

Town of Melbourne Beach

TOWN COMMISSION WORKSHOP

June 17, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

COMMUNITY CENTER – 509 OCEAN AVENUE

MINUTES

Commission Members:

Mayor Alison Dennington
Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow
Commissioner Robert Baldwin
Commissioner Anna Butler
Commissioner Tim Reed

Staff Members:

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro
Town Clerk Amber Brown

1. Call to Order

Mayor Alison Dennington called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Town Clerk Amber Brown conducted roll call.

Commission Members Present

Mayor Alison Dennington
Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow
Commissioner Robert Baldwin
Commissioner Anna Butler
Commissioner Tim Reed

Staff Members Present

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro
Fire Chief Gavin Brown
Town Clerk Amber Brown

3. Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence

Mayor Alison Dennington led the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. Public Comments

After being acknowledged by the Mayor, members of the public should state their name and address for the record. The Commission encourages citizens to prepare their comments in advance. Each individual will have three (3) minutes to address the Commission on any topic(s) related to Town business, not on the Agenda.

5. New Business

- A. Part 2 of the presentation from the Melbourne Beach Volunteer Fire Department pertaining to the need to adjust the Department's current staffing model – Fire Chief Gavin Brown

Fire Chief Gavin Brown started his presentation, which he said would cover rules, standards, and best practices, current response data, options for the future and costs associated, and potential funding sources. The big change causing this conversation is that the partnership with Indialantic has changed. They cancelled the automatic aid agreement with Melbourne Beach, and they were the safety net. Spoke about the difficulty of getting volunteers. The NFPA is the National Fire Protection Association, which is a nonprofit that develops and publishes standards associated with fire safety. NFPA 1710 is a standard developed for a paid department, and NFPA 1720 is the standard developed for a volunteer department. The main difference is how many people need to show up and how quickly. - 4:08

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said Melbourne Beach is considered a dense urban city, which means there are over 3,000 people per square mile. Spoke about the differences between a volunteer department, a combination department, and a paid department. Said they want to move from a volunteer fire department to a combination department. Explained the differences between basic life support (BLS) and advanced life support (ALS). Said they need a minimum of 16 firefighters to respond to an incident. The two-in two-out rule means there needs to be at least 4 members on scene before interior firefighting can start. An exception is if there is a rescue, then 2 firefighters can go interior to effect the rescue. Spoke about the NFPA 1710 requirements (what paid fire departments are following) and NFPA 1720 requirements (typically what volunteer departments are following). However, NFPA 1720 does not cover dense urban cities because usually those areas have paid departments. Our department follows 1710 because it is a little easier to meet the requirements. NFPA 1720 for a less populated area recommends 15 certified firefighters on scene in less than 9 minutes, which would not be possible all of the time for our department.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown showed a short video which showed how quickly a fire can grow, doubling in size every 30-60 seconds. Spoke about how synthetic materials in modern furniture make fires worse. Spoke about flashover, and how within 3 minutes everything in the room was on fire. - 20:45

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about staffing as it exists today. Melbourne Beach fire department is 0 minutes from the closest home in town and 5 minutes from the farthest home in town. BCFR Station 64 is 2 minutes from the closest home in town and 7 minutes from the furthest home in town. Indialantic Station 57 is 4 minutes from the closest home in Town and 10 minutes from the furthest home in town. BCFR Station 63 is 7 minutes from the closest home in Town and 13 minutes from the furthest home in Town. And finally Station 65 is 13 from the closest home in Town and 20 minutes from the furthest home in Town. Spoke about response times for Melbourne Beach and gave some examples. Spoke about his duties as Fire Chief and how it is important he is able to lead the scene instead of being inside fighting the fire.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin asked about the timeline for the dispatch phone calls and how they can make it more efficient. - 39:20

