

SPRING HILL FIRE RESCUE
Emergency Meeting
August 24, 2002
9:00 a.m.

Present: Chairman Kanner, Commissioner Hollander, Commissioner Panozzo, Commissioner Martin, Commissioner Marasciullo, Chief Morrison, Assistant Chief Davies, Attorney Salzman

Call to Order

Chairman Kanner called the Emergency Meeting to order at 9:02

Invocation

Commissioner Panozzo gave the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Kanner led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Marasciullo asked Attorney Salzman if they were in violation of the Sunshine Law, for Public notice?

Attorney Salzman reported because they called an Emergency meeting they are not in violation. A reasonable time period is 24 hours, for a Special meeting or Emergency meeting.

Chairman Kanner stated he called an Emergency meeting, because the Emergency is the state of this Fire District and based on the publicity, in which they have received regarding Fire District. He has seen numerous quotes by Commissioners in the newspapers. He does not know if they are accurate until they meet in public. Therefore, they need to discuss what is actually going on in this situation, in order all Commissioners have an understanding for what is going on in the process and what will happen in the future. Commissioners will then be able to give an educated answer to the citizens when requested. One of the reasons he called the meeting because this was the first time they were meeting since the incident broke. He asked if the Board had any questions.

Commissioner Panozzo asked Attorney Salzman if they can discuss anything the way the meeting was advertised?

Attorney Salzman stated that they can discuss anything related to the three employees who are on Administrative Leave. Normally, with an emergency meeting anything that was done if action was taken would be ratified at a subsequent Regular meeting. He recommended if the Board

comes to a point where they need to take a vote, he would postpone it to a Regular meeting. From what he understood, this meeting was setup for informational purposes. For the Board to understand where everything is, and any questions, they may have. The meeting was not called for any action to be taken or a formal vote.

Chairman Kanner stated that was his intent.

Commissioner Panozzo asked Attorney Salzman if the Board starts to lead to a certain way that is not suppose to be discussed, can he please shut it down.

Attorney Salzman stated he will make a comment, but it is up to the Board.

Chairman Kanner stated for a point of information, clarification, he would like to discuss the details of how he got involved and where he stands at this time. Because the situation is still under investigation, the victim's name is being withheld. The victim approached him sometime in mid June, and requested that he give her information on how a reprimand would take place. He told her he would need more details, and she basically said, "never mind." Less then a week later, she came to him again and asked him what would a reprimand be all about, and again, refused to give him additional information. On the evening of July 3rd, at 4:00 p.m., she called him at home and stated she needed to talk to him right away. He met her in the parking lot of where he has his business, because she is also employed in that building. She told him of a rape that had taken place by three Spring Hill Fire Rescue firefighters, she went into details with him, which he will not discuss, because he does not know where the sworn statement sits. He will show it to the attorney and it will be up to him to make a decision. He told her, anything that she told him he would have to report to the police department. She told him, prior to coming to him, two weeks ago she reported it to the Altamonte Springs police department. He requested the detectives name and phone number, and she gave it to him. He tried to reach the detective that day within minutes after he spoke to her, but he was not available, he was in a parade for the July 4th, holiday. He immediately called Sheriff Nugent, he was not in his office, so he had the operator contact the Sheriff at home. He called him back right away, and he told Sheriff Nugent what had taken place and he checked into it and called him back within a few hours to tell him that there was an active of investigation taking place in Seminole County, the Altamonte Springs police department. On the evening of July 4th, at 11:00 p.m. he met with Chief Morrison in the parking lot of Dunkin Donuts, on Spring Hill Drive and Mariner Blvd. They discussed the situation, and he told Chief Morrison he wanted the three firefighters suspended. Chief Morrison refused to suspend them, because before they do that they need to speak to the detective in detail, which the detective told him he would call him the following day. He agreed, because the three firefighters were off that day and the next day, they were on their two-day swing. He spoke to the detective, in which he believes was, July 5th, the detective's comment was, "do nothing at this time, " because they do not have any evidence on this case. The detective stated the case is still under investigation and preferred that they do nothing, because anything he does would have to be in the Sunshine, and would interfere with his investigation. At that time he decided not to take this situation to a Public meeting, because he felt it might obstruct justice. That was stated

by District Attorney, Donald Sagley, from the St. Pete Times. Therefore, if he had brought it out in public he could have been charged with a misdemeanor. There have been a few contacts with himself and the victim since, and every single contact that has been made and every conversation that took place, was reported to Detective Curtis Smith, at the Altomonte Springs police department. That is where it stands right now. He asked Chief Morrison if he missed anything?

