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Jupiter Fire Rescue Department to Provide Safety and Efficiency

In recent weeks, several fliers and emails have been distributed throughout our community regarding the formation of the Jupiter Fire Rescue Department (JFRD). The information is labeled as being from an organization called "Jupiter Residents to KEEP Palm Beach County Firefighters," which is a political action group organized by and being funded by the union organization that has a collective bargaining agreement with Palm Beach County ([Professional Firefighters/Paramedics of Palm Beach County, Local 2928, IAFF, Inc.](#)).

The Town wants to continue to offer its residents total transparency regarding the decision to start a fire department, the long-term benefits to taxpayers and residents, and its commitment to excellent public safety. We also wish to be transparent in the way in which we deliver information to you, our residents, and inform you about who else is sharing information with you, and why.

Below is some information you might find helpful in understanding the issue. We know you may be seeing these fliers, emails, signs and social media posts, so we wanted to take some time to explain the decision and address the inaccuracies that are being communicated. It might also help to explain why others are distributing unhelpful information. As always, we encourage residents to do their own research, reach out to the Town with questions, and attend public meetings and forums where you can form your own opinion on the issues that impact your community. To assist with this, the Town is maintaining an information page on its website at jupiter.fl.us/FireRescue.



History and Structure of Fire Rescue and Emergency Services in Jupiter

- For many years, the Town has had a contract with Palm Beach County (PBC) for the provision of fire rescue and emergency services. That contract is administered and delivered by Palm Beach County Fire Rescue (PBCFR) Administration. Traditionally, the contract was structured to address the cost for staffing and equipment at 3 stations within Jupiter, and has been based on the volume of calls for service generated in Jupiter. Funding for the services is collected through a municipal services taxing unit (MSTU) that is noted on Jupiter residents' tax bills as the "Jupiter MSTU".
- On September 30, 2023, a 10-year agreement between the Town and PBC expired. Leading up to that date, for a period of about 16 months, the Town attempted to negotiate a new agreement that would continue to serve the taxpayers of Jupiter at a sustainable and affordable rate based on the cost to provide services. PBC began negotiations by insisting that the Town of Jupiter would be moved to the county-wide millage rate of 3.4581 for fire over a 5-year period. Because of Jupiter's high property valuations (relative to other communities in PBC), that would equate to a budget of \$62.5 million per year. For reference, the Jupiter MSTU rate (the rate you see on your property tax bill) for 2023 was 1.8713, which equated to a budget of approximately \$26 million. By comparison, the Jupiter Police Department budget for this year is about \$28.5 million.
- PBC indicated that no new services and no increases in levels of service would be offered to Jupiter for this increase in cost. Rather, they explained that Jupiter needed to pay its "fair share" in helping to fund fire rescue and emergency services throughout the County.
- Ultimately, over the course of the negotiations, PBC and PBCFR Administrations were only willing to reduce the rate enough to equate to an estimated \$44 million per year in taxes to Jupiter residents. This new, 10-year contract escalated costs at an unacceptable rate, contained several, uncapped "add-on" cost categories, and removed the ability for the Town Council to have input into staffing and equipment levels in the Town. At PBC's insistence, this new contract contained a 36-month cancellation clause. This new agreement was approved by the Town Council on April 18, 2023 as a means of continuing service while investigating alternatives.
- In parallel to the contract negotiations, on June 7, 2022, the Town Council voted unanimously to hire a consultant, the Center for Public Safety Management (CPSM), to evaluate fire rescue and emergency services in the Town. A study was published in January, 2023 by CPSM comparing continuing service with PBCFR to starting a JFRD. The study showed that it would take 36 months to implement JFRD, and that it could be achieved at a much more sustainable cost per year, with the same or better level of service. The taxpayer benefit to creating a JFRD would be a reduction in taxes related to fire rescue and emergency services, at the same or better level of service.
- Also while contract negotiations were in progress, PBCFR Administration revealed some significant accounting errors in their past and present calculations related to the Jupiter contract. Since it involved accounting for taxpayer dollars, the Town had a fiduciary responsibility to investigate. The Town engaged its auditing firm, Marcum LLP, to conduct a Report on Applying Agreed-Upon Procedures, or a contract audit, of the agreement for fire rescue services provided to Jupiter by PBC ([see the audit here](#)). The results of that audit showed that the PBCFR's accounting processes and controls, with respect to the contract were vague, often undefined, and at times non-existent.
- Also during contract negotiations, members of the Jupiter Town Council asked PBCFR for information on how reserves were being managed, and if the Town was receiving credit for any reserves that were the result of collections within the Jupiter MSTU. Likewise, they asked for more information on why overhead and management costs seemed to be growing at a percentage rate that was much higher than the growth of other costs. Unfortunately, neither category of financial information was provided by PBCFR.
- On August 15, 2023, the Town Council directed Town Staff to exercise the 36-month cancellation clause in the contract with PBC, and to implement the Jupiter Fire Rescue Department.

