



ST. JOHN'S FIRE DISTRICT

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St. Johns Fire District Commission

MINUTES

The regular meeting of the St. John's Fire District Commission was held on, April 7, 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
Brooks McGougan
Jackie Stanley
Steve Rolando
Bill Thomae
Terrilyn Durham

Members Not Present

Leroy Blake

Others Present

Ryan Kunitzer, Fire Chief
Kevin Henson, Deputy Fire Chief
Brian Yuncker, Assistant Chief
Shawn Flanagan, Battalion Chief
Scott McCullough, Battalion Chief
Danielle Chambers, Controller
Christie Palmer, Administrative Assistant
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 March 10, 2024
 - i. Commissioner Lehman motioned, Commissioner Wright seconded, none opposed, the motion was carried.

III. Public Comments

- a. N/A

IV. Chief's Report

- a. Chief Kunitzer reported that Assistant Chief Whaley has notified us of his retirement after 20 years of service with The District. He stated that most recently Chief Whaley worked his way up to Assistant Chief of Support Services. He also stated that he was in an ops role and that some of the Commissioners worked with him. He added that Chief Whaley has done a great job and persevered through a lot of things and thanked him for his service to the district. He advised that we are hosting a drop in on Wednesday at HQ from 10:00am to 12:00pm if anyone would like to wish him goodbye.
- b. Chief Kunitzer stated that he wanted to mention to his staff how proud he is of them. He added we got a lot going on and he put a lot on their plate and they do a good job handling it, so he first wanted to just mention that and thank them again for how they're working through that.
- c. Chief Kunitzer reported tomorrow morning our command staff will meet with the city of Charleston. He added we typically do in the spring; a yearly sit-down meet over some food and just talk about the future of John's Island in particular and then how we work together between the city and the district. He stated that in the last couple years there's been some really good dialogue on how we can improve response within our auto-aid agreement and their future plans for fire stations and what it looks like when their new fire station comes online and then just overall general things like how we train together, how we do those things.

- d. Chief Kunitzer reported that a couple weeks ago several of our members including one of our captains, two of our firefighters, Assistant Chief Prouse traveled to Appleton, Wisconsin for a visit to Pierce. It was a pre-construction meeting for our heavy rescue. He added we expect delivery on that around the first of the year.
- e. Chief Kunitzer reported that for our deputy fire marshal position we have hired a new Deputy Fire Marshal that comes to us with some experience and that position starts on the 21st of this month.
- f. Chief Kunitzer reported that he wanted to thank our commissioners who signed up for our windy day boat ride. He said it sounds like they had a good time. He added that he does plan on scheduling another day and send some dates out to them all so that we can get more commissioners out there.
- g. Chief Kunitzer reported that Kiawah Beach Patrol had a fire earlier this year at their storage facility so before they tore the rest of it down, which was a pretty big stretch, they allowed us to come in and train for the day. He added we're doing some things with video and recruitment, and he wanted to show the Commissioners a video that we made from that day. He stated this is a quick video we can use for recruitment, and he wanted to thank our Professional Standards Chief Yunker and Battalion Chief Flanagan for setting that up. He added they're doing some really good work to get our members trained and have real training well as. He stated that this is also an opportunity to show people what we do.
- h. Chief Kunitzer reported that we're going to have employee meetings in May. He stated the goal of those meetings is just to give some department updates. He stated that the Commissioners approved the new pay plan so they will meet with each person individually to discuss where they're at in that pay plan.
- i. Chief Kunitzer reported that we had some mold issues with Station 3. He stated that a contractor came out to the station and mitigated the issue. He advised that he saw the before and after pictures and it looks almost brand new. He also advised that we've got our stations aging so we're going to have all of our stations checked for issues and get a full report back and before the end of the budget year we're going to have, whatever station needs to be, have those vents, duct work, and anywhere else that there could be mold cleaned so that we can be ahead of the problem instead of behind it.
- j. Chief Kunitzer reported that he wanted to thank Jason Hanks, our Fleet and Facilities Manager. He stated he and his department are on the ball with things that are happening in our fire stations and when there's issues, they respond to them immediately. He added that they are working hard on our facilities, working hard on our fleet and he is proud of them and appreciative of his and his team's work.
- k. Chief Kunitzer reported that they have posted externally for the Captain's position, which we know as a decision, himself and the command staff don't take lightly as his goal is always to promote our people as much as possible. He added we've got several internal candidates and then also had a large pile of external candidates as well. He advised we're looking for the best for those positions. He stated that we do have internal candidates testing but we also have some upcoming retirements that we know about as well, so we're trying to, even though we're behind a little bit, we're also trying to look ahead and fill those spots as much as possible. He then

stated, right after that we'll roll into engineer testing and then another hiring process for firefighters.

- I. Chief Kunitzer reported that the two recruits that we had in the academy unfortunately didn't pass their initial tests, so we have been working with some of the other area fire chiefs for some more recruit classes and things like that. He added he's hoping once Station 5 is done and we get that project completed we can start doing our own recruit classes.
- a. Chief Kunitzer reported we do have quite a few vacancies right now and what he hates the most is forcing people to work. He stated he thinks we've got a pretty good plan to attack that and judging by the amount of applications we have coming in, he is confident that we can get back to a position where we can address a lot of these vacancies with people that have experience.

b. Human Resources Report

- i. N/A

c. Incident Report April 2025

- ii. Johns Island – 206 incidents
- iii. Kiawah Island – 62 incidents
- iv. Seabrook Island – 37 incidents
- v. Wadmalaw Island – 38 incidents

V. Financial Report

a. Monthly Financial Report

- i. Controller Danielle Chambers reported that the Remaining Goal is 25%, the actual is 29.98%.
- ii. The Operating balance as of 03/31/2025 is \$16M. The Local Government Investment Pool balance is \$13K.
- iii. March revenue included retiree reimbursements.
- iv. The Charleston County wire transfer received was \$402,931 for February collections.
- v. Non-standard overtime for March is \$100,437.
- vi. Capital Projects bank balances as of 03/31/2025.
 1. 2021 balance: \$0
 2. 2022 balance: \$23,518
 3. 2023 balance: \$351,003
 4. 2024 balance: \$16,950,780
- vii. Dashboard Summary
 1. Operating expenditure is \$1.4M, which includes encumbrances.
 2. YTD non-standard overtime is \$722K.