Chief Morrison stated not that he was aware of, he believes Chairman Kanner was explaining his actions concerning the situation.

Chairman Kanner stated the reason he became involved with the victim to begin with, once again, she works in the building where he has his place of business. The victim came to him originally, to ask if she was able to do a theme documentary for college. He spoke to the Chief and after working it out, she was allowed to do it, through him, at Station #1. She came back to him within a week, and thanked him for everything, and told him things went great. She got a good mark on her filming and she appreciated everything that was done on the fire department.

Commissioner Marasciullo asked if Chairman Kanner confirmed with the college that she was a student doing a documentary?

Chairman Kanner said he did not. This information should bring the Board up to date as to where they stand now.

Commissioner Panozzo asked was the Chief also informed through Chairman Kanner or the Detective of Altomonte Springs to hold off on the investigation until it was complete?

Chairman Kanner stated he was told that and he was told by the detective that he did tell the Chief that, however, Commissioner Panozzo would have to ask the Chief what he was told.

Chief Morrison stated that when he spoke to the detective, he strongly recommended that the department take no action until they had a chance to further investigate. They kept in-touch with him in order to keep him in the loop on the investigation.

Commissioner Panozzo stated he just wanted to make sure, because the Chief is getting hammered in the newspapers too, and he does not see it. Because the Chief did not tell him and he had no idea as to what was going on and neither did Commissioner Martin. The Chief did not tell him, because he was told not to say anything.

Chief Morrison stated that part of the process when he was sitting with the detectives was that for him to understand it was an ongoing criminal investigation and he shouldn't discuss it. To clarify that, not only he did not tell the two Commissioners that were mentioned, he did not inform any of the Commissioners.

Commissioner Martin asked Attorney Salzman in the future, if they have an issue, that is brought

to the attention of the Chief or the Chairman, and it is something of this magnitude, would there be anything wrong with the Chief advising them that there is an investigation, but just be very general?

Attorney Salzman said probably not.

Commissioner Martin stated that is one of the things he would prefer to have seen is basic notification of what was going on. He realized the Chief's hands were tied to some degree by the investigator, and did not want to compromise the investigation. However, in the future, he would hope to come to an agreement. They are on the Board because the Secretary of the State of Florida felt they were duly elected to represent the citizens of this community. They should at least be intrusted with the basic information that there are some activities relevant to their personnel. He would like to know about it in advance, instead of second and third parties notifying him about what is going on in the department which he represents.

Chairman Kanner provided Attorney Salzman with a copy of the sworn statement he submitted to the Altamonte Springs police department on July 8th. He would like Attorney Salzman to review it and see if there was any problem as to the actions he took. He asked Attorney Salzman if it could be a Public record or not?

Attorney Salzman stated that anything that is related to an ongoing criminal investigation is not a Public record.

Chairman Kanner stated he provided the statement to Attorney Salzman, because he is an Officer of the court.

Attorney Salzman stated he cannot review and give his opinion until he talks to the State Attorney's office to see whether or not they are releasing the records. It is up to the State Attorney, when they conclude their investigation to whatever they disclose. Until they conclude the investigation, then everything becomes Public record if it is available, there is nothing the Board can do.

Chairman Kanner stated the Board needs to discuss what they are going to do presently, and in the future, and to discuss what they can do so this will not happen again. They do have an embarrassment, again, it is all alleged. There have been no charges filed at this time. It is all alleged accusations. He asked Attorney Salzman if he had any past experience in this type of situation, because he never has. This is something he has never been involved in, and he hopes he will never be involved in something like this again.

Attorney Salzman stated that because he was a former prosecutor, he had past experiences regarding this issue, however, he questions what they can do. There is an on going investigation and until they conclude, there is not much the Board can do internally. They can discuss their rules and regulations and see how they can deal with these situations in the future. Until the

State Attorney's office makes a decision, they are on hold from doing an internal investigation concerning those particular allegations.

Commissioner Panozzo asked after the Altamonte Springs, the State Attorney's office and they hold an internal investigation, what will they accomplish by doing that?

