

A Public Hearing of the James Island Public Service District (JIPSD) Commission was held at 6:30 p.m. on June 24, 2024, at James Island Town Hall, 1122 Dills Bluff Road, James Island, South Carolina.

Present at the meeting were the following members: Marilyn Clifford, Chair, who presided; Paul Cantrell, Brenda Grant, Ronald Ladson, Susan Milliken, and Kathy Woolsey. Commissioner BrownCrouch was absent.

Also present were Tim Muller, District Attorney; Tamara Robinson, Acting District Manager; Joanne Tucker, Administration Manager; Tom Glick, Deputy Fire Chief; Shawn Engleman, Interim Fire Chief; Brad Smiley, Deputy Fire Chief of Operations; Steve Aden, Director of Fleet Services; Kendra Smith, Director of Wastewater Services; Kevin Lavaughn, Assistant Director of Wastewater Services; Ed Kilcullen, Director of Finance; Walter Desmond, Director of Solid Waste Services; Melvena Turner, Human Resources Analyst; Tynetta White, Executive Assistant; and Charleston County Sheriff's Officer Colburn.

Chair Clifford called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The invocation was given followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. The Freedom of Information Act Report – In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, notice of this meeting and its agenda were provided to all news media and persons requesting notification.
2. The roll was called.
3. Oral and Written Petitions
4. Chair Clifford opened the floor to receive comments on:
 - A. Wastewater Collection System and Rate Resolution
 - B. FY25 Budget and Resolution

Nathan Johnson, 862 Seafarer Way, expressed his concern about inflation and its challenges with everyone. Should the leaders raise the millage or increase the sewer or solid waste rates to fix the problem? If so, who is going to pay and how is it going to be paid? Should one department be preferred over another? He hopes that those who feel that they deserve increases understand that others are deserving as well.

Jason Smith, 630 Lynne Avenue, played an audio recording. "We are trapped in a career we once loved but can no longer sustain. We cannot provide for our basic needs and those of our families. We urgently need a rapid intervention crew to advocate for us, to the elected officials who have the power to help. We have tried to rescue ourselves by working additional shifts and part-time jobs, spending more time away from our families. We have exhausted every option, but we need assistance, and we need it now. Our Fire Chiefs have wisely entered into automatic aid agreements to provide the highest level of service to our community. I ask these same Chiefs to extend that commitment to their firefighters. If you can cross jurisdictional boundaries to deliver top tier service to our communities, you can work together for a common goal to reset the pay scale of all Low Country area fire departments. It is time to use full authority of the badge on your chest and take the necessary steps for the members of your departments who are suffering. We are running out of time nearing the point of no return. The time to act is now." Mr. Johnson said that he would argue that the time to act would have been years ago. Right now, we are in the position we are in because of inaction. He asked that the community of James Island come together to pay the firefighters a livable wage.

Bill Pesature, 2259 Sandy Point Lane, stated that there are currently nine openings in the fire department. One person resigned a day ago, two people are coming next week, and there are 12 people actively seeking employment elsewhere. These people are not being paid a livable wage. To bring them here, they would have to be trained. If you cannot afford to pay the people who are already here, how are you going to afford to pay for new people coming in. How is it sustainable to pay for training and not salaries.

Heather Baity, 937 Hunt Club Run, said that her husband, Brad Baity was one of the Charleston Nine. She has several friends that work for the fire department and they voiced their concerns, which is a concern to her as well. She expressed that her situation is a worst-case scenario, and the district is headed in that direction. Her late husband worked for JIPSD fire department and left because of money in 1997 and she still cannot believe that she is here 17 years later, begging to pay firemen. If you want a healthy community, you must have protection. Firefighters are your first line of defense. If you don't take care of them, they can't take care of you.


James Teeple, 3425 Great Egret Drive, stated that he serves on the Charleston County Volunteer Rescue Squad and works closely with a lot of the firemen. He mentioned that he is a small business owner and employs around 100 people. There is a lot of expenses that come with turnover. Firefighters need to be paid what they deserve.

Owen Cook, 1045 Grand Concourse, said that he has been with the JIPSD fire department for four and a half years. He cannot afford to live on James Island with his current salary and has qualified for section 8 housing and still struggles to pay bills. He said that firefighters need to be paid a livable wage to be able to survive and provide for themselves.

Sean Foulois, 2192 Kings Gate Lane, stated that public safety is a fundamental responsibility of any community. The JIPSD and its commissioners must act immediately to address the urgent needs of our firefighters. These brave individuals risk their lives daily to protect the homes, families, and properties of James Island. Ensuring adequate salaries is not just an act of fairness but a crucial element in providing them with the necessary support to carry out their duties safely and effectively.

John Peters, 1301 Hampshire Road, said firefighters are heroes. He pays his taxes for them and if taxes have to be raised for them to show up, he is all for it.

Chair Clifford adjourned the public hearing meeting at 6:55 p.m.



Ronald Ladson
Secretary
RL/TW