

St. Tammany Fire Protection District No. 1

Board of Commissioners

Regular Meeting Minutes April 20, 2010

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

The pledge of allegiance and prayer were given.

Roll Call: Chairman Kline and Commissioners Rich, Davis, and Risley were present.
Commissioner Kingston arrived at 5:40.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES-

Commissioner Davis made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 16, 2010 regular meeting. Commissioner Risley seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS –

- a) **Unbudgeted purchase of new fire apparatus-** Chief Hess asked to postpone any action on this item.

NEW BUSINESS -

A) Chief's Report-

- a) **2009 Audit Compliance Questionnaire- (not discussed)**
- b) **Chief of Operations position-** Chief Hess requested that this item be postponed. He requested postponement of the two items based on an e-mail showing an almost zero increase in spending, from 2006 thru 2009. He would like us to position ourselves to do the same for the rest of this year. Chief Hess further stated his uncertainty with the direction things are going for our department. He stated that he received a letter from Attorney Henry Olinde regarding us becoming members of Unifire. It indicated that our employees would have to “start at zero”; however, two days after receiving the letter, we were asked to give a breakdown of the operations and cost associations for our Communications division. The communications officers felt that due to the “disadvantage” of our employees becoming members of Unifire, this would no longer be a consideration. Chief Hess requested that the Board offer a statement of clarification as to whether or not there is still a continuing interest in looking at the potential of our fire department becoming members of Unifire. Commissioner Davis stated that he didn't understand the confusion when a Commissioner asks for information that is public record. He further stated that this is not a judgment, and that he would be asking for the same information from Fire Dist #12 and the other districts in Unifire. Commissioner Davis stated that if Unifire doesn't work for this district, then we won't go. Chief Hess asked if the information from Attorney Olinde was sufficient enough. Commissioner Davis stated that there is no need for concern with the information that is being requested, that” this is not a witch hunt”. Commissioner Risley stated that this was not all of the information needed for the investigation into the possibility of Fire Dist #1 running the Unifire facility.

Chief Hess discussed the request for three years of the “operating” budget, by Parish President Kevin Davis and Commissioner Davis.

Chairman Davis stated that he did not want to put a disadvantage on any department. He stated that there's got to be a solution to the way Civil Service is interpreted, and there should be a way to get over it. Chief of Administration Kaufmann stated that the Civil Service issue was the first area of our investigation, all the way to The State Examiner. He stated that the letter came from a Civil Service attorney who was present at the meeting, and that should be sufficient clarification. He also stated that we have been working on a proposal to run the operation.

Chief Kaufmann further inquired about the recent request for Fire Prevention and Training Academy operations. He stated that this request did not come from the board, but from Commissioner Davis. Commissioner Davis stated that he requested the information to be sent to the entire Board of Commissioners.

Chief Hess commented on some of the confusion around the department, stating that an elected official, in attendance at the meeting, talked about cut-backs and lay-offs, and the Board not saying that this is not the Board's opinion. He stated, "We have young employees that are concerned that their job security is at risk." There was discussion regarding the budget. Commissioner Davis stated the Parish has had financial dire straits over the past few years; however, the economy is steadily coming back and there aren't many lay-offs anymore. Commissioner Davis stated that all of the nervousness is coming from him, due to him making all of the requests. The requests will provide a good overview of the department. He further stated that if Unifire is not good for the department, it will not happen. He stated that Parish President Davis does want this happen, but his vision is that all of the fire districts are in one center.

Commissioner Rich commented on the good stewardship that our department has on the budget. He further stated that he doesn't think there is a problem, but that we're being pressured. He doesn't want the employees to think these are problem areas; we need to be good stewards and remain diligent. Chief Hess inquired as to whether Parish President Davis was looking at all of the other fire districts as well. Commissioner Davis stated he thought it would be all departments. Chief Hess indicated that he would like another commissioner, assuming Commissioner Davis will already be part of it, to be in the meeting when we present the facts to the Parish President.

Chief Kaufmann discussed our position after Hurricane Katrina. The board gave permission to fill the vacant positions, but we made the decision, due to our three year budget projection, that we would not be able to do it. FEMA saved the district, and the employees.

Chief Kaufmann commented on the department status and the millage presentations being done to prepare for the millage renewal.

Chief Hess discussed the requests that are being made and the manpower that has gone into them. He also discussed the testimony on H.B.771, regarding greater detail being included in the publication of any taxing body, relative to the roll forward, roll back process.

Communications Supervisor Watson discussed the issue of Communications not going to Unifire if there would be any disadvantages.

Commissioner Davis stated that this is still being looked into. She inquired into the issue of Civil Service being a disadvantage. Commissioner Davis stated that he is looking into how to combine everyone under Unifire, without it hurting any of the employees. Commissioner Risley asked if the letter states that if Fire Dist#1 manages Unifire, that the employees would still be disadvantaged. There was additional discussion.

Ms. Peggy Devalcourt, Civil Service Board, inquired on the relevancy of the information requested on Fire Inspectors, or other job descriptions, and the part it would play in the Communications merger. Commissioner Davis stated that he didn't want to look into just one aspect of the department.

Chad Duffaut, President of the Firefighter's Association, discussed the confusion he has regarding past statements. He reiterated that if it harms our Communications Officers, it was supposed to "be a done deal." He stated that Parish President Davis said the same thing at the Union Meeting he attended. He further commented on "working through it" when it comes to Civil Service. There was further discussion regarding "moving forward" to find out if we can satisfy the request of the Parish and the expenditures that have been put forth to create Unifire and be a part of it.