Attorney Salzman stated that an internal investigation is to determine whether their rules and regulations have been violated, to the extent of, whether any kind of disciplinary action needs to be taken.

Commissioner Panozzo stated in that case, not that he is advising any member of the Board not to talk to the media, but when a statement is made to the media, just remember, the victim and the alleged perpetrator, he is sure, they have attorneys. This can all come back and negatively after this investigation is all over in a civil action. That is why he has not commented on anything. The other day he did say something, and the way the media quoted him, was wrong. He said "he didn't know what they are doing having a Special meeting when they cannot discuss anything" the media quoted him as saying "I don't know what they are doing." That is not what he said. Therefore, everyone needs to be careful when they talk to the media.

Commissioner Hollander stated that he is a firm believer in freedom of speech. Unfortunately, this is not a perfect world, and sometimes the job at the newspapers, and their job sometimes clashes together. He thinks the Board understands there were some difficult decisions that had to be made by the Chief, and to some degree by the Commissioners. He was contacted by Chairman Kanner on July 4th, and he told him to contact the Chief regarding an investigation. He contacted the Chief and he briefed him as to whatever he knew at that time, which simply was that there were allegations made against three firefighters. He told the Chief that they should suspend them. He listened to the Chief's arguments against suspending them, and his argument was sound. These were only allegations, and the detectives told the Chief not to do anything until they gather more information, and the firefighters were not on duty for the next couple of days anyway. He asked the Chief to mutually agree with him if this investigation escalated in anyway, he would reconsider further action. The Chief promised him he would. At the end of the 48 hours, they discussed it again, and the Chief told him not only had it not escalated, but they were even affirming further that the investigation was not finding any substantiation to the allegations. The Chief's argument was, they were told not to discuss this issue in a public forum, because of the investigation. That is where the clash between what the newspapers do and what the department's legal responsibility is. This is new territory for them, they have not gone through anything like this in the past, this is extremely serious. He believes if he, the Chief, or Chairman Kanner, thought the people of the community were in any kind of danger at all, appropriate action would have been taken. If anyone was to take a look at the three firefighters involved, which the Media has done, their service to the community has been exemplary. Regardless of any allegations, whether they did it or not, their service has been exemplary. There is not a black mark against them regarding their service, and based on that, he believes the Chief's action was appropriate. He told the Chief that he would support him in his

decision, and he does. He feels it is clear that they cannot discuss anything regarding the investigation. He thinks the most beneficial thing they can do for the people they serve, is to start to form a plan to deal with what will be coming down the road with these specific firefighters with the allegations, regardless of what is found. And for the future, and hopefully they will never have to deal with something like this again. On the other hand, they need to send a strong message to the people that work for them and to the Public, that they will not sit idly by and not do what needs to be done in those saturations. However, not that they do something from a knee jerk reaction, but has to be very carefully thought out and handled with care. Therefore, he took the liberty of contacting someone who he greatly respects as a Nationally known Investigator, blue color crime, white collar crime and doing it for many years. He has worked in many departments as a consultant. He would like to see someone appointed in the Department in charge of Internal Affairs Research. In this particular situation at some point, they are going to need an investigation done in the department. He thinks whomever the person is that the Chief decides to appoint to that position is going to need some guidance in how to do that investigation. There are numerous resources, for one they can use the Sheriff's department, or he may want somebody else that is use to developing an internal affair's department etc. If they Board would like, Mr. Scott could come up to the podium and give his credentials. He has also offered his services if the Board would like him to help.

Mr. Jack Scott, a resident of Spring Hill for fifteen years, and a retired investigator, stated that since his retirement in 1988, after twenty years, he spent eighteen years in corporate investigations and insurance investigations. He ran across these types of situations at least two dozen times in his career, especially targeted toward fire departments. After a situation like this, the department needs to develop some kind of procedure to handle these things in the future. In his experience, the best way to set it up, is between the Chief and the Board's attorney. In his experience, in the past, have been the appointment of one high level officer within the department to act as the internal affairs officer. It does not mean he will do the investigations, that means he is charge of settling the facts. It is generally not the Chief, because he is the decider of the facts and punishment. The Internal Affairs Officer's responsibility would be, to review any internal complaints, and have a regular system setup in writing. This would be approved by the Chief on how a complaint will be handled against any department personnel. Mr. Scott further discussed the responsibility of the Internal Affairs Officer. As Attorney Salzman stated they are not dealing with a criminal case, they are dealing with a policy and an internal civil type operation of the department's policy. With the guidance of legal councils, a summary is made of each individuals incident, then presented to the Chief so he can make the decision on whether to handle it on his level, or bring it to the Board. The internal affair's records should be kept extremely confidential, even on closed cases.