YTD salaries including regular and standard overtime is \$6.4M.

YTD vacation/sick pay is \$498K.

3. No COVID-19 related personnel expenses YTD.

VI. Attorney's Update

- a. Attorney Spencer Wetmore reported that tonight she got the final approval back from Charleston County on the new lease for the new fire station over on Kiawah River that she has for the Commissioners to review. She advised that it's appropriate to make a motion to go to executive session. She advised the lease was not very different from what they previously discussed in the past, just some updates on what they negotiated back and forth with the county.

VII. Unfinished/Old Business

- a. N/A

VIII. New Business

- a. Chief Kunitzer reported that he reached out to the Clerk of Council regarding the letter that some Commissioners may have received regarding the Oath of Office. He stated that if anyone has received a letter from the Attorney General requesting a signature, they advised to hold on to the letter and wait until further directives are provided.
 - i. Attorney Wetmore added that if they are asked for any reason by anyone externally to sign the oath, she stated that she thinks it'd be perfectly appropriate to say that they are perfectly willing to take the oath of office and will do so upon all of the governing body's requests.

IX. Committee Report

a. Building Committee

- i. Commissioner Thomae reported they did have a meeting last month with the architect for Station 5. He stated that as he reported last month, there are two monthly meetings with the architect to go over the progress. He added that they agreed that one of the meetings would be a full building meeting and the other meeting would be he and the chief.
- ii. Commissioner Thomae reported that this past meeting they were just going over in detail what the district wants in the building – how many rooms you want, open bunks, individual rooms. He stated that it is usually a pretty lengthy discussion of all this stuff.
- iii. Commissioner Thomae reported that regarding Kiawah River, we just received a draft contract for the architects. He stated that they were waiting on the results of the lease before we can do anything with that because of course of course we can't build a building on a property that we don't have access to legally.

b. Finance Committee

- i. N/A

c. Human Resources Committee

- i. N/A

d. Strategic Planning Committee

- i. N/A

X. Firefighter Comments

- a. N/A

XI. Commissioner Comments

a. Commissioner Lehman

- i. I was one of the lucky commissioners that got on the fireboat and not only was I impressed with the equipment, but I was impressed with the crew that took us out. I was so impressed, not only with the experience we had on the water, but when we came back and we went to the fuel station, there was a boat at either end and there was this slot in the middle and I'm thinking, how's he going to get in there, he's and Jay slid in there so easily. I was so impressed. I mean I was impressed with all of them. Captain Chris, I didn't catch all their last names, but you know they answered all our questions. They showed us the equipment. Bill and I got to play with some of the equipment. I'll let them go in more detail, but we got to drive it. I mean it was just a fun experience. The only thing I want to caution anyone is, I have little short legs, and it was kind of a challenge getting in and out of the boat, so thank God, they helped me, or I'd have been faced down on the dock. But I just wanted to thank the Chief for you know setting that up and highly recommend if you get a chance to go out on it, it's a great experience.

b. Commissioner Thomae

- i. So, I just want to piggyback on that actually. I was really impressed not only by the skills of the driver of the boat, the Captain, but I was impressed with the equipment that's on that boat and the capabilities of it. I forgot how many radios are on there, there were six or eight of them, anyway, of all different frequencies. What the captain explained to us was that this boat is the only one in the area that's capable of command operation at sea because of all the radios. That was impressive.

c. Commissioner Stanley

- i. I was unable to attend that day, but I'll catch the next one hopefully. I'd like to thank all the personnel. With all the calls y'all had recently, and I live on the island, I've seen a lot of these guys work and they're doing a great job, and I'd like to thank them for the job they are doing.

d. Commissioner Durham

- i. I too was scheduled to go on that boat, but due to my full-time job, I was unable to, so I'm looking forward to the next one and to all the firefighters, thank you and stay safe.

e. Commissioner McGougan

- i. I'm looking forward to going for a boat ride. I've heard good reports from those that went, so you guys take care. Stay safe.

f. Commissioner White

- i. I'd like to reiterate what you just said not just how, but what impressed me about the boat was able to direct that fire screen. That was one of my main subjects in strategic planning; how well that boat could operate. Also, that boat's able to maneuver itself...because being inside that dock area with the fire, that was very important to me to find out how that boat would handle in that situation. The crew, right on spot. I took a hard look at them because, myself being in that situation and the crew handled me in a way that made me feel valued. They made me feel as though they were very appreciative of what the commissioners are doing and that meant a lot to me. Also, they took the time, like they said earlier, to go over what's going on there. But what I like is that sonar. They can see what's going on underneath, you know, as your visual is up top in foggy weather and stuff. I was really curious about a whole lot of stuff and they were able to answer everything I had. So, to me that's a direct compliment from the chief, the commission, the administration. Everybody in here, because we are only as strong as our weakest chain. Would you please tell the crew that I really appreciate the time they took to let us know what's going on at Marine 701. Good job, well done.

Commissioner Lehman made a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss legal advice pertaining to Kiawah River lease agreement and the Kiawah River architect second contract. Commissioner Wright seconded. All in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm.