

**SALES TAX FOCUS GROUP MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 6, 2019 - 3:00 P.M.
18500 MURDOCK CIRCLE, ROOM B106
PORT CHARLOTTE, FL 33948**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Patricia Aho, Donna Barrett, James Coalwell, Steve Dionisio, Ed Hill, Gordon “Mac” Martin, Lynne Matthews, Danny Nix, Sylvia Orr, Brian Presley, Todd Rebol, Tom Rice, Steve Uebelacker, Bill Schafer, Steve Vieira, John Wright

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Shaune Freeland, Jason Green, Robin Madden, Kathi Obendorfer, James Parish

OTHERS PRESENT: Dr. Robert Lee, Meeting Facilitator
Bill Van Helden, Fire Chief
Travis Mortimer, Assistant County Administrator
Emily Lewis, Assistant County Administrator
Roger Warner, Facilities Manager

OPENING STATEMENTS

Dr. Robert Lee, Meeting Facilitator, welcomed everyone, asking Group members to sign the attendance sheet being passed around. He noted staff would provide a presentation for each project followed by questions and answers. He explained members would be given time to score each project and then submit same to Ms. Emily Lewis, Assistant County Administrator.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

October 24, 2019 Meeting

Mr. Vieira pointed out a correction to his statement on page 4, specifically the 4th comment up from the end of the Harborview Road Widening project agenda item.

Mr. Wright **MOVED**, Ms. Matthews **SECONDED** approval of the October 24, 2019 minutes as amended. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dr. Lee confirmed no members of the public had signed up to speak.

SALES TAX PROJECTS

Airport Rescue & Firefighter Training: Phase 2

Fire Chief Bill Van Helden explained Airport Rescue & Firefighter (ARFF) training was an annual Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirement which must be conducted using props such as aircraft fuselage, motors and brake assemblies. He stated crews currently traveled out of town to receive this training; thus, construction of an ARFF would allow Charlotte County firefighters to train locally as well as provide a training platform for other organizations. He noted Phase 1 secured grant funds to purchase the initial prop, engineering and design, while the remaining portions of the aircraft and site work would be accomplished in Phase 2. He displayed various

photographs, as delineated in the agenda material, of props used in this type of training, stating training was currently satisfied through travel to Tampa and Jacksonville. He mentioned the Tampa simulator was being decommissioned and might not be reconstructed. He advised the FAA required ARFF-trained personnel to be on duty for commercial flights. He pointed out Charlotte County would partner with other communities to host training sessions and charge associated fees, thus becoming a leader in aircraft firefighting. He projected construction and Maintenance & Operation (M&O) costs to be \$3.5 million and \$98,266, respectively.

Mr. Schafer asked if the latter figure represented an increase over existing costs.

Chief Van Helden replied affirmatively, stating as there was currently no ARFF training, no funds were budgeted for same.

Mr. Schafer confirmed the M&O costs were specific to firefighting at the Punta Gorda Airport (PGA), asking why those costs would not be absorbed by the Charlotte County Airport Authority (CCAA) in light of same.

Chief Van Helden replied the County had recently entered into a \$600,000 agreement with the CCAA to cover certain costs, expressing hope enhanced training costs would be covered by grant funds.

Mr. Travis Mortimer, Assistant County Administrator, reiterated training sessions for firefighters from other communities would recoup some operating costs through the collection of fees.

Mr. Schafer reiterated expenses should be borne by the CCAA, not Charlotte County taxpayers.

Mr. Uebelacker clarified the current cost to ensure personnel were properly trained was approximately \$20,000 annually. He pointed out a tremendous amount of training fees would have to be collected to even begin to approach \$3.5 million, questioning the benefit of such a large expense.

Chief Van Helden clarified only a portion of the Fire Department was currently trained, adding most firefighters from surrounding areas were unable to avail themselves of ARFF training. He explained Charlotte County currently met only minimum standards, adding the cost to train all personnel who could feasibly be called upon to fight this type of fire would be closer to \$250,000.

Mr. Vieira questioned the number of Fire Departments throughout the State which currently attended training sessions in Tampa and/or Jacksonville.

Note: Mr. Presley arrived at the meeting at 3:16 p.m.

Chief Van Helden replied he did not have that data on hand; however, any community with an airport providing commercial flights must meet FAA requirements.

Mr. Nix commented there seemed to be a need for additional training facilities, questioning the reason behind the decommissioning of Tampa's simulator as well as the possibility of same not being reconstructed.

Mr. Mortimer replied the decision was based on an environmental issue.

