

Pace Fire Rescue District
Regular Meeting
June 30, 2025

1. Meeting Called to Order

Present: Chairman Nick Gradia, Vice-Chairman Daniel Mills,
Secretary Jeremy Johnston, and Commissioner Lynn Garrett
Excused Absent: Treasurer Felix Hernandez

- a. Chairman Nick Gradia called the meeting to order at approximately 5:03 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

- a. Chairman Nick Gradia led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Moment of Silence

- a. A moment of silence was observed.

4. Public Form

- a. The Board acknowledges the public who were there for the “Proposed Budget”, and to hear about the status on Station 4, And any news on an increase on the assessment the news was reporting. Chief Whitfield explained the news said Santa Rosa County, but it’s for MSBU Fire Departments, which we are not one. Pace Fire Rescue District is a Special District. Chief Whitfield assured them that there was coverage at Station 4 during the day. Chairman Gradia explained these topics were on the Agenda and would be discussed in detail at this meeting.

5. Minutes from the previous meeting

- a. A Motion to approve the Meeting Minutes was 1st made by Secretary Johnston and 2nd by Commissioner Garrett.
- b. Motion passed, unanimously.

6. Financial Report (Written report attached)

- a. A Motion to approve the Meeting Minutes was 1st made by Secretary Johnston and 2nd by Commissioner Garrett.
- b. Motion passed, unanimously.

7. Chief's Report (Written report attached)

- a. A Motion to approve the Meeting Minutes was 1st made by Secretary Johnston and 2nd by Commissioner Garrett.
- b. Motion passed, unanimously.

8. Station 4 Construction Update

- a. Chief Whitfield informed the Board there had been a few setbacks due to the rainy weather. Due to the perk test on the land not draining properly the plan had to be redesigned and resubmitted. So, the civil engineer has not sent a final approval for the septic system from the Health Department. Also, there was a delay in connecting the power to the station, so we had to wait to install the floors and doors, but it has now been switched on. We have not approved any extensions on the project. They may ask for an extension which is normally 30 days, but we aren't going to approve it. The driveway has been poured, and the air conditioner techs were there today.
- b. Informational purposes only, no action is needed.

9. Property Appraisers Numbers/Tentative Budget

- a. Chief Whitfield informed the Board that based upon the figures provided by the Property Appraiser's office, and the rates stay the way they are we would not have the money to purchase a new truck unless the Board decides to dip into the Reserves which Chief Whitfield and Accountant Rachel Connell advises not to do. We could go ahead and order a truck and in two years we'd have the money to pay for it. The first payment would not be due until delivery of the truck to us. The only other option would be to increase the rates. Chairman Gradia asked Chief Whitfield had a change to meet with the other districts about the churches? Chief Whitfield said he has spoken to the other Chief's but there are no other resources to pay the church taxes. Chief Whitfield said, "Out of thirteen or fourteen churches, there are approximately three churches that have not paid their Fire Fee". Secretary Johnston stated some of the churches have businesses within the church like daycares, correct? Chief Whitfield said "yes." Accountant Rachel Connell stated the income from these "businesses" within the church would be taxable. The Board discussed if there was an increase of 3% we would need to have a third-party study completed to justify the increase. The increase of 3% would be a truck payment. Chief Whitfield is working on setting up a meeting with the new State Representative. So, if there's any questions the Board would like him to ask please let him know. Commissioner Garrett suggested we have no increase right now. Chairman Gradia said, "if we look at the proposed budget with no increase, we wouldn't be able to afford a new truck. Vice Chairman Mills asked about the Impact Fees, if they were still coming in and Chief Whitfield said, "it was up and down, it comes in spurts. We've just about used all of it on Station 4's expenses." Secretary Johnston asked if it could be

adjusted and Chief Whitfield said yes but there was a process you had to go through to increase the fee. The Board requested to see a Proposed Budget with a 3% increase by next month's meeting.

- b. The discussion was for information purposes; no action needed at this time.