Chairman Kanner asked Attorney Salzman if they are protected under Florida law?

Attorney Salzman reported that some parts of the investigation would be considered confidential and some are not.

Mr. Scott stated that if the Board makes a vote and the Chief would like to move forward with this issue, he would be happy to provide the Chief with whatever materials he may need to help him devise a plan.

Commissioner Panozzo stated that they were advised by Council, at this meeting they are unable to vote on anything, so he recommended putting this issue on the agenda for the next Regular meeting.

Commissioner Marasciullo stated he agrees with the Commissioners. He stated that in the newspapers he was quoted on one incident, which he would like to address. Everyone knows he is an entertainer. Before and after the fact, the entire conversation was taken out of context. He does not think he said anything wrong. Therefore, he feels there is no need to apologize. In defense, he is a businessman in the Spring Hill area, and very well known. He is respected in the community, as such, he takes everything personally, especially when his name is mentioned. Until three men are proven guilty of anything, he will not assume they are guilty. If something was admitted as consensual that is not admitting to rape. He agreed with how the Chief handled the situation.

Commissioner Martin stated that it is safe to assume they have two separate issues. They have an internal issue, and a potential criminal issue on the allegations. Presently, they have three firefighters who are on paid administration leave. He asked the Chief when is the report from the State Administration office?

Chief Morrison stated that they should receive the report sometime next week.

Chairman Kanner reported that he called the State Administration office, and was told it could possibly be sometime next week, but nothing definite.

Commissioner Martin stated so they should figure it will be another week before they see anything.

Commissioner Marasciullo asked as Fire Commissioners, are they supposed to be making any calls to find out about this criminal investigation that the police department is handling?

Attorney Salzman stated they are no different than any other citizen. Any citizen can call and ask the State Attorney's office.

Commissioner Martin stated he would imagine, to maintain the present status with the firefighters being on paid leave until they get the outcome, and then revisit the situation. He realizes that there are allegations that have to be substantiated, or disproved, which is a separate element. The activities in Altamonte Springs, have brought a great deal of turmoil to the department, and has cost the department money, and inadvertently is affecting some of the way they are doing things. He asked Attorney Salzman if they are able to act on the issue separately,

before the conclusion by the State Attorney's office, or would he advise to hold off?

Attorney Salzman stated that in this particular type of investigation, he would defer to someone from Mr. Scott's experience. There is not much that the individuals are going to say at this point, including the victim. The State Attorney's office should have given direction, from the victim's standpoint, no one speaks to anyone until they concluded their investigation. He does not know, but from the firefighters perspective, they may have an attorney. Their attorney would tell them not to say anything, because anything they say could be self incriminating. If they wanted to question the firefighter regarding their story, for the internal investigation, the firefighters will not be able to say anything. Could the Board do something about them not answering the question? Sure they can, but it will not get the Board anywhere. The ultimate goal is to determine whether they had their rules and regulations and policies violated. Then take the appropriate action based on the information. The Board needs to wait until the criminal investigation is concluded.

Commissioner Martin stated in other words, if they were to try and act upon "unbecoming conduct," there is a possibility if they take action now, after the State Attorney has completed their investigation, they would have to revisit the issue.

Attorney Salzman stated that was correct. Any action taken prior to having a complete investigation may not be helpful for the Board. Until the investigation is concluded, they may not have enough information that could help the Board. The investigation should be over soon, so the Board will know the extent of the charges. However, just because the State Attorney's office determines the charges, it does not mean the individuals are guilty. Therefore, unless the individuals are proven to the charges, or the jury convicts them. Parts of the investigation can be opened, but guilt cannot be concluded unless there is an admission, or the Board makes a finding, or a jury makes a finding.

Commissioner Hollander stated based on what Council said, he would like the Chief to move forward immediately, with speaking to Mr. Scott or whoever would be necessary in preparation for the Board to make a vote.

