



ST. JOHN'S FIRE DISTRICT

FIRE CHIEF RYAN KUNITZER

COMMISSIONERS

CHAIR, WILLIAM THOMAE
VICE CHAIR, DEBRA LEHMAN
LEROY BLAKE
ISIAH WHITE
STEVE ROLANDO
ROBERT WRIGHT
BROOKS MCGOUGAN
JACKIE STANLEY
TERRILYNN DURHAM



St. Johns Fire District Commission

MINUTES

The regular meeting of the St. Johns Fire District Commission was held on, February 10, 2025, at Headquarters, 1148 Main Road, Johns Island. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

Members Present

Isiah White
Debra Lehman
Robert Wright
Jackie Stanley
Leroy Blake
Brooks McGougan
Steve Rolando
Bill Thomae
Terrilyn Durham

Members Not Present

Others Present

Ryan Kunitzer, Fire Chief
Kevin Henson, Deputy Fire Chief
Nathan Prouse, Assistant Chief
Chris Whaley, Assistant Chief
Shawn Flanagan, Battalion Chief
David Hardwick, Chief Fire Marshal
Teresa Vaughn, Human Resource Manager
Danielle Chambers, Controller
Christie Palmer, Administrative Assistant
Stephanie Neal, Accreditation Specialist
Spencer Wetmore, Attorney

The commission meeting was conducted in-person and virtually through Zoom; all members of the public may observe and participate in the meeting:

Via video conference at:
ZOOM Meeting ID: 630-661-0867
Passcode: 170170

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, notices and agendas were emailed/faxed to the Post & Courier and persons requesting notification in compliance with FOIA regulations.

I. Call to Order

- a. Pledge of Allegiance
- b. Roll Call

II. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting of January 13, 2024
 - i. Commissioner Wright motioned, Commissioner Rolando seconded, none opposed, the motion was carried.

III. Public Comments

- a. N/A

IV. Chief's Report

- a. Chief Kunitzer reported we will be hosting our STJFD Annual Awards and Promotion Ceremony on March 8th at the Citadel, Mark Clark Hall, 2nd floor. He advised the doors will open at 9:00am with food and programming to begin at 9:30am with breakfast provided.
- b. Chief Kunitzer reported we had a little bit of a winter storm and wanted to thank his staff for how well they prepared. He stated the real issues we had wasn't so much the storm, but really, the next day after the storm, where everything froze overnight so we would get some of that sun, it would wet the roadways and then it would ice up. We had an issue getting our members off and on Kiawah, but we planned ahead and worked with a third-party vendor that came to our maintenance facility with pallets of salt and a salt truck. He advised the good news is that when that Parkway iced up, we deployed them, and they deployed salt on the roads and stuff.
- c. Chief Kunitzer reported that during the storm we were scheduled to have the Captains testing we had to postpone. He advised we will be starting that testing tomorrow.

