

**KEYS**WEEKLY

## MARATHON OFFICIALS & FORMER FIRE CHIEF SPAR OVER DISMISSAL

By **Alex Rickert** - May 14, 2026



*Former Marathon Fire Chief James Muro addresses his dismissal to the Marathon City Council during the council's May 12 meeting. ALEX RICKERT/Keys Weekly*

A show of support for recently-fired Fire Chief James Muro from residents and fire rescue personnel, along with a statement from Muro himself, headlined the Marathon City

Council's May 12 session.

Originally hired in 2024, Muro was terminated earlier this month after his alleged involvement in a four-car crash in Islamorada on April 8.

An April 23 press release from the city of Marathon announced that the chief had been placed on administrative leave after being "allegedly cited for leaving the scene of a crash without giving information and careless driving while operating a City vehicle after working hours."

A traffic infraction for careless driving was filed by the Florida Highway Patrol on April 23. A second criminal citation, alleging a misdemeanor hit-and-run with \$39,000 in property damage, while shown to city officials in April, was not immediately filed.

An email obtained by the Keys Weekly from FHP trooper Jihad Hammad to FHP lieutenant Sandra Batie on April 27 stated that Hammad had voided the criminal citation, though it later appeared in Monroe County court records on May 11. It is unclear whether the citation later appeared in error or was re-filed.

According to city documents obtained in a public records request by the Weekly, Muro reported his involvement in the crash to Human Resources Director Evie Engelmeyer the morning after the incident, later writing in a narrative description that he "stayed on scene and assisted with patient care and communicated with Law enforcement FHP on my recollections of the call @ about 22:00 hours."

Multiple sources confirmed that Muro was the first to report the crash via a radio call.

Monroe County Sheriff's Office body camera footage requested and reviewed by the Weekly shows Muro assisting victims in the immediate aftermath of the incident, later asking a deputy after other first responders arrive "I'll get out of your hair – stay or go?"

"You're good," the deputy responds, after which Muro leaves in his city-provided fire rescue truck.

Later in the same video, victims in the crash allege that a last-minute swerve by Muro to avoid a stationary car played a significant role in the accident, resulting in a head-on collision between two SUVs that totaled both vehicles. Officers agree following the interview with the victims, stating “he wasn’t technically a part of it, but he caused it.”

A second body cam video shows a visit to Muro’s home by MCSO and FHP the night of the crash around 10:30 p.m. In that video, Muro said he was unaware of damage to his city truck, allegedly caused as he swerved off the road and clipped the car stopped in front of him, removing a piece of fender trim.

In the video, Muro tells officers he will “do whatever you need me to do,” and report the crash to city officials along with a drug and alcohol test the following morning. No tests are administered in the course of the video.

Copies of Muro’s alcohol test results from April 9 just before 9 a.m. show a 0.000% alcohol content, while call logs show a call to Engelmeyer shortly before 8 a.m.

A termination letter sent to Muro by interim City Manager Steve Williams cites “significant violations of city policies,” including failing to report the incident according to city procedures and waiting until the next morning for Muro’s report and drug test. The letter states Muro’s report on the accident “contained information that has been determined to be inaccurate and has been contradicted by findings from multiple reviewing agencies.”

A copy of an after-hours accident policy provided to the Weekly, dated from February 2026, outlines a procedure for employees involved in an accident or suspicion of drug and alcohol use outside of working hours. According to the policy, the city’s fire chief would obtain an order for a suspected city employee to undergo drug and alcohol testing at the Fishermen’s Hospital emergency room, escorted by his or her department head.



Screenshot

Conflicting reports provided to the Weekly make it unclear whether the policy had been fully enacted and consistently enforced in the months prior to Muro's incident.

Addressing the council on Tuesday night, Muro requested to be reinstated, still under administrative leave, and to address the incident under oath. He disputed claims that he had provided an inaccurate narrative or been tested later than ordinary city policy dictates.

"The loss of my job (was) under pretenses that are far from traditional and ignore the facts and principle of just cause," he said. "I've never been asked a single follow-up question about any of the events. ... We do not have 24-hour testing, and to be clear, if a fire truck backs into a building tonight, (the driver) will be tested tomorrow at 8:30 at urgent care.

"If they take issue that I called the HR director and not (Deputy City Manager Brian) Bradley or Mr. Williams, I will take full responsibility for that action. This does not match

with how a good employee should be treated.”



Five public commenters, composed of Marathon residents and Marathon Fire Rescue employees, spoke unanimously in support of Muro.

“I’m about Marathon, and Chief Muro is about Marathon as much as any leader I’ve met in my life,” said firefighter-paramedic Trace Goodwin. “He came and we had leadership and direction – he has actually put us into the modernization of the fire department.”

Local business owner Wendy Bonilla referenced a letter of support for Muro’s improved narcotics control protocols authored by contracted Fire Rescue medical director Dr. Antonio Gandia. While given to city staff, the letter was not provided to council as it was placed on city letterhead without authorization, Williams told the Weekly.

“I don’t think the policies are crystal clear,” said Randy Mearns, a founding Marathon councilman and former volunteer firefighter. “I’m told about an ambulance accident that happened – that wasn’t reported for a couple of days, and that person still works for the city, so why is that? ... I don’t think it’s good for all of us.”

Multiple council members clarified that the decision to hire or fire all city employees other than the city manager or attorney rests with the city’s current manager. Asked during the meeting if he had further comment on Muro’s dismissal, Williams said he would not elaborate further as the city had already received notice of the crash victims’ intent to file a lawsuit.

“It was my decision based on the facts in front of me,” Williams said. “I believe I made the right decision, and I’d make the same decision today. ... It’s just unfortunate.”

Asked in a public records request for any prior disciplinary records for Muro, city officials referenced a letter written by Bradley in December 2025. It referenced what Bradley referred to as mismanagement of a former employee who reported to work after a night of suspected heavy intoxication, along with an overtime policy reportedly resulting in \$50,000

per pay period due to an unauthorized modification of the city's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with its fire union in August 2025.



Williams confirmed to the Weekly that while Muro was reprimanded for the previous issues, a performance improvement plan or similar discipline was never put into place.

Questions sent to the Florida Highway Patrol by the Keys Weekly regarding the initial dismissal and eventual re-filing of Muro's criminal citation were not returned by press time.



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### ALEX RICKERT

Alex Rickert made the perfectly natural career progression from dolphin trainer to newspaper editor in 2021 after freelancing for Keys Weekly while working full time at Dolphin Research Center. A resident of Marathon since 2015, he fell in love with the Florida Keys community by helping multiple organizations and friends rebuild in the wake of Hurricane Irma. An avid runner, actor, and spearfisherman, he spends as much of his time outside of work on or under the sea having civil disagreements with sharks.

