



**Sanibel Fire & Rescue District  
Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes**

**DATE:** Wednesday July 12, 2023 @ 9:00 AM

**ATTENDEES:** Jerry Muench (Chairman)  
Bruce Cochran (Vice Chairman)  
Richard McCurry (Secretary Treasurer)

Kevin Barbot (Fire Chief)  
John DiMaria (Deputy Chief)  
Larry Williams (Fire Marshal)

Shane Grant (Lieutenant)  
Mike Martin (Lieutenant)  
Robert Wilkins (Lieutenant)  
Michael Tejeda (Firefighter)  
Edward Zarick (Firefighter) – via online

Jeff Pawul (Fire Chief, Captiva Island)

Tiffany Repecki (The Island Reporter)  
The general public

## **1. Meeting Called to Order**

Commissioner Muench opened the meeting at 9:00 AM. Commissioner Muench led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **2. Minutes from Previous Meetings**

### **I) June 21, 2023, Commission Meeting**

**A motion was made by Commissioner McCurry to accept the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cochrane. There was no discussion. The motion was approved unanimously.**

### **II) June 21, 2023, Budget Workshop**

**A motion was made by Commissioner Cochrane to accept the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McCurry. There was no discussion. The motion was approved unanimously.**

## **3. Pinning Ceremony for Deputy Chief John DiMaria and Lieutenant Shane Grant**

Chief Barbot welcomed and thanked everyone for being there. Chief Barbot praised John DiMaria's contributions and hard work, and he was sworn in as Deputy Fire Chief. The pin was received and applied by Deputy Chief DiMaria's wife and kids. Deputy Chief DiMaria was congratulated and applauded.

Deputy Chief DiMaria then gave an overview of the role of a Lieutenant, and Shane Grant was sworn in. The pin was received and applied by Lieutenant Grant's wife and son. Lieutenant Grant was congratulated and applauded.

## **4. Fire Marshal Williams' Report**

Fire Marshal Williams explained that fire plan reviews were continuing, with around 500 completed so far for the year, along with fire penetration and fire wall checks. Beachview Cottages were noted to be due to start rebuilding soon, with Fire Marshal Williams confirming that he had been working with them regarding vehicle access as well as building plans. It was noted that he was working with Island Water Association regarding fire hydrants, and that saltwater had caused a lot of damage to parts, leaving many already in need of replacement. Commissioner McCurry asked, how often do fire hydrants get tested? Fire Marshal Williams answered, Island Water Association handles maintenance on them while the District handles the fire flow tests. Commissioner McCurry asked, how much does it cost to replace one? The cost to replace a hydrant was confirmed to be around \$3,000, with four normally kept on hand, but Fire Marshal Williams noted that more parts and hydrants had been ordered in anticipation of future needs, adding that the plan was to not spend more than \$10,000 at the current time.

## **5. Deputy Chief DiMaria's Report**

### **I) Call Volume Review**

Call volume was noted to be down 51% from the previous year, having gone from 968 to around 492, although it was noted that there were currently fewer people on the island and there was likely to be a spike as construction started and more people returned.

### **II) Personnel Training**

Deputy Chief DiMaria confirmed that he and Doctor Abo had successfully rolled out Droperidol as an alternative to Ketamine, which had previously been noted to be in short supply, including training for all crews, which had also been recorded and made available online. It was also confirmed that all BLS cards and instructors would be renewed this month covering the next two years. It was explained that additional locations were being identified for various training purposes and noted that Bailey's would be starting demolition soon. Deputy Chief DiMaria identified the monthly medical training as being on pediatric seizures, with officers instructed to work with the medics and crews on the pediatric bag to ensure familiarity with its contents and use. It was noted that Fire Marshal Williams was taking crews on some of his inspections to promote a greater understanding of building construction and fire code requirements. Deputy Chief DiMaria explained that the engineer task-book had been rolled out, the boat operator course would be hosted soon, and that he had nearly completed the curriculum for an officer development program leading to the role of acting officer.

Commissioner Muench wondered how older buildings were being brought up to code. Fire Marshal Williams explained that he was requiring one-hour fire walls, fire collars, and fire caulk wherever reasonable as part of repair and rebuilding work, including a minimum requirement of a fire alarm for individuals to stay in their units overnight.