- d. Chief Kunitzer reported we're doing our budget cycle a little bit differently. He advised today they started a budget retreat, so they camped out at an off-site location. He stated he wanted to give kudos to his assistant chiefs and their respective staff members as well. He stated that he asked them to produce their budgets for their pieces of the puzzle and all of them went to significant lengths and did a really, really good job presenting what their wants and needs are for next year. He added that they did such a good job, that it enabled him, Chief Hensen and Danielle to hear those justifications behind certain things and make sure that we have a really strong budget for the next fiscal year.
- e. Chief Kunitzer reported that last month we supported several of our members through the Fire Service Improvement Conference. He advised this is a conference that is local, in Columbia, South Carolina. He stated several of our members came back with really good things to say and did really well in training.
- f. Chief Kunitzer reported that last week, we hosted an officer development course about having tough conversations. He stated that we had a group out of Chicago that were retired firefighters who talked a lot about accountability and responsibility and how we have those conversations with our subordinates and our peers and those above us too. He added that we only spend a very small percentage of our time on actual incidents. He stated all that time spent the fire station and on the training grounds and a lot of those revolve around conversations.
- g. Chief Kunitzer reported that unfortunately, last month, we had a bed bug issue at our stations. He stated that he thinks every few years this kind of comes up. He added he is not minimizing that in any way, but as soon as we found out, we had a company out there right away that mitigated it at the one station. He stated we found a couple areas of some other stations and then we had all of our stations inspected as well and is hoping we corrected that issue. He added that, looking at next year's budget, if we can fit it in the office budget, he would like replacing the mattresses at all of our stations. He also stated kudos to our team that went ahead and tackled that right away and got that under control quickly.
- h. Chief Kunitzer reported that Coming up here March 1st will be our switch over to McGriff insurance. He advised that we are leaving the PEBA platform for health insurance, but we are still on a Blue Cross Shield plan. He stated that we have enhanced those plans while also saving the district quite a bit of money as well and because we save that money, we are able to offer some benefits to our employees like short-term disability, that's employer paid and not a big thing, so thank you to Teresa.
- i. Chief Kunitzer reported that Teresa has been working hard on that (insurance) change over and they have needed a lot of data from her as well. He added that we have 145 people that work here and all other things she needs help with, so he is going to try to fund a position to help her full-time.
- j. **Human Resources Report**
 - i. HR Manager, Teresa Vaughn, reported that we have hired 2 paramedics Fire Academy. They are scheduled to start on 3/12 and report to the academy in Columbia on 3/17/25 in Columbia. She advised, immediately after graduation from the academy, the recruits will stay in Columbia for EMT class.

- ii. She reported we have 2 separations. 1 captain and the staff accountant. She stated that she and Danielle have 6 virtual interviews scheduled for this week for the staff accountant position.

k. Incident Report February 2025

- i. Johns Island – 165 incidents
- ii. Kiawah Island – 54 incidents
- iii. Seabrook Island – 45 incidents
- iv. Wadmalaw Island – 28 incidents

V. Financial Report

a. Monthly Financial Report

- i. Controller Danielle Chambers reported that the Remaining Goal is 41.67%, the actual is 43.81 %.
- ii. The Operating balance as of 1/31/2025 is \$8M. The Local Government Investment Pool balance is \$13K.
- iii. January revenue included retiree reimbursements, insurance reimbursement for \$4k and a Kiawah Island paramedic payment.
- iv. The Charleston County wire transfer received was \$4,134,494 for December collections.
- v. Non-standard overtime for January is \$60,877.
- vi. Capital Projects bank balances as of 1/31/2025.
 - 1. 2021 balance: \$83
 - 2. 2022 balance: \$25,135
 - 3. 2023 balance: \$379,137
 - 4. 2024 balance: \$16,964,958
- vii. Dashboard Summary
 - 1. Operating expenditure is \$1.8M, which includes encumbrances.
 - 2. YTD non-standard overtime is \$543K.
YTD salaries including regular and standard overtime is \$5M.
YTD vacation/sick pay is \$420K.
 - 3. No COVID-19 related personnel expenses YTD.

VI. Attorney's Update

- a. Attorney Spencer Wetmore reported that she is negotiating a number of contracts and drafts. Drafting a couple of them and providing significant feedback on a few, in particular, the architect award on Station 5.

- b. She advised further negotiations on the settlement with St John's Water, which she believes would be appropriate to go into executive session tonight.
- c. She reported she is continuing to follow up with Charleston County on the Kiawah River Estates and she will continue to follow up with them as she does not have an answer as to why it's not ready. She advised that the last follow-up they told us it was with their legal department, so she hopes she will soon be able to come back on that one.

