

Minutes for the Meeting of  
the Fort Myers Beach Fire Control District Board of Commissioners

May 24, 2023 10:00 am  
Diamondhead Beach Resort  
2000 Estero Boulevard

In attendance: Chairman John Bennett, Vice-Chairman Larry Wood, Commissioner Ron Fleming, Commissioner Jacki Lyszak, Acting Fire Chief Scott Wirth, Fire Official Jennifer Campbell, Finance Director Jane Thompson and District members.

Via zoom: Secretary/Treasurer Jim Knickle

1. **Meeting Called to Order** 10:00am
2. **Pledge of Allegiance**
3. **Adoption of Agenda** [Discussion/Approval]

Commissioner Lyszak motioned to approve the agenda, Commissioner Wood seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0.

4. **Restate Agenda Items** [Information]
5. **Public Input on Non-Agenda Items** –*none*

Ms. Cereceda spoke about development of the Town, and requested that the District weigh in during development hearings in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian.

6. **Consent Agenda** [Approval]

*Items listed are considered routine and action will be taken by one motion; if a Commissioner desires discussion, the specific item will be removed during the Adoption of the Agenda and considered separately.*

- A. Approval of Meeting Minutes from April 26, 2023
- B. Checks approval 48077 thru 48149 total \$153,355.93

Commissioner Lyszak motioned to approve the consent agenda, Commissioner Wood seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0.

7. **Unfinished Business** - *none*
8. **New Business**

- A. Presentation of District Patch and Recognition

Chairman Bennett presented Anita Cereceda with a patch and plaque recognizing her involvement in the community. This patch will go toward the rebuilding of her patch collection at the Pier Peddler.

- C. Facility Restoration Projects [Approval]

Chief Wirth presented phase two estimates and proposed repairs to District facilities, including generators and doors.

The Board had no questions.

Commissioner Wood moved to approve the repairs for the estimated \$131,950 with a 5% variance per project, the motion was seconded by Commissioner Fleming and the motion passed 5-0.

D. Fire Chief Recruitment Process [Discussion]

Commissioner Fleming expressed that there needs to be a discussion about candidates as he is being approached by community members for updates.

Commissioner Lyszak shared that she has not gotten any questions from community members.

Commissioner Knickle shared that he has gotten a few questions and thinks we should begin with internal applications.

Commissioner Wood agreed with the idea of opening the position to internal candidates first and is not in favor of public applications yet. He would like to have a list of qualified candidates to consider by the next meeting.

Chairman Bennett shared he has had one internal inquiry about the hiring timeline for the Chief position. He added that he would rather have an internal candidate than one from a state or nationwide search. He suggested opening applications to internal candidates only and set a 30 day deadline.

The Board agreed to set a reasonable timeline and have a packet of applicants available at the next meeting in June.

Chief Wirth requested a 21 day timeline so the Finance Director has time to prepare candidate packets and information.

The Board consensus was to open applications for 21 days and then review them during the June 28<sup>th</sup> meeting. Any and all internal applicants are encouraged to apply.

E. Facility Planning [Information/ Discussion/ Approval]

Chief Wirth discussed data and ideal locations for a new station. He would like the Board to consider the idea of maintaining an on-island station and building an administrative and training facility off island. Additionally he asked for discussion of the sale of the Tropical Shore Way (2545/2555 Estero Blvd) property and purchase of other sites.

Commissioner Knickle noted this is an intriguing idea and he sees some advantages but has concerns about personnel being disconnected from Headquarters.

Commissioner Wood thinks putting Headquarters in a location that costs less is economical and a small substation on island is the way to go.

Chief Wirth added he has concerns about placing a training facility in a residential area. Accommodating a training facility will be easier in a commercial area.

Commissioner Lyszak feels there needs to be a District presence in the Times Square area given the size of development taking place. She agreed that Headquarters should be off island after the experience in Hurricane Ian.

Commissioner Wood agreed that a presence on island near Times Square is necessary.

Commissioner Fleming asked about the Town's desire to swap lots as the District's property is connected to Bay Oaks. Chief Wirth advised that the property size is comparable and the Town is in the process of obtaining an appraisal. If the District can accommodate the Town, he would advocate for it.

Commissioner Fleming expressed he is in favor of having a small station on island and large Headquarters off island, adding the sale of the lot would be good to fund these projects.

Chairman Bennett expressed his thoughts and agreement, and asked Chief Wirth about a timeline and possibly parceling the Topps site. Chief Wirth advised that a larger site would draw more money from a sale. The Town should have their appraisal in the next 3 weeks, at which time the Board will bring in Attorney Salzman to give formal direction.

Chairman Bennett suggested cancelling the June 14<sup>th</sup> meeting and having a heavy meeting on June 28<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, he discussed the September regular meeting to be held on September 27<sup>th</sup> at 5pm and the budget meeting dates to be solidified at a later date.

9. **Fire Chief Remarks** [Information/Discussion]

Chief Wirth gave a brief report on the past month's events. The District responded to a small roof fire on Mango Street. Crews did a great job, there were no injuries and he thanked everyone for their hard work.

Chief Wirth congratulated Joel Martinez for winning the day before Mother's Day race. Due to his role as Acting Chief, Chief Wirth relinquished his spot on the VEBA board and he thanked Fire Official Campbell for filling that vacancy.

The County has processed just shy of \$1 million of tax refunds and anticipates another 6 - 7 thousand applications to be process. The estimated total in refunds is \$1.5 - \$1.8 million once complete. Chief Wirth is confident the District can absorb this in the budget through the end of the year.

Chief Wirth thanked Andy Villa for his apparatus committee leadership, and Joel Martinez and Bill Galewski for their work on the new engine. There is a two year lead time to build an engine.

Chief Wirth shared the adjusted staffing plan and Lee County EMS running out of Station 32. He thanked DVP Jennifer Gordon for her assistance in making the new staffing plan. Finance Director Thompson has taken on Human Resources duties and recently attended an entity representatives meeting regarding benefits. Our thanks to Lee County's Human Resource Department for administering our health insurance benefits.

Reimbursements for COVID staffing have been appealed twice and rejected twice, the District will not recover \$128,000 for COVID staffing.

Hurricane season begins June 1<sup>st</sup>. The District is working through a final agreement with hotels near Coconut Point for hurricane housing.

Chief Wirth recognized May anniversaries of Alex Gonzalez with 18 years, Ivan Rojo, Kevin Hernandez and Keith Gaudet with 5 years, and Pietro Cracchiolo and Ryan Fischer with 4 years.

10. **Attorney Report** [Information/Discussion] - *none*

11. **Commissioners Remarks** [Information]

Commissioner Knickle thanked everyone for allowing his attendance via telephone.

Commissioner Fleming thanked everyone for a productive meeting and staff for attending.

Commissioner Liszak thanked everyone for their hard work and thanked everyone for the beach kids' performance attendance.

Commissioner Wood thanked Ms. Cereceda for being present today and highlighted her involvement on the island. He thanked Jennifer Gordon for her role in female firefighters visiting a school recently and for being a great role model.

Commissioner Bennett thanked everyone for stepping up to cover vacant positions. He shared he is excited about moving forward with the Fire Chief vacancy internally and that it is always encouraging to know you can move up through the ranks.

12. **Adjournment** -10:58am