

TIME TO RETHINK HOW STUART PROVIDES FIRE/RESCUE SERVICES

I have always been a supporter of Stuart Fire/Rescue Services in the past.

The last time “consolidation” was proposed, I was a commissioner and along with former commissioner, Troy McDonald, fought it vehemently. With the help of Budget Director Louis Boglioli, we showed where the study Martin County was using was flawed. It was also obvious that for the residents and taxpayers of Stuart, our own department was several mills cheaper than Martin County.

I have been following the increase in hiring in the department over the past few years. With the additions, there are now 78 FTE according to Mr. Boglioli who I met with on Friday, January 9th. The purpose of that meeting was to discuss the increases that have added as many as 24 employees since 2024. He said he would get back to me with confirmation of those numbers. Since then, Collins has removed him as interim city manager.



It is my understanding that most of the additional employees have been hired because of Boss Collins believing that he would receive some political benefit in his race for county commission later this year.

Through a public records request, I obtained a series of emails from the interim manager to the commissioners. In a November 23rd email addressing concerns with Tallahassee's upcoming session and their proposed real estate tax changes, Boglioli brought up the fact that Stuart Fire/Rescue was now more expensive to the residents than the county MSTU.

The pertinent paragraph reads as follows:

"One issue we need to address is a new reality of providing services in a reduced environment is what services we can reduce or consolidate without a noticeable change in service to the citizens. The most notable is our Fire service. For many years it was cheaper for us to provide the same level of service (in some instances better) than the County. The County charges 2.6XXX mills for fire service. However, our 2026 Fire budget (not actual) now represents 3.1 mills at \$12,054,538. And with the upcoming addition of capital outlay for the 3 new apparatuses, and their debt service, the fire budget increases to over \$15M, which is 3.9XXX mills (to put that in terms, our \$16M of Ad Valorem we get to spend, Fire would be \$15M of that; Fire would be 4 mills of the 4.9 mills we are charging). That is before any union negotiations concerning staffing, pay, benefits, or additional equipment. This does not include the 4 new firefighters we added to the 2026 budget. I am researching some additional revenue sources and will report on my findings before we begin the budget process as some of the scenarios would require action sooner, rather than later."

Without any doubt the commission knew of the seriousness of their budget predicament last year. Reed in a post on Facebook and on a subsequent email from the manager last Friday, claimed to have been broadsided by the revelation. Obviously, he either doesn't read his emails or doesn't comprehend what he reads. Of course, the 3rd alternative is that he is just plain lying.

Boss Collins must have been furious with Boglioli for broaching the subject of Fire expense. He has sold his soul and the city's financial future to his fire buddies in the misguided belief they will somehow help in his county election. Keeping this



fire buddies in the misguided belief they will somehow help in his county election. Keeping this secret is the only way he can navigate his election chances. He has utterly destroyed the city's finances.

After meeting with me on the 9th, Boglioli thought it prudent to once again write the commission regarding our meeting and to address all the chatter on social media. He said in the email that he was writing more as the Finance Director than manager. I quote:

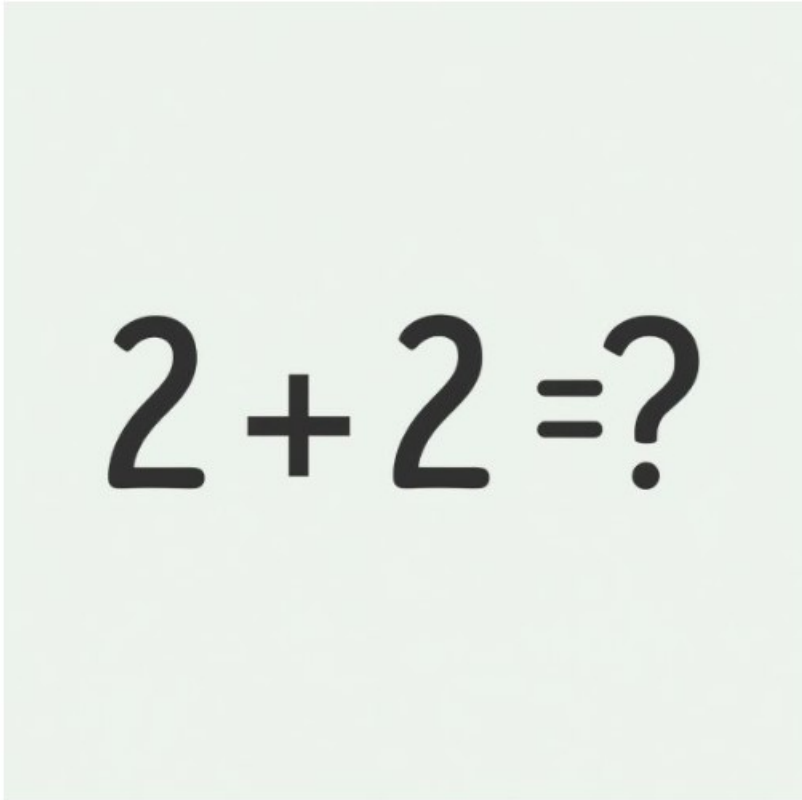
"Then today I took a meeting with Tom Campenni, and the content of the meeting was about the 2026 budget, the size of the Fire department, their staffing levels, and how the cost is represented in the millage. I am the actual individual who dispelled the previous attempts over the last 30 years to consolidate fire because it did not make sense for the City, and those same factors are flipped the other way. I shared only the same public information that is available in the budget, and in public record emails."

Before meeting with Boglioli I had already had the facts and figures available for any citizen to find. I wanted to meet with him strictly to confirm what I had in my notes before writing the story. I hold him in high regard and a straight shooter. We have in the past been on Florida League of Cities panels together, and he is well respected as a finance person throughout the state if not beyond.

My story was originally going to be about whether it was time to have Martin County provide fire/rescue for the entire county. That is obvious if it now costs 4 mills or more when the county is charging 2.6376. The savings to Stuart taxpayers would be 1.5 mills plus the fire fee. That could be thousands of dollars for some taxpayers per year.



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$$2 + 2 = ?$$

This is just math. Perhaps to Collins and Reed $2+2=6$ but to the rest of us it is still 4. The explanations for their behavior could be Reed just might like to ride around on a fire truck with a hat on. Collins is ripping off the taxpayers of Stuart for his own political ambitions.

Is that what you voted for?