommendation to pursue the voluntary separation incentive program so we can have a balanced budget next year.

Hillary Anderson asked what are we going to do if only one person takes this. Chief Sasser stated that we will have to reassess with the Board the other options which are available to them.

Tommy Green asked what other ramifications come with this. Chief Sasser stated that we will need some assistance with from the Union to change one of the articles in the contract. He said as it is stated now, we have to man three apparatus and we would need to drop that down to two. He stated that we would maintain one truck at each station and this is very similar to what we talked about when we discussed layoffs. He stated that anytime you reduce your personnel, trying to staff the trucks becomes a challenge, but we are in a difficult position as we do not have the dollars to support the manning and staffing that we have.

Chief Sasser reviewed the possible MOU which would be provided to the Union, having a minimum change of going from three trucks to two trucks. He stated this was the only change which we would need to do to be able to continue to operate as we have.

Rick Moore asked if the two trucks would be ALS. Chief Sasser stated yes, pending any further discussion with the Board.

Hillary Anderson stated she did not know how you are going to get down to two trucks and run as many medical calls as there are and be available for fire calls. She stated your making it a big risk for the department. Chief Sasser stated that what we do in those times is we have mutual aid agreements with other districts. He stated we have, even with three trucks, called for assistance from other departments. He stated that during the summer we get extremely busy and we end up having to bring the Island or North Bay or South Walton over to assist us in our calls. He stated that typically we are able to cut loose from a call and take it before they are able to get here. Chief Sasser stated that we are very proactive when it comes to our calls and when they are occurring and getting that assistance, even with the current staffing levels which we have now. He stated it does occur and it will be a challenge.

Hillary Anderson stated that this is another example that the fire district charter says that we are going to be fire personnel. She stated this is another example that if we are going down to two trucks between two stations, at that point I say no, you take ALS off the trucks, you are not responding to medical calls at all anymore. She stated how can you do the voluntary buy out and still support the County at the same time.

Chief Sasser stated that is a decision the Board can make. He stated that even if the Board decided not to run those calls and we still run fire calls, we still need staffing and if we removed the \$306,000 worth of service, we still don't cover enough to cover the deficit.

Rick Moore stated we need to go back to the County and say do your job and either pay us or you are going to take the job. He stated he did not want to cut the people.

Chief Sasser asked the board, if that is the direction they are going to go with medical calls, that we do both of these, as the one does not cover it all. He stated that we implement the program and then we can reassess it. He stated if we have people who are willing to voluntarily leave and if we can bring back more, this assists us by putting them in the tier 2 of the retirement plan and there are a lot of positive things with instituting this program including assisting us with balancing our budget.

Jack Wilson summarized by stating that we were at \$610,000 and based on up to date numbers were are at \$419,000. He stated we can save \$306,000 by not doing the County EMS and we could save approximately \$575,000 from taking positions out. He stated all that would put us at a surplus of around \$300,000 which Chief would propose to use to add back firefighters so we don't end up with 6 people off, we end up with maybe 3. Jack Wilson asked if we only lost 3 people and we are not doing medical, what impact does that have on staffing and how many apparatuses we man.

Chief Sasser stated he would still ask that we change our apparatus to 2, because we will not be at the staffing we are now. He stated even 1 less, there are going to be periods where we are going to have a difficult time trying to staff the ladder truck because we are right on the brink of personnel right now. He stated the intent would be to keep the truck staffed as much as possible but in the event we cannot staff it we are able to bring it down and operate it when we have to.

Rick Moore stated the manning's going to have to go hand and hand with proposal.

Hillary Anderson stated the current proposal is if anyone is interested they would have until June 16th to sign and they would have to leave by June 30th. She asked what the ramification would be to push that back as she thinks that is a very short time. If it was pushed back it would give individuals a little bit more time to think it through and maybe line up something else they are going to do.