Ms. Lewis added almost every community south of Jacksonville hoped to have an ARFF training facility in the southern part of the State.

Mr. Rebol acknowledged the PGA was growing; however, it was still a relatively small airport. He questioned the validity of establishing such a costly training facility which would serve outside cities and counties. He asked if additional grant funds were anticipated.

Chief Van Helden replied he would make every effort to pursue same, acknowledging he could not guarantee receipt of such funds.

Mr. Rebol noted the projects being presented this date were all Fire Department related, asking where this project would be ranked.

Chief Van Helden replied an ARFF training facility should receive the highest ranking. He opined training once annually was insufficient, asserting his desire for County firefighters to be the best. Mr. Nix questioned the current amount of tuition costs.

Chief Van Helden replied approximately \$10,000, stating additional travel expenses such as mileage, meals and hotels, for example, brought the total cost per person to almost \$20,000.

Mr. Rice asked if any consideration had been given to corporate grants, citing Allegiant Air as an example.

Chief Van Helden replied he would research that possibility.

Mr. Martin asked who would provide the training once all props were in place.

Chief Van Helden replied County firefighters who had been trained to perform the required exercises.

Mr. Martin asked if those firefighters would be taken off their regular duty.

Chief Van Helden replied costs would be passed on to trainees, stating the above stated M&O costs would cover the cost of County firefighters providing the necessary training.

Mr. Martin stated it seemed additional staff might be needed to run the school.

Chief Van Helden responded he had been advised the facility could be operated with existing staff.

Mr. Presley commented the proposal sounded very much like a fee-shaped capital structure supported by Charlotte County. He stated the largest revenue source was the FAA, which was charged with passenger safety. He opined the project was a good idea which should be re-thought in terms of financing, suggesting all of the entities which would benefit from the facility should contribute toward its construction and operation.

Mr. Schafer confirmed the abovementioned tuition figure of \$10,000 covered a group of 15 or 16 firefighters.

Dr. Lee confirmed there were no additional comments or questions, providing several minutes for members to complete their scoring.

Fire Station #3 Replacement

Chief Van Helden stated the existing Fire Station (FS) #3 was constructed in 1978 and thus did not meet hurricane wind load standards. He noted the current structure's rating was poor and undersized, adding a three-bay facility was needed for current and future requirements. He advised all new fire stations would be constructed either at an elevation from storm surge of 18 feet or as a 2-story facility, adding structures would also be built to withstand Category 5 hurricane winds. He pointed out firefighters were forced to evacuate FS #3 at times when area residents remained in their homes. He concluded construction and M&O costs were projected to be \$4.5 million and \$56,976, noting staff costs were already included in the budget as FS #3 was an existing facility.

Mr. Uebelacker asked if fire trucks and equipment would be kept above 18 feet if the new station was constructed in a 2-story design.

Chief Van Helden replied they would not as the second floor should be kept as a refuge of last resort.

Mr. Schafer requested clarification of the \$56,976 in M&O costs.

Mr. Roger Warner, Facilities Manager, replied M&O covered any additional site-specific requirements such as mowing/landscaping or utilities, for example.

Mr. Schafer commented he would have assumed operating costs would remain the same, if not decrease, as the new facility would be constructed to newer, more energy efficient standards.

Mr. Warner explained new stations might have to be constructed at different locations if existing sites could not accommodate the larger structures, stating relocations would entail new stormwater requirements.

Chief Van Helden confirmed FS #3 would be relocated.

Mr. Schafer asked if the existing station would be demolished, further questioning the County's intentions regarding use of the existing site.

Mr. Mortimer replied real estate decisions fell under the purview of the Board of Charlotte County Commissioners (BCCC).

Mr. Rice commented FS #3 and FS #6 were both close to 40 years old, questioning the age of the next oldest station.

Ms. Lewis advised the Capital Needs Assessment section of the binders provided to Group members contained 20-year projections from all County Departments. She noted those projections were applicable to all capital projects.

Mr. Presley questioned the anticipated purchase price of land needed for a new station.

Ms. Lewis replied \$300,000 had been budgeted.

Mr. Mortimer noted the salvage value of an existing station or land sale proceeds would be worked back into the program to improve the bottom line.

Mr. Presley asked if relocated stations would result in increased response times.

Chief Van Helden replied he did not anticipate any increases.

Fire Station #6 Replacement

Chief Van Helden stated FS #6 was located in the Cleveland area, adding the details associated with the existing structure were almost identical to that outlined in his presentation of the previous agenda item, FS #3 Replacement.

