



## **Sanibel Fire & Rescue District Budget Workshop Minutes**

**DATE:** Wednesday, June 21, 2023 @ 10:00 AM

**ATTENDEES:** Jerry Muench (Chairman) – present via Microsoft Teams  
Bruce Cochrane (Vice Chairman)  
Richard McCurry (Secretary Treasurer)

Kevin Barbot (Fire Chief)  
John DiMaria (Deputy Chief)  
Larry Williams (Fire Marshal)  
Greta Fulkerson (Administrative Assistant)

Lieutenant Reitenbach  
Lieutenant Martin  
Firefighter Grant  
Firefighter Schelm  
Firefighter Felix  
Captain Tracy – present via Microsoft Teams  
Firefighter Zarick – present via Microsoft Teams  
Firefighter Bell – present via Microsoft Teams

Tiffany Repecki – The Island Reporter

Commissioner Cochrane opened the meeting at 10:00 AM. Commissioner Cochrane led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Cochrane to excuse Commissioner Muench from the June 21, 2023, Budget Workshop. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McCurry. There was no discussion. The motion was approved unanimously. Commissioner Muench was noted as being present virtually for the workshop.**

## **1. Chief Barbot's Budget Review**

### **I) Budget Overview**

Chief Barbot noted it was extremely early in the budgeting period and that the Board had until September to adopt the budget, but that the lasting impact of Hurricane Ian had made it more of a priority, and that they had already been working on it for the last two months. Chief Barbot presented a spreadsheet with preliminary figures for revenue, expenses and potential cutbacks.

### **II) Millage and Revenue**

Chief Barbot noted that property valuation taxable values on the island were at their lowest since 2014 and the budget at its lowest since 2016, while costs in 2023 were significantly higher. He stated that this year's estimated revenue of \$5.4 million would be further reduced to \$4.6 million by property appraiser fees and tax collector fees, as well as the deduction of the catastrophic event allowance. He noted that there were not yet any obligated funds or time frame set out for reimbursement of the latter, and that the property appraiser had made clear that at least 9,000 damaged structures had yet to be assessed, potentially bringing the number down further.

### **III) Personnel Services**

Chief Barbot noted that the largest expense was personnel services and that overtime was well over the budgeted amount, but that this was primarily due to the storm and some could be recouped. The Board agreed that it was not feasible to cut back on personnel services. Commissioner Muench emphasized that it was important that personnel be assured there would be no changes in their salaries, no freezing, and that they would take priority.

### **IV) Fire Chief's Life Insurance**

Commissioner McCurry queried a budget line item showing a life insurance expense of \$13,488.77 for the previous year with no amount specified for the current year. Chief Barbot clarified that the former Fire Chief's contract had specified that the District would pay for life insurance every October, which was not the case with Chief Barbot, and hence that line item would disappear effective October 1, 2023.

### **V) Other Personnel Expenses**

Commissioner McCurry queried a budget line item regarding a cancer bill expense of \$7,500 this year that was not present the previous year. Chief Barbot stated that he was unsure how it had been calculated last year,

but that he had spoken with Allen Durham at United Badge and fixed some incorrect numbers from the prior budget sheet and was awaiting an invoice that he expected to adjust that number down to below \$5,000. Commissioner McCurry also queried a budget item for personnel services labeled 'other', and Chief Barbot clarified that this was regarding a current unemployment claim against the District that could potentially be corrected next year.

**Actions:**

Chief Barbot to amend cancer bill line item on receipt of invoice from Allen Durham.

**VI) Legal Services**

Chief Barbot noted an unavoidable increase in fees for legal services this year due to the storm, consulting and new procurement policy, having already exceeded last year's \$30,000 and estimated to reach \$60,000 for the full year. He clarified that he expected some ongoing issues from the storm and other matters would require continued assistance.

**VII) Medical Director**

Commissioner McCurry asked for confirmation that the Medical Director had agreed to stay where he was. Chief Barbot confirmed that he had agreed, but that his contract renewal would be up in September of the current year and it was unclear whether he would agree to do the same for an additional year. Chief Barbot clarified that he was currently at around \$17,500 or \$18,500 and the budgeted \$25,000 was to allow for a possible increase.

**VIII) State Department Community Affairs**

Chief Barbot noted a small amount of \$175 budgeted for State Department Community Affairs, but that nothing had been spent this year and he planned to look into what that entailed.

**Actions:**

Chief Barbot to look into reasoning behind State Department Community Affairs budget.

