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, February 9, 2026, 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
Debra Lehman
Isiah White
Steve Rolando
Bill Thomae
Brooks McGougan
Jackie Stanley
Robert Wright
Leroy Blake

Members Not Present
Terrilyn Durham

Others Present
Ryan Kunitzer, Fire Chief
Kevin Henson, Deputy Chief
Nathan Prouse, Assistant Chief
Brian Yuncker, Assistant Chief
Shawn Flanagan, Assistant Chief
Justin Miles-Miller, EMS Chief
Tim Pristatskiy, Chief Fire Marshal
Teresa Vaughn, Human Resource Manager
Krista Brown, Human Resource Specialist
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 January 12, 2026
    - i. Commissioner Lehman motioned to approve minutes with the mentioned changes, Commissioner Wright seconded, none opposed, the motion was carried.

III. Public Comments

- **a.** N/A

IV. Chief's Report

- **a.** Chief Kunitzer advised the Commissioners that they all had a copy of the Annual Report that has a whole bunch of photos and information inside of it. He advised that our goal was to just make it goal was to just make it as simple as possible and for us to highlight our members as much as possible too. He stated he thought 2025 was a really pivotal and growing year for St. John's Fire District and we are seeing some fruits of our efforts in what we're putting in and what our personnel are really working hard on.
- **b.** Chief Kunitzer introduced our new Chief Fire Marshal, Tim Pristatskiy. He advised that Tim is a native of Pennsylvania and has been in South Carolina for a little while now and is hitting the ground running and doing some really good things with that division. He added that one of those good things was he identified when we had the tragic incident, the fatal fire on Wadmalaw, we really need to be doing a smoke alarm blitz in those areas. So Chief Tim and his team, Capt. Singleton, teamed up with SC State Fire Marshal's Office and volunteers with American Red Cross, he added that he would allow Chief Tim and Chief Henson tell them about it.
    - i. Chief Tim advised a little background about himself. He stated he came from Fire Department, South Carolina. Was there for just over a year before he came over and joined St. John's and then before then he was the Chief of Special Operations. He added that he is really glad to be here.

ii. Chief Tim reported that he wanted to highlight some of the successes that we had on the island. Thanks to the generous donation from the American Red Cross, we were able to install almost 150 smoke alarms. He stated, to put that into perspective, that's over $5,300 in smoke alarms for what we installed. He added that was about 31 homes that we were able to enter and install but er contacted close to over 80 folks. He stated that it was a good event and the ability for us to do this was a team effort between coordination with South Carolina State Fire and the American Red Cross, who brought close to, if not over, 10 volunteers with them from the community to be part of our teams to do these installs.

iii. Chief Tim advised these teams had three components to them. One was the person that's going to install smoke alarms. Another one is a person documenting the install. And the third, the most important but most important for us, is the person that's in charge of doing the fire safety education throughout our installs.

iv. Chief Tim advised we identified that a lot of these homes are using space heaters to heat their homes primarily and we identify people using their own ovens to primarily heat their homes or other means. So, it really highlighted the importance of fire education for us and for that person providing that to the residents that we were able to contact. He added that we were able to open the eyes of the residents there that live in that community, but our own firefighters as well, to understand this is a situation that we're dealing with, and it could be a potential hazard here in the future, but something that we hope to address through education, through these smoke alarm blitzes, through these installs, to prevent future fatalities from happening. Not only on Wadmalaw, but throughout the district as well, not only on Wadmalaw, but throughout the district as well.

v. Chief Tim advised the impact we had on the community was immediate and it was visible. He stated we were able to touch a lot of these families and also give them resources outside of the smoke alarm blitz. He added he especially want to commend our operational and administrative staff that stepped up, but also our own paramedic Alyssa Haddon, who assisted these residents with coordinating car seat installs, two of which we did today, as well as some other support with mental health needs, primary health care support, chronic disease management and resources for children with autism.

