



City of Margate

5790 Margate Boulevard
Margate, FL 33063
954-972-6454
www.margatefl.com

Meeting Minutes City Commission Workshop

*Mayor Arlene R. Schwartz
Vice Mayor Antonio V. Arserio
Commissioners:*

Anthony N. Caggiano, Tommy Ruzzano, Joanne Simone

*City Manager Cale Curtis
City Attorney Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman
City Clerk Jennifer M. Johnson*

Tuesday, August 12, 2025

11:00 AM

Commission Chambers and Zoom.us
Webinar ID: 881 4988 7497

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88149887497>

CALL TO ORDER

MOMENT OF SILENCE

The Moment of Silence was recognized after the Call to Order.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was performed after the Moment of Silence.

ROLL CALL

The Roll Call was read after the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: 5 - Commissioner Tommy Ruzzano, Commissioner Anthony N. Caggiano, Commissioner Joanne Simone, Vice Mayor Antonio V. Arserio and Mayor Arlene R. Schwartz

1) DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

- A. [ID 2025-198](#)** DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION - FIRE DEPARTMENT MERGER WITH THE BROWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR PROVISION OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL, FIRE PROTECTION, AND FIRE PREVENTION SERVICES.

CITY MANAGER, CALE CURTIS, explained that at the direction of the City Commission, for the last several months, he had been in contract negotiations and discussions pertaining to merging Margate Fire Dept with Broward Sheriff Fire Rescue (BSFR). He advised that there was a final contract price for the first year of transition, there were draft agreements and contracts in the back-up of the Agenda Item and today's Workshop was also an opportunity to discuss this as a group and ask questions of the professionals that were here from BSFR and City staff.

Discussion ensued including whether to let the public speak.

REPRESENTATIVE OF 3080, INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS (IAFF) DISTRICT 14, MARGATE, ASSISTANT DISTRICT VICE PRESIDENT AND FIRE LIEUTENANT, BRIAN PALMER, thanked the City staff and the City Commission for taking the time to prepare for this Item. He discussed the potential of Margate's fire service joining forces with BSFR which he expressed was near and dear to his heart and read a speech in support of the proposed merger.

COMMISSIONER TOMMY RUZZANO asked a number of questions to Fire Lieutenant Palmer. He emphasized that it was not the City Commission's idea but the firefighters who requested it. He believed that the merge was a good move for both parties and that they would not be losing their Fire Department but it would be administratively operated under a different division. He said that recently, there was a fire where they had back up as there were no fire trucks available.

FIRE LIEUTENANT PALMER said that there was a great majority of his colleagues that wanted to merge with BSO. He gave a history lesson on the Margate Coconut Creek partnership and explained that when they separated, it left the City in a bad spot as far as sustainability of an organization. He said that it had also left Margate with 43 staff members and within the next three years, 23 were currently in the drop and that there were 24 employees with less than two years out of the 85 on shift. He said that when he applied to the City in 2017, there were approximately 300 – 400 qualified applicants that showed up on test day for 12 spots and most recently, they had approximately, a total of 30 applicants, some of which, were unqualified and very few that were competent to finish their testing process. He highlighted that the BSFR provided float trucks for a two-house fire in Margate.

Discussion ensued.

MAYOR ARLENE, R. SCHWARTZ expressed that one of her biggest concerns was something she read pertaining to the City of Deerfield Beach and she referenced a Sheriff addressing his people from a social media post. She said that it should be about service, costs and safety rather than a personal vendetta. She also queried whether the recruitment was down to money and benefits which resulted in departures.

FIRE LIEUTENANT PALMER said that although he was aware of the video, he explained that there were concerns within their organization where they may not be able to provide proper staffing, keep their units in service and provide a Fire Department to the public if they were to lose personnel to retirement, to retention and recruitment issues. He disagreed that it was strictly compensation as he said that a bigger organization was able to provide unique opportunities for the firefighters such as development of career progression, promotional opportunities and long term health situations which also affected the City's recruitment. He advised that regional systems such as tri-counties and the bigger systems would traditionally have the best candidates in the pool but this was no longer the case for the smaller organizations.

