

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING  
**ALVA FIRE CONTROL & RESCUE SERVICE DISTRICT**  
2660 STYLES ROAD, ALVA, FLORIDA 33920  
DATE: SEPTEMBER 09, 2024

**Call to Order**

Chairman Crittenden convened the regular monthly meeting of the Alva Fire Control & Rescue Service District at 6:39 PM, September 09, 2024. There were sufficient Board members present to establish a quorum.

**Commissioners in Attendance**

Adam Crittenden  
Henry Grant Fichter  
Richard “Dick” Spence  
Darren Watkins  
Paul F. Meloy, Jr.

**Also in Attendance**

Jean P. Etcheverry, Chief (via speaker phone)  
Sunny Sipes, Finance Manager  
2-District Firefighters  
1-District Volunteer  
Pastor Paul Cords

**Pledge of Allegiance / Moment of Silence / Prayer**

Prayer Performed by Pastor Paul Cords

**Presentation of Awards & Acknowledgments**

Sunny Sipes wished District Engineer, Matthew Richards, a Happy Birthday.

**Approval of the August 01, 2024 Special Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Fichter moved to approve the minutes of the, August 01, 2024, special meeting. Commissioner Spence seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous and the motion passed.

**Approval of the August 12, 2024 Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Watkins moved to approve the minutes of the, August 12, 2024, regular monthly meeting. Commissioner Fichter seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous and the motion passed.

**Approval of the Financial Data from July 2024**

Finance Manager, Sunny Sipes, detailed District income and expenditures (copy attached hereto).

Commissioner Fichter moved to approve the financial data from August 2024. Commissioner Meloy seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous and the motion passed.

**Public Input on Business**

None

**New Business**

➤ **Chief's Report**

Chief Etcheverry reported the following:

- ✓ Stated that he was still not feeling well so he decided to join the meeting via cellular phone.
- ✓ Wished Matthew Richards a Happy Birthday.
- ✓ Lightning Wireless has ordered all lighting for R-121.
- ✓ All engine and tanker annual pump tests were completed.

- ✓ Annual hose testing is scheduled to be completed next month at the Fort Myers Shores Fire Department.

Commissioner Fichter moved to accept Chief Etcheverry's Chief's Report. Commissioner Spence seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous and the motion passed.

- Finance Manager, Sunny Sipes, presented the Board with the VFIS proposals for the Commercial Portfolio, Automotive and Liability policy renewals for FY end 09/30/25.
  - ✓ She explained that higher deductible revisions were explored and they did not benefit the District.

Commissioner Watkins made a motion to approve the VFIS proposals for the District's Commercial Portfolio, Automotive and Liability policy renewals for FY end 09/30/25 (copy attached hereto). This motion was seconded by Commissioner Fichter and unanimously approved.

- Finance Manager, Sunny Sipes, presented the Board with the PGIT Workman's Compensation proposal for FY end 09/30/25.
  - ✓ She explained that the District will see a minor increase in premiums due to a slight increase in the District's MOD rating.
  - ✓ Premiums approximately \$25,500 annually.

Commissioner Fichter made a motion to approve the proposal from PGIT for the District's Workman's Compensation coverage for FY end 09/30/25 (copy attached hereto). This motion was seconded by Commissioner Watkins and approved.

- The Board was presented with the Board of Commissioner meeting dates for FY 2024-25.

Commissioner Watkins made a motion to approve the monthly meeting dates for FY 2024-25. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Crittenden and the motion passed.

- Approval to post the FY 2024-25 meeting dates in the Fort Myers News-Press was presented.

Commissioner Watkins made a motion to post the Board of Commissioner meeting dates for FY 2024-25 in the Fort Myers News-Press. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Crittenden and the motion passed.

- Discussion ensued on the lease payoff balance, of Engine 121, through Leasing II.
  - ✓ Sipes informed that Board that the payoff balance, current through September 20, 2024, was \$137,409.39.
  - ✓ She stated that the funds will be disbursed from the District's Future Engine Assigned Funds account.

Commissioner Spence made a motion to payoff the lease balance of Engine 121, through Leasing II on or before September 20, 2024, in the amount of \$137,409.39. Commissioner Watkins seconded this motion. The vote was unanimous and the motion passed.

- Sipes presented the Board with Resolution #24.09.03 concerning the GASB Fund Balance Policy revisions for FY end 09/30/24.
  - ✓ Modifications reflect discussion from the Tentative Hearing and moving possible carryovers in the amount of \$117,600. These amounts are as follows:

- ✓ \$50,000 to future engines, \$5,600 to radios, \$4,800 to air packs, \$2,600 to cascade system, \$4,600 to command units and \$50,000 to future brush trucks.
- ✓ Sipes also stated that \$150,000 will be moved to the Assigned Funds account for operational revenues used in November/December of 2024.
- ✓ Accumulated interest in this account was considered in transfer and assigned per Resolution designations.

Commissioner Watkins made a motion to approve Resolution #24.09.03 concerning the GASB Fund Balance revisions for FY end 09/30/24 (copy attached hereto). This motion was seconded by Commissioner Fichter and unanimously approved.

