

Dear Board,

I have answered the questions (bold black) statements in red. If you agree, send this out to whomever.

Richard

Dear Upper Captiva Citizens:

The responses in red type are from the Concerned Citizens of Upper Captiva who represent over 140 property owners on the island. We fully support the UCFRD but not a 1.2 million or more fire station expansion. All statements are factual and verifiable and not intended to impugn reputations or cast dispersion in any way. We only wish to point out differences in positions and ask for full island representation.

Thank you.. CCUC

The Upper Captiva Fire and Rescue Service District was created by an act of the Florida Legislature in 1990. That act established that a Board of five Commissioners be elected by the voters of Upper (or North) Captiva to govern the "Independent Special Fire Control District." Specifically, the board is required to develop and adopt a budget and to fix an ad valorem tax on all taxable property of the District, in order to maintain a fire department and rescue service. The Board is charged to "adopt a five- to ten-year plan to identify the facilities, equipment, personnel, and revenue needed by the district over the next five-year period."

None of the current or former fire commissioners has ever stood for an election. None have ever run opposed and thus were never placed on a State Ballot. Every time there has been a vacancy on the board, either the Chief or the board members has solicited, from registered island voters, someone to fill the vacancy. The new board member is then accepted by the previous board...

Just expand on this statement: Elections are every two years, any registered voter may apply. They must file with the Supervisor of Election, File a State financial disclosure, a loyalty oath and be able to attend each monthly meeting. When a position is vacated, the district post the vacancy for all to see, usually on the island bulletin boards.

Your five fire Commissioners and the Chief meet every month at an appointed and publicly noticed time and place, to attempt to accomplish all the duties demanded by Florida State Law – including the "Sunshine Law" -- and the demands of the bill passed by the Legislature. Minutes of those meeting are readily available on the web site (UCCA1.com) or in person. We are not professional Commissioners, we are simply island residents who volunteer our time and effort to fulfill the District's obligations. The Board recognizes however that our principal purpose is to provide the best life saving and fire protection/ fighting service possible on this small island.

We have good news! For the fourth year in a row your Commissioners have developed plans to maintain or reduce the budget of the district and thus reduce the tax burden on the vast majority of island taxpayers. This, in spite of the fact that the valuation of the properties on the island has fallen by over 100 million dollars. Over the same period, the costs of insurance, transportation, and materials have increased! Upper Captiva has a fiscally conservative fire board; we are taxpayers too. We have examined every expenditure, using

in-house maintenance on our equipment, employing part-time professional fire fighters from other districts, seizing every opportunity to economize, and through many other efforts. This year the Board found that hiring a third firefighter (effective October 1) and reexamining part-time staff hours is more economical than other shift-style, bunk room solutions. All this without sacrificing essential safety of life and property of owners, residents, visitors, workers and renters.

Regardless of the monthly island meetings, with the demographics and transient nature of our island property owners, for a decision of this magnitude it is incumbent for the UCFRD to reach out to ALL property owners. We are not suggesting the daily operations of the district require this degree of outreach, but in this instance it is imperative.

The district agrees: This is why we are waiting for our seasonal owners to return for more in depth meetings. Right now, the UCCA web site and e-mail are our only mass media communication. We are intending to build an interactive web site.

The current board has done an adequate but not outstanding job considering the current economic conditions. The tax millage rates for the last five years starting in 2005-06 are as follows: 2.0659, 2.0900, 2.2900, 2.5430, 2.9960. So as you can see the millage rates have continued to increase in all of the previous five years. Some individual's taxes have decreased while others have INCREASED. If any individual's tax burden decreased, it was caused by the decrease in property value and/or the Save Our Homes initiative, not the actions of the commissioners. The commissioners did trim some fat from the budget but primarily increased the millage rate annually in order to take in the same or just slightly more revenue than the previous year.

Both positions are correct: But , the fire board has stabilized or reduced cost and increased the level of service with less money.

MEET LONG-TERM NEEDS

The 2004 Board of Commissioners recognized the need for more and better space. The existing Fire Station is fully utilized with fire fighting vehicles, protective gear, equipment and emergency transport vehicles. Additional vehicles, equipment and supplies are currently stored in temporary structures or exposed to the elements on adjacent District property, which was always intended to accommodate a Station Addition.

The Assistant Fire Chief is presently housed far off site at considerable expense, because suitable facilities are not available on site. Part-time firefighters are housed in the common/meeting area of the existing Fire Station or in the Chief's quarters for the same reason. Current facilities are inadequate to accommodate additional firefighters, emergency medical personnel, equipment or supplies, even if their cost were to be absorbed by the County.