VICE MAYOR ANTONIO V. ARSERIO highlighted that there was minimal career growth in Margate.

Discussion ensued.

FIRE CHIEF FOR BSFR, 2601 WEST BROWARD BLVD, TIMOTHY KEEFE provided a background on himself. He said that he had learned over 36 years that talks of mergers

got framed as lost or gain but believed that it was about evolution and synergy and he spoke on those two keywords. He provided a PowerPoint presentation on the merger discussions between Margate and BSFR and praised City Manager Curtis. He listed the positives of the services of which a merger could provide which included move-ups, training and at various City events, they would be able to provide a variety of staffing. He also informed that the same operational staff would continue. He said that the total cost for Proposed costs for service which included three personnel on fire Rescue apparatus, Battalion Chief per operational shift, District Chief, Administrative Assistant and three fire prevention personnel was \$22,464,349. He concluded his presentation by saying that the City had an outstanding Fire Department which he wanted to become a part of BSFR and hoped that Margate would see the long term benefits it could provide.

COMMISSIONER RUZZANO questioned Fire Chief Keefe what he thought would enhance the 911 system in the future. He said in the last few years, he had not heard any complaints about it. He also questioned why the contract was structured not to have any sets, limits or caps for the first two years.

BSFR FIRE CHIEF KEEFE explained that he was present as a County resident when they did the vote to consolidate dispatch and they took a 13 piece absent and combined them altogether. He advised that BSO was one of the largest systems in the USA handling more calls than most major metropolitan cities. He said that the 911 system had improved significantly, that Broward County had approximately 2,000,000 residents and advised that if it was a city, it would be the fifth largest in the US between Chicago, New York and Los Angeles. He explained that Margate was not an existing customer but there was a cap in the price which would not be exceeded. He said that he was working with City staff and that the cap was the implementation salary wise of the second year which was difficult to project.

Discussion ensued.

MAYOR SCHWARTZ questioned why they should go into any merger with the Sheriff when he was having issues with other cities. She expressed her concerns about the caps and said that if a situation changed or were not necessarily in the contract, the out clause could be "do it our way or go somewhere else." She believed that it was about the money and indicated that it was difficult to increase salaries if the fire assessment fee had not increased over the last eight years and said that the City could not do both and come up with any agreement. She said that she was very proud of her Fire Department and spoke about Coconut Creek since the separation.

BSFR FIRE CHIEF KEEFE explained that one of the key advantages with BC and the BSO through the current system was that they have with agreements and that they were stuck to the four corners of that and he highlighted a situation with a small department during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and said that despite having a number of employees being sick, they did not reduce service in one contract City, area or municipality. He said that they would have a leg-up in recruitment in the future as they consider this.

Discussion ensued.

COMMISSIONER ANTHONY N. CAGGIANO said that Pompano Beach had an 18% increase where their budget with BSO increased from \$53,000,000 to \$63,000,000. He indicated that there was a 14% projected increase of over \$72,000,000 for 26. He voiced his concerns with the inflexibility on the caps and contracts.

BSFR FIRE CHIEF KEEFE was not familiar with the Department of Law Enforcement's numbers but knew that the original figure that Commissioner Caggiano gave included the number of additional deputies which the City had requested hence the large increase.

VICE MAYOR ARSERIO advised that even though he did not like the tactic, he indicated that you could still continue to have discussions within the 90 days and made comment on the negotiations that took place with Coconut Creek. He informed that the budget increase was for raises which BSO would implement and if they did not merge with them, the City would have to compete with those salaries and that the price in the contract accounted for those earnings. He said that the information that the City Manager provided was that they could stay on their own and increase those salaries or go to BSO but the numbers would be the same and that the City would get through a merger.

Discussion ensued on contract negotiations and control.