### **III) Community Involvement**

Regarding PR and PIO, Deputy Chief DiMaria highlighted the July 4th event at the rec center, which had been highly successful and received great feedback. It was noted that the date was yet to be set, but Deputy Chief DiMaria and Chief Barbot would be attending a Q&A at the community center rotary club, with a presentation to start informing the public of the current situation and future plans of the District. It was explained that CPR classes were continuing, with Sanctuary Golf Club, SCCF, and Sanibel School all seeking re-certification for staff. Deputy Chief DiMaria confirmed that the safety committee would be meeting on July 21st, addressing any safety concerns from the District at that time.

Commissioner McCurry highlighted that Chief Barbot had started off the year's road rally, and that he and Chief Barbot had attended the hurricane partners meeting with the city and local governments.

It was noted that the newly purchased Can-Am had been used in response to a traumatic injury reported on the beach and had been able to keep up with Engine 172 with no issues, enabling a quick and efficient recovery of the patient to the ambulance. It was added that the lights package was due to be attached on August 1st, along with brace handles in red to match the skid unit.

Fire Marshal Williams noted that there were plans in place to add EVAC systems to the gates accessing Wildlife Drive to allow quicker responses when the gates were closed.

## **6. Chief Barbot's Report**

### **I) District Financial Report**

Chief Barbot explained that expenditures were still being cut wherever possible, with thousands of dollars saved by operating with a reduced administrative staff and managing the workload between existing staff. It was noted that follow-ups were taking place with agencies assisting by cutting their fees, and that refund checks were overdue in a couple of places, but everything was being kept on top of, with Chief Barbot highlighting the work of Fire Marshal Williams, Administrative Assistant Fulkerson, and Deputy Chief DiMaria. It was confirmed that relationships were being built with elected officials, representatives, and senators who could promote the need for financial assistance to the state, with their emails forwarded to the Florida Department of Emergency Management, where an application for \$2 million loss of revenue was in progress, and preparations were being made to apply for a grant of money to reconstruct Station 172, with Chief Barbot noting that the latter might come as a 0% loan on any FEMA funding received. It was added that the grant closed on July 31st and clarified that the letters were to illustrate the most affected areas, which had also been highlighted by the property appraiser's report released on July 3rd, showing a 34.76% valuation drop for Sanibel Island, a 40% drop for Fort Myers Beach, and the next closest only a 6% drop. Chief Barbot also added that a lot of state official's aides did not appear to understand the concept of special taxing districts, with explanations required to highlight that funding and aid received by the City of Sanibel was not coming to Sanibel Fire and Rescue District and noted that the letters were also serving to remind officials of their pledges to aid in the District's recovery in the long term.

Following the Board's resolution to set up a new sub-account with Bank of the Islands for the reconstruction of Station 172, Chief Barbot confirmed that the account had been opened and the funds transferred. It was added that discussions were taking place with two different banking institutions regarding preparations for funding for construction services on Station 172 in order to minimize delays, with a viable option being a principal deferment for the first year buying some time to plan for 2025. Chief Barbot explained that he and Administrative Assistant Fulkerson had attended the FGFOA conference, which had provided a lot of helpful knowledge and information, as well as valuable contacts. It was confirmed that the financial audit had been completed by Grau and Associates, with the report received and submitted to the Auditor General and Florida Department of Financial Services. It was noted that the District's CPA would be on-site on Monday to assist with rectifying outstanding uncleared checks, to the sum of approximately \$90,000, and that the liabilities and equities account had some issues remaining, although Chief Barbot confirmed that the account had been used correctly since October 2022. It was explained that the District was looking to obtain higher interest yields from operating accounts due to significant balances in some operating and reserve accounts, with discussions taking place with Synovus and Bank of the Islands, and results anticipated by September.

Chief Barbot explained that he had met Executive Director Justin McBride at the FASD Conference in WCIND and confirmed that 50:50 grants, such as had previously been received to purchase the boat, were still available, with a view to replacing the fire pump. Subsequently, Justin McBride had confirmed to Deputy Chief DiMaria that if the replacement pump was identified, it could be funded 100%, following which quotes had been sourced and WCIND would be sending a check for about \$8,000 to the manufacturer. It was

confirmed that the new pump would be replaced by District personnel, and the old pump would be sent for reconstruction and retained as a spare. It was noted that there were multiple other grants for equipment and gear being pursued, which would be reported to the Board if awarded or issued positive feedback.

## **II) Community Disaster Loan**

Chief Barbot confirmed there were no updates, as state approval was still pending for the approximately \$1.5 million line of credit.

