

St. Tammany Fire Protection District No. 1

Board of Commissioners

Regular Meeting Minutes June 19, 2012

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m.

The pledge of allegiance and prayer were given.

Roll Call: Chairman Kline and Commissioners Rich, Risley, Kingston and Brackett were present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES-

Commissioner Risley made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 15, 2012 meeting. Commissioner Brackett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS- (none)

NEW BUSINESS -

A) Chief's Report-

a.) Years of Service Recognitions-

- Deputy Chief Bill McInnis- Retiring today with 31 years of service

b.) Fire Prevention Staffing Proposal- Chief Hess requested an amendment to the current operating budget. In 2011, a Resolution was adopted stating that as of July 1, 2012 the Fire Prevention Bureau would no longer be funded for current level staffing (2 members on each platoon, as well as a Chief). This Resolution would be reconfigured to accommodate a Chief and one Fire Prevention Officer for each platoon.

Chief Hess stated that due to sick leave and family leave within the division, there has been a struggle to meet minimum staffing. This has shown that which was projected when the issue first came up where the actual savings was looked into. Chief Hess stated that what we are currently spending, to make up for the vacancies, is in excess of that which would have been spent, due to upgrades and overtime.

Chief Hess stated that the services that we can deliver are better in the current configuration. He further stated that with the July 1 deadline, he cannot change the leave status of the employees that are out on sick leave, therefore still having to pay them.

Chief Hess stated that we are in a predicament of having to amend the budget for this year, to accommodate what we have in manpower. Chief Hess further stated that due to the fact that the overtime impact is higher than projected, he requested reconsideration of the July 1 decision. If amenable, the Board would have to suspend Resolution 2011-037.

(The floor was open for comment, with a two minute limit)

FF/ Paramedic Jason Gaubert- Jason stated that he is currently trying to earn a position as Inspector/ Investigator. As there has been discussion to reduce the force through attrition, Jason wanted to let the Board know what the Fire Prevention Division means to him. He stated that the Fire Prevention Division is a progressive division, where members need to be self- motivated and educated. While there is a structured 8 hour work day, these members are also subject to be called out for working fires, or investigations. As a member of suppression, he is not always up to par with

what Fire Prevention does all day, but knows that there are countless inspections done (i.e. annual and new construction). He stated that Fire Prevention employees work very hard, and are given little credit for their hard work. The daily inspections that are done are not only for the safety of business owners, but are also for the safety of suppression personnel that may have to fight a fire at that business.

Jason stated that while there may be suppression personnel that do not agree with him, what they fail to recognize is that if Fire Prevention is not there, it will fall back on suppression.

Jason stated that with the decision to reduce the division, sick leave has resulted, which has created a huge amount of overtime, proving that it is not in the best financial interest of the department. He feels that we should be the trend setters, and other departments can model themselves after our department.

Firefighter William Dekemel, Vice President of SFFA- Mr. Dekemel has requested support in overturning Resolution 2011-037, which would cut the Fire Prevention Bureau in half. This would result in a reduction of services that are currently provided, which are a vital part of our community (i.e. opening businesses, reopening businesses after disaster, public safety initiatives affecting thousands of children, ensuring public safety of commercial buildings and homes, and creating good will between the fire department and general public). This will affect the department negatively, as some employees may have to be demoted, or not promoted, and others will not have the opportunity to advance in their chosen field of work.

William further stated that the department has historically promoted progress, throughout the years, moving forward with every aspect of the fire service, including Fire Prevention, EMS, Training, education, etc. He stated that everyone has worked diligently to build a fire department that they have wanted to work in for their career.

As Vice President of the SFFA, William stated that the IAFF #2455 does not support any reduction of services that impact the public, or members, in a negative way. He requested support of the fire district, its members, and the public, by overturning the Resolution.

