

## A Note from Our James Island Public Service District Commission Chair, Alan Laughlin

Friends and Neighbors of and on James Island,

It has come to my attention that you have been receiving half-truths, inaccuracies, and highly slanted truths as part of a strategic & targeted attack toward the James Island Public Service District by a small group.

First, I am one of the loudest and most vocal of critics to the huge tax increase we all received in October 2018. In fact, that was one of my campaign promises "To STOP huge tax Increases". I am a realist, tax increases are a very negative part of life. They can be controlled but are going to happen no matter what we do, as long as we have infrastructure & services that require funding. They just don't have to be huge!

Next, as part of a personal attack on the District Administrator, Robert Wise, it was stated that he "proposed a budget with no tax cut". This is true, following my direction; there also is **NO TAX INCREASE**. I have spent many hours working with & questioning the District department heads about the finances, and studying, the answers I received. The facts are the District: put into place approved programs requested in this year's budget; ordered the necessary equipment to maintain a level of service we residents expect; and signed contracts based on the budget the Commission had authorized. To cancel, revise or return things now will cause fees well over what we spent. So for the upcoming 2019/2020 Budget I directed the Administrator to generate a budget with NO INCREASE aimed at stabilizing the District in a relative holding pattern until Commissioners have worked with the Department Heads to identify areas where costs can be reduced WITHOUT reducing services and creating long term solutions.

After learning first hand, we are truly "locked into" our commitments, I had the CFO invite our experts (Mr. Bill Hancock, Auditor; Bob George, Engineer; Sam Howell, Bond Counsel & John Canney, Financial Advisor) to allow the Commission to hear, what ramifications, if any, there would be in reducing our millage, and all the experts agreed, based on past & current commitments of the JIPSD, it will be lethal to the District financially.

Commissioner Woolsey and the other 5 commissioners have steadfastly clung to the mantra -they want a 2 mil decrease in next year's budget. I applaud their close mindedness. However, it is the fiduciary responsibility of each commissioner to listen to experts hired to direct and advise the District in finance, law, human resources, bonds, construction and design and other interests. They have no reason to influence us badly, that would jeopardize their ability to continue to be utilized by the District. Some of the repercussions mentioned by the experts included: an adverse effect on our S&P credit rating; paying more in interest for 30 years (as much as \$1 million in interest); higher millage in the coming years to meet bond and loan mandates; and not being able to get loans at lower rates, if the proposed amendments are passed.

The mayor of the Town actually argued with the bond counsel and general finance experts about the way to accomplish what they have been doing for decades. The proposed savings for the Fire Station 1 funding was shown to be phantom savings by the construction expert who knows where almost every sewer line on the island is located and has had a hand in many of the buildings on the island for more than 2 decades. He pointed out that a reduction of funding would cause extra costs, with redo work necessary by the architect & contractors, and in fact, could be less facility for the same or higher costs.

It is interesting that of the 6 other commissioners, ONLY commissioner Woolsey, who is married to the mayor of the Town of James Island, has submitted any amendments to the JIPSD budget for the coming year. Why is that? What is the Town's agenda for working up all the motions?

Her proposals include:

- Selling the 2 properties on Dills Bluff Road. The District had attempted, in earlier years, to use that property as Headquarters for the District AND the Fire Department. But the Town refused to change the zoning to allow this. And I have to say, the extra efforts to provide a very clean, safe, and quiet headquarters were very extensive. Now, the wife of the mayor is proposing to sell the properties for an estimated amount without an evaluation for a fair market value. I have already received realtor interest letters despite a set process to be followed by law. I wonder how they knew to send me letters before the potential sale was mentioned outside of the District conference room? In fact, her submittals indicate these are surplus properties. NOT. I intend to try again to obtain approval to move the headquarters of the JIPSD there. So, this is not surplus property.
- Limiting the bond millage, calling what the District is requesting “surplus”. Funny, the state REQUIRES the ending balance for the year to be able to pay the bills for the beginning of the next year. Right now, the current budget will have the District ending the year with more than a \$35,000 deficit. (Also, do you remember a few years ago, the windy and wet incident called Irma? If the District had not had money in to pay for cleanup of the island, we wouldn’t have been back to normal as fast as we did. The JIPSD finally got reimbursed for Irma this year.) IF we hadn’t had this money in the bank..... You get the idea.
- Then she wants to cut the budget for the new station by 10%. This is MUCH too late to consider. To do this now will cause new architect costs, new bidding costs, new construction company costs to bid the project, and more. NONE of these will be lower than what is already in the system. So, what we will end up with is a higher priced (or maybe equal priced) facility with reduced service capability. Does that make sense? Earlier that might have worked, but not now.
- Turning over the maintenance of street signs in the town to the Town of James Island. That is OK with me. It will save the PSD a whopping \$5,000 out of a \$15,000,000 budget. I know the Public Works people for the Town. They do a superb job for the Town. Those of you in the other areas of the island will have to contact the county. My question – why did the Town and commissioner Woolsey push SO hard for this? What is so important about this agenda item? In fact what is the Town’s agenda for you and the PSD?