### **Old Business**

- Discussion ensued on the Chief's selection process including the terms of Chief Etcheverry's employment agreement.
  - ✓ Commissioner Fichter distributed documents, related to the Chief's selection process, that were devised in conjunction with Attorney Richard Pringle.
  - ✓ He stated that these documents included an application process, job description, professional and educational experience requirements and goals for this position. The documents also include a sample of the media postings.
  - ✓ Fichter called to have a posting date approved. He also stated that a salary range will also have to be approved by Commissioners.
  - ✓ Fichter stated that the position can be posted in the Fort Myers News-Press, Lee County Fire Association website, Lee County Fire Academy website, Florida Fire Chief's website or the National Fire Chief's website. He stated that due to the timeliness of filling this position, website postings will streamline the process. He believed that in order to post this position by Thursday, the FL Fire Chief's website, the Lee County Fire Association and the Lee County Fire Academy would be most efficient. Stated that a Special Meeting could be scheduled prior to the November meeting in order to discuss the applicants, interview and make a decision.
  - ✓ Fichter reminded the Board that Chief Etcheverry's contract concludes on November 07, 2024. He also hopes that he will re-apply for this position. He also believes that it is proper for the Board to give him notice should they make an alternate decision for this position. He stated that a contract extension is possible, and could be discussed, in order to provide stability to Chief Etcheverry.
  - ✓ Discussion of dates and process ensued.
  - ✓ Commissioner Spence voiced his concern as to this process since Chief Etcheverry was not being "fired". He is concerned with this decision especially the possibility of leaving the District without a Chief.
  - ✓ Fichter voiced his intentions and stated that the Chief's contract was for a 1-year term. He feels that the "cleanest" way for the Board to move forward and serve the community without conflict would be to see who is available to the District in regards to this position. He is hoping that Chief Etcheverry is open to considering this position once again.
  - ✓ Spence voiced his concern with Commissioner's private discussions with Union members going "behind the back of the Board" in regards to this topic.
  - ✓ Commissioner Watkins stated that he would talk to members if they reached out to him. He stated that he called no one.
  - ✓ Sipes stated that any conversations or written correspondence, using the Board members position or title to persuade one's decision on District topics, must be discussed in a public setting and first approved by the Board per Florida Statutes. Any violation of these Statutes are viewable by the State of Florida Commission on Ethics.

- ✓ Spence believes that Chief Etcheverry should be offered a contract renewal for 1-3 years as he meets all qualifications and has experience with the District. He stated that due to current and ongoing District employee issues, he believes that other's dysfunctions are unfairly affecting Chief Etcheverry.
- ✓ Commissioner Fichter feels his duty to the tax payers is to be sure that the District has a strong leader and he is very supportive of a competitive selection process for any position.
- ✓ Commissioner Meloy stated that he supports Chief Etcheverry and feels that he has accomplished all that the Board has asked of him. He would like to see Etcheverry's contract extended.
- ✓ Commissioner Watkins stated that he would like to proceed with the process that he wanted to see take place a year ago. He stated his concern with the turnover at the department.
- ✓ Spence stated that turnover at this District, with reduced funds for salaries, cannot be blamed on the Chief.
- ✓ Commissioner Fichter inquired with Etcheverry if he would apply for this position should the Board move forward with the selection process?
- ✓ Chief Etcheverry stated that the discussion leads to putting him in the same situation that he is currently in. The one year proposal would lead to this same discussion next year. Why would he apply to put himself in that same situation. He believes that he greatly improved the District and created value to District employees. This discussion takes away the value the he has provided to the Alva Fire District. He is not going to wait until November 7<sup>th</sup> to make a decision about his future. His lease is up on November 1<sup>st</sup> and he should not be expected to wait for the Board's decision. He stated that the previous one year contract was acceptable because his wife was terminally ill and he was unknowing of future occurrences. He stated that the term was definitely an obligation that he could complete. He informed the Board that over the last few weeks, employee moral is very good. He stated that individuals, especially when on different shifts, can influence moral as a whole in a small department; stating that it's important to get to the bottom of what or who is creating this divide.
- ✓ Commissioner Fichter inquired if anyone has left the department since he was in this position?
- ✓ Etcheverry stated none. He did state that he terminated one employee prior to the end of his Probationary Period.
- ✓ Commissioner Fichter inquired if he had stability and employment for an extended period, would he consider applying for this position?
- ✓ Etcheverry stated that he thought that was what the one year contract period was for. He stated that employees, along with himself, need stability. He stated that the Board needs to figure out this process. He did relay that there is a possibility that no one will apply for the position leaving the District with no leadership. He doesn't understand that if the Board is satisfied with his actions and encourages him to re-apply, why this process is taking place.
- ✓ Fichter stated that he wants the Chief to stay but wants to follow a process that is satisfactory for the District.
- ✓ Meloy stated that "if he is good enough for the job, why are they not renewing his contract?"
- ✓ Commissioner Watkins wants to proceed with this process and get the job posted in the next couple of days.
- ✓ Sipes inquired with the Board that should they remove the review process that was proven manipulated and slanderous, from this process, would they still be considering his possible replacement? She stated that Chief Etcheverry has listened to fabricated statements about him and his performance and has acted

professionally with fear that defending himself would create grounds for termination. She reminded the Board of his two page accomplishments that were sustained in a short six month period. She feels that he has succeeded in everything that he as been asked to do by the Board.