COMMISSIONER JOANNE SIMONE had given this Item a lot of thought and explained that initially, she was against going with BSFR but they gave her some compelling reasons when she met with Brian and John and she had no reason to believe they were not being forthright with her with what they said. She supported the firefighters tremendously and believed that the City had the best in the County, if not in the State and that BSFR would be extremely lucky to obtain their staff. Her biggest concern was the contract being the 5% cap in year three and not knowing the cost for the first two years and said that once the City agreed, there was no turning back. She said that aside from the contract and what she had read from multiple cities that were not happy with BSFR gave her pause as they highlighted skyrocketing costs, lack of fiscal responsibility and accountability of BSO Tony's administration. She explained and that the City would have no control over BSFR or the personnel assigned to protect Margate and highlighted that Cooper City complained that they have no input, oversight or control over the public safety operations or their finances. She alleged that in 2021, BSO received approximately \$8,000,000 in undesignated contractual services surplus dollars collected from the cities for Police and Fire but they were not returned to the respective municipalities. She also highlighted the issues at Deerfield Beach and she was aware of other cities that were considering leave and forming their own Police force. She had reservations whether it would work with BSO Tony and said that she did not have confidence or faith in him that he would take care of Margate. She said that she was not comfortable in supporting this merger with BSO and that she would be standing firm on her decision. She hoped that there was some loyalty to their City for their veteran firefighters and that they would not leave Margate because of the money and said that the grass may not always greener on the other side.

BSFR FIRE CHIEF KEEFE responded to Commissioner Simone's comment in terms of the costs and advised that it was thoroughly vetted and that it was contained in year one and there was no need for a cap when they were coming in as they were not in the existing municipality. He outlined that the only hiccup they currently had was to somehow capture that their increase in year two was with only the second half of the implementation and the study. He said he was the Subject Matter Expert (SME) that had handled and dealt with this and that the Department of Law Enforcement was not a part of this conversation as it did not need to be.

MAYOR SCHWARTZ read questions from the audience. She asked what the difference between BSO Police and BSO Fire Administration and if there were any separation of policies.

BSFR FIRE CHIEF KEEFE responded to the question.

Discussion ensued.

COMMISSIONER SIMONE read a document from the City Manager pertaining to a draft agreement with BSFR.

BSFR FIRE CHIEF KEEFE explained that the standard language was carried through every contract for years. He said that the number was the number at this point unless the City Commission wanted to add or reduce services which would be a conversation that they would have to review with the City Manager and come up with a new set of numbers.

Discussion ensued on the term "cap", whether BSFR had three on an engine and Fire Rescue-Emergency Medical Services (EMS) truck and Fire Department budgets.

CITY MANAGER CURTIS said that regardless on whether the City stood alone or merged with BSO, they could expect anywhere from 6% - 9% increases everywhere. He forewarned that next year, if they merged with BSO, there would be a substantial increase but if they needed to stand on their own and bring up salaries and benefits to remain competitive, they were looking at some substantial increase as well.

Discussion ensued.

VICE MAYOR ARSERIO said that the numbers seemed to be apples to apples but questioned what the level of service and morale would be over the department that you want to have. He forewarned that if the merger did not go through, the City should have a plan b as a three station Fire Department was not going to work.

CITY MANAGER CURTIS informed that if the City Commission did not vote to merge with BSO, he would revert to the negotiating table with their union and hoped to come up with mutually agreeable terms that could keep them competitive in the market, offer the ability to recruit and retain staff and keep the Fire Department operational. He said at present, he would not have an answer for training and resources.

Discussion ensued on stories of buildings and whether the City's equipment could handle it in terms of development.

MAYOR SCHWARTZ continued to ask questions that were written from the residents.

Discussion ensued on budgets and the fire assessment fee.

COMMISSIONER RUZZANO forewarned that the morale would be low if the merger did not occur and hoped for a plan b if one was not in place. He spoke about property taxes and values increasing in Margate over the last 10 years, that the City had a flush budget and informed Mayor Schwartz that they did not need to increase anything such as a fire assessment fee.

COMMISSIONER CAGGIANO discussed with many cities who paid more money to BSO then they received in property taxes but he said that money had gone as the City was spending the same. He indicated that the City Commission's job was to plan for the future and alleged that the Florida State Governor, Ronald Dion DeSantis, was getting rid of property taxes.

