

**JUPITER INLET COLONY
REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING**

LIVE AND VIA ZOOM

Meeting ID 585 628 8134

04.10.2023

3:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Mayor Comerford Called the Meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

Roll call for the record:

Mayor Daniel J. Comerford III
Vice-Mayor Milton Block
Commissioner Richard Busto
Commissioner Lisa Hines
Commissioner Marie Rosner

Chief of Police John Pruitt
Town Administrator Kevin Lucas
Town Attorney William P. Doney
Town Clerk Ivelisse Chico-Randazzo

Also present approximately 75 members of the Community via zoom and in person.

2. **Announcement:** Chief John Pruitt's Retirement Announcement

Chief John Pruitt announced that he will be retiring on his 34th anniversary of becoming a police officer. He has 41 years of public service. He is proud of everything he has accomplished during his 16 years in Jupiter Inlet Colony. He stated that when he submitted his intent to retire, he had no say in the selection process for a new Chief. Instead of it being a joyous event for him, he did not want to see the turmoil that was going on. He thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve everyone for all the years. His intention, when he submitted his retirement, was to train, to pass on everything there was to know about policing, Town administration, budget, ad-valorem, and non-ad-valorem taxes. He wants it to be a smooth transition and he will be around to support those who will be relieving him. 41 years of public service is something to be proud of and he is certainly proud of it.

3. **Vice Mayor Chip Block:** Statement on the selection process for the Chief of Police

Vice Mayor Block thanked Chief Pruitt for his years of service to the community. Vice Mayor Block requested from everyone in attendance to keep things civil. He stated that everyone has invested a lot in the Town, regarding the spirit of the Town, relationships with friends and neighbors, treat everyone with respect and just keep things civil. He read a statement saying that the meeting was not to promote any candidate or denigrate the candidacy of any other person. Jupiter Inlet Colony has a Strong Mayor system which means the Mayor makes the choice. The Mayor has the authority to hire and fire Town personnel including the police department without Commission votes. Mayor Dan has

authorized the creation of a committee to select the next chief which is entirely in his authority. He has taken a step back to allow the committee to recommend to the Commission one or more candidates for the position of Police Chief. The purpose of the committee is to screen, conduct background checks and interview candidates. The committee will be fair and operate in a businesslike manner, doing everything legally. Anyone can apply for the position. Although the Mayor has the authority on how the police department is organized, the committee will make recommendations on department structure and operations. The committee will consist of five members which will be composed of Vice Mayor Block, Commissioner Dick Busto, Chief Gus Media of the Village of Tequesta Police Department, Tony Prosser and Pam Rauch. All meetings will be held in public, and all laws and ordinances will be followed. Town Council Doney will provide legal advice. Vice Mayor Block stated he knows an HR expert who works with governments and other businesses who he hopes will work with the committee. The process of selecting a new JIC Chief is critically important, and the committee hopes everyone will be satisfied with the process that will be fair and open and will result with them picking or recommending the best candidate(s).

4. Public Comments:

Public comments were a question-and-answer session between the residents and Commissioners regarding the process of selecting a Police Chief. The questions asked were:

- How long will the process be? Mayor Comerford stated that the job was first advertised internally and would be posted in the Palm Beach Post on 4/11/23 and close on 4/21/23 at 2:00pm. Vice Mayor Block then stated they are not setting a deadline for applications.
- Will it be possible to provide the requirements of the Chief of Police? Yes, the committee will set up the job description and qualifications.
- Will the committee be responsible for creating an interim plan? Yes
- Is the committee going to do the selection and interviews? The committee will select and interview candidates and then make the recommendations to the Commission on their selection. The Commission will have the final vote on who the next Police Chief will be.
- Was the same vetting process used for other police officers used for the Deputy Chief? Personnel matters are internal, Mayor Comerford has sole discretion on hiring and firing staff.
- Was a background check performed? Yes.
- In looking at the structure of the Police Department, it looks “top heavy,” it is the residents’ opinions that they hire more police officers. Vice Mayor Block stated that the committee will make recommendations to the Mayor and Commission as to the structure and operations of the Police Department.
- Residents stated that due to the show of support and the residents feeling strongly about this issue, they hope that the Commission takes their opinions into consideration.
- Residents stated that the Town should move the meetings to 7:00pm so

that there will be more community involvement.

