

WEST MANATEE FIRE & RESCUE DISTRICT COMMISSION RESILIENCY WORKSHOP

*Minutes of July 9, 2025
Administration Building*

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. with the following members present: Dana Tindall, Robert Bennett, Larry Jennis, Derrick Warner, and Billy Burke. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by a moment of silence.

REVIEW OF UPCOMING THREATS: Chief Rigney introduced Jennifer Hubbard, Warning Coordination Meteorologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Mrs. Hubbard presented a PowerPoint that outlined what the National Hurricane Center does, along with her role there in the Tampa Bay region. Mrs. Hubbard then highlighted trends that affect our area, like flooding rain, high winds, storm surge, and tornadoes. Mrs. Hubbard spoke on the hurricanes that affected our area last year and how different paths bring different challenges.

Chief Rigney then went on to reference other threats facing the District from our Strategic Plan, including funding, geographic area, legislative changes, natural disasters, and tax base.

REVIEW OF CURRENT RESPONSE: Deputy Chief (DC) Johnson presented on the guidelines of NFPA 1710, which establishes performance objectives in terms of response times, staffing, and deployment models.

REVIEW OF RESPONSE DATA: EMS Transport data: DC Johnson gave handouts to the board, including data requested from Manatee County EMS. He highlighted out-of-zone unit responses in 34216 and 34217 and noted very long response times if out of zone as well as surge data. Commissioner Bennett asked if the surge seconds were per truck or collective. DC Johnson stated they were collective. Commissioner Warner asked about the income EMS receives from transport. DC Johnson spoke on BLS and ALS tiers. They bill \$7M (2023), collecting \$4.5. Chief Rigney stated our district is most likely around \$3M. DC Johnson went on to address the call volume breakdown, stating the District volume increases by about 100 to 150 calls per year and noted that the increase in volume is shown in Station 3's zone. Chairman Burke asked what medical calls we do not run. DC Johnson answered that EMS runs the BLS calls, such as toe pain, etc, while WMFR runs Charlie, Delta, and Echo calls, or high-acuity calls. DC Johnson said they would prefer to run the BLS calls to clear up ambulances to respond faster to more serious calls. Chief Rigney noted the District taking over lift assists calls due to the time EMS was allotted to complete them.

CURRENT STAFFING: DC Johnson explained our current Operations staffing and compared it to NFPA 1710 staffing standards to which we are short by 5 personnel daily. Fire Marshal (FM) Kwiatkowski spoke on current Prevention Bureau staffing, highlighting productivity. FM Kwiatkowski spoke on how many hours the Bureau spends on different types of inspections, public education, etc. Explained that total hours are 14,136 hours and related that to the current 5 inspectors. There is a deficit of 6,961 hours.

ISLAND TO ISLAND COMPARISONS: DC Johnson compared WMFR to various island Districts that have similar geographics, population, and size. DC Johnson pointed out that the District is short on equipment, stations, and staffing on Anna Maria Island when compared to alike locations such as Treasure Island, Longboat Key, Fort Myers Beach, Madeira Beach, and Pinellas Suncoast. Staff and the Board discussed staffing in high times like Spring Break, 4th of July, etc. However, serious incidents are occurring on regular days as well when we do not plan for extra staffing. This causes the apparatus to go out of service to staff the fire boat and high second unit response times don't help. Commissioner Warner asked if the other islands have transport services available. DC Johnson stated they always have transport units available.

LEGISLATIVE BURDENS: Chief Rigney stated there are many legislative updates that effect the District or will soon noting they are necessary but unfunded by the state or federal government. Chief Rigney spoke on the Florida Cancer Benefit Bill, Performance Review, Senate Bill (SB) 1212, threats to property tax revenue, federal funding instability, and Executive Order 14239: Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness. Chief Rigney keyed in on SB 1212's 42-hour workweek recommendation and PFAS-free gear. Commissioner Jennis asked what the gear process will be. DC Johnson spoke on better cleaning practices and more use of dual-cert gear rather than bunker gear. Chief Rigney spoke on the current grant opportunities the District is pursuing, but stated all grant funding is currently unknown.

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AD VALOREM LEGAL FRAMEWORK: Chief Rigney stated that a 3.75 millage rate is the mandated max. He noted that 1 mill is \$18M in revenue and that a homeowner with a house valued at \$500,000 would pay \$500. The Board discussed where the District goes from here while progressively thinking ahead. Chief Rigney mentioned on previous attempts at ad valorem and the close votes that occurred in 2004. Chief Rigney went on to speak about a possible timeline, noting a March special election or being on the August or September ballots. Chief Rigney explained that the Board would need to adopt a referendum resolution and a 90-day notice to the Supervisor of Elections is required for a special election.

Commissioner Jennis said he thought this Workshop would include more of what the District wants to do and a more detailed cost. DC Johnson estimated it would cost \$4 to \$5 million to accommodate a 42-hour work week and roughly \$4.8M to staff 6 more people per 4 shifts. Bureau staff, administrative staff, and transport also need to be factored in. DC Johnson stated 1 mill would get us \$18 million more revenue. He also noted that the system couldn't handle that much hiring and onboarding at once so the plan would be to start low then raise as more onboarding occurs, given the lessons learned from the last large hiring. Commissioner Bennett asked if we can maintain our current level of service with non-ad valorem or if we are getting to that point where we need to find more funds. Chief Rigney said the years of 0s and 1% didn't help, we may have been in a different spot if we had gone to the max PIG the whole time. Chief Rigney stated that the burden falls on business owners, but affects very few residents who have been here for a long time because they haven't had their property appraised in a long time. Inspector Price spoke on the ad-valorem process she experienced with NPPFD.

COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS: Commissioner Tindall praised the presentation as thorough and aligned with the District's future needs. Commissioner Bennett thanked staff for answering questions, noted non-ad valorem may not be the best option, supported a phased approach, and commended the department's growth. Commissioner Warner agreed with Bennett, stressed the importance of future planning, and praised Inspector Price's presentation. Commissioner Jennis expressed disappointment with the lack of detail and Board discussion on individual initiatives, raised concerns about tax impacts, special elections, and timing, and urged a careful approach, noting the District has consistently responded adequately, including during hurricanes. Commissioner Burke thanked staff and Inspector Price, emphasized community education, noted the current tax base is insufficient, acknowledged Jennis' concerns, and expressed confidence in the District's ability to find solutions.

NEXT MEETING: Regular Commission Meeting on Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at the Administration building.

ADJOURNMENT: Chairman Burke adjourned the meeting at 12:20 p.m.



Chairman



Secretary

