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**BLUFFTON TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICT  
FIRE COMMISSIONERS MEETING  
SPECIAL MEETING  
Thursday, January 3, 2013  
Bluffton Fire Station #35, Headquarters**

**MINUTES**

**Commissioner's Present:** Terry Reynolds, Jack Bennett, David Meeder, Mike Raymond, John Oram, Ed Olsen (attended via phone)

**Absent:** Bob Rogers (excused)

**Member's Present:** Barry Turner, John Thompson, Dan Wiltse, Bob Payne, Paul Boulware

**VIA Video Conferencing:** None

**Community Members:** Roberts Vaux (District's council), Gary Kubic (Beaufort County), Chris Kardish (Bluffton Today), Josh Gruber (Council for Beaufort County), Jerry Stuart (County Council Member), Stu Rodman (Beaufort County Council)

**Meeting called to order at 9:00 AM by Commissioner Reynolds**

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Prayer**

**Commission Roll Call**

- **Special Business:** Commissioner Reynolds noted the purpose of the special meeting was to review and approve the updated Colleton River/Palmetto Bluff ISO Rating Improvement Plan previously approved by the Commission on November 20, 2012. The changes are delaying the start up as well as reducing the cost during the Fiscal Year 2013. Commissioner Oram made a statement noting after the most recent ISO evaluation, certain areas of Colleton River and Palmetto Bluff had their rating reduced from a 3 that covers the Bluffton Township Fire District to a 10. Subsequent to the rating change, members of the Colleton River and Palmetto Bluff communities approached County Council members to gain assistance to have the ISO rating improved through some form of fire department response revision. County Council representations as well as representatives from Colleton River and Palmetto Bluff approached the Fire District and requested a plan be presented for an improvement in the response to bring the rating back to a 3. The Fire District formulated a plan and presented it to Beaufort County. Once presented the County requested changes be made to the implementation of the plan, requirements and funding process. At this time that has been done through the use of two specially appointed committees. Each community was presented with a plan that was discussed and what each party could do to help lower the ISO rating. After the revised plan is approved, it will be presented

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again to Beaufort County. Following his statement, Commissioner Oram made a motion to approve the revisions to the plan and that those revisions be based on the plan originally approved by the Commission on November 20, 2012 with the addition of the information provided to the Commission in late December 2012. Motion seconded by Commissioner Olsen. Commissioner Reynolds opened the floor for discussion. Commissioner Raymond pointed out that both communities have excellent fire protection coverage and not a protection problem but an insurance rating problem that needs to be corrected. Commissioner Raymond explained that the entire Bluffton Township Fire District could be affected by today's decisions and not just the two communities being discussed. Commissioner Raymond asked the Commission to turn to Page Two of the plan and referred to the Progress on Plan Implementation area, specifically "Insurance Service Office was asked to confirm the department plan for activating stations with two firefighters per shift beginning as soon as possible and increasing manning those stations to four firefighters." Commissioner Raymond believes that statement was misleading and believed the question was if a two manned stations would solve the ISO rating problem and that the answer was yes, the two manned stations would solve the insurance rating problem. A secondary question was if a four man station would have any effect and the answer was that it would make the 3 rating more solid. Commissioner Raymond wanted to be sure that it was clear that a two man station would solve the insurance rating problem. Commissioner Reynolds noted Addendum C to the document explained the reason for having four people at each station and that Chief Turner could explain in more detail if needed. Commissioner Raymond noted that regarding the insurance rating requirements, a two man station would solve that problem but he understood the additional concern of NFPA and OSHA requirements. Chief Turner confirmed ISO said a two person station would solve the rating problem but ISO doesn't dictate the number of people per NFPA or OSHA standards. Due the expansion of the current manpower, we are on the boarder of jeopardizing the current 3 rating but the four person crew would solidify the 3 rating for the District. Chief Turner noted that the District uses four people per station to meet national standards. Commissioner Raymond then asked the Commission to review Page 2, Item 2 specifically "Palmetto Bluff will deed to the Bluffton Township Fire District a five acre parcel to be used for a fire station." This is controlled by the Development Agreement. Per Palmetto Bluff's agreement, two five acre parcels to be used for municipal purposes that are deeded to the Town of Bluffton. Commissioner Reynolds noted this request was made at the last meeting with Palmetto Bluff and Palmetto Bluff and Crescent Resources are in process on this currently. Commissioner Raymond pointed out Item 3 in the plan "Palmetto Bluff will, on enactment of the budget addendum, providing for the temporary staffing, pay to the Bluffton Township Fire District's Impact Fee Fund \$500,000.00." was discussed in the last negotiating committee meeting but that Dallas Wood, Vice President of Development, did not have the authority to make that decision but would forward it up the chain of command to Crescent Resource Management but was not approved. Commissioner Reynolds asked if this was in writing and Commissioner Raymond noted that he has not been provided anything in writing at this time, just verbally. Commissioner Raymond moved to Item 4 "Palmetto Bluff will enter into an agreement with Bluffton Township Fire District acknowledging it's obligation to construct, on land deeded to the District, a station comparable to Station 30." Commissioner Raymond noted that this was proposed but an obligation controlled by the Development Agreement which is between Crescent Resources and the Town of Bluffton. Commissioner Raymond explained that he felt this would have no merit based on the Development Agreement stating a third party contract cannot be entered into. Commissioner

