FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 17, 2026

TAX ALERT: Newly Elected Bonita Fire Commissioner Larry Kosalla Could Fast-Track Bonita Fire 4th-Shift Tax Hike as Soon as Tuesday, December 1, 2026

While EVERY other independent fire district in Lee and Collier counties operates on 1 day on, 2 days off (24/48), Bonita Springs taxpayers face up to $7.2 million (~20%) in cumulative 4th-shift tax hikes and 34 new hires so firefighters can work 6.5 to 7.5 days per month—instead of consolidating duplicative agencies and bloated standalone pensions.

BONITA SPRINGS, Fla. — Just weeks after voters overwhelmingly demanded property tax relief at the ballot box—passing Amendment 3 statewide with 61.99% (4,917,482 yes votes) with Bonita Springs precincts, by 68.91% (199,877 yes votes to 90,186 no votes) Bonita Spirngs' homeowners and businesses are facing an aggressive push to raise local fire taxes instead. Taxpayer watchdogs warn that following the election of Fire Commissioner Larry Kosalla, the Bonita Springs Fire Control and Rescue District could fast-track a major property tax hike and 4th-shift staffing expansion as soon as the **Tuesday, December 1, 2026,** Fire Commission meeting.

The Numbers Behind the Property Tax Increase

- **Immediate $2,022,719 (+5.6%) Tax Jump:** District budget documents show ad valorem property tax collections have already been pushed up from $36,085,536 (at a 1.9466 millage rate) to $38,108,255 (at a 1.9999 millage rate)—an immediate increase of $2,022,719 (+5.6%) in direct property taxes.
- **Up to $7.2 Million (~20% Cumulative Increase) for a 4th Shift:** Fully funding the union-backed transition to a 4th shift (24/72 schedule) carries a projected total price tag reaching approximately $7.2 million—representing an overall property tax hike of roughly 20% above baseline collections to pay for permanent payroll and pension expansion.
- **Hiring 34 Additional Full-Time Employees:** Moving from a standard 3-shift rotation to a 4-shift rotation requires adding an entire extra shift of personnel—forcing taxpayers to fund roughly 34 new full-time positions, including base salaries, overtime, health coverage, and costly standalone Chapter 175 pension liabilities, without adding a single new fire station.

See: https://tripledippers.org/bonita-springs-fire-24-72-shift-tax-increase/

Bonita Springs Is an Outlier: Every Other Lee & Collier District Works 1 Day On, 2 Days Off

All other independent fire districts across both Lee and Collier counties—including Estero, San Carlos Park, South Trail, Iona-McGregor, Lehigh Acres, North Fort Myers, North Collier, Greater Naples, and Immokalee—operate on a 3-shift system (working 24 hours on duty followed by 48 hours / 2 days off). Bonita Springs is breaking away from every neighboring district:

- **Only 7.5 Workdays Per Month Under 24/72:** Over a standard 30-day month, a 4th-shift (24/72) schedule rotates firefighters on duty for 1 day followed by 3 full days (72 hours) off—meaning each firefighter works just 7.5 shifts (7.5 days) per month and is off duty for 22.5 days every month.

- **Down to 6.5 Workdays After the July 14, 2025 'Kelly Day' Vote:** At its July 14, 2025, Regular Board Meeting, the Bonita Springs Fire Commission voted to set aside $1.8 million in the budget to grant firefighters extra paid days off ('Kelly Days') while setting a path toward 24/72 schedules. Combining a 4th shift with an extra paid day off reduces scheduled work to as few as 6.5 days per month before vacation, sick, and personal days are even counted.
- **No Ban on Working a Second Job:** Under Article 20 ('Outside Employment') of the Bonita Springs Professional Firefighters IAFF Local 3444 collective bargaining agreement, there is NO prohibition against firefighters working a second job or running side businesses during their 22.5 to 23.5 days off each month—requiring only prior written notification to the District.

The Prudent Response to Amendment 3: Consolidation & Pension Reform—Not Higher Taxes

A prudent, reasonable response to Amendment 3 property tax cuts is not to raise taxes—it is to eliminate duplicate agencies, buildings, and gold-plated standalone pensions:

