

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

August 12, 2014

Minutes

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

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

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

Public Comments:

Bob Wagner of Misty Way – stated at the last budget meeting there was discussion about a proposal from the Chief about a 3% pay raise. He stated giving 3% at this time after laying off six guys is not a good idea and is a bad perception for the public. He stated he does not like the idea of taking the money from the guys who retired early to give a raise when the contract is not due until next year. He stated you have a contract which is good until next November and hopes that you vote against it and not give a raise until next year when the budget comes up and negotiate it then.

William Kennedy of 2759 Raintree Circle – read a statement to the Commission. He stated, Dear Ma'am and Sir's, my name is William Kennedy. First off I would like to thank the District for allowing me to serve the community for the last 12 and ½ years. He stated he has seen this department grow from cross manning the only ladder truck in the District to having two and all the employees needed for them, to now barely having the numbers to staff two trucks. He stated, over the past couple years the fire district has had its hardships, defeats in the millage increases and now the departure of almost 100 years of dedicated experience. With regards to the millage increase it is my opinion that this will never be accomplished without cutting back on services, as these were services that were created when the District was in great financial prosperity. There was no added cost to the residence, however the residence now expect these services for free. He stated nothing in the world is free and now it is the decision to keep the services and let the employees leave, and something about that does not sit well with me. He stated the employee moral here is at an all-time low. This was once the department that firefighters wanted to come to work to, now it seems to be the laughing stock of the entire panhandle. He stated he feels that this environment has been created from the leaders of this department. The way that this board has taken over the day to day operations is appalling. He stated he does not believe that any of you have any current firefighting certificates, so there is no need for any of you to show up on a scene. He stated you have done nothing but stick the Chief in the middle. When he took over as the Chief the moral was outstanding. He knows how to manage his employees and they need no micromanagement. Since he has been so worried about keeping his own job he jumps through every little hoop you tell him to, now he has lost the respect of a lot of his employees. I have the most respect for the Chief. He has always been there when I needed an ear to talk to, to give me advice, and to lead me to be a better person. However, I think he has let the employees down by not standing up to you as the chief. When the shift employees wanted to keep the 48/96 schedule there should have been no discussion about it. This would have been a great gesture on your part, knowing all the effects coming of not

getting the millage increase, no pay raiser, higher insurances, and the cost of living has greatly increased over the years, yet none of these men are getting anything to help in that aspect. He stated he feels that there are some on this board who have a real grudge against the firefighters here. He has heard that everyone is going to work together, but in reality, he does not feel that will ever happen until there are new board members. He stated in closing, I truly wish nothing but the best for this department. He would be so happy to come visit when the air in the station is no longer thick with animosity over the kindness and willingness for all here and to all here. Thank you.

Patty DeFerenza of 4648 Sunsail Circle – stated that she agrees with what Mr. Kennedy said and disagrees with what Bob Wagner said. He stated these firefighters have not had a raise in two decades. They have cut their pay; they have had pay freezes, with the voluntary incentive program she stated she believes you are saving \$500,000 when we only needed \$360,000 to save the EMS/Paramedic services. She stated she thinks they are due for a pay increase. She stated you are going to have people leaving and you already have people leaving, and as Mr. Kennedy said there is low morale, management is bad. She stated she would like to know how the hiring and promotion policies even are enacted here. She stated in other departments which she has participated with in the north you had fire officer I, fire management I, fire prevention principals, fire officer II, then you were on a list to be promoted and if you did not have those you were not in charge as a Battalion Chief or Shift Commander or Incident Commander, so she would like to have that public knowledge. She stated the upper echelon, the Battalion Chief, what are their credentials, how are they hired and how is the hiring process even formulated in this department. She stated she believes the firefighter and paramedics should get a raise and the Chief and Battalion Chiefs need a pay cut of about 25% if they are not responding to calls and not physically being paramedics or firefighters, they certainly don't need to have that type of pay, if they are doing administrative duties only, there needs to be a pay cut. She stated the budget will be balanced, the moral will go up, the firefighter's cost of living needs to be increased at a minimum of 2%. She stated we all know how the cost of living has gone up to live here and you can't expect them to raise a family, pay a mortgage, pay taxes and utilities and come to work here every day. She stated the 24/48 she worked and you work 24 hours and if you have back to back calls the next day you go home and you sleep, and the next day you have to rest because you have to be back on shift. She stated there is just no time to be with family and go out and do what you want. She stated she was not opposed to the 48/96 as she thought that gave them time to rest, actually have a life and come back and be glad to come to work. She stated that in light of the City employees getting a raise last year and this year and we have about \$150,000 surplus, after the voluntary incentive program, she stated she thinks they need a raise.

