



St. Tammany Parish Fire Protection District # 3

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Patrick F. Sicard
Fire Chief

Special Public Meeting of the Board of Commissioners

July 17, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Called To Order:

Chairman Danny Hall called the special meeting to order on Wednesday, July 17, 2024, at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:

Danny Hall, Murphy Arsenaux, Leo Casanave, Raymond Batiste, and Jeanne Hutchison were present.

Councilman Joe Impastato, Chief Sicard, Assistant Chief Geissler and Mrs. McCarthy were present representing the Fire Department.

Mark Waniewski representing PMI was also present.

This meeting was also live streaming on Facebook. Comments were not available on the live stream, but Mr. Hall stated that you could call the fire department and ask for him and he would answer any questions you may have. Mr. Hall stated that everyone should be respectful during discussions. Discussions should be kept on topic. He stated that while everyone in the public is welcome to come to meetings, but when it comes to the discussion specific to the millage and how that millage will be managed and how that money will be spent, to please reserve those comments to the citizens of Fire District 3 because that is who that tax affects. Please give name and address when speaking.

New Business:

1) Discussion relative to 2024 tax assessment and rolling forward taxes to amount approved by the citizens of Lacombe.

Mr. Impastato stated the Folgers situation where the state approved a program where Folgers paid taxes of \$60,000.00 per year for 20 years. He stated that the fire department touches the citizens of Lacombe's lives every day. As a citizen, he feels that the fire department touches the citizens' lives every day. He and his family are landowners in this district and wants the best service for his family. A fire district that is also our ambulance service, we need to make sure that priority number one is providing the best service and not to be cutting every nickel. As a council member, his responsibility is to appoint people to this board that he can trust that they will make good decisions, carry out those decisions and perform a great service. He stated that he told Mr. Hall and Chief Sicard to do what they need to do to provide the best service. If the Board needs to roll forward to provide that service, then to roll forward and that the board has his support.

Mr. Hall went over some slides to make sure all members had an understanding. See attached.

Mr. Hall stated that the voters of our fire district have approved us to get 34.95 mills. After a reassessment by the assessor, he must reduce the millage, so a citizen's tax bill stays the same. The millage for the district was rolled back to 32.36 mills. This was a 2.59 difference. This is not an increase in taxes. This will only be moving millage with will increase tax.

The Board has three things to consider.

- 1) Can we continue to provide adequate services with the rollback the assessor has done?
- 2) With new growth, can that new money provides adequate services to those new properties?
- 3) Will the roll back millage and new growth money provide for strategic planning?

The Board of Commissioners, with the guidance of the people, must decide if they should roll up to the amount the citizens have approved.

The assessor posted that District 3 would have an increase of \$1,457,620.00 with an increase of 71.31%. The illusion is that the department is rolling forward \$1.4 million. The maximum amount that the department can roll forward would be \$260,256.00, not \$1.4 million. In addition, the only money that can be rolled up would be new money which would be new constructions, new subdivisions, Folgers, who have been tax exempt for the past 20 years, and their inventory.

If the Board rolls forward to the maximum of 34.95 mills, it will cost the owner of a \$250,000.00 home with a homestead exemption, \$45.33 per year or \$3.78 per month.

Mr. Waniewski stated that the source of his information was released from the assessor's office and the new money also came from an email from the assessor. New growth is any new asset added to the tax roll for this year. This would be new construction, a new business, a new home, or a tax-exempt property that has not been on the tax roll for a period of time, which would be Folgers for this year because they have been exempt for twenty years. The new growth for District 3 was 28.99% in the reassessment. Every year the district receives new money whether it's five new homes or a new business every year. No official document has been received from the assessor's office regarding new growth. The assessor stated that a vast majority of the new growth or new money for Lacombe is Folgers. If you roll forward it would be only for the \$260,000.00.

Mr. Hall stated that whether or not the assessor agrees with the laws of Louisiana specific to the duties of Boards, the Board of St. Tammany Fire District 3 takes the duties seriously and we follow the laws of Louisiana that they are sworn to uphold. Mr. Hall stated that District 3 has taken legal action against the assessor. See attached.

There is also legal action taken by the St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association. See attached.

When deciding, Mr. Hall stated that the Board needs to consider adequate services and strategic planning. Mr. Hall stated that a comment was made about all of the shiny trucks, and it was a ploy to get money. He added that some of these trucks are on the road everyday and that 4 of 9 of the fire suppression and rescue vehicles qualify as an antique. The trucks range from 14 years old to 41 years old.

Staffing and quarters also need to be considered. NFPA standard 1710 says each engine should have a minimum of 4 firemen per engine. On an average day we have 7 to 8 fire fighters on duty of which 2 are assigned to ambulance operations.

Mr. Arsenaux, a 36-year retired veteran of the fire service, stated that when he hears a statement of “do more with less”, he hears injuries and death. The Department has been doing more with less, every year the call volume has gone up, but staffing has not increased and apparatus has not been changed out. He shared a video to help the understanding of what the firefighters do and why the NFPA says a minimum of 18 people on a structure fire is necessary. The video is available on our website at stfd3.com.

Mr. Arsenaux stated that if there are any questions, he would like to get a better understanding of what the public thinks and what they want.

Mr. Casanave stated that he felt the same way and that if there are any concerns that they should contact one of the board members so they could address the situation and show the positive of it.

Mr. Batiste stated accountability. The Board is accountable to the public but also the firemen. The Board has to be aware of the danger they go through to protect the citizens in our area, especially if they are short-staffed.

Mr. Hall stated that the Board needs to consider what they have today with 44% of the apparatus that are antiques, one-man trucks, stations that cannot accommodate growth, taken into account what demographics are coming down 434 and the area. It is worth it to him to give a few dollars a month for the public and the firemen to have what they need to serve.

Mr. Arsenaux stated that this will not bring the department to 18 people or 4 on each engine. The department still would not be able to buy a new apparatus because they run around \$500,000.00 each but it will help to make some changes.

Chief Sicard stated that staffing and building renovations need to be handled. A lot of money is spent on keeping the apparatus up and running and safe for the firefighters.

Chief Geisser stated that there is a want and a need and a lot of things addressed today are a need in our community that we serve and want to protect need these advancements, the manpower, and the apparatus for them to efficiently do their jobs.

Mr. Hall stated that if there are any questions, his email address is dhall@stfd3.com Or call 985-882-5977.

There is no vote tonight, the vote will take place July 31st at 4:00pm at Koop Dr. Mandeville.

No further comments.

Adjournment:

Mrs. Hutchison made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Arenaux seconded. A vote was taken

Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 7:10pm.