## **III) FEMA Status**

Chief Barbot confirmed that category Bs had been submitted, giving special thanks to Lieutenant Martin for his work on the project. Spreadsheets were confirmed to have been reviewed by state officials and Hagerty Consulting, with no issues expected in reimbursements. Station 172 was confirmed to be making headway and at the Federal CRC stage, with Chief Barbot estimating a potential \$3 million in obligated funds once estimates had been checked and agreed and suggesting that the outcome was likely to be known by September. Bi-weekly meetings with FEMA were noted to be continuing.

## **IV) District Administration and the Line of Duty Leadership**

Chief Barbot noted that the quarterly meeting had taken place on Monday, covering expectations on both sides, issues regarding training, station repairs, staffing, and budgeting, with the opportunity to highlight needs and ensure an accurate budget figure for September.

## **V) Station 172 Rebuild Status**

Chief Barbot explained that the footprint of the building had been shrunk by 1,500 square feet to reduce costs without losing the exterior aesthetics or critical functions, and that a geotactical report and land survey had been ordered. It was noted that Schenkel and Shultz and the District would need to go before the planning commission to request variance issuance, but that discussions were also taking place regarding possible ways to reduce the building height. Chief Barbot added that the preliminary cost estimator's report was pending and would provide the estimate of the structure's cost.

## **VI) Personnel Updates**

Chief Barbot noted there were no updates beyond the earlier pinning ceremony.

## **VII) Equipment Updates**

Chief Barbot explained that the Ladder 171 truck was still out of service, but the major work required to the engine was being covered by the warranty, and it was hoped that it would be back in service next week.

It was noted that the District had never had a fire safety inspection from the state, but there was one scheduled in the near future, which Captain Jackson would be assisting with, as it was a requirement for a number of state grants. Chief Barbot explained that Greg Suszek with U.S. Fish and Wildlife was currently

recommending against prescribed burns due to the mix of dry and wet areas and would be in touch with an update if that changed, however added that there had been some complaints and concerns raised around dead brush and debris behind the dunes on the Sanibel Church property. Chief Barbot noted that approval from the church was needed to access the land, and a state mitigation team to build a fire-line were being sought, but that it would not be a quick process.

### **VIII) Years of Service Update**

Lieutenant Martin was congratulated for sixteen years of service.

## **7. Business Agenda Items**

### **I) Public Accessibility of Meeting Videos and Online Voting**

The Board generally agreed that they did not have a problem with meeting videos being made available, since the meetings were a matter of public record and open to public attendance, and it was noted that it would provide a means of fact-checking or clarification if needed at a later date. Chief Barbot added that meetings permitting a Commissioner to attend online should also permit the public to attend the same way.

Chief Barbot explained that attorneys had been consulted regarding online votes from a Commissioner not in physical attendance, with confirmation received that a physical quorum was required to hold a meeting, being two of the three Commissioners present, and Commissioners advised only to permit online votes for non-contentious decisions. It was further confirmed that a resolution was not required to permit online voting.

**A motion was made by Commissioner McCurry to permit accessible online viewing of all meetings by staff and the public. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Muench. There was no discussion. The motion was approved unanimously.**

### **II) Fire Chief Annual Performance Review**

Commissioner McCurry noted that the Chief's contract stated a review could be done once annually in advance of the anniversary date of October 12th, and suggested it be done early enough to work any changes into the budget, with Commissioner Muench carrying out the review as a one-on-one in private. After some discussion regarding how the review could or should be carried out, it was concluded to be an ongoing process with issues highlighted as necessary, and there was wholehearted agreement by the Board that Chief Barbot was operating to their expectations and doing an exemplary job along with his staff.

### **III) Tentative Millage Rate for Fiscal Year 2023-24**

Chief Barbot stated that a memo had been received from the Property Appraiser's office with some concerns regarding the DR-420 form to be submitted by August 4th to the Department of Revenue, calculating millage and revenue based on the property tax valuation of the island, and the calculation of the current year's rollback rate. He explained that \$3 billion of deletion and property wipe-out, according to state statute, was included as part of the current year adjusted taxable value, despite not being taxable value, resulting in the DR-420 form's calculated rollback rate of 1.1061. Chief Barbot further explained that the calculated rate would result

in ad valorem revenue of \$4.6 million, commensurate with the 2008 budget. The Property Appraiser's office was noted to have estimated upwards of 100,000 properties impacted and over 25,000 structures destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, with over \$9.5 billion taken from the Lee County tax rolls following a previous upward growth of double digit increases county-wide, and to have stated that their interpretation of Florida Statute 200.065 was to ensure the rollback rate was exclusive of new constructions and deletions.