Review of the minutes:

Minutes for the regular meeting of July 8, 2014, special meeting of July 8, 2014 (budget workshop), and special meeting of July 22, 2014 (budget workshop) were presented. Rick Moore made a motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting July 8th, special meeting on July 8th, and special meeting on July 22nd. Mike Buckingham seconded. Jack Wilson stated there were a couple of typos. On July 8th the list of attends is wrong as his name is wrong. He stated there is a typo in the second paragraph, last sentence which should end with "guilty and to those he apologizes." He stated on the July 22nd minutes the second page, 5th paragraph, 3rd line, the sentence "He state we had looked at," should be "He stated." Tommy Green stated corrections are noted, and with no further discussion the motion to pass the minutes as amended passed unanimously.

Review of the financial report:

The financial reports for the month ended July 31, 2014, were presented. Kathryn Wagner stated the Balance Sheet shows total assets remaining strong at \$8,700,000 of which 57% consist of current

assets and the remaining 43% is fixed assets and prepaids. Accounts payable are high for the month but that is due to a few large repair and maintenance bills and an outstanding invoice for the purchase of our new Beach 9 vehicle. She stated other liabilities and equity have been adjusted accordingly. She stated pages 16 thru 20 details the revenue over expenditures versus budget we are ten months through the fiscal year at this point, which puts us 83% through our budget and provides us with 17% remaining in our current budget. She stated revenue we are still waiting to collect our pension fund contributions from the State. She stated our annual report was approved so we do expect to collect funds. She further stated that currently we are to receive approximately \$250,000 and our second check is not known and could be upward of \$172,000, however, historically it is not that high. She stated as far as expenditures go we had a normal month with just a couple exception, one being repair and maintenance of vehicles and the payment of the capital expenditure for the new vehicle.

Jack Wilson stated that on page 16 for the actual net of the impact fee against the reserve for the impact fee, so it basically washes, why didn't you do that with the budget. Kathryn Wagner stated the budget presented should only be the general fund budget. Jack Wilson stated when he reads the budget column shows a pretty significant deficiency when it really isn't because it should have been \$17,955 against \$20,000, so that is pretty close. He further stated if we are going to compare actual to budget, there ought to be the same basis for the numbers so it's comparable.

Hillary Anderson made a motion to approve the financial report for July 31, 2014. Jack Wilson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business:

1. Budget and Restructuring of the Department and 2. Voluntary Separation Incentive Program

Chief Sasser stated the voluntary separation program ended up having a total of 7 take it, so that leaves us with eight slots. He stated we are going through the process of hiring, filling two positions to round the numbers out at six, as this evens the shifts out so we don't have an odd shift. He stated we have probably around 35 or 36 applications and we will be running the physical agility test on the 19th and follow up with interviews on the 20th. He stated he hopes to have them on just as soon as we can.

Chief Sasser stated he would like to pull the VSIP off the agenda at this point as it has been concluded. He stated it accomplished what we needed it to accomplish as far as being able to balance the budget and with a little bit additional we are able to hire two people back. He stated as far as the budget is concerned we have a budget workshop right after this meeting.

Jack Wilson stated there are at least two issues related to the voluntary separation program, one is financial and the other is capability of the department's primary mission. He stated it has the impact of reducing our response time in certain circumstances, it changes our firefighter tactics in certain circumstances, the ability to respond to multiple incidents is degraded, but all that the public in this town knows is well some people left so we're all okay. He stated we had an article in the Destin Log and he was really saddened to see that we did not tell our tax payers that we have degraded the capability of this department to fit the box that they put us at. He stated over time it will come out because the response time degrades and the people who are waiting are going to figure that out, but how do we get on the front of that. He stated it seems to him we have a responsibility to report back to our constituents that we have done something, we think this is the best thing we can do, not what we wanted to do, but all things considered we did what we felt was the right thing to do, but it has an impact to you and here it is.

Hillary Anderson asked if that could be posted on our website. Chief Sasser stated absolutely. Mike Buckingham stated that we talked about this at our last meeting and it was said that maybe we should wait until we were done with the budget. Rick Moore stated he thinks that was in regards to not running the paramedic program. Further discussion was held on how to address the public about the degraded service.

Tommy Green recognized Patty DeFerenza who commented that it was in the paper that Mr. Buckingham said it does not matter, we will not cut services. She stated she has gone to the website and there is not much information there and very few people go to destinfire.com and look up run calls. She stated that needs to be out front in the public.

