



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, March 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
Leroy Blake
Brooks McGougan
Steve Rolando
Bill Thomae
Terrilyn Durham

Members Not Present

Jackie Stanley

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 February 10, 2024
 - i. Commissioner Thoma requested changes to be made to the February minutes.
 - ii. Commissioner Lehman made a motion to approve the minutes for the regular meeting of February with clarifications to page 5. Commissioner White seconded, none opposed, the motion was carried.

III. Public Comments

- a. N/A

IV. Chief's Report

- a. Chief Kunitzer stated he wanted to thank our commissioners and also our personnel who attended our Promotion and Awards Ceremony on Saturday morning. He stated we had great attendance and some good food. He advised they had a really nice morning. He added he wanted to thank all those who came down and were in attendance and supported our personnel.
- b. Chief Kunitzer highlighted a couple of Awards from the Promotion and Awards Ceremony:
 - i. Firefighter of the Year – Garrett Mack
 - ii. Engineer of the Year – Daniel Lowder
 - iii. Officer of the Year - Tim Northern
 - iv. Support Staff of the Year – Sarah Brown (Payroll Specialist)
 - v. Fire Chiefs Award for Excellence – Teresa Vaughn (Human Resource Manager)
- c. Chief Kunitzer reported on Saturday at the Promotion and Awards Ceremony, he regretfully missed one of the promotions. He recognized Danielle Chambers promotion to Controller as well as thanked her for her hard work.

- i. Commissioner Leahman reported that Danielle Chambers is doing multiple jobs right now because our staff account position is open and she made a motion to give her a one time bonus of a net of \$1,000. Commissioner Brooks seconded. All in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.
- d. Chief Kunitzer stated he wanted to thank Danielle, Teresa and Stephanie as they were big drivers of the people who assisted putting the event on and we had some beautiful flower arrangements. He also thanked Brownswood Nursery here on John's Island as they donated flowers for the centerpieces.
- e. Chief Kunitzer reported that Professional Standards hosted some more officer development. Our captains completed a Critical Thinking for Instant Commanders Class, and that class finishes this week.
- f. Chief Kunitzer reported he wanted to recognize Captain Steve Mantie on his retirement. He thanked him for service to St John's. That position of Community Risk Reduction Coordinator has been posted, and we have received quite a few applications in that short period.
- g. Chief Kunitzer reported that four recruits finished EMT class today. All four passed their state examination today so we get them back tomorrow, then back out on our line for operations to support. He added congratulations to them for they had a long process of Mt Pleasant, but they are coming out with EMT and certified as firefighters.
- h. Chief Kunitzer reported that the old Marine 701 boat is up on GovDeals if anybody is looking for a 26-foot boat. He stated it has some Yamaha engines on it, it's not in the best shape but it's workable.
- i. Chief Kunitzer reported that we have finally completed some repairs to the roof at Station 3.
- j. Chief Kunitzer reported that one of our spare ladders had an engine repair this last month of about \$12,000 that was unanticipated.
- k. Chief Kunitzer reported that in the past we talked about a new development going in by Station 5 called Orange Hill. He stated that they're putting in a golf course, about 125 homes, and some other buildings. He added that, as a Commission, we decided to have an ask, similar to what we did with Kiawah River, of \$450,000 towards an apparatus/engine. He stated that development is finally going in front of the County Council and will likely be approved. He assured us that this was still in the agreement. He stated they have a benchmark similar to Kiawah River, 50% occupancies and they would give us the funds for the engine.
- l. Chief Kunitzer reported that they completed the FY26 Budget. He stated that they will talk a little bit about that with the finance committee section and discuss it later in the agenda for approval.
- m. Chief Kunitzer reported that he met with HR this morning and they are creating a plan to tackle some vacancies they have within each rank. He stated they know of some vacancies on the horizon. He stated with the Commissioners approval, part of the plan to tackle that, would include a new pay plan.

- n. Chief Kunitzer reported that we have been working on the St John's water settlement for some time, and he wanted to thank Commissioner Lehman for her efforts in that as she has been instrumental in that. He was glad this is finally behind us, and we can move forward.

o. Human Resources Report

- i. HR Manager Teresa Vaughn reported that we have hired a staff accountant that starts on the 24th.
- ii. She reported we have two Academy recruits starting this Wednesday and on Monday they'll go to Colombia to the Academy followed by the EMT training.
- iii. She reported we had a few separations this month, a couple of firefighters, one engineer and a retirement.
- iv. She added that on March 1st, we went on to a new insurance broker, McGriff. She stated the representative was here today and they were auditing everything and made sure everything was correct.

p. Incident Report March 2025

- i. Johns Island – 207 incidents
- ii. Kiawah Island – 55 incidents
- iii. Seabrook Island – 50 incidents
- iv. Wadmalaw Island – 33 incidents

V. Financial Report

a. Monthly Financial Report

- i. Controller Danielle Chambers reported that the Remaining Goal is 33.34%, the actual is 36.79%.
- ii. The Operating balance as of 02/28/2025 is \$17M. The Local Government Investment Pool balance is \$13K.
- iii. February revenue included retiree reimbursements, Advanced EMT Program reimbursement and a Kiawah Island paramedic payment.
- iv. The Charleston County wire transfer received was \$11,157,180 for January collections.
- v. Non-standard overtime for February is \$78,237.
- vi. Capital Projects bank balances as of 02/28/2025.
 - 1. 2021 balance: \$83
 - 2. 2022 balance: \$25,135
 - 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 \$621K.
YTD salaries including regular and standard overtime is \$5.7M.
YTD vacation/sick pay is \$467K.
3. No COVID-19 related personnel expenses YTD.