VII. Unfinished/Old Business

- a. N/A

VIII. New Business

- a. Commissioner Lehman stated that they are going to discuss the approval of the contract with Liollo for the building design at Station 5 with the option of being able to make any final changes later on.
 - i. Commissioner Thomae made a motion to approve the approval of the contact with Liollo for the building design at Station 5 with the tender apparatus. Commissioner Lehman seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

IX. Committee Report

a. Building Committee

- i. Commissioner Thomae reported the number for Liollo was about \$600,000, it is just under 10% of the estimated cost of the for the new fire station.
- ii. Commissioner Thomae reported the building committee met on last Thursday and aside from discussing the Liollo contact for Station 5, they also looked at RFQ's from eight architects for Kiawah River and at that meeting they selected three of those eight for further interviews. He stated that they will meet with those three architects on Friday, the 21st starting at 8:30am to listen to their interviews and then hopefully shortly thereafter, make a selection. He advised the three architects are: Court Atkins Group, Glick-Boehm and Liollo.

b. Finance Committee

- i. Commissioner Lehman reported they had a combined meeting on January 22nd with Finance, HR and Strategic Planning. She advised that they basically focused on strategic and anything strategic obviously has Financial ramifications. She stated that HR was part of it because we talked a lot about Personnel/compensation benefits that's obviously the majority of our budget. She added she thinks they had a nice foundation to move forward on the 2026 budget.
- ii. Commissioner Lehman stated that when we are ready in March before the March Commission Meeting to have a finance committee meeting to discuss a 2026 budget of what our final draft is, let her know the date and she will not just invite the Finance Committee, but she will make sure all the Commissioners are aware in the case that they want to join them.

1. Chief Kunitzer added that our goal is sometime before that March Commission meeting is to have some different things for you to look at as far as Compensation schedule and long-term planning as well, so that we can make that decision of how we want to move forward and then we will present that full budget. He stated that we will get all the other budget stuff knocked out at that meeting too, but then we can come to the March meeting armed with information so we can have a good budget this year and then have a plan moving for the future.

c. Human Resources Committee

- i. Commissioner Rolando reported they had a joint meeting (with the Finance Committee) to discuss compensation.
 1. Chief Kunitzer added that they came to the Commission to discuss pay of all of our members' compensation, salary and then also talk about schedule as well too. Pros and cons and benefits of different schedules and how we work to achieve, and if it's even feasible to work towards goals in the future to enhance the lives of our firefighters, but also our administrative staff that work hard as well too.

d. Strategic Planning Committee

- i. Commissioner White reported that regarding our future plans, everything is intertwined with financing and everything else. He stated that we are coming along really well with the project on River Rd. and Kiawah Island Estate. He also stated they briefly touched on some areas in our district that we could look at. He stated he there's some other things, but wanted to pause right there and follow up on it on the next meeting and let us know what he come up with.

X. Firefighter Comments

- a. N/A

XI. Commissioner Comments

- a. Commissioner White

- i. I just want to reiterate that it's good to sit here on a panel and hear everybody working together at one, you know when any organization come together and everybody works together things work so much better. I would like to thank our attorney, that she's working hard helping us great and tell all your personnel that we appreciate what they're doing and we'll never forget about them and their family. Thank you.

- b. Commissioner McGougan

- i. I concur with what Ike had to say, and I congratulate Chief that he's doing a good job pulling this wagon and sounds like we get through the ice and snowstorm good. Thank you for that, as well as the employees that are on the trucks, I just like to thank everyone. For what they do depends upon you.

- c. Commissioner Wright
 - i. Just thank everyone for what they've done. Residents out there depend on us, and I think we fulfill that mission pretty well. Thank you.
- d. Commissioner Blake
 - i. Again, ditto. Thank you guys for doing all that you do.
- e. Commissioner Thomae
 - i. No comment
- f. Commissioner Rolando
 - i. No comment
- g. Commissioner Stanley
 - i. No comment
- h. Commissioner Lehman
 - i. No comment
- i. Commissioner Durham
 - i. Ditto to everything that has been said. Thanks to everyone and everyone stay safe. See y'all soon.

Commissioner Leahman requested a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss contractual matters. Commissioner Lehman made a motion, Commissioner McGougan seconded. All in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 5:58 pm.