FIRE LIEUTENANT, BRIAN PALMER, said that they were trying to give the City a tract to

have a future to continue to provide services to the residents of Margate, regardless of costs. He said that the firefighters were very passionate and indicated that they were dedicated but historically, they were underpaid and under compensated. He expressed BSFR were offering an opportunity to provide a future for the residents at the same current costs as Margate. He understood the concerns about the caps and the future of the organization and he could not answer to his firefighters to stay at the City for loyalty as it was difficult to provide for their families. He said that he could earn more at Boca Raton and that it was not about money per se but also about opportunity, supporting their families, having additional trucks for back-filling, training, maintain their Range Safety Officer (RSO) Class 1 and being able to answer a call to the residents and provide the best service available. He was so passionate about this and did not want to see the City fall apart. He requested the City Commission to stand behind the firefighters.

COMMISSIONER CAGGIANO commented that they should not think that the City Commission did not care about their firefighters and said that Margate put a third man on, they built another fire station and that they organized medical testing. He said that the question was about the budget and deciding whether or not they were going to merge with BSO.

FIRE LIEUTENANT, BRIAN PALMER, apologized but explained that it was not his intention, if it came across, that the City Commission did not care. He spoke on the opportunity for safety within a structure and said that during the last 90 days, they have had over five major incidents from fires, to major accidents where additional support was required. He advised that BSFR allowed them to provide better staffing by backfilling in their time of need and that it was better for the residents. He explained that historically, firefighters died within seven years of retirement and that caring about them meant that you trusted their opinion.

Discussion ensued.

VICE MAYOR ARSERIO questioned the soft costs what the other departments had to go through versus managing a department on its own versus an external body. He sought Fire Chief Lorenzo's position on the merger proposal. He questioned that if they did not merge with BSFR, whether the Fire Department would be sustainable as it was or was the recommendation to still merge with another city.

CITY MANAGER CURTIS responded to Vice Mayor Arserio's comments and said that there was an external service number and a value they could put for that but it was not a dollar amount that would come off the budget.

FIRE CHIEF, ROBERTO LORENZO, said that there was a lot of passion in the room and detailed his backstory. He said that the Fire Department had overcome a number of challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, separation from Coconut Creek in September 2021 and the building of a fire station. He said that State Governor DeSantis was passing a law recommending a 42 work schedule which was also known as 24/72 instead of 48 hours and agencies such as Palm Beach County, Miramar, Boca Raton and smaller agencies had signed contracts to adhere to the recommended schedule. He said that the City was in a unique position and alluded to Fire Lieutenant Palmer's comments that where they had 46 employees with 20+ years of service and that 23 of those individuals would be gone in three years or less and that the others would leave thereafter. He said that although the City was on the Florida Retirement System (FRS), so were all of the other agencies who were looking at a more competitive benefit and work schedule. He explained that it was discussed before that middle group of people that were going to take the department to the next level as more experienced individuals

retire, they were in Coconut Creek. He indicated that it was a difficult decision to make but his recommendation was to merge with BSFR. He loved what he did but foresaw some challenges on the horizon and in his capacity as the Fire Chief and that he had to have alternative plans. He indicated that if the merge with BSFR did not take place, there were different things as an agency if needed to execute some of those items that were discussed. He indicated that it would be a good start if the City's employees had an identical compensation but it would not satisfy everything such as promotional opportunities where some staff members may elect to leave and advised that there would also be challenges for the middle group.

Discussion ensued.

LOCAL 3080, FIRE CAPTAIN, KEVIN DELACOVA, advised the City approximately five years ago of what the right decision would be and said that it only made sense to do this. He indicated that there were other cities also looking into this or had asked for bids as he believed that the municipalities realized that the sustainability and the fiscal responsibility to do something. He referenced Palm Beach County in the North and Dade County in the South and said there was a reason why they were predominantly run by one department. He indicated that applicants were not attracted by smaller cities and that they had already seen it with their most recent hires as Margate received very minimal candidates which would continue. He informed that the tri-state counties were hiring in mass to cover a new shift that had been recommended on a bill for 24/72 and also offer higher better career paths, promotional aspects and any specialty units that they do. He appreciated everything that the City had done for the Fire Department up until this point and reiterated that this was the right move both for the residents and for the firefighters and he implored that Margate should not put this on the backburner again.