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about how it can take a long time for the call to come in when police decide fire is needed. They are currently dispatched by the Indian River County Police Dept., which costs \$6,000 per year, switching to the County would potentially be more efficient but would cost \$20,000 per year. Compliance with recommended alarm to arrival time is 21%, compliance with recommended dispatch to arrival time is 20%, the percentage of calls that did not have 2 certified firefighters on the initial apparatus was 7.3%, average time dispatch to arrival was 7.8 minutes, average time from alarm to arrival was 11.8 minutes.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said option one is having Indian River County take over fire protection for a flat rate of \$800,000 annually. That would get one added firefighter on Indian River County's fire engine, and they would respond to Melbourne Beach. This would guarantee a response to all calls, and they have ALS. Things to consider is their response time would put addresses in Town out of NFPA 1710 compliance with the recommended response times, they have 3 firefighters so they would have to wait for 1 more to have the 2 in 2 out in order to go interior to fight fires, Melbourne Beach volunteers would go away, and this cost does not include commercial or vacation rental fire inspections. Said the Town would be giving away control and would never be able to get it back because we would no longer have the infrastructure to have our own department, and this would thin out the resources available in the local emergency response system. This would add workload to another department, but there would be one less department for local response, and it would not add an additional fire engine to the response.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said another option would be to go with Brevard County Fire Rescue. They would add 2 tax assessments to everyone's tax bill, one below the line and one above the line, which would total around 1.1 million dollars. This would not add any firefighters or any fire engines. They would provide a guaranteed response, and they would provide an ALS unit. This would include commercial and vacation rental fire inspections. Things to consider: Some properties would have a response time that would fall out of compliance with NFPA, but some properties would not. Melbourne Beach volunteers would have the option of staying at a reduced capacity under the County's supervision, this would give away control, and thin out the resources available in the local emergency response system. - 51:24

Commissioner Robert Baldwin confirmed this would not mean the County adds firefighters or anything; this would just be Melbourne Beach paying them for what they already have.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about Melbourne Beach's proposal, which has an estimated cost of just under one million. This would provide 2 paid firefighters per shift to Melbourne Beach's dedicated fire engine. There would be a total of 7 paid staff members (6 new) and 1 Fire Chief (which they already have). There would be 30 volunteers. This would guarantee a response in Town. BCFR and IFD would be willing to return to an automatic aid, and the majority of homes in Town would be within the NFPA compliance response time. The volunteers would stay with a reduced burden, so they would continue the Town events and community outreach. This would have the fastest response, this would ensure a qualified and competent supervisor is available 24/7 to manage incidents, and this would eventually reduce the cost of commercial and vacation rental fire inspections. This provides 2 additional Town staff members (the firefighters) 24/7 to assist other Town departments as needed. A major benefit is that the Town would retain control of the service for the future, and this will enhance the resources available for the local emergency response system. Some

considerations are that this would start off with a BLS level for medical response. Said the requirements for ASL would be in the equipment and certification training, and it would be a higher cost. The department would be held to the NFPA 1710 level standards, which is a shorter response time but requires fewer firefighters on scene. Said the initial response would be 2 firefighters. This would add an engine to the local emergency services, and if we need additional personnel, we could pull from the volunteers or automatic aids with Brevard County or Indialantic.

Commissioner Tim Reed asked about the staffing schedule. - 1:10:45

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about looking into what would be the most beneficial and attractive to staff. There is a proposed bill where the standard goes from 24 hours on 48 hours off to 24 hours on 72 hours off. Since our department would not be running back-to-back calls, we would be able to get away with staffing the same as Satellite, which is 48 hours on and 96 hours off. With the 48/96 model, you would need 6 firefighters; with 24/72, you would need 8 firefighters.

Mayor Alison Dennington asked about the density and size of the Town.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about how the 1.4 square miles includes the land that is underwater, which does not get included in the density, so the Town is only .99 square miles.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin asked how many calls from midnight to 8 a.m. the fire department gets on average.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said it really depends; if they took medical calls, they would go from 150 calls to 700 calls per year. Provided a printout of random properties in Town to compare the amount currently being paid for the fire department, and the cost for the three options presented, being Brevard County Fire Rescue, Indialantic Fire Department, and Melbourne Beach. Brevard County's is fixed; they just put fire assessments on the residents' tax bill. For Indialantic or Melbourne Beach, there are 4 options for funding. Option A is based on funding through a fire assessment based on property use and base square footage. Option B is based on funding through taxable property value. Option C is based on keeping the current funding allocated and adding an assessment to raise the additional amount to cover the cost. Option C assessment would be based on property use and square footage. Option D would be to keep the same funding from the general fund and add an assessment to raise the additional costs. The assessment for Option D would be based on the property value.

