

Sanibel Fire & Rescue District

Tentative Budget Hearing – Fiscal Year 2026

Date & time: Wednesday, September 3, 2025 @ 5:01 PM

Location: Station 171 – 2351 Palm Ridge Road, Sanibel, FL 33957

Attendees: Chairman Jerry Muench / Vice Chairman Bruce Cochrane / Secretary Treasurer Richard McCurry / Fire Chief Kevin Barbot / Deputy Chief John DiMaria / Assistant Chief Chris Jackson / Administrative Assistant Greta Fulkerson / Island Reporter – Tiffany Repecki

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Muench. All stood to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Budget and Tentative Millage Presentation / Board Discussion

- The tentative millage rate for FY 2026 is set at **1.3915 mills**, representing a **19.44% increase** over the rollback rate of 1.1650.
- Projected proceeds from ad valorem taxes: **\$7,841,718**.
- **Comparison to Pre-Hurricane Ian (FY 2023):**
 - Pre-Ian property valuation: ~\$6.4 billion, millage 1.2365, revenue \$8,011,000.
 - Current valuation: \$5.64 billion, with \$7.8 million in projected revenue – about \$200,000 less than pre-Ian due to lower valuation despite higher millage.
- The District has retained similar staff and operational cost levels as before Hurricane Ian.
- FY 2024 saw a reduced millage due to a **\$2 million state grant** for personnel services, temporarily supplementing revenue.
- Island property valuation remains **\$800 million** below pre-Ian levels but has recovered significantly over the past year (**\$1.2 billion** valuation increase over FY 2025, driven by properties returning online).
- The real estate market has softened, but gradual island recovery is ongoing.
- The Sanibel district continues to have the lowest fire district millage in Lee County, nearly **one mill lower than neighbors**.
- **Major Budget Line Items and Increases:**

- Personnel Services – 11.55% increase over the prior year. Driven by agreed wage increases (collective bargaining), increased work comp costs, and a >2% rise in Florida State Retirement contributions.
 - Operating Expenditures – Approx. 12% increase, notably in apparatus maintenance due to coastal environmental damage. Challenges in estimating new/temporary facility utility costs, necessitating budget flexibility.
 - Capital Expenditures – **Only about a 16% increase; major projects include completing Station 172 and commencing Station 171 (approx. \$2M for Station 172; \$4M allocated for Station 171). Purchase of a new fire engine (\$1 million estimate; up from \$500,000 five years ago); will deplete apparatus reserve and require multi-year replenishment plan.**
- Total Expense for FY 2026: **\$14,304,875** (14.28% increase over amended FY 2025).
 - Carryforward Balance (including Station 172 allocations): **\$16,010,000**.
 - Total Budget for FY 2026: **\$28,125,694** (approx. 2% overall increase from prior year).
 - The unpredictable environment post-Ian, uncertain utility costs, and ongoing rebuilding complicate revenue/expense estimates.
 - Commitment to biannual budget amendments and responsive adjustments as more accurate data becomes available.

Board Discussion and Agreement: Unanimous agreement to proceed with the 1.3915 millage rate for protection and flexibility, with the ability to amend the budget as needed.

2. Public Input on Budget and Tentative Millage Presentation

No public input.

3. Resolution 25-015: Adopting the Tentative Millage Rate for Fiscal Year 2026

- Tentative millage rate for FY 2026 set at 1.3915 mills (19.44% increase over rollback).
- To generate **\$7,841,718** in ad valorem taxes.
- Scheduled final adoption: **September 16, 2025, at 5:01 PM.**

A motion was made by Commissioner Muench to approve Resolution 25-015 as read. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cochrane. There was no discussion. The motion was approved unanimously.

4. Resolution 25-016: Establishing a Tentative Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

- Tentative budget for FY 2026 adopted at \$28,125,694.
- Established date, time, and place for Final Budget Hearing: **September 16, 2025, at 5:01 PM at the Sanibel Fire & Rescue District, Station 171, 2351 Palm Ridge Road, Sanibel, FL 33957.**

A motion was made by Commissioner McCurry to approve Resolution 25-016 as read. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cochrane. There was no discussion. The motion was approved unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 PM.

Commissioner Jerry Muench



Commissioner Bruce Cochrane



Commissioner Richard McCurry