MAYOR SCHWARTZ questioned why Tamarac, North Lauderdale, Coconut Creek, Coral Springs or Parkland had not come up with the idea of merging with BSFR.

LOCAL 3080, FIRE CAPTAIN, KEVIN DELACOVA, alleged that one of the cities that Mayor Schwartz listed asked for a bid recently but advised that Margate should be proactive on this. He believed that there were other cities that could be watching to wait and see and if Margate merged with the BSFR, they would see other municipalities looking to do the same. He referenced Coconut Creek as a perfect example of paying more money for positions that were already been provided for. He informed that having a private pension could factor into a merger of this nature. He concluded his comments by recommending that the City should place this Item on the Agenda for August 20th, 2025 and make a decision.

Discussion ensued.

COMMISSIONER SIMONE referenced the words "the right decision" but forewarned that it may not be the right decision for Margate's residents who she had a responsibility for. She also did not hear much in the way how merging with BSFR would benefit residents and also referenced skyrocketing costs. She also voiced her concerns about putting her trust in working with a sheriff who ran both the Police and Fire Departments that the City felt that they could not trust. She believed that the best decision was for the City to stay as they were. She hoped that the new development would provide more benefits for the City's firefighters.

Discussion ensued.

VICE MAYOR ARSERIO highlighted the importance of mutual aids and advised that if

there was a major call, he believed that with BSO, they would have trucks sitting in the station ready to go. He also believed that loyalty had disappeared where employees would stay in a job for 20 – 30 years and that the fastest way to get a promotion was to switch jobs.

Discussion ensued.

Meeting went into Recess.

Meeting Reconvened.

MAYOR SCHWARTZ questioned whether Margate's Fire Rescue's call out charges for residents would change under BSFR.

CITY MANAGER CURTIS confirmed that currently, the billing procedure would not change.

Discussion ensued on the services costing for residents, BSO Tony and the date of when this Item will be placed on a City Commission meeting Agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Transcribed by Salene E. Edwards



Jennifer M. Johnson, City Clerk

Date: 9/17/2025

PLEASE NOTE:

If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the City Commission with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, the person will need a record of the proceedings, and for such purpose 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. Anyone desiring a verbatim transcript shall have the responsibility, at his/her own expense, to arrange for the transcript.

[Unified Land Development Code – Section 40.300(C)] Any representation made before any City Board, any Administrative Board, or the City Commission in the application for a variance, special exception, conditional use or request for any other permit shall be deemed a condition of the granting of the permit. Should any representation be false or should said representation not be continued as represented, same shall be deemed a violation of the permit and a violation of this section.

Any person with a disability requiring auxiliary aids and services for this meeting may call the City Clerk's office at (954) 972-6454 with their request at least two business days prior to the meeting date.

One or more members of the City of Margate Boards may be in attendance and may participate at the meeting.

Members of the public are invited to view this meeting through Zoom using Webinar ID: 881 4988 7497 or can listen via telephone by calling one of the following phone numbers: US: +1 312 626 6799 or +1 929 205 6099.

- A copy of the Agenda for this Meeting is posted on www.MargateFL.com and on the main bulletin board outside City Hall located at 5790 Margate Blvd, Margate, FL 33063.

THROUGH THE CITY'S WEBSITE:

Go to www.margatefl.com

Go to "Agendas & Minutes" > Find the respective meeting date and click "Agenda Summary" to view the agenda items and see the Zoom meeting information

ALTERNATE OPTION FOR VIEWING AND LISTENING TO THE MEETING THROUGH ZOOM.US

Instructions:

Topic: "City Commission Workshop"

Enter the following link to join the webinar: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88149887497>

Telephone:

Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

US: +1 312 626 6799 or +1 929 205 6099