

WEST MANATEE FIRE & RESCUE DISTRICT COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING

*Minutes of March 17, 2026
Administration Building*

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 p.m. with the following members present: Larry Jennis, Robert Bennett, Billy Burke, Dana Tindall, and Derrick Warner. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by a moment of silence.

CHANGES TO AGENDA: None

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

CONSENT AGENDA: Commissioner Warner motioned to approve the Consent Agenda as presented; seconded by Commissioner Tindall; motion passed unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS: Finance Clerk (FC) Larson spoke on letters sent from Congressman Vern Buchanan's office congratulating Firefighter Sarah Joseph on becoming a Paramedic in Charge, and congratulating Lieutenant Inspector Adkins and Fire Marshal Kwiatkowski on their Florida Fire Chiefs Association's "of the Year" Awards.

CARRIED FROM CONSENT AGENDA: None

OLD BUSINESS:

- A. Ad Valorem Discussion: DVP Fire Medic (FF) Gonzalez expressed pride in labor's outreach during the Ad Valorem referendum and thanked firefighters and their families for their time and professionalism. He noted that many residents were confused about the tax structure, indicating a need for stronger public education, which may have affected the outcome. Despite the result, he emphasized continued commitment to service and the opportunity to better inform the community about WMFR services. Commissioner Burke echoed appreciation and noted similar feedback from residents. FF Gonzalez added that earlier IAFF mailers and a stronger social media campaign may have improved voter education, with current efforts focused on building community trust. Commissioners Tindall, Bennett, and Warner commended labor's professionalism and emphasized the need for continued outreach, particularly to less-informed residents. FF Gonzalez agreed that regularly sharing service data and performance metrics would improve public understanding. Chief Rigney also praised the efforts of Gonzalez and labor.
- B. Bradenton Beach Property: Chief Rigney stated there is no new news regarding the Bradenton Beach Property and requested it be removed from Old Business.

NEW BUSINESS:

- A. Dogs Inc Therapy Dog: Battalion Chief (BC) Brunner delivered a presentation on rising PTSD rates among firefighters and the benefits of a departmental therapy animal as part of a mental health initiative he was assigned to lead. He highlighted the positive physiological and psychological impacts of therapy dogs and noted successful outcomes in other departments. Brunner introduced the Dogs Inc. Therapy Dog Program and requested approval to begin the adoption process. Deputy Chief (DC) Johnson added that a draft policy is in place and that the estimated annual cost is approximately \$4,000. In response to questions from Chairman Jennis regarding housing, Brunner explained he would share primary responsibility for the dog when it is not at the station, with strong support from staff. The commissioners expressed agreement that the program would benefit both employees and the community. Commissioner Burke motioned to ; Seconded by Commissioner Tindall; Motion passed unanimously.

CHIEF'S REPORT: DC Johnson invited all to attend the Manatee County Fire Chiefs Association "Of The Year" awards for BC Moore and Lt Inspector Adkins at the City of Bradenton FD Station 1 at 9 am on March 26th. Fire Marshal Kwiatkowski recapped the Open House events and thanked attendees. He stated that the Bureau enjoys showcasing the department and welcoming the community, and that they look forward to continuing to develop the event next year. He reminded everyone that the 2nd Annual Brian Reed Homecoming Celebration will commence on April 11th at Station 2. The event will be a day to honor Brian, welcome the

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legacy of WMFR back to the Station to foster a long-lasting relationship, and highlight a pickleball tournament. Chief Rigney thanked labor again for the great effort.

OTHER REPORTS: FC Larson reminded the Board of their annual Ethics Training requirement. FC Larson then stated that Financial Disclosures are due by July 1st and are to be done electronically again.

COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS: Commissioner Burke expressed his enjoyment of the Open House, thanked the Bureau and the vendors, and also reiterated FF Gonzalez's and labor's commitment in supporting the referendum. He noted that the therapy dog will benefit the firefighters as well as the community. Commissioner Tindall agreed and again commended labor. Commissioner Bennett spoke of his pride in how committed and progressive the department is, noting the sensory safe open house hours and the therapy dog. He stated that a lot can be learned from this election and that in the future, we will do better. Commissioner Warner echoed the other commissioners and thanked everyone for their support during his recent health concerns.

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, April 21, at 5:00 p.m. for the Budget Workshop, followed by the regular meeting at 6:00 p.m. at the Administration building.

ADJOURNMENT: Commissioner Tindall adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

Chairman

Secretary

