

To: JIC Commission and Selection Committee
From: Robert Sommerville

As a resident of JIC for 30 years, I believe that Officer Friendly should be the model for the new chief of police, as opposed to an intimidating authoritarian person who we had in the distant past. Chief Pruitt was an Officer Friendly type and seemed to be a successful leader. Chief Pruitt was on the force for a number of years before becoming chief. Promotion from within has the advantage of knowing from experience what you are getting.

I was disappointed that the Colony recently hired **two** new “major ranking” police officers since I believe we already had a surfeit of officers and equipment for a town our size in our location on the southern tip of an island with one entrance. The Colony is not Miami or West Palm Beach, or even Jupiter or Tequesta, and I think the level of experience to police the Colony is much less. To some extent, our police needs are more like security guards (prevention of crime), traffic controllers, and emergency and other assistance to residents. In my limited experience, any major crime event such as aliens landing on our shore or a Peeping Tom incident has the Tequesta police and the Sheriff’s Department present or involved.

I believe that interpersonal skills are probably the most important attributes of a policeman in JIC—which is probably the reason Captain Jim Matthews seems to be the overwhelming choice of the residents for the new chief position. As Emerson once remarked “an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.”

Finally, I was very disconcerted to learn by the grapevine that the most popular police officer in the Colony, Captain Jim Matthews, was fired shortly after the last town meeting at which there were a number of critical comments made regarding certain practices of the town administration. The timing was amazing, to say the least. I will leave evaluation of Jim’s qualifications to be chief to the Selection Committee and the Commission, but he certainly exemplifies the Officer Friendly model. I hope that there were sufficient and serious grounds for dismissal, as opposed to spite, because it is a serious matter to fire any person, let alone the most popular officer in the Colony—particularly under the present circumstances. It has an impact on a person’s reputation, self esteem, and ability to obtain other employment. I expect that the Commission will give the community a full report as to the justification of the firing in the immediate future.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Sommerville

P.S. I am in favor of 7:00 PM town meetings (and Selection Committee meetings) at the Beach Club so that younger working residents and older residents can more easily attend the meetings. I believe there is a freer discussion of issues at in-person meetings and more participation from the audience. It is my understanding that the Beach Club has an operative zoom system now. This would also eliminate the need for increasing the square footage of the town hall.