Robert Marquette- Mr. Marquette stated that for the past two years, he has been studying to be a Fire Investigator/ Fire Prevention Officer. He further stated that over the past four months, he has been in Temporary Appointment to relieve some of the burden in the division. He stated that the Board, as well as the public, knows what Fire Prevention does for the public; he went on to explain what he does for his brotherhood, stating that statistically, firemen die within five feet of an exit, due to exits being blocked, or the sign not being lit. These are things he insures are in compliance when doing inspections, to ensure Suppression safety.

Eric Dubuisson (owner of Slidell Cleaners)- Mr. Dubuisson stated that Fire Prevention knew where 300-400 lbs. of flammable liquid were as well as where the boilers were, in his building, due to annual inspections. He stated that he recently requested assistance from an inspection about a hood, upstairs, where he used to live, which is now commercial. Mr. Dubuisson thought he may have to put in a commercial kitchen, and would not be able to afford a commercial hood. The inspector advised that this hood would not be necessary. At the same time, the inspector hit the button on the exit sign, and it did not work due to a leaking battery.

Mr. Dubuisson stated that after Katrina, he and his wife decided not to move back into the business and to make it commercial. He had an architect draw up the plans, sent the plans to Baton Rouge and discussed the project with inspectors. The plans came back, from someone sitting in a Baton Rouge office that had never seen the building, with red ink all over the drawing. Chief Ricca spoke to the person in Baton Rouge and explained the situation and worked out all of the issues, without having to do all of the work.

Julie Watson- Julie stated that when she came to work here in 1998, she had been exposed to emergency services and other fire departments. She realized, very quickly, that our department had things no other departments had; Fire Prevention. This made a big difference in our turnaround times for business, etc. She also state that we have had fires where the Fire Prevention employees were closest and the first on the scene.

Vick Corso (Slidell contractor since 1990) - Mr. Corso stated that he did not realize all of the things the Fire Prevention does. He stated that he is presently dealing with a high hazardous storage warehouse and sees and Inspector at least once a week. He further stated that he does not see how anyone could cut these services.

Dave Kaufmann (builder, developer and property owner) - Mr. Kaufmann stated that the Fire Department works with him in many ways. As an investor, annual inspections are done for his rentals. As a contractor, you can pick up the phone and have an inspector pre-inspect a building, thus saving lots of money. Mr. Kaufmann stated that if we end up in a situation where it will take a week for an inspection, it can have an economic impact on our community. He further stated that he appreciates the services that have been provided to him.

John Smith (Chairman, East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce) - Mr. Smith stated that as Chairman, he frequently talks about the quality of life in the parish and the difference our agencies make in continuing to improve the quality of life. He stated that he is extremely comfortable with Fire Dist. #1 and the level of services provided. Mr. Smith presented a Resolution, on behalf of the Chamber, in support the Fire Prevention Bureau. He further stated that we need the Fire Prevention Bureau to make a difference in our community.

David Miceli (Reine Const.)- As a developer, Mr. Miceli stated that he feels he has a good working relationship with Fire Dist. #1 and the Inspectors. He stated that the Inspectors take a project from inception to completion by first doing a plan evaluation prior to construction and providing invaluable inspections. As a developer in other municipalities, an inspection must be booked 3-4 weeks in advance; and if something is done wrong, you have to file for a re-inspection and wait another 3-4 weeks. He further stated that the goal here is to get business open, thus saving time and money.

Joe France (Chief Building Inspector, City of Slidell) - Mr. France stated that he works with the Fire Prevention employees each day. He stated that these employees benefit the City by being an extra set of eyes in the evening and on weekends. He further stated that he can call the Fire Prevention Bureau at any time and save the citizens of the community time and money. Mr. France stated that there are many new developments and the buildings need walk thru's done constantly.