Mr. Vieira observed the Capital Improvements Budget sheet for this project indicated construction was not projected to commence until Fiscal Year 2025, asking if same was because the existing structure was less aged or due to future increases in population.

Chief Van Helden explained projects must be prioritized to ensure the budget's ability to sustain such significant endeavors. He cited the FS #3 Replacement project as an example, noting that structure was located closer to the water than FS #6.

Ms. Aho pointed out one section of the agenda material indicated the existing FS #6 was constructed in 1978 while another sheet depicted a 1995 construction date.

Chief Val Helden explained he understood FS #6 was re-constructed in 1995.

Mr. Presley asked if no equipment acceleration was planned.

Chief Van Helden replied fire safety equipment, including vehicles, was tracked separately.

Mr. Martin questioned the proposed square footage of the new facility.

Chief Van Helden replied between 8,000 to 10,000, which was typical for a 3-bay fire station.

Mr. Martin clarified costs were estimated at approximately \$400 per square foot.

Discussion ensued regarding vehicle replacement schedules followed by members' completion of their scoring sheets for this project.

Fire Station #17

Chief Van Helden announced FS #17 would be a new facility which would serve the southern corridor between I-75 and U.S. 41, where 2 new developments were planned. He stated the proposed location was based on growth, adding FS #17's establishment would help the County's Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating which typically impacted residents' insurance costs favorably. He concluded construction and annual operating costs were projected to be \$5.5 million and \$1,233,446, respectively, briefly reviewing the project timeline.

Mr. Schafer confirmed the proposed location would provide back-up to the PGA. He asked if new engine costs of \$725,000, as delineated in the agenda material, included staffing.

Chief Van Helden replied it did not, stating personnel costs would be \$1,176,470.

Discussion ensued with regarding to Fire Department staffing, including FAA requirements for the PGA.

Mr. Rebol opined this project would score high when compared to the other projects presented this date, inquiring if the Fire Chief concurred.

Chief Van Helden responded affirmatively.

Mr. Rice commented each project was essentially new construction; however, FS #17 was approximately \$1 million more than the others, requesting clarification of same.

Mr. Warner replied the property near FS #17 was costlier, at least twice as much.

Chief Van Helden added different types of fire stations varied in cost.

Mr. Rice suggested breaking out land costs for clarity.

Ms. Aho pointed out the agenda material for each project depicted \$300,000 for land acquisition, questioning the above stated differences in land prices.

Mr. Warner confirmed he would reevaluate those land acquisition costs, which should be higher for the FS #17 project.

Ms. Aho requested members be provided such updates at the end of the review process to assist members with their final ranking.

Mr. Schaefer confirmed the property with the highest elevation would likely be purchased, even if slightly higher in cost, in the interest of stormwater retention.

Emergency Vehicle Warehouse/Radio Communications

Chief Van Helden stated a significant amount of funding was being invested in Emergency Medical Service (EMS) supplies and firefighters' gear. He noted new standards required more back-up supplies than in past years, explaining carcinogens had been found to be embedded in fire gear. He cited high incidents of thyroid cancer in firefighters as an example, stating gear which touched firefighters' necks were required to be specially laundered to remove those carcinogens. He clarified due to the large number of firefighters, back-up gear was being purchased in a phased approach, approximately 30% per year, adding a storage area, triple the current size, was necessary for the additional gear. He stated EMS medical supplies had grown from \$129,357 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 to \$470,000 in FY 2020. He concluded construction costs were projected to be \$2,750,000, and M&O costs were projected at \$37,077.

Mr. Uebelacker clarified additional space for emergency vehicle maintenance would be needed as well.

Mr. Dionisio stated he understood the new facility would be located near headquarters, asking if same was a necessity and, if not, would construction of two of the three facilities into one structure result in any cost savings and still satisfy storage requirements.

Chief Van Helden explained certain staff members operated out of the facilities daily, thus the need to maintain the site near headquarters.

Mr. Martin questioned the anticipate square footage

Mr. Warner replied 10,000 to 12,000 square feet.

FOCUS GROUP MEMBER SCORING

Dr. Lee confirmed members had submitted all scoring sheets. He then asked Ms. Lewis to comment on the Group's next meetings.

Ms. Lewis commented the Group had performed admirably, stating project review was slightly ahead of schedule. She stated the BCCC would review four external projects submitted from the community at their December 10, 2019 Meeting, adding the Group would then conduct their review in 2020.

Discussion ensued regarding the Focus Group's meeting schedule with a consensus to review the external projects on January 22, 2020, and to perform a full review of all projects on February 5, 2020.

Meeting adjourned at 4:23 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Kelly