Chairman Kanner stated the reason why he called the Emergency meeting was because on their next Regular meeting he does not want to hear that they have to look into this issue, and having to wait for someone to get back to them. Because the Board canceled the September 11th Regular meeting, he would like to hear some definitive answers at the next Regular meeting. Therefore, if the Board agrees, he would like to instruct the Chief and Attorney Salzman to meet with Mr. Scott, or whoever else they may need to speak with, because he would like some answers at the next Regular meeting, one way or another.

Chief Morrison stated that after Commissioner Panozzo's statement the agenda was being revised for their next Regular meeting. With the item being on the agenda, he plans on meeting with Mr. Scott and Attorney Salzman, and hopefully, he will come back to the Board with some

answers.

Chairman Kanner asked Mr. Scott, if he would like to be a guest speaker at their next Regular meeting?

Mr. Scott stated he would speak to the Chief regarding that issue.

Commissioner Marasciullo asked at the time of the incident, were the three firefighters on Spring Hill Fire Rescue's time? And were they paid in anyway for the trip to Altamonte Springs?

Chief Morrison reported that they were not.

Chairman Kanner stated that the three firefighters are on Administrative Leave with pay, as per Council directions. From a legal perspective, is that a problem?

Attorney Salzman reported they did nothing illegal.

Chairman Kanner asked Council if he suggested keeping them on Administrative Leave at this time?

Attorney Salzman reported yes, especially with the time line of the State Attorney office's report coming in within the next week.

Chairman Kanner asked if they are on the right track, or do they have to change anything?

Attorney Salzman stated that they have several different issues, and one of those issues is that they have rules and regulations, and policy procedures to follow. Based on any decisions made by the Chief or by the Board, individuals that are employed, the union has rights too. So one of the things the Board is careful about, when doing these things is to follow the policy and procedures. The Board has not violated the policy and procedures at this point.

Commissioner Panozzo stated based on Attorney Salzman's statement, the Chief and the Board did right by following the detectives in Altomonte Springs, as to, not doing anything until the investigation completed.

Attorney Salzman stated he agrees with that statement. Based on the detectives investigations, the Board needs to comply, because the idea is to come with the truth and determine whether the law was violated or not. Anyone related to the District, should follow those requests. The idea is to determine whether or not the criminal acts, or violations occurred and whether or not they should be prosecuted. To that extent, he would advise them to cooperate with law enforcement, and that is the position the Board has taken. Unfortunately, based on the circumstances, and some information was not relayed to individuals, and to the public in a timely manner. That is a problem with situations such as these. Any situation, as this type, would have to be discussed in

the Sunshine, such as, a public forum.

Commissioner Panozzo stated that he wanted to make it clear, because in the newspapers the Chief, the Board, and especially the Chairman, got hammered for not doing anything. However, they were advised not to do anything.

Attorney Salzman stated that the Board and the Department were put in a tough position with this investigation.

Open Forum

Bill Fagan, resident of Spring Hill, is involved with numerous community organizations. He has spoken in front of the Board previously, therefore, he has interest as to what goes on in the community. He said Chairman Kanner started off the meeting by saying “this is the first meeting regarding the incident of the Sunshine matter.” During the meeting Chairman Kanner stated he spoke to Commissioner Hollander, does that fall within the Sunshine Law? He questions that, just the procedure of what has happened here.

Chairman Kanner asked Council to reply to the question.

Attorney Salzman stated the violation of the Sunshine Law would occur if there was a discussion between two Commissioners about any item that would be potentially voted on between the Board. Just individual contact, without anything more, is not a violation to the Sunshine Law.

Chairman Kanner stated the only thing he said to Commissioner Hollander was he needed to call Chief Morrison and ask him about an ongoing investigation. There was absolutely no discussion other than that.

Bill Fagan stated that Commissioner Panozzo stated he knew nothing about the investigation. Chief Morrison did not discuss it with him, and the only information Commissioner Panozzo received was through the newspapers.

Chairman Kanner stated the reason why he contacted Commissioner Hollander, was because he is the Vice Chairman, and he felt the Vice Chairman needed that information.