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concerns with the structure of the contract, PBC and PBCFR Administration did not address those concerns. Aside from one general public comment by Chief Kennedy at the September 5, 2023 Town Council meeting and a letter to clarify dates, PBC and PBCFR Administration have not communicated with the Town since the Council voted to exercise the cancellation clause in the contract. PBC and PBCFR Administration have not indicated a desire to work with the Town toward a different outcome.

- PBC has a collective bargaining agreement (contract) with its union, the Professional Firefighters/Paramedics of Palm Beach County, Local 2928, IAFF, Inc. ([see the collective bargaining agreement here](#)). The Town is not a party to this collective bargaining agreement.
- The Local 2928, IAFF, Inc. has created a political action group to oppose the JFRD called Jupiter Residents to KEEP Palm Beach County Firefighters. The union hired William Stafford Jones to create the PAC, who is known for creating dozens of political action committees that have spent millions of dollars in Florida state elections. The union organization and its PAC, many of whom are not taxpayers or residents of incorporated Jupiter, appear to be behind the literature and messaging opposing the implementation of JFRD.
- The union is not lobbying its management (PBC and PBCFR) to renegotiate the Town's contract. Instead, it appears to be choosing to spend members' dues on lobbying the Town, with which it has no contract.
- The union's collective bargaining agreement with PBC expires in September, 2024. Typically, negotiations start 6-12 months before a contract expires. PBC will have to look at PBCFR's 3-5 year revenue forecast when determining how to fund any union requests for increases in salary, benefits, and staffing. Since the PBCFR's financial forecast will not include revenues from Jupiter taxpayers after fiscal year 2026, it is difficult to see how PBC will be able to meet the union's demands during those negotiations.
- The graphic below may help to summarize these relationships.

Relationships and Agreements

Contract for Fire Rescue and Emergency Services

Funded directly by Jupiter taxpayers through Jupiter MSTU. Current agreement runs Oct. 1, 2023 – Sept. 30, 2033. Funding from Jupiter residents included in County-wide system, to subsidize other County areas. Cancellation clause exercised by Town to end services on Sept. 30, 2026.



Collective Bargaining Agreement Between Employees (union) and Employer (PBC)

Town is not a party to this agreement. Current agreement expires Sept. 2024. Negotiations between PBC and union beginning now.



Jupiter Fire Rescue Department

In implementation phase, with first service call on Oct. 1, 2026. First year of service estimated budget at \$5-\$7 million less than PBCFR's budget for the Jupiter MSTU. Dedicated to the highest level of service to the Jupiter community, with local control over services and funding.



JFRD

Political Action Group

Consultant hired by IAFF 2928. Consists of union members, many of which are non-Jupiter residents. Funding of efforts (fliers, outreach, petitions) come from union member dues. Objective of keeping Jupiter taxpayer revenues with PBC in order to fund future collective bargaining agreement, which is now under negotiation.