Chad also asked about the requests that are being made and what are they being compared with. Commissioner Davis again stated that it's the Board's right to request any expenditure, budgets, etc.

Chief Hess asked the Board what would be useful in making a determination relative to the Civil Service question regarding disadvantage. Commissioner Risley stated that the letter Mr. Olinde prepared does not address the issue of Fire Dist #1 running Unifire.

Van Joffrion requested that we not be simplistic with the requests made. He stated that there have been underlying issues with Communications that go back years ago. He was one of the members to decide how the employees are handled, after the Board decides the direction of the department; and Mr. Olinde confirmed that in his letter. He further stated that the local Civil Service board is the deciding factor and the paperwork provided to the Board covers the requirements of the State and Constitution. He further commented on Commissioner Davis' response to "work around the laws". The Civil Service system is in place to encourage stability. Fire Dist #12 is not Civil Service, and they will be disadvantaged when they become Civil Service.

Communication Officer Rachel Aucoin stated that the Communications Officers have been told by Mr. Joffrion, the Civil Board and The State Examiner that they would be put at a disadvantage. She requested a commitment from the board on not still looking into sending them to Fire Dist #12, as employees. Chairman Kline and Commissioner Rich stated they would not vote on that tonite, if a vote came up.

Deputy Chief David Kuhn spoke regarding the comments made by Slidell City Councilman Chris Canulette. He disagreed with the comments regarding taking stronger cuts, our membership is aware of how the public feels about our millage. All of this affects the morale of the department. He also spoke about the matrix that has been provided and hopes that it is compared to comparable fire departments in the state.

Fire Operator Leblanc stated that Commissioner Davis indicated that he has the right to make requests and then discussed transparency, without providing a reason for his requests.

Wynn Williams commented on the “open” budget and that the board sees the budget, and even confirms the budget. She further stated that it’s no secret that Kevin Davis wants to combine not just Communications, but fire district divisions. This creates nervousness within the department and may make some employees want to transfer to other fire districts. She feels that in order to retain the employees we have, there needs to be confidence that they (employees) will be represented first.

Commissioner Kingston stated his priorities:

- 1) Citizens of the Fire Dist #1
- 2) Employees of the department
- 3) Parish, as a whole

He further stated he feels the board will do what is best for Fire Dist #1.

- c) **Office of State Examiner’s position regarding Unifire and our BOC’s position regarding the issue of relocating FD-1 Dispatchers to the employment of FD-12-** (discussed above)
- d) **Fire District BOC’s position regarding acceptance of any additional Unifire clients-** (discussed above)
- e) **Fire District BOC’s position regarding recent comments of Parish Councilman Chris Canulette to our employees-** (discussed above)
- f) **Fire District #1 testimony in opposition to H.B. 771-** (discussed above)
- g) **Request for BOC member (preferably 2) to attend meeting with Parish President when we present our financial data he requested-** (discussed above)

Commissioner Davis made a motion to accept the Chief’s report. Commissioner Risley seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

B) PMI Report

1. Human Resources

a) 2010-005 BOC Resolution- VFIS Renewal

Commissioner Rich made a motion to approve Resolution 2010-005. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

b) 2010-006 BOC Resolution- VFIS Supplemental Accident Renewal-

There was discussion regarding this coverage for the LaSAR group.

Commissioner Kingston made a motion not to approve Resolution 2010-006 relating to the renewal of the Voluntary Supplemental Accident & Sickness insurance coverage. Commissioner Risley seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously, with Chairman Kline in agreement.

2. Payroll

- a) **2009, 2008, 2007: Compensation Analysis by Employee-** Mr. Waniewski discussed the layout of the comparisons.

- b) 2009, 2008, 2007: Communications Compensation
- c) 2009, 2008, 2007: Accreditation Compensation Analysis

3. FRS (Firefighters' Retirement System)

- a) 2010 Projected ER Contribution rate: 21.50% (effective 7/1/10)- There was additional discussion on future contribution rates.
- b) FRS Back Pay Audit- pay off balance (outstanding)
- c) FRS 2006- Outstanding audit acknowledgement (filed as not in agreement with FRS determination)

4. VFIS Special Risk Insurance & LWCC

- a) VFIS Renewal Proposal: Premium reduction- 3.5% (\$10,000)
- b) VFIS Commercial Auto: Consent to rate- 3rd Annual Reduction
- c) VFIS Down payment: 25%

Mike Thiel gave an overview of the Accreditation process.

Mr. Waniewski presented a "snapshot" of the services provided by PMI

Commissioner Davis made a motion to accept the PMI report. Commissioner Risley seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

C) DiGiovanni & Associates, CPA's, L.L.C

Mr. DiGiovanni stated that "unofficially" it appears that we may owe 1.1 million on the FEMA CDL loans.

The financial report was discussed. Mr. DiGiovanni also discussed the future budget projections.

Commissioner Davis made a motion to approve the financial report. Commissioner Rich seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

D) Attorney's Report- Per Commissioner Risley's request, Attorney Troy Ingram identified the areas of work performed and provided details of what is involved with these areas:

- Millage
- Parcel Fee
- Advisement
- Litigation

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to accept the Attorney's report. Commissioner Rich seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Risley commented on the tension being directed at the Commissioners. She further stated that she doesn't think any of the Commissioners can say that they aren't proud that they are part of our organization or of the jobs done here. She commented on the questions that are being asked, from the public, and the need to gather more detailed information to answer these questions.

4/20/2010

Commissioner Davis made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Rich seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:42 pm.