- ✓ Spence feels that the review process was “taken to something that it was not meant to be”.

Meloy made a motion to extend Chief Etcheverry’s contract for a three year period. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Spence. Commissioners Crittenden, Watkins and Fichter voted “nay”. Motion denied.

- ✓ Commissioner Fichter feels that it is his duty to the citizens of the District to proceed with this process and encourages Chief Etcheverry to apply for the Chief’s position. He believes that the advertisements should be placed this week on September 12, 2024, given a full 28-day listing and a deadline of October 10, 2024. Fichter asked the Board to give him the right to schedule a Special Meeting, on or around October 23, 2024, for the Board to go over the submitted applications. He stated that Chief Etcheverry’s employment contract should be pushed out, to February 7, 2025, in order to allow him to prepare for his future whether with the District or not.
- ✓ Commissioner Watkins stated that a letter from Chief Etcheverry, relaying his interest in this position, would suffice in replacement of the fully required application since these items are on file with the District.
- ✓ Commissioner Fichter stated that he should respond as other applicants are required.
- ✓ Commissioner Spence relayed his opinion that all applications should be submitted to Sipes then distributed to Commissioners in order to conserve attorney fees.
- ✓ Fichter stated that he believed there is a legal process that needs to be followed in order to vet the applications. He also feels that the online advertisements will suffice for this open position.

Commissioner Watkins made a motion to approve the listing of the Chief’s position per the dates discussed above. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Fichter. Commissioner Crittenden voted “yay” and Commissioner’s Spence and Meloy voted “nay”.

- ✓ Pastor Paul Cords inquired with the Board if Chief Etcheverry meets all qualifications for the the position that he currently holds?
- ✓ Board members stated, “yes”.
- ✓ Pastor Cords then read a biblical verse and encouraged the Board to find unity amongst themselves. He stated that “a house divided will not stand” and will create more division in the department if the Board cannot find unity.

Commissioner Fichter made a motion to extend Chief Etcheverry’s employment contract to February 7, 2025. Commissioner Watkins seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

- ✓ Commissioner Fichter asked for the Board’s approval to work with Attorney Pringle in moving this process forward as discussed as well as scheduling any necessary Special Meetings.
- ✓ Commissioner Spence asked Fichter to also have Attorney Pringle forward the submitted applications to Commissioners as they arrive. Fichter stated, “yes”.

Commissioner Watkins made a motion to give Commissioner Fichter approval to continue with this process. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Spence and passed.

## **Union Report**

None

## **Volunteer / Public Comments**

James Barritt, Volunteer/Support Coordinator

- Stated the District now has 14-active Volunteers.
- Informed the Board that the Volunteer meetings are evolving.
- Mr. Barritt made a public comment: He stated that he believes moral is 90% on the employees. The Chief can certainly help, but he believes moral is a choice by each individual. He is thankful that he had time in the office, while on light duty, to see the administrative side of the industry. This is an opportunity that most Firefighters do not have. He stated that the moral over the last couple of months has been great. When he compares that to when he was first hired by the District, it is a drastic improvement. He stated that he appreciates Commissioner Fichter's dedication to the taxpayers in developing this process, but as a Firefighter, he thinks about the possibility of not having a Chief. He hopes that Chief Etcheverry applies and believes that he is the right fit for the position. However, if he chooses not to apply, the thought of not having a Chief concerns him greatly. He stated that Chief Etcheverry is aware of where he can improve, they know his dedication to the department and they can communicate with him. The next individual may not work that way. He also stated to whoever went out and poisoned the community with negative talk, "shame on them". He has seen first hand that every decision Chief Etcheverry makes is what is good for the District and its staff. He also stated that he wished more than two Commissioners had inquired on his position as they could have heard his positive feedback sooner.
- Commissioner Fichter stated that any talk he heard from the public was dispelled immediately and he appreciated Mr. Barritt's input.
- Volunteer Meu updated the Board on the T-600 repairs and offered his input on the military's guidelines for leadership effectiveness. He has presented a copy of those guidelines to Commissioner Fichter.

## **Commissioner Comments**

- Commissioner Spence stated that the review process was to establish these guidelines and it was sadly manipulated by others.

## **Reminders**

- The Final Budget Hearing for FY end 09/30/25 will be held Monday, September 23, 2024 at 6:15 PM.
- The October Board Meeting will be held Monday, October 14, 2024, at 6:30 PM.

## **Adjournment**

Commissioner Fichter moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 PM. This was seconded by Commissioner Meloy, and the vote was unanimous. Chairman Crittenden closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Sunny Sipes, Finance Manager / Administrative Specialist

Minutes Distributed Electronically to Board Members