Chief Barbot clarified that the rollback rates he had used were no longer correct, then gave a presentation on the current year's budget and an overview of the projected budget for fiscal year 2023-24, reiterating the drop of 34.76% in property valuations from the current fiscal year, and noting that the ad valorem revenue for 2023-24 at the current rate would be \$5.2 million, down by \$2.7 million from the current year. Also highlighted was the remaining property tax relief liability balance, being the 20% ad valorem revenue refund of \$394,000, with the Department of Revenue having stated that they had \$35 million for refunds if applied for prior to October 1st, but no application process yet in place and no guarantee of receipt. Chief Barbot emphasized that the Property Tax Collector and Property Appraiser's offices would also take an approximately 4% cut of the ad valorem revenue in 2023-24. It was clarified that to obtain the same revenue as the current year, the Board would need to set a millage of 1.8753, which could be set as a maximum with the option to reduce it in the September meeting. Chief Barbot reviewed the other funding sources under consideration, including the Community Disaster Loan, state appropriations through the emergency grant of \$2 million, cash carried forward from current year savings, millage increase, and emergency reserves. Emergency reserves were noted to currently be at the agreed six months balance, with \$3.1 million emergency and operating reserves, \$1 million in the apparatus fund, and \$167,000 in the major medical and fire equipment fund. It was advised that the apparatus fund not be touched due to current replacement costs. Since 2008 millages were noted to have increased by 34% and the budget by 50.2%. Chief Barbot reiterated that to achieve the same funding as the previous year, the millage rate would have to be set at 1.8753.

Commissioner Muench wondered how those with destroyed or damaged properties would be affected. Chief Barbot admitted that he had similar concerns, and that while it had been confirmed there would be a property-by-property valuation amount by September, there were currently no reports to enable such a comparison. Commissioner Muench further wondered what the higher millage rate would mean in real terms. Chief Barbot showed a graph and chart of fire district tax amounts based on property values and millage rates, indicating an approximate increase of \$640, or 50%, on a \$1 million property. Commissioner Cochran wondered how the millage rate compared with other fire districts. Chief Barbot showed the millage figures obtained from the Property Appraiser's website, reiterating that other sources of funding could permit a decrease in the millage rate come September. Commissioner Cochran noted that there was the possibility of homeowners choosing to defer the repair or reconstruction of their homes for various reasons.

Captiva Chief Pawul explained that he had spoken to both the Property Appraiser and an attorney, and had been assured the calculation was correct, with taxes and millages calculated for the District, adding that they were going to be in the same position of having to explain the situation to homeowners. Chief Barbot confirmed that he would be sitting down with homeowners to explain the situation once the exact figures were known, and Commissioner McCurry wondered if Captiva Island had set their millage. Chief Pawul confirmed they had not set their millage, as he had not received a response to his inquiry at the time.

Chief Barbot added that he had spoken to the Board members, with Wednesday September 6th at 5:01 PM agreed as a tentative budget and millage hearing, and Wednesday September 20th at 5:01 PM as the final hearing. He also suggested moving the regular Board meeting to September 20th at 4:00 PM.

Deputy Chief DiMaria read **Resolution 071223** regarding the tentative millage rate for fiscal year 2023-24. By using the millage of 1.8753 which would exceed the rollback rate of 1.1061 mills, this would result in a tax percentage increase to residents of the District of 69.54%/ This resolution also instructed that the District complete the DR420 and the DR420-MMP and submit them to the County with the established millage rate of 1.8753 and set the hearing date for September 6th at 5:01 PM and the second and final hearing date for September 20th at 5:01 PM.

**A motion was made by Commissioner McCurry to adopt Resolution 071223. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Muench. There was no discussion. The motion was approved unanimously.**

#### **IV) RFP for Auditing Firms**

Chief Barbot explained that the five-year contract with Grau and Associates had expired, and previous discussions with the Board had indicated a desire to go to RFP and start obtaining proposals. Chief Barbot requested further input from the Board. Commissioner McCurry agreed to move forward with the decision to go to RFP for a new auditing firm. The Board agreed unanimously.

#### **8. Commissioner Items**

No items to discuss.

#### **9. Union Items**

No items to discuss.

#### **10. Public Input**

No public input.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 AM.

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Commissioner Jerry Muench



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Commissioner Bruce Cochrane



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Commissioner Richard McCurry