**IX) Performance Review and Financial Audit**

Chief Barbot noted that they had previously budgeted a much larger amount for performance review, having expected the expense to be greater than it was. He explained that the performance review still needed to be completed, but that due to Hurricane Ian, the submission deadline had been extended by six months from the original date of the end of the month. He stated that the additional financial audit was completed and being reviewed by senior management at Grau & Associates, and a draft should be available by the end of the week to submit to the State by the end of the month.

**Actions:**

Performance Review to be completed by new extended deadline.

RFP for financial audit to go out after getting audit back.

Draft financial audit to be reviewed and submitted by end of the month.

**X) Annual Awards Banquet**

Chief Barbot raised the matter of whether the Board still wished to hold the awards banquet at the end of the year and stated that it could probably be done for a lot less than the allocated \$7,500. Commissioner McCurry

emphasized that it was important to get everyone together and recognize them and noted that costs had gone up substantially. It was agreed to leave the amount budgeted at \$7,500, with the option to move it to another category by a motion if unused.

#### **XI) Phones**

Chief Barbot stated that they had been able to reduce telephone fees by getting rid of unnecessary lines, and that some administrative staff had opted out of carrying two phones and agreed to just a cell phone allowance. Commissioner McCurry queried how this would mesh with the new law coming into effect regarding staff using personal phones and accessing TikTok among other sites. Chief Barbot clarified that if the personal devices were connected to their network, those websites and apps would be blocked, and noted the need to come up with a policy so staff were clear on not bypassing protective measures. He also clarified that one line item where no amount had been specified was still pending a discussion with Fire Marshal Williams regarding the impact of switching to 3G cell phone service.

#### **Actions:**

Chief Barbot to come up with policy regarding use of personal phones on the network.

Chief Barbot to speak with Fire Marshal Williams to clarify costs after switching to 3G.

#### **XII) Insurance, Repairs and Maintenance**

Chief Barbot raised the good news that FEMA would be covering deductibles, making it possible to break even on bringing Station 171 back to life. He explained that the budget for miscellaneous maintenance expenses had gone largely unused this year due to so many repairs being categorized as related to Hurricane Ian, but that this would not be the case moving forward, so a buffer for unforeseen expenses would still be needed.

#### **XIII) Equipment**

Chief Barbot noted that they were working on a couple of grants for firefighter PPE and safety equipment, but that it was still necessary to budget funds until those came to fruition. The issue of whether fire hydrants had needed additional maintenance after being covered in salt water was raised. Chief Barbot explained that one of the strike teams had taken care of the necessary maintenance of all the hydrants on the island. He noted that it would however be necessary to keep the hydrant budget higher this year to replenish the stock of hydrants available for replacements after six were put out of service by Hurricane Ian.

#### **XIV) Operating Expenditure Budget and Capital Improvement**

Chief Barbot stated that the overall operating expenditure budget had been brought down from last year's \$1.2 million to \$972,000. He noted that some capital improvement items had been left blank, as it would be up to the Board to decide how much of the budget to allocate to the Station 172 project. He also noted that they were working on a grant to fix an issue with the boat equipment.

#### **Actions:**

Chief Barbot to bring information on boat equipment grant to the Board once grant process comes to fruition.

#### **XV) Overall Total Expenditure**

Chief Barbot stated that the overall total expenditure was \$6.5 million, putting the budget deficit at \$1.9 million. He noted that they had an application in for a state grant that would balance the budget if it was

received. Commissioner McCurry raised the question of whether officers had been consulted regarding any needs not taken into account. Chief Barbot explained that he had consulted with Deputy Chief DiMaria regarding PPE and other matters, but there would need to be a team meeting to assess priorities.

**Actions:**

Team meeting to be held to discuss priorities early in July.

**XVI) Reserve Funds and State Funding**

Chief Barbot noted the presence of \$3 million in emergency reserves split across seven different buckets that the Board could amend and move around if necessary, but that would need to be replenished if tapped into. He also stated that it should be known by mid-August whether they would be getting State assistance, which the State hoped to disburse before the end of the fiscal year. Commissioner McCurry asked about backup plans in the event of failure to secure State funding. Chief Barbot referenced the reserves and that he expected the ending balance to be pretty substantial over previous years due to cost-saving measures, and that they would also be able to fall back on a community disaster loan of \$1.6 million once it was applied. He stated that he was not overly concerned and it was just a matter of starting to get answers from different agencies and making better-educated decisions.

**2. Commissioner Items**

No items to discuss.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:59 AM.

  
Commissioner Muench

  
Commissioner Cochrane

  
Commissioner McCurry