vi. Chief Tim advised that we were able to do is utilize our GIS and ReadyOp systems and we used a lot of different technology to make this event successful and I'm really glad that it was able to come together with support from our partners and with the people, our boots on the ground, to get this done He added it is no easy feat to get a smoke alarm blitz of this length completed and he is honestly surprised at the amount of work that we were able to do in such a short amount of time.

vii. Chief Henson described to the Commissioners a “demo” / fruits of their labor and stated that when we ask for technology and stuff in the budget, this is when they get to kind of see some of the back end of what we're doing with that so that we can make actionable decisions. He advised what they were looking at, was a product that we're looking for in our new budget here that'll be coming up in July, we were able to utilize a demo called Ready Ops. He advised the digital form deploys information, which is fed directly into a live dashboard. It tracked 146 installed alarms across 49 residences where entry was denied or no one was home. A map displayed green dots for homes where alarms were successfully installed and red dots for unsuccessful attempts. Clicking on a dot revealed specific data from the form, such as the address and the number of alarms installed (with a maximum of nine in two separate homes).

c. Chief Kunitzer reported that during our winter storm we did have a structure fire in the early morning hours and when they arrived, to a three-story elevated structure with a fire in the garage area, two of our residents were on the third floor and they had actually deployed one of the deployable ladders that, if you've been in the fire service for some time you've seen them at the store. He stated he had never actually seen one in the wild and this was the first one he had seen ever deployed in the wild. He also stated that these people had to make a decision because they're on the third floor and it's a long ways up there. He added that Captain Matt Lomas and his crew, as well as Captain Mitchell, were able to deploy some ground ladders and safely get the people off the third floor. He also stated that interestingly enough, This is something in a scenario that they just had trained on prior in the last couple months, so we were able to put that in action and no injuries and saved a whole bunch of property. He added that the incident really, really went well, so fruits of their labor on the training ground as well.

d. Chief Kunitzer reported that a recruit class one starts next week with twelve people. He added that we have a pretty good plan. He stated that they're going to start with EMT and then go into Fire Skills. He advised to mark on the calendars July 10th as the graduation date, because that's when they will be finally done with that whole entire program.

e. Chief Kunitzer reported that St John’s High School Firefighter Program is under new leadership and it has been really impressive to see the new leadership take the reins of that. He stated that we are working right now through a joint agreement between ourselves, the school district, and Charleston Fire Department for that program to continue and it has reinvented itself and we've already got a few students in the hopper that are going to be starting Firefighter I. He stated there are some recruiting opportunities as well, but we're going to be partners with them in that and excited the direction that goes.

f. Chief Kunitzer reported that he was able to have pretty good breakfast and conversation with the new EMS chief, Chief Way, last week where we talked about some things that we're doing, some things they're doing, and how we better work together. He stated that they’re very open to that and we’ve got some ideas on Johns Island, Kiawah, Seabrook and Wadmalaw and the future of that and what EMS response looks like for them, and how we better work together in those. He

added that he's very open to our ideas and vice versa, so we are going to have a meeting, but he doesn't know when because they haven't scheduled it yet. He state he has to follow up with them for them to look at the data behind that, them look at the data and see what that looks like, and perhaps staffing a peak hour's truck, but they're very open to collaboration on that, so more to come on that.

g. Chief Kunitzer reported some traveling coming up for our staff. He stated last week they were in Texas for the pre con for the high-water vehicle as they got into Dallas there's a group led by Chief Prouse and Chief Flanagan that will be the final inspection on the heavy rescue. He added we are still working on some equipment for new Engine 2 on Seabrook, but hopefully in the next few weeks we should have that in service.

h. Chief Kunitzer reported that last month he, Chief Tim and Chief Prouse were able to help Kiawah CERT Team lead a tabletop for them. He advised that our CERT teams can be reliable in disasters and emergency response in the right areas. He stated that hopefully we got some good feedback. He stated that it was a really good day with them and he would like to future engage as a Johns Island team forming and how we better get through that.