Benefits of the JFRD for Jupiter Residents and Taxpayers

- **Safety:** The Town of Jupiter will implement the JFRD to deliver at service levels at or above what is currently being provided in the Town by PBCFR. It will do this by increasing the amount of vehicles and apparatus, hiring the best candidates, and structuring the best training programs. In addition, mutual aid and partnership agreements with neighboring communities will allow the Town to share resources and best practices. In addition, the Town has a long history of establishing excellence in public safety, as evidenced by the Jupiter Police Department.
- **Local Control:** Creating the JFRD will allow the Jupiter Town Council to have local control over costs, operations and levels of service. It will also allow the Council to make fiscally-responsible decisions on behalf of Jupiter's residents and businesses, and will significantly decrease the cost of fire rescue and emergency services compared to what is charged by Palm Beach County Fire Rescue (PBCFR), currently and into the future.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Over the 10-year timeframe of the current interlocal agreement, Jupiter taxpayers will save between \$50 and \$70 million by establishing the JFRD. For example, a homesteaded property valued at \$550,000 will pay about \$951 to PBCFR for fire rescue services during 2024. In the first year of operation of the JFRD (2026), the same homesteaded Jupiter property would pay about \$533 for fire rescue services. Residents and taxpayers will not see charges for the JFRD for the next three years, and will continue to pay PBCFR through the Jupiter MSTU during that time. When the JFRD begins operation in October, 2026, the Jupiter MSTU will no longer be on residents' tax bills. Instead, the new, lower amount for JFRD will be there.

Political Action Committee and Union Myths

The Jupiter Residents to KEEP Palm Beach County Fire in Jupiter Political Action Committee is distributing literature with many myths and

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<p>Jupiter residents will be unsafe or at risk.</p>	<p>Jupiter residents will receive the same – or better – level of service from JFRD. Jupiter’s plan involves funding for additional equipment and apparatus, and additional staffing over PBCFR.</p>
<p>Numbers are “faulty”; Town’s estimates are wrong.</p>	<p>The Town, along with experts in the field of providing fire rescue services, did a thorough analysis of the costs and timeframe to build and operate its own fire rescue and emergency services department. In addition, the Town’s annual independent audit consistently shows a pattern of excellent fiscal management. Unfortunately, an audit of PBCFR’s contract with Jupiter, also conducted by an independent audit firm, showed that PBCFR does not have the accounting practices and controls in place to responsibly manage their finances. It is too risky to allow an organization without processes and controls to manage tens of millions of Jupiter taxpayers’ dollars.</p>
<p>The Town did not thoroughly vet this decision.</p>	<p>Over the course of 16 months and at 9 different public meetings, the Town Council reviewed information from both PBCFR Administration and its expert consultant. All of those meetings were publicly noticed, and all included opportunity for public comment. Now that the implementation phase of JFRD has started, items will continue to be brought before Town Council at public meetings where public input is encouraged. In addition, the Town provides advance notices and summaries of meetings for interested residents through its email system and on its social media sites.</p>
<p>Municipal fire departments are not adequate.</p>	<p>In Palm Beach County alone, over 80% of the coastal population is served by a municipal fire department. Municipal fire departments are invested in their communities and provide excellent levels of service. Jupiter is fortunate to have neighboring departments like Palm Beach Gardens, Tequesta, and North Palm Beach to work alongside as partners. These departments set the example in how they serve their residents every day.</p>
<p>The Town will not be able to find locations for stations.</p>	<p>The station in Abacoa is owned by the Town. To locate the other two station locations, the Town is fortunate to have several sites to consider. For example, should PBCFR Administration wish to engage with the Town, one option would be to come to an agreement with the County on the Burt Reynolds Park station. This option would likely make financial sense for both parties, as Jupiter ramps up its service and PBCFR ramps down.</p>

For more information on the JFRD, including a list of questions and answers, and links to important documents, visit www.jupiter.fl.us/FireRescue.



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