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Reynolds disagreed stating Palmetto Bluff has worked with Palmetto Bluff and specifically names Bluffton Township Fire District as providing fire protection for that community and notes land, the building and equipment will be provided in the Development Agreement. The District had to work outside the Development Agreement due to denied requests to be a part of it to try and solve the this problem. Commissioner Raymond noted the Agreement is between the Town of Bluffton and Crescent Resources and that the Town of Bluffton will designate the Bluffton Township Fire District to oversee the building of a fire station but he did not feel it was possible for the District to be part of the Development Agreement. Commissioner Reynolds noted that this was new information. Commissioner Olsen asked for the legal opinion of Mr. Roberts Vaux and Commissioner Reynolds suggested going through the rest of the objections and input from the Commission at this time. Commissioner Raymond noted those are his objections to the current document and wanted to make it clear that ISO said the rating problem could be solved with two man stations despite NFPA standards call for four man stations noting the only thing a two man station could not do is enter a burning structural fire. Fire service coverage will continue to come from Station 31 and Station 33 with the two man crews answering service calls. Commissioner Olsen asked about the safety of the two firefighters when responding to a structure fire. Commissioner Reynolds asked Commissioner Bennett to speak based on his past fire experience. Commissioner Bennett stated two firefighters is unacceptable as the two responding firefighters wouldn't be able to do much on the actual scene and provide a size up of the current situation. Commissioner Raymond explained that actual structure fires are a very small percentage of the calls and that solving this problem does not require hiring an additional 24 firefighters. Commissioner Raymond made a motion to amend the plan to 12 firefighters from 24 and would be substations of 31 and 33 and those officers can be rotated in and out of assignments as they are today. Commissioner Reynolds explained that an amendment cannot be amended because it's still on the floor. Commissioner Meeder believed the amendment could be made if the person who made the original motion accepted the amendment. Mr. Roberts Vaux agreed that a motion could be amended by the person who made the original motion if they accepted the amendment as well as by the person who seconded the original motion. If the person who made the original motion doesn't agree with the amendment to the original motion, a separate motion and vote will need to take place. Commissioner Reynolds asked for the specific amendment. Commissioner Raymond shared that his amendment is to revise the plan and instead of 24 man, 4 station contingents move to a 12 man, 2 station contingents to solve the ISO rating problem beginning following the same time line. Mr. Roberts Vaux pointed out that the ISO letter paragraph four specifically states there must be a minimum of five additional people per shift totaling 34 per shift. Commissioner Raymond added an overall contingent that meets the ISO standard. Commissioner Reynolds asked if Commissioner Oram would be willing to revise the original motion. Commissioner Oram explained he would not be willing to revise it based on past fire experience and studies on the number of people in a fire station. Commissioner Oram went on to explain that it would be irresponsible to the tax payers to have two people in a station to run service calls only. Commissioner Oram addressed responding to a fire stating that one person running the engine and one person running a hose line will not work while trying to fight a structure fire. Response time can be extended based on a number of factors including the possibility of getting into an accident when responding to a call as happened last year. Commissioner Bennett agreed with Commissioner Oram's feelings and beliefs about having two firefighters responding being unsafe. Chief Turner pointed out that criteria is only based on structural fires, not any of the other calls