Louise Mace (Purple Armadillo, Business Owner)- Ms. Mace stated that she has attended most of the meetings in the past 16 months and the Board has never answered the question on why they want to cut Fire Prevention. She stated that unless you have tried to open a business, get an inspection, had a horrific fire, etc. you have no idea of the job that the Fire Prevention Bureau does. She further stated that we are going to have a building boom, and the Board wants to cut back Fire Prevention to raise the PIAL rating. Ms. Mace stated that if you don't have the businesses and the taxes, than you can kiss the rating goodbye because the insurance on businesses and housing is going to increase. She also stated that careful consideration should be given when wanting to cut a department that is an asset to the City.

Mayor Freddie Drennan- Mayor Drennan stated that the City and the Fire Department work together to help businesses. He also stated that we are doing things that are unheard of in other parishes. He further stated that the City and the Fire Department are praised for the work that is done when businesses come and both agencies meet and discuss the pre-building process. While Mayor Drennan stated that he understands budgets, it is his understanding that this will not impact the budget and urged the Board to keep moving forward.

Fred McDonald (citizen)- Mr. McDonald said that he has attended all meetings for the past 16 months and there has never been so many people that have come to speak. He also stated that no one is asking to get rid of the Fire Prevention Bureau; only to reduce it to a manageable number. He further stated that no other parish, in the state, has seven Fire Prevention Officers. While the Chief stated there would be a \$28,000.00 savings, Mr. McDonald stated that is hard numbers, and not inclusive of retirement, which is applicable when Fire Preventions Officers work mandatory overtime.

Mr. McDonald stated that over the past six months, he has not heard of an instance where we could not support our customers. He further stated that a reduction may result in a demotion; however, the Civil Service board would not allow that and the employee would be moved into a lateral position.

Mr. McDonald stated that there is a huge construction boom in West St. Tammany and they are doing it with less Fire Prevention Officers than us. Mr. McDonald stated that he is only asking to save a little bit of money, and the only way to do that is by starting with the first penny.

Deputy Chief David Kuhn (33 yrs. of service) - Deputy Chief Kuhn stated that he has seen the growth in the Fire Prevention Bureau from where it was, to where it is now. He further stated that the support duties that the division does, which affect him, have not been discussed. He stated that they provide better turnaround time in putting suppression back in service, as well as wait for the Fire Marshall to come down for an investigation. He stated that he supports the division in having seven members.

Fire Prevention Officer Van Joffrion- Inspection Joffrion stated that he was leaving copies of the Chamber Resolution, where thousands of business owners endorse the services that are currently provided. Additionally, the seven members talk to thousands of children to discuss fire safety issues, conduct building inspections and annual inspections, and attend pre-construction meetings. He also stated that the Fire Prevention Bureau represents the department on a weekly basis when attending meetings with the City regarding new projects.

Mr. Joffrion stated that the other copies that he has provided detail what Fire Prevention Officers do. He further stated that the reduction will not result in significant savings.

Mr. Joffrion thanked those in attendance and stated that while they were invited, none were asked to say anything in particular. He also stated that it should not be forgotten that over 80% of our constituents support our department.

Chief of Administration Chris Kaufmann- Chief Kaufmann recommend support of the proposal. He also stated that he worked in Fire Prevention when there was only one person on shift; therefore not getting vacation and having to work overtime. He further stated that he had a commitment to this community and to what needed to be done in the job that he committed to and took an oath in.

Chief Kaufmann stated that a vote was done, fifteen years ago, to put two people on each shift in the Fire Prevention Division, based on demand. He stated that the growth in the parish should be considered, not someone else's lack of progression in leadership. He further stated that we are here to put people in business, not out of business.

Operator Stan Leblanc- Operator Leblanc stated that when on duty and performing an annual inspection or performing public safety education, this cannot be done with only one Inspector. He further stated that services would need to be cut back.

Captain/Instructor Eric Abney- Mr. Abney stated that the Board does not know what it is like to wait on a truck for four hours, in order to maintain scene integrity, for the State Fire Marshall to show up. When Fire Prevention went to 24 hours shifts, suppression no longer had to wait; thus allowing for more public event coverage, etc. He further stated that the tax dollars are the city's

biggest drive, and Fire Prevention helps keep businesses open. He requested support of a seven member Fire Prevention Bureau.