Commissioner Tim Reed asked if the square footage model includes accessory dwelling units. Also asked about the millage used to raise the difference in funding. - 1:24:40

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said it currently does not, but if the Commission goes with Melbourne Beach or Indialantic, it would be up to them to decide how to generate the funds and could be done 100 different ways. It could be through increasing the general fund, so there would not be a fire assessment, or they could do an above-the-line and or below-the-line fire assessment on each tax bill. Said if they keep the current funding, they would raise the difference and use 0.558 mill for Indialantic, 0.902 mill for Melbourne Beach.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said the provided spreadsheet includes some properties with the highest value and also some of the lowest, which have had a homestead exemption for many years. The added cost for the residents ranged from \$9-\$287 per year. The fire department is like an insurance policy. You pay for car insurance, but don't use it often, but when you do, you want it there. Provided statistics on the demographics between Melbourne Beach and Indialantic. Melbourne Beach is slightly larger in land mass, housing units, population, and median age. However, Indialantic's operating budget is \$9.4 million, whereas Melbourne Beach has an operating budget of \$4.5 million.

Mayor Alison Dennington pointed out that the difference in budget could be because they have a higher number of commercial buildings.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said Indialantic pays 21% of its budget towards fire protection, whereas Melbourne Beach allocates 8.77% towards fire control. Spoke about the Safer Grant, which is a Federal grant through FEMA for staffing to provide adequate protection with 24-hour staffing. The Department is actively working on applying for the Grant. However, the grant is not provided at the same rate as previous years. Now it is 75% for the first and second year, and then 35% for the third year. The cost share if the Town were awarded the grant, the Town would have to provide 25% for the first and second year, 65% the third year, and 100% for every year thereafter. It would cover the cost for the usual base salary (standard benefits package, etc). The deadline to apply is July 3, 2025, and they plan to start announcing awards starting August 18th and continue to award them until September 30th or until they run out of funds. The overall objective for the Safer Grant is to help get departments closer to meeting the NFPA 1710 recommendations.

Commissioner Tim Reed confirmed that the taxing scheme would have to be done prior to any announcement from the grant.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin confirmed that if awarded, the grant is for 3 years, but it is paid out over time, so it would still be dependent on the Federal Government appropriating the funds to the grant each year. - 1:46:00

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about whether you go with Indialantic or Brevard County, you would be doubling their response area, but not adding any fire trucks. In his opinion, any calls with red being not in compliance could be a near miss where something bad could have happened. The responsibility of public servants is 1 - manage public funding and taxes responsibility, 2 - provide adequate levels of service and protection to your taxpayers, and 3 - leave it better than you found it.

Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow asked if there were any modifications to the station that would be needed.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about how there would be minor modifications. The corporation recently put in a kitchen, but the bunk room would need to be divided in case there are female and male firefighters.

Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow asked what would happen to the fire truck that is on order if the fire department goes away.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said the Commission would sell it.

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about how the Fire Chief's main concern is safety, but thinks this should go to a referendum. Asked if they would be able to get this on a referendum.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown agreed with the Mayor, however, switching takes time, and the current staffing and output from the volunteers is not sustainable. The Commission is elected to make the hard decisions, and if it went to a referendum, no one wants to increase taxes. Said that as the Fire Chief, he is not comfortable with the position he is in moving forward without some sort of change to provide adequate protection for the residents.

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro spoke about how any changes to the taxes through a referendum would not take place until the following year.

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about wanting to budget for it with the condition that it depends on the outcome of the referendum.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin asked how much the fire budget is for the current setup. Said take that amount (421) and suggested establishing a fire tax that pays that, stop taking it out of the general fund, and wait to see the results of the referendum, and then there is still money for fire.

Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow spoke about how it will need to be presented in the referendum because the question is yes or no. For example, do we want to pay for the Melbourne Beach Fire Department, yes or no? But if the answer is no, right now we are looking at options to consider paying Indian River or Brevard County.

Mayor Alison Dennington said that the other options are not implicated unless and until Fire Chief Gavin Brown retired and took a group of people with him.