Bill Fagan stated as a citizen of the community, and a taxpayer, holding meetings in a parking lot is not the place to conduct meetings. They should use a good meeting place, such as, the Commission Room or the Chief’s office. As Commissioner Hollander brought up, Mr. Scott, whom he never met, but he is sure his credentials are good. He noticed in the meeting another citizen, who has local and federal credentials to assist the Fire and Rescue Department. His name is Walter Dry, and with the Board’s permission, he would recommend Mr. Dry to join the meeting with Mr. Scott and the Chief.

Chairman Kanner stated that would be up to Mr. Dry.

Bill Fagan stated that Chairman Kanner emphasized, very strongly that Chief Morrison said to him do not take any action regarding the three firefighters, when they first met in the parking lot of Dunkin Donuts. That seems to be typically motivated because it was over emphasized that Chief Morrison told him to do something. That decision should have been his own, as an individual.

Chairman Kanner stated that nobody on the Board as an individual Commissioner, has the authority to suspend or put anyone on Administrative Leave. The only one that has that authority is Chief Morrison, unless a meeting was called in the Sunshine. Anything that Chief Morrison stated at that time, he had to respect his decision.

Mr. Dry, a resident of Spring Hill, and most people know him as a consultant of the Spring Hill Fire Rescue. He was trained in diversity and sexual harassment, and if the Chief feels he needs his services to conduct additional training regarding these issues he can call him. The Chief knows he is always available.

Chief Morrison stated that Mr. Dry and the District has a longstanding relationship. Mr. Dry has conducted all of their diversity and sexual harassment training. When this situation is concluded, he and Mr. Dry will meet to discuss future plans for the District.

Terence Gorski, resident of Spring Hill, and a friend of the Spring Hill firefighters, stated that he has had the opportunity to know and work with the Chief. He is really concerned with the situation at hand. He understands that there is a great deal at risk for everyone, especially the Board. There are certain things that are not coming to light, as far as, not being brought up. He strongly encourages the Commissioners to appoint a public affair officer who can respond and help direct the Media, and present the quality and confidence of the Spring Hill firefighters. His concern is for the firefighters, how can they expect their firefighters to go in harms way, when in the public eye there is an appearance of a coverup. Whereas, everyone is scurrying to cover their own ass, and then expect the firefighters to put their ass on the line. He asked the Board to consider doing something in the public eye to represent the quality and professionalism of the fire service. To attempt and put up some type of protective wall between the accusations against the three firefighters, and the rest of the members of the fire service. When he read the newspapers, it showed him some members of the public are assuming that many of the firefighters, simply by admitting that they are firefighters, are guilty of sexual misconduct. That cannot be allowed to stand, in his mind. He strongly recommended getting a Public Affairs Officer that can actively put the point of view down. There is a provision in the union contract that calls for an Employee Assistance Program. There is no time like now, that the firefighters in the department need an EAP more than they do right now. He is really surprised that there has not been any attention regarding this plan. There are many firefighters who are deeply concerned, and legitimately so, about what is going on, to the point where their head is not fully in the game. When the firefighters head is not fully in the game, they are at risk for injury, death and not carrying out

their responsibilities, and putting citizens in harms way. He strongly recommended that at the next Regular meeting, the Board get a viable EAP in place, immediately. In order to make sure that debriefing, defusing and counseling is available to every firefighter in the department, so the stigma is removed, and positive action is taken to protect public safety. He worked for thirty years in an Employee Assistance Program, and had quite a background in personnel matters. He strongly suggested that the personnel policy be reviewed. He has reviewed the department's policies, and there is no policy stating what is to be done if a firefighter is accused of any felony crime. For customary and usual policy, it goes on the record, and there is no admission of guilt, there is a suspension with pay, pending the outcome of the investigation. This would not be an indicator of guilt to the firefighter, but as a protection to public safety and public interest. In the departments policy manual there is a level #3 offence called sexual misconduct, however, defined nowhere in the manual. There needs to be an operational definition of sexual misconduct. If there was sexual misconduct, and as soon as administration was made aware of this issue, the individuals should have been engaged in some form of counseling, or some type of corrective action with the firefighters. He was concerned because, there was no form of action taken until it hit the newspapers. He does not think it was intentional, but he believes because of the lack of policy and guidance, and the concern to protect the firefighters got out of hand. Where was the chain of command in all of this? They have the firefighters union involved in this issue. What is the status of the leader of the firefighters union? Is the firefighter's union in a position where they can now adequately represent the safety and welfare of an officer of the fire team? Should the Board not formally request that the firefighter's union, at a higher level in this Local, to send a representative to guide the members of the union. In order to reform a leadership that can see them through this crisis, to make sure that the rights and privileges of firefighters are defended. If he was a firefighter in this department, he would be scared to death that something can reverberate on this and he would end up with his job, and his families safety, and family's reputation on the line. Past allegations are already creeping into the newspapers from alleged offensive from seven, eight and nine years ago. He encouraged the Board to formally partition the firefighter's union at a higher level. Whereas, to form a meeting where the firefighters can get together in an open forum and get leadership higher then the current President and Vice President to come and guide them through the process. The firefighter's union has many people who are experienced regarding these issues. As far as, Mr. Scott, he believes he is an extremely confident person, with a very good background regarding these issues. However, he suggested that Mr. Scott bring a bias person with him at the meeting with him and the Chief. He feels Mr. Scott has formed a prejudgement as to what is going on in this department. He strongly recommended that this situation be brought to an open select process to seek the finest consultation from an objective process regarding this matter. Public credibility and safety of this department is seriously on the line, and the welfare of the firefighters is on the line. He does not think this issue will go away, unless there is a far broader and more definitive action on the part of the Commission. In order to, protect the firefighters integrity, and assure their performance and health is being handled the correct way.