Mike Buckingham stated he said we weren't going to cut the level of service, but we have asked for two years in a row for them to come forward and help us financially so we didn't have to do this. He stated it is his understanding from the Chief that they have brought this program to us to help save, quote, the money with the department, and this is their choice by doing this, it was not our choice. He further stated it was his understanding that we are not cutting the level of service, that they are cutting the level of service. Hillary Anderson stated our level of service has decreased tremendously.

Patty DeFerenza stated no one know the facts. She stated she came here two years ago and offered to write a column called Fire Lines, monthly which the Destin Log editor at the time said go ahead. She stated this was mentioned to this Board but no one ever responded back to her. She further stated if this was out front in the paper monthly people would be paying attention to what you need.

Jack Wilson stated what he is hearing is we all are nervous about this and it needs to be said what it is and what we've done, but it also needs to be clear but the time to do it is when we wrap up the budget. He stated please let us see what we are going to say and have some input so it reflects what the Commission thanks and feels.

Mike Buckingham stated why don't we wait until we are done with the budget and the hiring process and then go and tell them what we have done. He stated he thinks we are going to confuse them.

Hillary Anderson stated the thing to realize is before these individuals left this department was already down a firefighter on each shift. She stated now they are down at least two people until someone gets replaced. She stated there has been no vote to bring ALS back, but even if it does come back you are still not getting the same service if you are down two employees.

Tommy Green stated we could go out and put it on the website and put it in the paper but how many people care. He stated the public wants someone else to tell them how to do it; they don't want to go out and research it on their own. He stated there is some personal responsibility there as a voter to go out and educate yourself on what is on the ballot and then make your judgments accordingly. He further stated some of this has to go back on the people as we do what we can to furnish any information, but the public needs to educate themselves on the issue.

Further discussion on Patty DeFerenza's idea of having a fire line column in the local paper was held.

Chief Reports:

1. Beach Safety update

Joe D'Agostino stated our race team finished first in the region overall and just this past weekend we finished second in the country in the small beach patrol division. He stated the statistics show we have had good weather and a lot of people. He stated we are going to come close to, if not, set a record for attendance.

2. Training report

Chief Sasser stated that each shift received 25 hours of training in July so they are continuing to make time from the beginning of the year and a good job on the guy's part.

3. Inspection report

Ron Gerdeman presented the July 2014 inspection report. He stated as you know the Destin Commons grand opening went very well and in spite of the fact that the majority of those businesses are all now completed and open, you can see by the numbers that we are still pretty active with new construction, work in progress and work projected to come up.

4. Paramedic report

Chief Sasser presented the July 2014 paramedic report. He stated that July is one of our busiest months of the year and the percentages are staying roughly the same with EMS and fire and 8:59 level for July is back up over 90% is where we want it to be.

5. Overtime report

Chief Sasser presented the July 2014 overtime report. He stated there was only 5 hours of overtime this past month but does not anticipate that remaining there with the transition we are going through.

New Business:

1. Mutual Aid Agreement with Eglin Air Force Base

Chief Sasser requested that this once again be tabled until the next meeting as it is still in legal review by other departments.

2. MOU – Article 13 Discharge/Probation Period

Chief Sasser stated the Union President presented a MOU to increase the probation period. Chief Sasser stated it is a benefit to us as well as to them so we have a little longer period to evaluate the employees. Chief Sasser recommended to the Board to approve the MOU.

Hillary Anderson asked on part B. where it states that a new firefighter hired without standards, isn't there prerequisites. Chief Sasser stated in the State of Florida you can hire someone and employ them without them being state certified and employ them for up to a year. He stated at the end of the year, they either have to have it or they don't work anymore. He further stated for us, we are not hiring anyone unless they are state certified.

Hillary Anderson commented about part D. for the newly hired employees will not be allowed to utilize vacation or swap time, that a year is a long time and wants to make sure that since we are going through the hiring process that those individuals are aware of these changes.

Hillary Anderson made a motion to approve the Memorandum of Understanding – Article 13 Discharge/Probation Period. Rick Moore Seconded. Rick Moore asked what is the benefit to the union. Chief Sasser stated we both derive the same benefit, meaning they have the ability to

evaluate the employees that they are working with and we will get that feedback from them as well as our own observations. He stated minor benefits might be the new individual can't take vacation so that is one vacation slot which someone else can get.

With no additional discussion the motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting:

Tommy Green stated that the next meeting will be a Budget Workshop following this meeting, a Budget Workshop on August 26, 2014 at 5:30pm. He stated our next regular meeting of the Commissioners would be on September 9, 2014 at 5:30pm followed by a Public Hearing on the tentative budget and proposed millage rate) at 6:00pm. Then the final Public Hearing on September 18, 2014 to adopt a final budget and millage rate at 5:30pm.

Adjournment:

With no further business to be addressed, the meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.