VI. Attorney's Update

- a. Attorney Spencer Wetmore reported that she is delighted to report that our settlement with St John's water has been approved. She stated we have filed that with the court, and we can check this off our list.
- b. She reported that Charleston County got back to us regarding the lease at Kiawah River. She advised she had additional concerns with some of the language they had put in, specifically with approval for certain changes that we wanted to make. She stated the last word she got was that they agreed to those changes; we are just waiting on them to actually be made.

VII. Unfinished/Old Business

- a. N/A

VIII. New Business

- a. Commissioner Lehman stated she and Chief Kunitzer will be out of town on our April commission meeting, and they are asking and would like to make a motion for approval of moving the April commission meeting date to April 7th.
 - i. Commissioner Rolando seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.
- b. Chief Kunitzer reported the FY26 Budget approval is due to Charleston County this Friday. He stated they presented a couple of different options to the Finance Committee. He advised that he believes they have a fairly balanced budget for next year.
- c. Commissioner Lehman provided a reminder that the South Carolina Ethics Report is due before March 31st. She states that she did complete it and it was very similar to last year but if anybody needs any help the Chief said someone here on the administrative team can help.

IX. Committee Report

a. Building Committee

- i. Commissioner Thomae reported they had a building committee meeting a couple of weeks ago and interviewed three Architects, which they ranked one, two and three. He stated they are currently negotiating the fee with the number one ranked and of course if that doesn't work out, they can move to number two if they need too. He stated that after they do the fee, then they will put together a contract with whichever architect successfully negotiated the fee.

- ii. Commissioner Thomae reported with Station 5, they had a first kickoff meeting with Liollo, the architect, a couple of weeks ago and from now on through the design of the building they will have a progress meeting every two weeks. He stated that after discussion with the Chief and the Chair, they don't think it's necessary for the entire building committee to attend both of those meetings every month. He added that he will report on anything that they discussed at the first meeting that might have been missed.
- iii. Commissioner Thomae reported that the next meeting is this Wednesday, two days from now and he is trying to get that to be a Zoom meeting.
- iv. Commissioner Thomae reported that they received site survey bids for Kiawah River and the lower was \$18,000.

b. Finance Committee

- i. Commissioner Lehman reported the finance committee meeting was Thursday, March 6th. She stated they did go over various scenarios. She advised that one option was a 0.5 increase in millage for property taxes, which was kind of conservative. Another option was to do nothing. She advised they are recommending a 1% increase, from 26.8 – 27.8 per mil.
 - 1. Commissioner Lehman motioned to approve the 1% millage increase for the 2026 budget. Commissioner Thomae seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.
- ii. Chief Kunitzer reviewed a funding presentation, “Fire Station & Funding Project”. This can be viewed online on our YouTube Channel at the 30:29 mark thru 45:27.
 - 1. [STJFD Commission Meeting 3.10.25](#)

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 White

- i. I just want to say that I was really impressed on Saturday with the turnout. Really happy with all the promotions. I see the department growing, although we lose some people along the way. I want to leave on a positive note, I appreciate all you do. Everyone be safe.

b. Commissioner McGougan

- i. I want to commend the Chief and his staff on an excellent job. Let the guys know we appreciate you, we're behind you, keep up the good work.

c. Commissioner Wright

- i. I concur with Brooks comments. I want to just add I've been around here six or seven years, and this department has totally changed. You guys are world class. That's what you guys are. I'm proud to sit up here and work for you guys.

d. Commissioner Blake

- i. On the 13th, the DOT will be at St John's showing their information on Segment 8, which is 17 and Main, showing you what they plan to do about the roundabout and all the other stuff that they plan to do and why they are out of money. He asked the Chief if we have anyone who is available to teach CPR and advised he would be back in touch. He also thanked Danielle for taking care of our money.

e. Commissioner Thomae

- i. The award ceremony, Chief, was topnotch. Thank you for all your efforts and getting that done and to all those that helped you do that. Congratulations again to all those who received the awards and promotions.

f. Commissioner Rolando

- i. I would like to congratulate everyone on their promotions and awards. I have to say that ceremony, even though I get bits and pieces along the year, but to see it all together makes one very proud of our district and all of you for what you do. The other thing I wanted to mention was yes, there's the operating budget and there's the capital budget, Chief went over the capital. During the operating budget discussions, we always try to take care of the personnel, and my commitment is to continue to try to take care of you the best we can because of what you do. Thank you very much.

g. Commissioner Stanley

- i. NA

h. Commissioner Lehman

- i. I also attended the promotion awards ceremony. I was really impressed with the turnout and the different awards. Some of the different details that you went into was like, wow. I don't realize how many lives you save until you hear some of those examples. I know it was more than just the examples but I just thought the ceremony was fantastic. The facilities were great to accommodate us and the speakers were inspirational. Chief asked me if I wanted to say anything and after I heard that Joe Boykin and The General were speaking, I said no, I can't be as inspirational as them. I am proud to be part of this and I've said that many times. I hear a lot of compliments from people on Seabrook Island about how fantastic their experience is with this fire department, so thank you for everything you do.

i. Commissioner Durham

- i. Congratulations to all award recipients and promotions. According to the pictures, looks like you all had a great time. To all the firefighters and staff, stay safe.

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.