Chief Morrison stated that he wanted to assure the citizens of the District that they have one of the finest fire departments of the area. He is as proud of it now, as he has always been. He met

with each and every crew in the fire department to discuss the situation. He told them he has an open door policy and if they had issues they wanted to discuss, to come to his office. He had firefighters take advantage of the offer. He educated the Officers as to what he expects from them in this situation. Their firefighters are holding their heads up high, because they work for a great organization. He told the firefighters if they heard any comments from the public that they are uncomfortable with, tell the public, their Chief would love the opportunity to discuss this issue with them, and to give them his phone number. He has been in contact with the two members of the Executive Board who are remaining out of the union. They have informed him that they have gone to their District level for guidance. He believes that there is leadership in place with the union. He has met with them and told them this is a difficult time, and Administration would help work through this situation. He thinks everything came out prosperous. As far as, getting all of the firefighters together to let them air some of their concerns, he thinks that is an excellent idea. However some of the firefighters tried it, but Administration felt it was inappropriate. He spoke to some of the Firefighters, and they understood his actions regarding that issue, and they are now working together on that situation.

Chairman Kanner asked do they have counselors on board in case firefighters need to speak to them?

Chief Morrison stated that they do not have them on board. Therefore, their Employee Assistance Program is seriously lacking. There have been discussions over the past few months regarding the EAP. He has discussed it with some of the Commissioners, and has met Mr. Gorski. Mr. Gorski was going to speak at the next Regular meeting regarding plans for an EAP, however, with everything that has been going on, that will be discussed at the following Regular meeting. The public need not fear. The men and women of the department are all professionals, and doing a great job.

Paul Brosnar, resident of Spring Hill, his concern was watching character assassination in progress. The person was called a victim, and her name was withheld, when in reality, she was giving interviews to the newspapers. The fact of the matter is, the reputation of the three men has been ruined. They will never get promoted above where they are, if they get to keep their job. From the sound of Commissioner Martin, they will be receiving their unemployment checks soon.

Second of all, this has to do with Chairman Kanner, because he is running for County Commission. Chairman Kanner needs to realize, in that position, having to with the Fire Board, he needs to keep his mouth shut. Because quite frankly, he is giving fuel to the newspapers to crucify the department. The answer he should give to the newspapers should be, "no comment." Third of all, it has to do with Independence of the fire district. Be sure that Chris Kingsley and Nancy Robinson will come and steal the budget money as fast as they can turn their heads. They want this District, and they want control. They want to create a kingdom. It will be at the Districts expense, and the Spring Hills residents expense. Let it be known that this is about the future of this fire district. This is the future of Spring Hill protection from Fire and Rescue, and the attempt of the County to take it over. This is all political, it has nothing to do with the three

firefighters. If this issue did not make the newspapers, nothing would have been said. It had no reason to make the newspapers. These are all allegations. The fact is, everyone needs to wake up, the County wants this Fire District and it's money. Until the people realize what is going on, they are going to be lead by the nose by the newspapers, and by the County Commission.