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro said the concern is that the shelf life for the volunteers is limited because they have volunteered for so many years.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said he had some additional requested information about staffing and provided a spreadsheet. The age range of volunteers is 20 to 71 with 1/3 of the department of 60, if they are certified or not, how many years of service, if they live in Town or out of Town, if they have kids, etc. Said there are two tiers of volunteers based on those who live closer or further from Town. Had to expand the accepted distance to get more volunteers, now accepting those living 20 minutes from the station.

Dave Micka - 323 Fourth Ave – Said if you go to referendum, you can kiss the grant goodbye. Spoke about the way the grant works with having to hire people. Been a resident since 1977, raised his kids here, and served the Fire Department for many years. Has retired from the active side, but still helps on the admin side. Has done a lot for the Town for free. He was the Fire Chief and was not compensated, but times have changed, and we need a paid fire department. Fully in support of the move towards a paid Fire Department. - 2:12:38

Jeff Boos – Merritt Island – Been in the Fire Department for many years and runs the marine rescue unit. Used to live on Riverside Dr, but moved to South Merritt Island, so he is one of the 20-minute response people. The dept. was here 7 years ago, letting the Commission know the volunteer dept. is not sustainable, but with Indialantic canceling the aid agreement, that was a major change. The Commission will still have a decision to make even if people say no.

Sam Cox – 307 Third Ave – Spoke about being a resident who responds to fire calls. If we go with Indialantic or Brevard County, you might lose marine rescue services. There was a recent call where a resident's kid was on a paddle boat and stuck out in the river during a storm.

Bruce Pickett – 1501 Oak St - Spoke about being in 3 different volunteer fire departments. The most important part to him is the response time. With paid firefighters, we would be able to meet the standards. In 2009, his wife had a heart attack, and that Fire Department arrived quickly. In 2016, she had a stroke, and that Fire Department was close, and so was the hospital. Quick response time is the most important. The thing about money is you cannot put a value on your family; you can put a value on your home.

Paul Carlson – 400 Riverview Lane – Spoke about being on medical leave from the department due to his back being out. 2.5 years ago, his father had a stroke, and BCFR response time was not good. They refused to send an ambulance until he answered all of their questions. We need this department. It took about an hour to get his dad to the hospital, and he did not make it out of the hospital. If our department was paid and ran medical they would have been there within minutes. We need this now. This started 6-7 years ago and we cannot kick the can anymore. We have something that works, but it needs some help because it cannot depend only on the volunteers anymore. Believes in being part of the community, do not let this slip away.

Steve Walters – 416 Sixth Ave – Spoke about how the budget is already out there. It makes more sense to go ahead and apply for the grant. In regards to response time, hiring 6 more people, they would still have to travel. Reminded the Commission of the promises they made when they ran/were appointed.

Dan Maloney – 1403 Pine St – Spoke about being a resident, being a volunteer in the Fire Department, and being full-time with Brevard County Ocean Rescue. The cost of everything is going up, so the main thing is getting the best bang for the buck, which in his opinion would be a combination department. Keep the local department. One way or the other, we are all going to be paying more. Do we want to have control or outsource it and have less control?

Jan Pickett – 1501 Oak – Spoke about being a resident, a nurse practitioner, lieutenant colonel. If it goes out to referendum they will not understand the gravity of the decision. The Commission is elected to make the decisions.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about being an ISO class 3, but that does not significantly affect residential property insurance; it more significantly affects commercial. The bigger issue for insurance is wind and flood damage. - 2:39:35

Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow asked about hurricanes and hurricane response.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about how it would not exist if the Town went with Indian River or Brevard County. Being a small Town, we help each department out, so during hurricanes, we have volunteers come in for emergency response, and after the hurricane, the volunteers go out and help the Building Official to do damage assessments and help Public Works clear the roadways. Brevard County Fire Rescue has in the past pulled their resources from the beachside. The Fire Department has never left the Town for a hurricane. There is a plan in place to move vehicles mainland if need be, but a skeleton crew stays in Town.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin asked if the Town Attorney had an opinion on whether it had to go to a referendum.

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro said it would not need to go to a referendum.