i. Chief Kunitzer reported that we are currently working through our budget process and we have a budget retreat next week and it is due to the county on March 16th, so he is going to get hold of the finance Chair and request a meeting for March 5th to go over our budget submission for next year.

j. Chief Kunitzer reported that the awards and promotion banquet is confirmed for the morning of February28th at the Citadel. He advised this starts at nine o'clock at the Citadel, but he'll make sure you guys have that invite in your inboxes much like we've done the last two years.

k. Human Resources Report

Human Resource Manager, Teresa Vaughn, reported the following:

i. Hiring Activity:
   - **i.** FT Paramedic Specialist Started 1/20
   - **ii.** PT Paramedic Specialist Started 1/20
   - **iii.** PT Paramedic Specialist Started 2/02
   - **iv.** 2 Certified Firefighters starts 2/17
   - **v.** 1 Engineer starts 2/17
   - **vi.** 12 Academy Recruits starts 2/17

ii. Open/upcoming postings: NA

iii. Separations: NA

iv. Workers' Comp Time Off: NA

v. Staffing Levels: Does not include hires listed above
   - **i.** Ops BC – 6/6
   - **ii.** Captain – 27/30 (3 floater open)

iii. Engineer – 31/33

iv. Firefighter – 45/54

v. Paramedic Specialist – 3/3

a. Incident Report February 2026

i. Johns Island – 213 incidents

ii. Kiawah Island – 57 incidents

iii. Seabrook Island – 32 incidents

iv. Wadmalaw Island – 20 incidents

V. Financial Report

a. Monthly Financial Report

i. Danielle Chambers reported that the Remaining Goal is 41.67%, the actual is 45.15%.

ii. The Operating balance as of 1/31/26 is $11.6M. The Local Government Investment Pool balance is $13K.

iii. January revenue included retiree reimbursements, $93K Kiawah Island Paramedic payment and $78K from the sale of asset.

iv. The Charleston County wire transfer received was $7,392,423 for December collections.

v. Non-standard overtime for January is $94K.

vi. Capital Projects bank balances as of 1/31/26.

i. 2022 balance: $0.00

ii. 2023 balance: $144,723

iii. 2024 balance: $15,169,054

vii. Dashboard Summary

1. Operating expenditure is $12.9M, which includes encumbrances.
2. YTD non-standard overtime is $828K.

   YTD salaries, including regular and standard overtime, is $5.2M.

   YTD vacation/sick pay is $507K.
3. No COVID-19 related personnel expenses YTD.

VII. Attorneys' Update

a. Attorney Spencer Wetmore advised that she thinks it would be appropriate for the commissioners to go into executive session for an update on an ongoing investigation.

b. She also stated that all the new property for Station 5 is complete, so we got the letter of approval as to the rezoning and the subdivision. She stated Chief Kunitzer signed, did all the closing documents, the seller wired the money and we are all done here. Thank you all for your patience on that. Thank you.

VI. Unfinished/Old Business

a. N/A

VII. New Business

a. Approval to purchase new badges from Badge and Wallet in the amount of $27,547.52.

i. Commissioner Lehman motion to approve, Commissioner Blake seconded, all in favor, none opposed, the motion was carried.

VIII. Committee Report

a. Building Committee

i. Commissioner Thomae reported they had 2 meetings in January on Station 5 and they have 3 meetings coming up this week. He stated that they are not full building committee meetings; they're just meetings that we need to attend. He added tomorrow is a meeting with Charleston County on Station 8 to discuss the site issues and some things that they want to talk with us on that connection with the sheriff's department and the EMS building for later on and then Wednesday is our regular meeting with Liollio Architects for Station 5 and Thursday we are excavating a small pit on site at Station 5 for the purpose of discovering more information about the soil. He advised that getting soil borings is not good enough to handle the leach bed for the septic system, so we're excavating a pit for about $11,000 to get more information on that soil from that excavation and that takes place at 2:30pm. He also stated that he is unable to attend either one of those on Tuesday or Thursday so Ike's going to attend both of those for him.