Commissioner Martin stated that he appreciates Mr. Brosnar's comments, and he is well in his right. However, Mr. Brosnar was rushing to judgement and to assume that he wants the three employees fired. Being the issue has been brought before the Board, and there are issues that have come up. They are not created by the Board, and they are going to have to address them. For him to look at this situation and say, as far as he is concerned, it is a non issue and turn his heard, he would be quickly accused of ignoring his responsibilities as a Commissioner. When the time comes to address the issue, it will be addressed in a professional manner as possible, and in accordance with the policy. In addition, they do have a person who is available for the firefighters, EMT's and paramedics in the department. They have Dr. Clemons, who is their Chaplin, and probably the most under utilized person in the department. He would encourage people if they feel they need to speak to someone about a problem, speak to the Chaplin, or a clergyman. He thanked Mr. Brosnar for his comments, but he feels they were premature and mean spirited.

Commissioner Panozzo stated that he agreed with Mr. Gorski, 90% of what he said, however, the only thing he did not agree with was the comment he made about Mr. Scott. All Mr. Scott said was, he handled cases like this, he did not say he was for or against these types of cases. He agreed with Chief Morrison, that this is the finest department there is, and their employees are professional. The firefighters are called to a job, not to answer questions about the three firefighters. He said when the newspapers are doing their stories, to please remember, that these firefighters have to work here, and deal with the citizens of the community. And they do a terrific job.

Bob Hinter, resident of Spring Hill, stated that everyone grew up with firemen and everyone knows what firemen do. They are great and they care about sick people, injuries and death, and he has seen it. He just hopes that everybody believes in them, and God Bless them.

Chief Morrison stated that Mr. Hinter, came to many of their scenes. He comes by Headquarters, and out of his own pocket, he drops off tapes of scenes from their department and other fire departments, in which they can use for training. His freelance videos are on some of the local news media. He has been an asset to the department for many years.

Chairman Kanner stated that Mr. Hinter dropped off copies to him, and he now has an entire library, and he would not take a penny for them.

John Liparito, firefighter and Secretary of Local 2794, stated he was not much of a public speaker, but he will do the best he can. First of all, Chairman Kanner's opening statement was that there are accusations against three firefighters, and yet he said "the victim." The victim is

also an alleged victim.

Chairman Kanner apologized for not stating that, and Mr. Liparito was correct.

John Liparito stated that as far as Union business, it is going smoothly. Alex Lopez, and he have been handling the day to day situations that arise. In regards to what Commissioner Panozzo said about the newspapers, everyone knows the newspapers like to sell papers. However, the very first article that came out stated three firefighters accused of rape, and the newspaper had a picture of a guy from New York. Therefore, is the paper accurate? Some parts are, and some parts are not. If anyone has any questions about Union business, they can contact either him or Alex Lopez. As it was said, the firefighters were just accused with accusations, and the Union stands behind them 100%. Pray to God that they can get them through this situation, so they can get onto the issue of Independence. These are the views of the Executive Board

Iris Mezzapelle, a Hernando County taxpayer and wife of a firefighter, stated that the gentleman was correct in stating that they are being assassinated through the newspapers. It is wrong, the alleged victim should have no more rights then the firefighters accused. They should be afforded, confidentiality, respect and support from everyone, including the Commission. Those were allegations. Nothing was substantiated. The Board did not act on anything because they were told not to. Then all of a sudden, by strong recommendation, as she stated in an article she sent to the newspapers, something was done. It was wrong, these men deserve respect, support and they deserve everybody to be by their side right now, because these are only accusations.

John Liparito stated that this is America “innocent until proven guilty,” because they are firefighters, “they are guilty until proven innocent.” That is wrong!

Chairman Kanner stated that he feels the Emergency meeting accomplished quite a bit, because there was two experts in the audience who have much experience in the field, Mr. Dry and Mr. Scott. This will put them on track for the coming week, and he thinks a lot will be answered at their next Regular meeting.

Motion

Commissioner Panozzo made a Motion to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Marasciullo seconded the Motion.

The Motion carried unanimously (5-0).

Adjourn

Chairman Kanner Adjourned the Commission Meeting at 10:25 a.m.

Robert Kanner, Chairman

Joan E. Chiofalo, Board Secretary