- What has changed from the last time a Chief was selected to now? The last Police Chief was fired for cause and Chief Pruitt was appointed.
- Where did Alex Freeman come from? The Commission was not going to get into personnel matters.
- Who vetted him and why does someone with his background want to be Deputy Chief? The Commission was not going to get into personnel matters.
- Some residents never thought about how important the Police Department really was because they always felt safe, but they would like to see more police officers on the street.
- A question was asked regarding the Town paying for Chief Pruitt's education and if he would be required to pay the Town back? The Town has paid for the Chief's master's degree program because it is part of his compensation package being that he is one of the lowest paid Chiefs in the county. The Town made only 2 payments towards his education which is directly related to Emergency Management. The Chief has put his studies on hold. He will not be required to pay the money back.
- Was the offer that was made to the Chief made to other officers? No
- Is there an ongoing training budget for all Police Officers? Yes
- Were you about to install a new Chief before all this uproar happened? No

5. **Vote:** to approve Consent Agenda

- a. March 2023 General Operating Fund Budget Report and Financial Statements
- b. Minutes from March 13, 2023, Regular Commission Meeting.
- c. Minutes from March 27, 2023, Special Organizational Meeting

Motion: Commissioner Busto made a motion to approve.

Second: Commissioner Rosner seconded the motion.

Motion passed 5-0.

6. **Commission/Staff Reports:**

- a. **Town Administrator-** No report
- b. **Town Clerk –** No report
- c. **Chief of Police-** Chief Pruitt commented that there have been 9 moving violation citations, one non-moving violation, one written warning, and a few verbal warnings. He stated arrests have increased due to the LPR.
- d. **Code Enforcement-** Mayor Comerford reported 8 incidents regarding whether people have permits. Issues have been resolved.
- e. **Town Attorney –**No Report
- f. **Commissioner Reports-** Commissioner Busto thanked Chief Pruitt for his service to the Town saying he will miss him. Commissioner Rosner thanked everyone for attending the meeting. She also stated she will submit a report to Town Attorney Doney regarding landscape work on the weekends.

- g. **Vice Mayor Block-** Vice Mayor Block reported that he along with the Mayor, Kevin and the Chief met with BLM and they will have a local agreement with them to finance an officer to be in JILONA.
- h. **Mayor Comerford-** Mayor Comerford thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He announced the Beach Clean-up at the North and South Walkways as well as the Beach Luau Town party hosted by the Social Committee. He also thanked Ted Rauch and his crew for the flagpole. Mayor Comerford also mentioned the possibility of putting a deck on the intracoastal walkway and had the engineers do a drawing of what it might look like. A 16x24 deck would be covered by vegetation. Mayor Comerford stated he and Kevin will be meeting with Verizon about the possibility of installing a 16ft pole so that everyone will have a robust 5G network. At this point it is only preliminary, but they are having the conversation with Verizon.

7. Discussion: Request for donation to Honor Flight

Mayor Comerford stated he received a request from Wounded Warrior Honor Flight for donations, so he is bringing it to the Commission to see if they want to do a donation. Commissioner Busto stated he would like to see more information, specifically how much of the donation will go directly to the people as opposed to the administration. Vice Mayor Block stated he has supported honor flights personally, but he has a problem with the Town using taxpayer funds for donations. Mayor Comerford stated he will get more information and will pass it on.

8. Wrap-up and adjourn.

Motion: Vice Mayor Block made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:18 p.m.

Second: Commissioner Ciarfella seconded the motion.

Motion passed 5-0.

Approved by:

Mayor Daniel J. Comerford III

Date

Town Clerk Ivelisse Chico-Randazzo

Date

STATE MANDATED STATEMENT

If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the board, agency, or Commission with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, he/she will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, he/she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

Any person requiring special accommodation at this meeting because of a disability or physical impairment should contact the Town prior to the meeting. Please contact the Town Administration Office, Administration Building, 50 Colony Road, Jupiter Inlet Colony, and FL 33469, telephone 561-746-3787.