10. Fire Camp Grant

- a. Chief Whitfield informed the Board this grant was now open for applicants. This grant is designed mainly for the recruitment of volunteers. Commissioner Garrett asked Chief Whitfield if we paid our volunteers. Chief Whitfield informed Commissioner Garrett that our volunteers are true volunteers, non-paid. This grant is up to \$5,000 with no matching funds required. The grant would provide funds for hands-on introduction to fire services. The funds would cover eligible Fire Camp expenses. Chief Whitfield is waiting for the paperwork to come in so he can submit it.
- b. Informational purposes only, no action is needed.

11. New Apparatus Discussion

- a. Chief Whitfield informed the Board that based upon the numbers he was given by the Property Appraiser's office we would not have the funds to purchase a new apparatus. Secretary Johnston asked, "how much would we be short now." Chief Whitfield said, "we would be short by the whole amount." After a lengthy discussion it was decided to table the decision to purchase a truck until the next meeting. Chairman Gradia asked what the situation was on the trucks we currently are running. Chief Whitfield said the best truck we have is a 1999 truck, we have a spare Aerial, and the Freight Liner.
- b. Secretary Johnston inquired about the Rescue status. Chief Whitfield informed the Board the Rescue was at Ten-8 due to a "code" that popped up on the apparatus, that shouldn't have because it is a new engine. And we are waiting for mounts to be put on the truck for the equipment. Some equipment is on the Rescue now. It should be operable by August.
- c. Informational purposes only, no action is needed.

12. Additions

- a. Chairman Gradia asked about the status of the PERK. Chief Whitfield said, "the list of FF/EMT's had been submitted. In the current proposed budget, it includes a 6% plus step increase." President Andrew Adcox of the Santa Rosa Professional Firefighters Union stated there was a PERK meeting set for July 17-August 14, 2025.
- b. The Board asked about the status of Life Pac 15. Chief Whitfield stated, "the State Budget goes into effect tomorrow". He was waiting for the document to be signed and then it will be ordered. Vice-Chairman Mills asked if we would have an air pack for the new station and Chief Whitfield said yes.

- c. The Board asked for the status on hiring an Assistant Chief. Chief Whitfield stated there were 14 applicants, one was disqualified because he didn't meet the qualifications. Chief Whitfield said, "he had the interview panel, one from Ocean Springs, S. Walton County and North Okaloosa". Applicants for the Human Resource Specialist position have been evaluated, three were interviewed, not one was qualified. Sandra will be contacting the others.
- d. Chairman Gradia asked about the staffing, Chief Whitfield said we need two more firefighters and that will be all. Chairman Gradia asked about graduation at one of the colleges and Chief Whitfield said Gulf Coast had one and he had planned to go there next week to speak to them. Secretary Johnston asked if we were going to have a skeleton crew when Station 4 opens?" Chief Whitfield assured him; we would be at full staff when Station 4 is completed.
- e. Lieutenant Marcus Murphy mentioned hiring a Grant Writing to ensure receiving grants we apply for. The Board said it would be a good idea but too expensive. Chief Whitfield said he does hire one if it's a big Grant we are looking at and we hadn't lost but a few grants total.
- f. Commissioner Johnston asked about an update on other properties for another station. Chief Whitfield said he hadn't heard anything, but he was going to contact Ron Risen from Jubilee and ask to give us 2 acres. There is another plan, but Chief Whitfield wants to contact the residence to make sure they will support it. Commissioner Johnston asked, "how many stations are needed to cover area?" Chief Whitfield said, "we need to relocate Station 2, obviously and probably an additional 2 stations, 6 total and we've started updating the Five-Year Plan.

13. Motion to Adjourn

- a. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:25 p.m.
- b. Motion to Adjourn was 1st made by Mills and 2nd by Commissioner Garrett.
- c. Motion passed, unanimously.

Approved this 25th day of August 2025.



Nick Gradia, Chairman