Deputy Chief Bill McInnis- Deputy Chief McInnis reiterated what Captain Abney stated about having to remain on scene for scene integrity. When having to do this, this may cause delayed responses from other units. He further stated that what the Fire Prevention Division does for Suppression is immeasurable.

Deputy Chief McInnis stated that this generation of children is so much smarter when it comes to protecting themselves as a result of the public education done by Fire Prevention.

After discussions, Chairman Kline stated that the Chief requested that reconsideration be given to rescind the decision on restructuring the Fire Prevention Bureau.

Mr. Waniewski stated that a motion should be posted to rescind Resolution 2011-037.

Commissioner Rich made a motion to rescind Resolution 2011-037. Chairman Kline seconded the motion.

Commissioner Kingston stated that while most public safety education and building inspections are done during business hours, he would like to see the savings if someone were on call for the night shift.

Commissioner Risley inquired into how many personnel are qualified to be Fire Prevention Officers. Chief Hess Stated that two are qualified.

Commissioner Risley also inquired about Pre Fire Planning, a sub-category under Training for PIAL, and whether the Training Officers are doing the inspections, or is it strictly Fire Prevention. Chief Hess stated that Pre-Fire Plans are done by Suppression; as they are non-enforcement activities.

Commissioner Risley stated that she does not feel that any of the Commissioners are against Fire Prevention and that she has utmost respect for everyone in the department. She further stated that she feels that she has done her due diligence in trying to find another department, in surrounding states, with 24 hour shifts. Chief Kaufmann stated that St. Bernard does. Commissioner Risley stated that Dist. #12 and Mandeville have one Officer, and we are requesting seven. Chief Hess stated that he does not feel that it is only the department asking for this, but the business community as well.

Chief Hess stated that if he could make a compelling argument that we would see a benefit, financial or implementation of services, through reducing the force, there would be no discussion; it would have already been done.

Chief Kaufmann stated that a lot of the public education is done on weekends, and additionally, most fires happen after hours, usually early in the morning. He further stated that not only are we getting PIAL credit for a 24 hour employee, we are getting inspections, education and investigations with these employees.

Commissioner Rich reiterated Chief Hess' comment, stating that if ever there was a compelling business reason to change the structure, it would have been done. He further stated that an e-main, sent by Chairman Kline, summed up what the Board of Commissioners' job is; and he does not feel the need to be involved in the day to day operations.

Commissioner Rich commented on the significance of the members of the business community and the Chamber that attended and spoke.

Chairman Kline stated that he did send an e-mail to the Commissioners, and that he feels the Board's relationship should be on a corporate level. Chairman Kline stated, in his own opinion, the Fire

Prevention discussions, over the last six months, started on a personal level, with one of more Commissioners. He further stated that when he became a volunteer, in 1995, he had discussions regarding not having any fires, and his desire to fight fires. The Captain, Vince Coulon, told him that the reason we don't have as many fires is because of the good job done in Fire Prevention. Chairman Kline stated that this should be the primary mission of any Fire Department.

Chairman Kline called for the vote:

Rich: yea
Brackett: yea
Risley: nay
Kingston: nay
Kline: yea

The motion carried.

c.) **Fire Prevention Month End Reports-** Chief Kaufmann stated that monthly Fire Prevention reports will be submitted with the Fire Chief report

d.) **Bid Opening- Station 14**

- McDonald Construction \$ 68,515.00
- Barry S. Breaux & Assoc. \$ 49,182.00
- Owen's Construction \$ 51,000.00
- FMA Construction \$ 74,692.00
- CM Combs Construction \$ 77,000.00

Chief Kaufmann stated that quotes were received; however, they exceeded the amount that the public bid law allows, which prompted the public advertisement. This project is an addition to the living quarters. Chief Kaufmann further stated that this is budgeted under Station Renovation, with approximately \$40,000.00 to cover the project.