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responded to. Commissioner Reynolds asked if there was a second to Commissioner Raymond's amendment to the original motion. There was no second so the amendment fails and discussion returns to the original motion by Commissioner Oram. Commissioner Meeder shared his understanding of the current situation which is that previously ISO accepted the unmanned stations that were not counted on this most recent inspection. Because of that, homeowners in Palmetto Bluff and Colleton River saw an increase in their homeowners insurance and approached the Governmental Affairs Committee who in turn approached the Fire District and Commission to come up with a recommendation to potentially solve the problem. Commissioner Meeder also pointed out that discussions with Palmetto Bluff had taken place previously and with the understanding there would be no additional cost to the Fire District or citizens of Bluffton. Two committees were set up to meet with Colleton River and Palmetto Bluff and because Commissioner Meeder was present at the Palmetto Bluff meetings, he noted items Palmetto Bluff was required to do under the Development Agreement and were willing to currently do such as donate land and purchase equipment as well as go above their current agreement and assist with temporary housing, utility costs, site work and other items. Commissioner Meeder continued that Palmetto Bluff was adamant that assistance with operating costs. Commissioner Meeder pointed out that he didn't have time to properly review the previous plan before having to vote on it making him wonder if other plans or options may solve the problem. His understanding was that the Commission was in negotiation with the two developments with their first negotiation back being they were not paying anything so the committees were asked to go back and get more participation from the developers before this changed and the committees were now tasked with getting them to sign off on the previous Development Agreement items as well as additional items such as temporary housing. Commissioner Meeder noted that no one approached the Government Affairs Committee stating the Bluffton Township Fire District was delivering poor service or had poor response times. Commissioner Meeder asked the commission how the commission arrived at a motion costing tax payers to support these stations when the last direction he could recall was having this not cost the District any money. Commissioner Reynolds explained that the money would not be for the long term station costs, but only for the interim costs of approximately \$300,000.00 per community. Commissioner Reynolds noted that both communities referred to Development Agreements that historically paid for capital items but not operating expenses. Commissioner Meeder stated that he believed only recommendations were requested at this time instead of only the one plan. Commissioner Reynolds explained that the Commission and District are trying to work closely with both communities to help reduce their ISO rating without getting in the way of development in either community. Commissioner Reynolds reminded everyone of the current revisions which are a later start date because of the time it takes to secure a temporary facility which reduces the overall cost. Commissioner Meeder asked for Commissioner Oram's motion to be tabled until proper options can be presented. Mr. Vaux asked Commissioner Oram if he would accept Commissioner Meeder's amendment. Commissioner Oram stated he would leave the motion as previously presented because he believes it addresses what the County asked the Commission to do which was present a plan to revise the ISO rating from a 10 to a 3 in those communities. There is a possibility to have more than one plan but based on the reactions of Colleton River and Palmetto Bluff being completely negative from the standpoint of providing any funds would be a waste of time for everyone involved. Commissioner Reynolds asked if there was a second to Commissioner Meeder's motion which failed for a second. Commissioner Reynolds asked for any other comments before holding a vote on the current motion.

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Commissioner Olsen made a motion to move for question. Commissioner Reynolds asked Commissioner Oram to restate the original motion which was accept the revised plan as it was given to the Commission on December 27 to be presented to the Governmental Affairs Committee at their next meeting. Motion passed with a four to two vote.

- **PUBLIC DISCUSSION:** Mr. Gary Kubic addressed the commissioner starting off by stating his comments have nothing to do with ISO or cause and effect it may have on Palmetto Bluff or Colleton River or on the mechanical requirements to deliver fire service as the Commission and County Council deem appropriate. Mr. Kubic explained the County is currently in a reassessment process and working to determine the new value of a mil as assessed by Beaufort County and the basic reassessment process. Mr. Kubic also gave insight on the budgeting process including how the roll forward and TIF figures are a part of the process. Mr. Kubic explained that he is willing to present the approved plan to the Governmental Affairs Committee at the next meeting as information only at this time with the expectation of a thirty to forty five day wait while the budgeting and roll forward processes and decisions are made.
- **ADJOURNMENT:** Commissioner Raymond made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Rogers and approved with a unanimous vote. Meeting was adjourned at 10:0 AM.

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