b. Finance Committee

i. Commissioner Lehman reported that they met on the 20th of January and talked about the mid-year reports and it all looked good and she knows we've probably already sent them to the county to go over them before they are submitted to Charleston County. She advised they went over some of the capital projects and where they are at in their current bonds. We do have additional funding approved from the county that we could issue additional bonds without having to go to county council.

c. Human Resources Committee

i. N/A

d. Strategic Planning Committee

i. N/A

IX. Firefighter Comments

a. N/A

X. Commissioner Comments

a. Commissioner McGougan

i. Having read the annual report, excellent. The presentation is very, very good. The contents are outstanding. Looks like we are continuing to be a leader in the first responder services for Charleston. Thank you.

b. Commissioner White

i. Yes, I just want to thank each and every one of you for your hard work and I really appreciate how you all come around with smoke detectors because it's very important to have those smoke detectors installed in your home. I really appreciate the wonderful job that HR is doing. I think it's an excellent idea going to the high school. There's a lot of kids that need to know what we do here at early age, and maybe they'll come and work here. So, thank you so very much.

c. Commissioner Wright

i. A couple things, welcome Tim. You'll have fun here. And Krista, thanks for all the hard work. The annual report went through; it's impressive. We need to get it out to our constituents, the Johns Island Council, Kiawah, Seabrook. The more they understand what we're doing and when they look at the numbers and look at the taxes, they'll get a better appreciation for what the investment is and I think that's important. The smoke alarms, our church has a big program that they call the Paraclete program. It's a food program where we deliver food on Christmas and Thanksgiving, and in the process of delivering the food, we take a look at what the houses look like and identify where we need to make some investments so we should connect with those people.

d. Commissioner Blake

i. Welcome, Tim. I know why you left the other place. Don't take the last two weeks as how the weather goes here. You will definitely enjoy June and July. Thank you for joining us. For everyone, man, you guys are doing a wonderful job, and thank you guys for all that you do. Please continue to be safe. Thank you.

e. Commissioner Stanley

i. Welcome Tim. Glad to have you on board. I really do appreciate what the St. John's Fire District has been doing and will continue to do in regard to smoke detectors. I know that all fire departments, a lot of fire departments, don't do that at all and we have a son that lives in Ohio, and he had a smoke detector problem recently and I said, "Well, call the local fire department." He did, and he said nope. They won't even come look at it, you know, but we got it fixed. Thank you.

f. Commissioner Rolando

i. Welcome Tim. I want to thank you and Chief Henson, for attending the public safety committee down at Kiawah and Tim for answering the questions that the Mayor had relative to fire safety inspections and hopefully that gets sorted out and becomes more of an institution. Congratulations to everyone that was promoted in 2025. We had a number of promotions, that's good to see and thanks Chief for attending the cert training session. I did get feedback. It was very positive. It's a pleasure to speak with you.

g. Commission Stanley

i. Good evening, everyone. There's not much more I can say other than repeat everybody that came out here. Tim, welcome and I will approach you now to keep up the good work you're doing. I saw that fire in Seabrook. I did see it on the news. So, you did a really good job. Thank you.

h. Commissioner Lehman

i. Welcome Tim. I'm originally from Pennsylvania. You are going to like it here a lot better when it comes to The weather, I can guarantee that. And thank you for everything you and Henson have been doing; it's helpful. And Krista, thank you for all your hard work and keeping Teresa straight. So that's a big help. Going back to the smoke alarms, do we ever do carbon monoxide? Do we ever get into it, is that included in your safety discussion? (Chief Kunitzer "that's something we provide as well")

Commissioner Lehman made a motion to go to executive session to discuss personnel matters with the board. Commissioner Stanley seconded. All in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 5:39 pm.