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to table the Station 14 bids. Commissioner Risley seconded the motion. The motion carried.

e.) **Decision on video taping of monthly BOC meetings-** Chief Kaufmann stated this this should be up for discussion on the Board level, in an effort to provide better audio. Chief Kaufmann further stated that he is seeking additional options regarding venue change, someone to video tape, etc.

f.) **EAP Contract Renewal**

Commissioner Risley made a motion to table Resolution 2012-013, Relating to the renewal of the Employee Assistance Program for District No.1. Commissioner Rich seconded the motion. The motion carried.

g.) **Training Facility Contract Renewal-** Chief Hess recommended that the Board approve the Renewal (with no changes, other than the separation of the Police Department), based on legal counsel review.

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to adopt Resolution 2012-012, Relating to the renewal of the Camp Villere "Occupy Land" agreement for District No.1, pending review of legal counsel. Commissioner Risley seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to accept the Chief's report. Commissioner Brackett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Commissioner Rich left the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

B) PMI Report-

1. Employee Benefits

2. Human Resource

- a.) 2011-008: BOC Resolution (Referred to Civil Service (OSE))
- b.) 2011-009: BOC Resolution (Referred to Civil Service (OSE))
- c.) 2012-009: BOC Resolution (LA Audit Compliance Questionnaire)

Commissioner Brackett made a motion to approve Resolution 2012-009, Relating to the approval of the Louisiana Audit Compliance Questionnaire. Commissioner Kingston seconded the motion. The motion carried.

- d.) 2012-010: BOC Resolution (ER Contributions to EE Benefits)

Commissioner Risley made a motion to approve Resolution 2012-010, Relating to the increase in employer contributions for employee benefits for District No.1. Commissioner Brackett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

- e.) 2012-011: BOC Resolution (Equipment Surplus- Fire Hose)

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to approve Resolution 2012-011, Relating to the surplus of inactive equipment. Commissioner Brackett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

- f.) 2012-012: BOC Resolution (Camp Villere- 20 year "occupy land" renewal agreement)
- g.) 2012-013: BOC Resolution (EAP Renewal)
- h.) LA Workforce Commission (UI) Reimbursement: \$9, 656.00- this money will go into the General Fund and can be transferred accordingly.

Mr. Waniewski stated that with regards to Fire Prevention, there is an outstanding, open, un- acted upon Resolution, 2011-013, which dealt with the formation of the Fire Prevention committee; as well as a consultant to review.

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to reconsider Resolution 2011-013. Commissioner Brackett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to terminate Resolution 2011-013. Commissioner Kline seconded the motion. The motion carried.

3. Payroll

- a.) District ER Contribution Inc (Major Medical Only)- 7/1/2012
- b.) FRS ER Contribution Inc: 23.25% to 24% (07/01/2012) Adjusted to 26% (Poverty status), as applicable

4. FRS (Firefighters Retirement System)

- a.) FRS Back Pay Audit- Pay off balance (Outstanding)
- b.) FRS 2006- Outstanding Audit Acknowledgement (Filed as not in agreement with FRS determination)

5. VFIS Special Risk Insurance & LWCC

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to accept the PMI report. Commissioner Brackett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

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

Mr. DiGiovanni discussed the financial report.

Chief Hess stated that money was set aside to cover the district's portion of the purchase of a LUCAS device, if awarded the grant; however, we were turned down for the grant.

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to accept the financial report. Commissioner Brackett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

D) Attorney's Report-

- a.) **Millage Advertisement-** The millage advertisement has been published to be voted on at the July 17 meeting, as required.

Commissioner Brackett made a motion to accept the Attorney's report. Commissioner Risley seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Commissioner Kingston made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Brackett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.