Finally, Commissioner Woolsey and several other commissioners have expressed they have a problem with the public not being able to speak at Special Meetings. These are the work meetings. When done properly, the work commissioners have to do is done IN those meetings. In fact, the PSD Rules of Procedure #7 specifically states

*“The agenda for any special meeting shall be prepared in accordance with the request for the meeting and shall be restricted to the business set forth in the request for the special meeting.”*

I know just how frustrating it is to be in the audience at any meeting, JIPSD or otherwise and not be able to say what I feel about the topic under consideration. I sat through EVERY meeting the PSD had for 4 years before I decided to run for office.

Almost any company works this way and has the same restrictions. Special & committee meetings are WORKING meetings so the General Meeting can run smoothly and quickly. For years the JIPSD has had almost

no special committee meetings. Today is no exception with only 3 committee meetings this year (2 administrative and 1 fire committee). How can the commissioners know the business need of the JIPSD if they don't talk to the staff? I found out a lot of information just talking.

Finally, and I accept responsibility for this one, the Rules of Procedure #27(g) states:

*"All ordinances or regulations, resolutions and contract documents, before presentation to the Commission by the Chair, shall have been reduced to writing and shall have been approved as to form and legality by the Commission's engaged General Attorney. Prior to presentation all such documents shall be referred to the head of the department under whose jurisdiction the administration of the subject matter of the ordinance or regulation, resolution or contract document would devolve. When so referred, the Department Head or his/her designee shall affix his/her signature on the document certifying to the factual content, append his/her recommendations, and reviewed by the CFO, Commission Clerk and forwarded through the District Manager."*

Every commissioner has a copy of these rules and yet we as a body constantly ignore it. My fault, I promise to rectify it.

As to our internal experts, the department heads who spent months generating a budget, have been roundly ignored. In fact, the internal experts took large scissors to their own departmental budgets before submitting the FY 19/20 budget to the commission, they reduced needs identified to better service to you and wrote out over \$250,000 of their budget. The District has a scheduled vehicle replacement program that is fractured because support vehicles were removed from this year's budget. Accordingly, maintenance on older vehicles becomes more important and costly.

**Now I have to respond to the NextDoor comments:**

The Dill Property is VERY different from the Dills Bluff Road property. This is one of the inaccurate/incorrect statements communicated. One is partially on Riverland Drive at Folly Road where the Food Lion is located and back along Riverland Drive. The other 2 lots on Dills Bluff Rd., are located right behind the shopping center at the corner of Camp Rd and Dills Bluff Rd.

JIPSD owns the Dills Bluff Road property and has considered moving the Headquarters there for several years. As I mentioned the Town blocked this, and now appears to be sponsoring the sale of it for some commercial site. I have a problem with this. This corner is the center of population for the island and either putting residential property of some kind or a commercial company there is not why the Town was formed. We were trying to limit the population density, so residential will violate the density and commercial in the middle of the population is another situation we tried to limit. After all James Island is called a "bedroom community" by the entire area.

Also mentioned were the numerous emails I received. I got 8, and 2 of those complained about the huge tax increase we are planning for next year (which is incorrect). The "Dill" property was mentioned and not allowing public comments was included too. I'm sorry, you were given bad information.

Another indicated they didn't want a career public servant. I spent my career in hospitals and I'm not looking for a new one. It was the processes and infighting of the old commission driving me nuts the 4 years I sat at every PSD meeting and saw the dysfunction. Little did I know this would increase exponentially in this new commission. If anyone else wants to replace me, I will be happy to step down next election. Come, listen and

make independent decisions by coming to JIPSD meetings and learn the issues of the company. Good ideas are no good if they are dogmatic and uninformed.

Kathy has mentioned the sewer rates will go up. If they are operating at a deficit of \$83,000 as they are this year, don't you think that something drastic might happen if their rates don't go up a little? I don't want to think about it.

I am borrowing some information from the Post and Courier article by Mikaela Porter that was printed on Wednesday.

*"About 10,000 homes and businesses are protected by the four-station fire department. About 7,000 homes have their garbage collected, while 13,000 homes have sewer lines maintained by the district. ...There are 9,112 taxpayers in the district."*

I made a couple comments at last week's meeting and Ms. Porter quoted and are so true.

*"This is a service organization, not a political organization, so anything we do to take money away from our program is going to have the potential for reducing services," ..... "I'd rather people be mad at me and have a high quality of service than people being mad at me and not getting the services they're used to getting."*

A public hearing is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Monday June 24 and the Regular Meeting of the commission will be at 7 p.m. to take what I hope is a final vote on the budget. You are invited.