Chief Sasser stated the further back we push it the more the \$76,000 number will go up. Hillary Anderson asked how much of an increase it would be to push it back 30 days. Kathryn Wagner stated she would have to do another calculation and come back with that number.

Jack Wilson stated that if it was in the neighborhood of \$25,000 or \$30,000 it would be the lesser of two evils to spend this then to come up 3 or 4 people short on what we are trying to achieve.

Chief Sasser again asked the Board, even if they go down the other road with the medical calls, that we also institute this program because this helps us to get there.

Discussion was held on how to word a motion to discontinue responding to medical calls.

Rick Moore made a motion to approve the voluntary separation incentive program with the date of July 30, 2014. Mike Buckingham seconded. Chief Sasser stated we would say the 15th of July with the end of employment date of the 30th of July. Jack Wilson stated if we get 4 people instead of 6 then our costs will be less because the incentives we pay will go down per person. Rick Moore asked how many people have communicated their interest. Chief Sasser stated approximately 8 people are interested with 4 people being very serious and 4 giving it consideration. He stated he feels 4 or 5 is what we will be with and it will be an additional \$25,000 (to extend the time frame by 30 days, for the estimated cost of 5 accepting the program). Tommy Green asked for any further discussion, having none, the motion passed unanimously.

Tommy Green allowed Prebble Ramswell of 14 Country Club Drive to ask a question. She asked if there are any statistics on how often all the trucks are out and occupied and when we call for back up service. Chief Sasser stated we don't track those statistics, but stated it was not often it occurs that we are bringing someone else over to cover or help run calls.

Attorney Dawn Stuntz provided language for a motion to cancel medical call responses.

Jack Wilson made the following motion: Due to budgetary considerations, as of October 1, 2014 the Destin Fire Control District will no longer respond to medical only calls. Destin Fire Control District will continue to respond to all required fire and rescue calls in the District. Rick Moore seconded. Hillary Anderson stated we are not running and doing public events anymore, we are cutting back so much stuff and there is only so much the Commission and department can do and without the money coming in, as a Board, we have to think about the financial responsibility of this department. She stated she doesn't want anybody to think we are doing this out of proving a point. She stated this is a serious decision and we have talked about it and this is a decision we have finally had to come to. Tommy Green asked for any further discussion, having none, the motion passed unanimously.

Chief Reports:

1. Beach Safety update

Joe D'Agostino stated we took delivery of the new tower and it is in the pass and will be open for the 100 days of summer. He stated looking at the statistics there was nothing out of the ordinary but in two weeks there will be a lot of people here.

Mike Buckingham asked what the schedule was to try and get another tower. Joe D'Agostino stated he would like one every year. Chief Sasser stated the City Council asked the same question and he responded we were looking to change ours out one a year. Tommy Green stated for the public, the tower was not paid for by the department and that it was paid for from the TDC and the City of Destin.

Jack Wilson asked if there were any thoughts of expanding beyond the pass, by going all the way down the Island. He stated we are giving the County a difficult decision here that we just can't help with responses anymore, but at the same time is there some leverage for putting all the beach together and for the 100 days of summer having the best beach operation you could have for Okaloosa County. He stated we have expertise. Chief Sasser stated that has merit because what we cover and what we provide versus the amount of people is a good cost. Joe D'Agostino stated South Walton is \$0.70 per visitor and Okaloosa Island is \$0.64 per visitor and these are numbers which they report to the United States Lifesavings Association. He further stated that Destin is \$0.28 per visitor.

Jack Wilson stated if we can help the County even in a small way, through the 100 days of summer on the beach, this is a good thing. Chief Sasser stated that we provide a heck of a service and sometimes the District, Commission and the guys do not receive the credit for the job we provide for the money we are provided to do it.

2. Training report

Chief Sasser stated that each shift received 21 hours of training in April and they are keeping it up and doing a good job.

