WEST MANATEE FIRE & RESCUE DISTRICT COMMISSION
BUDGET WORKSHOP

Minutes of April 15, 2025
Administration Building

The workshop began at 5:10 p.m. with the following members present: Larry Jennis, Robert Bennett, Dana Tindall, Billy Burke, and Derrick Warner.

Chief Rigney welcomed everyone. Chief Rigney then gave the floor to Finance Clerk (FC) Larson.

FC Larson went through the mid-year budget review, stating most revenue and expenses are right on target. Chief Rigney stated the District is expecting FEMA and FDEM reimbursements of about $500,000 for hurricanes Helene and Milton. FC Larson stated that the overtime budget is exceeded, however, a lot of that will come back in reimbursements from FEMA. FC Larson also noted insurance was slightly high due to having to obtain flood insurance. Commissioner Jennis asked about accounting services and legal services. Chief Rigney answered that the accounting services budget is solely for the annual financial audit, and the legal services are for the labor and board attorneys, as well as current litigation. Chief Rigney stated the legal services budget was $75,000 this year due to litigation, but it is typically $25,000. FC Larson continued to speak on expenses, which are currently on track.

FC Larson went on to explain the commercial and residential assessment comparisons. When using McDonald's as the parameter for the commercial rate comparison, the chart showed WMFR is sitting above North River, but below Cedar Hammock, Southern Manatee, Englewood, and East Manatee. FC Larson noted North River Fire District will be going ad valorem next tax year. The residential rate chart shows WMFR below most, including Southern Manatee, Fort Myers Beach, Cedar Hammock, and East Manatee, but above Englewood and North River. Commissioner Warner asked where TPLEs fall into that to which Chief Rigney answered on the commercial sheet. Chief Rigney answered that TPLEs would fall into the commercial category. Commissioner Bennett spoke on the large differences between our assessments and the other Districts with ad valorem assessments.

Deputy Chief (DC) Johnson reported that 18 members are nearing FLUSAR specialist certification and outlined the technical training involved. He noted WMFR's upgrade to dual-certification gear for all line personnel, which is safer for training use, and highlighted increases in Operations and Prevention staffing, improvements in internal and external communications, and participation on various committees. DC Johnson stated that two new engines will arrive in November and December, and that enough hose has been procured for them and the current apparatus. DC Johnson spoke on marine operations and zones. DC Johnson mentioned relationships and increased communications with the City of Bradenton and North River through the LTRT 636 and with Blake Hospital through Training Chief Tuttle. In response to a question from Commissioner Jennis, he explained the county's two USAR teams, noting WMFR is on the deployable one. DC Johnson then noted his and Chief Rigney's participation on the county IMT team. DC Johnson moved on to speaking about the future of the District and discussed the county's massive growth, the impact on District operations, and noted one million annual visitors to the island. He stated the Cortez Bridge project will further increase traffic and emphasized the importance of resiliency planning. DC Johnson spoke on other threats like flooding and high tides, and how they affect future response. DC Johnson also commended the Prevention Bureau's management of TPLEs. Commissioner Burke asked about the bridge's completion date, and DC Johnson responded that it is expected by 2027. Chief Rigney noted the continued increase in TPLE activity.

Chief Rigney began his presentation on Operating Expenses for the next two years. Chief Rigney stated the Personal Income Growth (PIG) rate is 7.52% and that this budget is based on a 7.5% increase. Chief Rigney expressed his two main goals for personnel are to add an inspector, considering the increase from 3,000 to 4,330 TPLEs, and the addition of a training officer position. The personnel services budget would need to increase by $1 M to accommodate the new positions and the current contract. Commissioner salaries were doubled due to the honorarium increase, which also includes the equivalent Chaplain's pay. Chief Rigney then moved on to Maintenance and Repair. Chief Rigney spoke on the education budget decreasing for paramedic school, USAR training, and college courses. Chief Rigney then noted that Legal Services is likely to go down due to the current litigation. Chief Rigney stated that medical expenses will increase because chest x-rays are required for physicals next year.

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Chief Rigney moved on to explaining Capital Outlay items, including a FLIR Boat Thermal Imager, two new engines with supplies, three vehicles with high water capabilities, two portable radios, and a side-by-side. Chief Rigney spoke about the benefits of that type of vehicle and touched on an MOU with the county and marine rescue, which would include similar equipment usage.

Chief Rigney began speaking about the Assigned Fund Balance first noting that this number will change. Chief Rigney stated there will be about a $700,000 carryover. Chief Rigney stated leave liability was increased due to multiple employees nearing their retirement mark. Chief Rigney spoke on Restricted Funds from impact fees. Chief Rigney specified that those funds could be put towards a POD – Point of Distribution – on the WMFR Administrative Building Property.

Chief Rigney went on to Vehicle Capital, reviewing the current fleet for replacement timelines. Chief Rigney noted the extra usage of reserve engines recently. For that reason, he stated that after the twin-engine delivery, only one reserve engine will be designated as surplus equipment.

Chief Rigney went through the Revenue tab, stating that it reflects a 7.5% increase.

Chief Rigney moved on to Revenue Changes.

Lastly, Chief Rigney went into the Rate Options tab, which compares different rate options. He stated his recommendation is a 7.5% assessment rate increase and explained that it equates to roughly a $28 increase for an average-sized residential home and a $63 increase for average commercial properties in our District.

Chief Rigney reminded the Board that the Workshop is also included on the Agenda in New Business, and his preference is to hold the rate direction until the regular meeting.

Chairman Burke adjourned the meeting at 5:58 p.m.

William A. Burke, III
Chairman

Secretary