

**BLUFFTON TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS WORKSHOP
Thursday, March 14, 2017
Bluffton Fire Station #35, Headquarters**

MINUTES

Board Members Present: Mike Raymond, Joe Paolo, Thomas Mike, Elaine Lust

Members Present: John Thompson, Paul Boulware, Rick Cramer, Steve McKinley, Bob Payne, Pete Reid

Meeting called to order at 10:00 AM by Chairman Raymond.

Pledge of Allegiance

Board Member Roll Call

- **PUBLIC COMMENTS** – None
- **CHAIRMAN’S REMARKS** – None
- **MOSS CREEK EMERGENCY ACCESS ROAD:** Chief Thompson stated that Moss Creek has asked that we share the cost of an emergency access gate from Colleton River Plantation to Moss Creek to allow a second access for emergency vehicles. The gate was quoted at \$70,000, with \$35,000 being our cost. The gate would lower the response time from seven minutes to 4 minutes. The gate would also free up Station 33 for other potential emergencies. Other plantations may also benefit from emergency access gates, but none are planned at this time. Some Directors expressed concern of setting precedence in our paying a portion of gate fees. Chief Thompson thinks that we can negotiate with the Town to help pay for future emergency access gates. However, a line item will need to be added to the budget for gate development and upkeep. Newer developments require two access points, which would eliminate the need for these gates. Director Paolo suggested we set a cap of what we would contribute for access gates. However, Chairman Raymond stated that there are too many variables to set a flat amount. A straw poll was taken that \$35,000 be used to pay for the emergency access gate. The Directors were clear that they did not want to use the “50 percent” term as this may set precedence. A vote will be taken at the next meeting as well as a resolution that funding for any future gates will be determined separately.
- **FY2018 BUDGET PRESENTATION:** Chief Thompson credited Chief Boulware and Chief Cramer for putting together the 2018 budget proposal. He stated the County has not yet released any numbers or projected values. We do have issues that need to be discussed, namely staffing of the proposed Station 38 and additional PORS and SCRS requirements of 2-3%.
Chief Boulware stated that the County said we should receive their numbers by the end of the month. The FY2018 budget of \$14,032,311 is based on past revenue trends and current growth in the district. While it is an increase of \$1,242,434 from last year’s budget, no tax increase is being requested. A mil rate of 24.73 would be needed to support this budget. Chief Boulware referenced the large growth in new construction over the past few years. He also discussed the two major components of the budget, personnel costs and non-personnel costs. Personnel costs represent over 88% of the budget and include current personnel, personnel to be hired during FY2018, benefits, merit and promotional costs, longevity pay, cost of living increases, and possible health insurance increase costs. If we are successful in obtaining the SAFER grant, our personnel costs for the 6 new recruit firefighter positions would be decreased. Chairman Raymond asked if we are looking to build a station in the HH National Golf Course area on Bluffton Parkway. Chief Thompson stated that the district continues to monitor that area but there is no immediate plan of development as yet. The Hampton Parkway/Bluffton Parkway area is currently seeing lots of growth with the potential for much more, making Station 38 an immediate necessity. The Town is also looking at the development of Willow Run, a large parcel of ground across from Eagle’s Point. Fifteen new firefighters

will be hired to support the new Station 38. Hiring these personnel early will allow them to be trained and ready to join a crew while limiting OT costs.

The Fire District responds to medical calls most often. All firefighters must have EMT or paramedic certification. The district uses off-duty paramedic personnel for this training, costing the district \$12,000. A new position of assistant medical training officer would take care of the training, keep updated on new procedures, oversee certifications, and handle DHEC requirements. If we eventually qualify to transport, this person would be necessary. This would also allow in-house EMT classes, saving a substantial amount of money. When asked, Chief Thompson stated that this program is eventually leading to a combined Fire/EMS District. While a separate EMS facility had been proposed in the Pritchardville/Palmetto Bluff area, the plan seems to be in limbo. (Regarding service calls, the new Sun City general manager sides with the District as to how to solve that issue.)

The District is also looking to hire a Facility Maintenance Technician. There was much discussion as to the relevance of hiring this position as opposed to hiring outside sources. Currently, Chief McKinley and his staff are doing much of the repairs when they have time. We are still looking to maintain most of the County vehicles that are south of the Broad River.

The SC Legislature is ready to pass legislation to reform SCRC and PORS, retirement programs for state employees. This will cost the District to make up the differences in the state shortfall and it is only the first of several steps to come in the future.

Health Insurance should remain flat for the FY18, but a 4% increase has been added to the budget as a cautionary measure.

Non-personnel costs make up 11.17% of the FY2018 budget or \$1,568,599. These funds represent costs for training, facilities maintenance, utilities, supplies, vehicle costs, information technology, professional services, and capital improvement projects. A list of capital improvement projects was listed and discussed as to the merits and costs.

The projected FY2018 value is \$564,164 per one mil, an increase of 8% from FY 2017. These numbers are projections based on prior years' growth. The current debt service budget request (to pay on the bond) is approximately \$569,000. This total remains the same as last year. We are entering the third year of the 2015 General Obligation Bonds that paid for the fleet replacement, maintenance facility, and training facility. Bonds and impact fee funds will be used to support the Hampton Parkway Station 38 construction and its apparatus. Impact fees funds continue to grow. We are at the permitting stage of Colleton River Station 36 and will use impact fees for this construction. Future impact fees will be used for Callawassie Station 32 upgrades and refurbishment.

The general fund balance was increased by over \$600,000 in FY16, bringing the current balance to \$2,073,067. While we are still short of the Board's recommended reserve level, we should meet that level in FY21 with no additional millage increases. These numbers will help with future bond ratings. With the County TIF being paid off, general fund amounts will increase.

It is the recommendation of the Administration that the Board approve moving forward with the FY18 operating budget request in the amount of \$14,032,311 to be funded by tax revenues based upon a millage rate of 24.73 mils.

It is the recommendation of the Administration that the Board approve the FY17 debt service budget request in the amount of \$569,019 to be funded by tax revenues based upon a millage rate of 1.01 mils.

- **SECOND WORKSHOP:** Another workshop will possibly be scheduled after the County sends out its numbers at the end of March or beginning of April, prior to the scheduled April Board meeting.
- **ADJOURNMENT:** The workshop adjourned at 12:00. No vote or action was taken during the workshop.