- **Lee County EMS Already Duplicates Bonita Fire Staff, Equipment & Buildings:** Lee County government already runs countywide EMS stations, ambulances, and paramedics—even co-locating County EMS units inside Bonita Springs Fire stations—duplicating Bonita Springs Fire's own EMS personnel, medical equipment, and facilities at double the taxpayer expense.
- **Consolidate Lee County's 17 Fire Districts Into One (Building on 2026's HB 4013):** Consolidating all 17 independent Lee County fire districts into one countywide fire district eliminates 17 separate boards of elected Fire Commission politicians, 17 Fire Chiefs, dozens of Assistant Chiefs, and 17 duplicative HR, Finance, and Legal departments. Lee County fire consolidation has already begun—with lawmakers passing and Governor DeSantis signing HB 4013 in 2026 to merge the Fort Myers Beach Fire District into the Iona-McGregor Fire District.
- **Shut Down the $7.83M/Year Standalone Pension Plan—Save ~$2.65M to $5M+ Annually:** Bonita Springs' standalone Chapter 175 pension system costs taxpayers $7,826,707 per year (67.71% of payroll, plus $381,808/year for its standalone General Employees' plan) so local employees can collect higher pension multipliers and bonuses than Lee County and State of Florida firefighters and EMS workers. Freezing the standalone plan, switching existing employees going forward into the standard Florida Retirement System (FRS)—just like Lee County and the Immokalee Fire District—saves roughly $2.65 million every year, while placing new hires into a 401(k)-style defined-contribution plan saves $4.5 million to $5 million+ annually.

  "Voters in Bonita Springs and across Lee County spoke loud and clear by passing Amendment 3 with nearly 69% support—we do not want higher property taxes," said organizers with the Lee County Taxpayers Association and TripleDippers.org. "Every other independent fire district in Lee and Collier counties operates on one day on, two days off. Instead of hiking taxes by $7.2 million so employees can work 6.5 to 7.5 days a month with full freedom to work second jobs, leaders should follow the precedent of 2026's HB 4013 merger law, consolidate Lee County's 17 duplicative fire districts into one, end EMS duplication, and switch to FRS and 401(k) plans. Residents must pack the room on Tuesday, December 1st to stop this tax hike."

Three Immediate Demands for the Tuesday, December 1, 2026, Meeting

1. Reject Any 4th-Shift Property Tax Increase: Honor the 68.91% Lee County Amendment 3 mandate and match every other Lee and Collier fire district by halting any millage hike or budget expansion tied to a 24/72 shift schedule.

2. Ban Second & Third Jobs and Verify With Tax Filings: If the stated goal of adding a 4th shift and extra paid days off is to give firefighters more rest and recovery time, enact a strict ban on working second or third jobs and require employees to submit annual federal income tax returns (W-2s/1040s) to Human Resources to verify they are not working outside jobs on their off days.

3. Cancel the $1.8 Million Extra Paid Days Off & Cut Pension/Admin Bloat: Rescind the $1.8 million extra paid day off ('Kelly Day') budget allocation, freeze the bloated standalone Chapter 175 pension plan in favor of FRS for existing staff and 401(k)-style plans for new hires, and eliminate duplicative executive and EMS overhead.

Read the full investigation, budget records, and public pension reports at: https://tripledippers.org/bonita-springs-fire-24-72-shift-tax-increase/

Key Dates & Record Citations Included

- **July 14, 2025 Regular Board Meeting:** Official minutes record Chairman Jeffery Maturo requesting $1.8 million be set aside in the budget for Kelly Days (extra paid days off) and noting "a path to 24/72's is being set" alongside Commissioner Jeff Kerr's push to implement 24/72 schedules.
  Official Minutes PDF:
  https://www.bonitafire.org/files/d081cbb92/07_14_2025_Minutes_of_Board_Meeting_APPROVED.pdf
- **September 3, 2026 Budget Workshop & FY 2026–2027 Final Budget:** Chief Greg DeWitt and the Board raised the millage rate from 1.9466 to 1.9999, increasing ad valorem property tax revenue by $2,022,719 (from $36.09M to $38.11M) while citing the transition toward a reduced workweek and staff increases.
  Budget Workshop Minutes PDF: https://www.bonitafire.org/files/82f98bd6e/09-03-26+Budget+Workshop-Meeting+Minutes.pdf
  Budget Meetings Page: https://www.bonitafire.org/budget-meetings
- **2026 Florida Legislature HB 4013 (Fort Myers Beach / Iona-McGregor Fire Merger):** Passed by the Florida Legislature and signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis in June 2026 to merge the Fort Myers Beach Fire Control District into the Iona-McGregor Fire Protection & Rescue Service District (subject to voter referendum).
  Florida Senate Bill Page: https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2026/4013
- **Bonita Springs Fire Commission Meeting & Video Portals:**
  • Board Meetings & Agendas: https://www.bonitafire.org/board-meetings
  • Official Board Meeting Videos: https://www.bonitafire.org/board-meeting-videos

Media Contact:

Dave Jaye, Chairman, Lee County Taxpayers Association, and Lead Researcher https://tripledippers.org

586-488-5177 dave.jaye55@gmail.com