3. Inspection report

Ron Gerdeman presented the April inspection report. He stated the construction projects are still pretty good with most of it out at the Commons and Shoreline Village Mall. He stated it is trending that we are getting more of the upgrade type of reviews.

4. Paramedic report

Chief Sasser presented the April paramedic report. He stated in April Station 9 was around 59% and Station 10 was around 41% of the calls and we stayed within our fractile response time of 90%.

5. Overtime report

Chief Sasser presented the April overtime report. He stated we are down 1 person and there have been 2 medical issues for the month which placed us in a significant overtime positions throughout the month. He stated that based upon the language change which he is proposing to the Union we will see a significant reduction in the number which you have before you.

Hillary Anderson asked that the Commission have a discussion again regarding the 48/96 shift schedule. She stated when that was brought up previously it was because of the overtime and how much money we were spending. She stated it was also brought up that it was a safety issue. She stated that we are now, for the first time, mandating employees to stay and work another shift. She stated there is not concern right now about anybody's safety and she feels there were other issues in regards to the 48/96. She requested that be added to the agenda for our next meeting.

Rick Moore asked what typically causes overtime. Chief Sasser stated the article states sick leave should be the only thing which places us in overtime. He stated you might see two people on vacation and someone calls in sick, then we are in overtime. He stated in the past we had a buffer because we could only have one person off, then we could have up to three people off. He further explained that we made the change to go with two people off several years ago when we were increasing our personnel. He stated when we moved backwards with personnel we did not do that and now we have no buffer.

Rick Moore asked what would change if we went back to 48/96 hours, would they be off one or two days. Chief Sasser stated it was his decision not to mandatory people in when we were working 48/96. He stated he did not want to mandatory someone to work 72 hours. He further stated we are now forcing them so we don't have to shut down trucks and only 1 or 2 out of 8 people who are working the shift are now working 48s and the other 6 are still working 24s. He stated that as has been done in the past, if a guy comes in and works, if at all possible we try to put them on the slower truck and we try to cover people when they are working extended periods of time.

New Business:

1. Commissioner Stipend

Tommy Green stated he requested this item on the agenda because there have been a number of people who have questioned how much Commissioners get paid. He stated there is a stipend which has been in effect which allows Commissioners to refuse or receive it. He stated when it comes to budget time, we have to budget it at the maximum it can be, which is \$30,000. No further discussion on the issue.

2. Use of Unassigned Fund for Voluntary Separation Incentive Program

Chief Sasser stated this item was placed on agenda in case the program was accepted. He stated the adjustment will be made once the cost is known. Hillary Anderson made a motion to use the unassigned fund, with the amount to be determined later, to cover the VSIP (Voluntary Separation Incentive Program). Jack Wilson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments:

Tommy Green stated he will once again open the floor to public comments.

Jennifer Malich of 335 Tequesta Drive – asked if the voluntary separation incentive program would have language to allow people to be compensated for unused sick time and vacation time. Chief Sasser stated we would be bound by whatever the CBA (collective bargaining agreement) says. He stated they would be paid for their vacation and sick leave. He further stated that the only persons who would be paid for sick leave are those who retire. He stated some funds are set aside for this and were figured into the VSIP number. He stated if an employee is able to they could retire and get their VSIP.

Patty DeFrenza asked if you already have an overtime problem and if you lose these people, how are you going to fill the shifts. She stated you could have a seniority call back. Tommy Green stated this is a collective bargaining agreement issue as right now there is a certain manning requirement on the trucks, but we are proposing a MOU to the Union.

Shane Stewart stated he understands the difficult decision and applauds the Commission for making it. He stated our charter says fire service not medical services.

Prebble Ramswell stated she will be attending the City Council meeting on Monday and will make sure this is on the public record for the City.

Next Meeting:

Tommy Green stated that the next regular meeting of the Commissioners would be on June 10, 2014 at 5:30pm.

Adjournment:

With no further business to be addressed, the meeting adjourned at 6:54 p.m.