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about a provision in the Charter about no material changes and how that is in relation to the Police Department, not Fire.

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro spoke about how the decision is up to the Commission.

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about how this is not in the budget right now and asked if they would have to budget the full amount.

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro spoke about the option of allocating the money from reserves, but if we get the grant, then that money would be reduced.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin asked what the deadline is for pulling something off the referendum.

Town Clerk Amber Brown said the Brevard County Supervisor of Elections has not provided a date for when to remove things from the ballot. August 18th is the deadline to provide language for things going on the ballot. Said if she had to guess, whenever the ballot is written, you cannot change it anymore.

Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow said Dave mentioned that if you go to a referendum, you would not qualify for the grant.

Mayor Alison Dennington said that is not true.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin spoke about how we could start the search prior to but not give an offer.

Mayor Alison Dennington asked how many of the current volunteers would be interested in doing the paid work.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about how there might be 1 or 2 people interested who already have the certifications, but they would have to have firefighter level 2 and EMT to qualify. Most of the volunteers are happy with their current jobs and make more money.

Mayor Alison Dennington said she keeps hearing there is no time for a referendum, feels rushed, and is uncomfortable with that.

Commissioner Tim Reed spoke about having a conversation with Indian Harbour Beach, and they are going for an intermediary step. Asked if an incremental step would give us the time to get things in motion. A big community outreach needs to be done. Indian Harbour Beach is looking at bringing on 2 paid firefighters and seeing how that goes.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about how his understanding of Indian Harbour's option is to have 2 paid firefighters only during business hours Monday through Friday. - 2:56:25

Commissioner Robert Baldwin asked if the Town got the grant, would anyone be opposed to hiring 6?

Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow and Commissioner Anna Butler spoke about not being opposed.

Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow said her biggest concern is the volunteer fire department going away, and if that happens, the default is Brevard County.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin said Indianalantic would be better than Brevard County because at least they would hire an additional person where Brevard County would make no changes.

Commissioner Tim Reed spoke about if we got the grant he would be in favor of taking advantage of it, but maybe not the full 6 people.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said they are working on the grant for the 6 firefighters. Said if they hired 2 people to cover business hours, that would only help for 8 hours a day, Monday through Friday, but it would not fix the situation they are currently in. Fix it right the first time, rather than kicking the can down the road, which would be a disservice to the residents. Agrees the residents should have input, but most do not want to sit through a 3-hour meeting to learn the intricacies of this. It is the role of the Commission to make the hard decisions and spend the time to educate themselves to best serve the residents. If every hard decision went out to a referendum, why have a Commission?

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about an option for the SAFER grant is to recruit volunteers.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about the grant being for one or the other. You either apply for the paid staffing or for the recruitment of volunteers. Grants are a lot of work to apply for. The only possible option other than having paid people is if there are 30 young, able-bodied residents who live less than 3 minutes from the station who are willing to volunteer, become certified, and are able to leave work.

Mayor Alison Dennington pointed out that the grant had two options: apply for hiring or apply for money to help find volunteers.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown agreed that you can apply for recruitment and retention, or for hiring, but funding to find volunteers would not solve the problem. Said applying for the grant is a big undertaking, and it has to be worth it.

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro asked what the minimum training is. - 3:05:40

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about how the bare minimum for fire 1 is 191 hours of butts in seats class work just for fires. That does not include marine rescue, vehicle accidents, or medical emergencies. Originally, the \$100,000 stipend was split to cover hiring a paid Fire Chief, the maintenance person, training because we had to send people out to be trained, and a stipend to all of the volunteers. Now the stipend is \$30,000-\$40,000 per year.

Mayor Alison Dennington asked if there were bills not yet signed that would affect the Fire Department.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said the Florida Fire Chiefs Association tracks them. He has not checked recently, but watches for updates.

Commissioner Tim Reed spoke about wanting to get the packet, put it online, and do social media posts to get the information out there.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin suggested having an FAQ.

6. Adjournment

Commissioner Robert Baldwin moved to adjourn; Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow seconded; Motion carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm.



Alison Dennington
Mayor

ATTEST:



Rachel Pembroke (Jul 11, 2025 17:51 EDT)

Rachel Pembroke
Transcriptionist