The existing Fire Station was completed in 1996 at a cost of approximately \$400,000. To save money and to assuage Islanders concerned with the costs, the "final" design was modified to reduce the size and height of the structure, to eliminate a maintenance bay, and they eliminated other features such as fire sprinklers and storm resistant windows. The proposed

Station Addition has been designed to overcome these shortcomings. Also, due to the unique general conditions of island construction, undertaking a single large project is much more cost effective than undertaking several short term / temporary renovations or deferring parts of the project for future construction.

It is generally accepted the island needs to solve the HOUSING issue for our fire fighters. The need to build a completely new FIRE STATION is the question. There are communities with vastly larger populations and much larger service areas that currently have smaller fire buildings than Upper Captiva, with it's less that one square mile area and 315 homes. A new housing facility is what is needed, not a totally new full function fire station. The new housing facility will alleviate storage concerns and fulfill all future manpower housing needs.

Two Points: Over the years, many fire officials have visited our island. Everyone has come to the same, unsolicited conclusion; this island is a disaster waiting to happen. To the trained , professional eye, they see the un maintained 350 acres of wild land. They see tall wooden construction intertwined with over grown vegetation. They see NO one coming to help. These small station with large areas to cover that was mentioned, has a great advantage, other fire trucks and crews are coming to help.

FOCUS ON UTILITY

In March 2010 the UCFRD Commissioners and Staff presented the basic what, why, when and where of a proposed Station Addition to many Island residents who attended well publicized meeting at the Fire Station. Questions were raised and answered and the overall response to the proposed Addition was very positive. It is clear Islanders want and need adequate fire protection and emergency rescue services: What is considered "adequate" and how these "wants and needs" are met, is the primary focus of the UCFRD Commission. There are no simple answers; everything involves tradeoffs. Over the past year and a half we have collected data, spoken with many islanders and professionals, and the project has slowly taken a form that we can discuss with certainty. Commissioners have taken over a year to learn what's legally required to build a utilitarian public facility that meets projected needs: The design mirrors the old building, with equipment and work bays below; two living units and a spare bedroom above. Plans for the addition are on display at the firehouse, where any Commissioner or the Chief will be glad to discuss the details or get you answers.

The well attended 2010 meeting Commissioner McDonald references, totaled less than 50 people and no subsequent meeting has garnered anywhere near that number. (The attendance lists are available at the firehouse.) Commissioner McDonald is absolutely correct when he says, the "primary focus of the UCFRD" is to determine "wants and needs." The approach this board of commissioners has taken to reach their determination of what is "adequate," IS, what is at question.

This is true, It is difficult to get people to attend meetings. "Adequate" is still being answered.

Recognized standards (both State and National) set the minimum requirements for professionals at an incident. We can no longer count on volunteers who aren't at least certified "Firefighter One" to carry out the standardized requirements of our district. If the District does not have four qualified firefighters/members at the scene of a structure fire, it cannot send anyone into the burning structure to contain or extinguish it, or to rescue occupants. Accordingly, the District must plan to increase its manpower capability to comply with all applicable regulation. The proposed Station Addition has been designed to accommodate both full-time salaried personnel and hourly part-time personnel. The existing Fire Station is simply too small or inadequate to accommodate all these needs, even if reconfigured. The District must plan to increase its manpower capability to comply with all applicable regulation"

Since its inception in 1990 the UCFRD has had a Standard Operating Procedure of "surround and drown." Meaning that due to limited resources they would fight a fire from the outside of the structure and attempt to prevent the fire from spreading. Commissioner McDonald's statement" is simply not true. The UCFRD "can" adopt a new SOP if they "choose" to do so, but are not REQUIRED to do so by any law or code. It is their Choice. The choice for a fire fighter to enter a building while the fire is in the "incipient" stage is based on his/her professional judgment, and not restricted by the number of fire fighters on the scene. The requirement for four fire fighters is only required IF the district's SOP is to go inside to fight a fire. This is the law. The current SOP of fighting the fire externally and preventing it's spread has severed the island since the 1990. A much more salient question is why do we not have a para medic on the island. With the emergency medical related calls for the district running 500 to 1 for medical versus fire calls, the prudent decision calls for a paramedic and to house him/her in a new Housing Facility. The cost savings for this approach over a 1.2 million dollar fire station should be one of the information items presented to the community?

This is true, but misleading: First, let me explain the difference between a Standard Operating Procedure and Guideline. SOP's are documented procedures that cannot be deviated from. A guideline however, is an operational decision. Upper Captiva FRD has never had a Standard Operating Procedure of "surround and drown". With that said, when I took over as fire chief in 1991, it was apparent that with our equipment and volunteer resources, our only options was to contain a structure fire to its area of origin. During the 1990's, yes , I was clear that "surround and drown" was our only option, due to the fact that we was a "one man" operation. Over the past decade, the island has grown and the district has adapted to those demands. When the fire district submitted it's Public Facilities Report and Mission Statement to the Clerk of Courts, we stated that the district would comply with Florida Administration Code 69a62.006 FL., Statutes 633 and applicable documentation. IF the homeowners desire that the fire department NOT enter their house in case of fire, they simply need to make their case to the fire board. As far as medical response, the district would / is communicating with Lee County EMS about stationing a Paramedic at the station. With our current finances, this would be the only way we could afford it. (I'll be glad to elaborate, call or e-mail)

DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

The Commissioners studied and considered several alternative plans for accommodating personnel and other needs from a simple bunk room to shared extended-stay facilities, expanded administrative facilities and reconfigured community facilities. Have we investigated buying or renting a distressed house or Townhouse or build a "Butler building?" Yes. To paraphrase one islander, an experienced civil engineer and consultant to the Board, costs and limitations of a temporary building, its eventual removal and replacement equals no long-term economies. This volunteer expert added that the plan and price of the current design are quite reasonable and timing is the best the district will ever see. Bringing a distressed structure up to code and requirements for public facilities is problematic, at best. Placing firefighters in scattered locations slows response time, especially while they scramble to the firehouse for equipment and protective gear, then turn around and respond to the emergency. Neighbors could understandably object to the 24/7 movements of firefighters and their internal combustion vehicles. On-duty firefighters often patrol lanes, or respond to calls at all times, day or late at night, especially while holiday crowds roam. Building just a garage on the adjacent property and renovating the existing upstairs facilities for more housing wouldn't accommodate immediate needs much less future demands. At some point in the future another addition or alterations will be needed at an additional cost. Which would include demolition or partial demolition of existing facilities, and that would indeed waste taxpayers money and possibly jeopardizes the districts ability to immediately respond to life threatening emergencies. The planned service bay will help reduce the cost of servicing our aging vehicles and equipment and, more importantly, minimize the time they are out of service. Equipment and vehicles have never been barged on/off the Island for free.

Commissioner McDonald has done a good job at explaining the reasons not to accept several alternate proposals, but a very poor job at explaining the need for the new 1.2 million dollar fire station. His quote from an island owner who is a civil engineer is totally disingenuous. The actual statement concerned whether the estimated 1.2 million dollar price tag was reasonable considering it's design and current construction costs. The statement was not a confirmation or recommendation of the necessity to build nor was it an approval of the actual design. We have spoken to the gentleman directly about this issue. Commissioner McDonalds only statement in support of the proposed 1.2 million dollar expansion references saving money on barging and repair service. We question and challenge the UCFRD to justify this statement by showing the cost of repairs and maintenance over the last 15 years versus the projected costs to maintain the new 1.2 million dollars building for the next 15 years? Please provide the community with estimated tax, insurance, electric, upkeep and repair costs for the next ten years. Then the community can make a decision as to the cost savings.

I will not go into the who said what but, the district is working hard to solve the cost issues. At the UCCA meeting I did not get the opportunity to explain some basic annual expenses of the expansion. For example: The district pays out about \$16,500 a year for offsite housing. The estimated annual Expenses for the addition are: Insurance \$5,000 utilities \$5,400 communication \$1,800 . Building maintenance should not be a factor for a few years.

GOING FORWARD

The result of our work is that we now have answers. Although the learning and tweaking process continues, we now know what can be done, and what must be done to satisfy building and fire codes and legal requirements for this project. It has been a long haul and honestly we have been astonished at the time and expense required, just as the Board that built the existing building must have been. We know all too well that these are difficult economic times, but we don't want to make the mistake of addressing our present needs at greater expense tomorrow. We are devising a method to finance the project that should make this improvement affordable for all islanders. As the District continues with information meetings, financing plans and more public discussions, we hope your questions and considerations will reflect on the facts presented here. The Board greatly appreciates your informed involvement in this project. We plan to build the most appropriate and the last fire service facility the island will ever need.

If Commissioner McDonald has "the answers" please share them with our community. Please share the data that has been accumulated from independent experts and consultants as to:

- 1. The justification and cost differential for a totally new 1.2 million dollar fire station versus an adequate housing facility?*
- 2. Total cost estimate for the proposed building along with the projected cost to the taxpayers to maintain and support the building for the next ten years?*
- 3. What are the projected maintenance and repair costs savings over 10 years that could justify the 1.2 million dollar price tag?*
- 4. Please provide the actual codes, statutes and legal requirements that mandates the district build a totally new fire station versus a housing facility? And last and most important, though not required by state law, make a pledge to the community the final decision will be made by a vote of all PROPERTY OWNERS, not just registered voters.*

*Thank you,
Concerned Citizens of Upper Captiva*

- 1. We are working with the county, counsel and the architect to answer this question.**
 - 2. Unknown until we have a final number.**
 - 3. Same as two.**
 - 4. To my recollection, the district has never stated that this expansion is mandated by any code or statute.**
- If this project goes to referendum, there will be many meetings, forums and hearings. Every property owner will get a chance to express their opinions.***

Chief Pepper