

Columbia County
BOARD of COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Board of County Commissioners met in a scheduled workshop
January 31, 2008 in the School Board Administration Building at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioners in Attendance:

Ronald Williams District 1
Dewey Weaver (Chair) District 2
George Skinner District 3
Stephen Bailey District 4
Elizabeth Porter District 5

Others in Attendance:

County Manager Dale Williams
Marlin Feagle, County Attorney
Sandy Markham, Deputy Clerk
Asst. County Manager Lisa Roberts

The meeting opened with invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America followed.

Code Enforcement Board

The Board of County Commissioners is appreciative of the work of the County Code Enforcement Board. There is a need and willingness to transition Code Enforcement from a board based enforcement mechanism to a citation issuing system. Assuming the County continues to move toward a citation based system, the commissioners considered the need, if any, for a Code Enforcement Board after the transition.

It was the consensus of the Board that the county take action to eliminate the Code Enforcement Board and move to a citation based system, which they feel will be a much more effective system.

Attorney Feagle said there is nothing that will require the county to keep the Code Enforcement Board in place and that the ordinance may be repealed.

Mr. Earl Peeler, Chairman of the Code Enforcement Board, expressed his support in moving to a citation based system, as it will provide a better means of enforcement.

Mr. Doug Pritchard, a member of the Code Enforcement Board, agrees that the citation system will provide more enforcement, but expressed concern that many people simply need a "little push" and do not need a citation or courts to come into compliance. He agreed with moving to a citation based system, but felt the Code Enforcement Board should be left in place. He explained that if citations are written for every incident, the court system will become clogged with cases that could be more effectively handled by the Code Enforcement Board.

The County Manager explained to Mr. Pritchard that the citation based system will continue to have a provision that will give a violator notice that they are in violation of the county ordinance, and that they are being warned to come into compliance within a certain number of days. Failure to come into compliance, under the current system, requires a Notice of Hearing to appear before the Code Enforcement Board. Under the proposed citation based system, failure to comply would result in a citation and may require a court appearance.

The County Manager explained the time needed for transition is not certain. The County Attorney has laid out procedures for transition, and the officers will need to be educated. It will be necessary for the Code Enforcement Board to remain in place until the transition process is complete. An immediate issue to be addressed is that according to the current ordinance, there is only one member of the Code Enforcement Board eligible for reappointment. The County Manager suggested the ordinance be amended in a way that will allow the County to keep the existing Code Enforcement Board membership through the transition period. Attorney Feagle

concurring the ordinance could be amended to allow for continuous reappointments as is allowed by state law. As a matter of information, Attorney Feagle added the citations are not criminal.

It was the consensus of the Board to have Attorney Feagle draft an amendment to the ordinance.

Animal Control Board Ordinance #96-29

This ordinance was drafted to serve as a mediator for handling disputes between the public and the Lake City/Columbia County Animal Shelter. It appears the ordinance has lost its purpose. The commissioners discussed whether the ordinance should remain in place as is, should it be amended, or should it be altogether done away with.

Commissioner Weaver's opinion was that the Animal Control Board ("ACB") should remain in place, but that there should be a new ACB appointed, and the ordinance should be amended to require regular meetings. Commissioner Williams concurred with Commissioner Weaver and added current members should be eligible to reapply for a position on the ACB, but that the Board should strive to have representatives from all districts, and that the Animal Shelter Director should be allowed to appoint two members to the nine member ACB.

Commissioner Bailey believes one of the largest problems is that there has been no consistency in the meetings. Commissioner Bailey said a diverse group is needed on the Board.

Animal Shelter Director Margaret Smith explained there was never a standard date and time set for meetings, but when the occasional application was made to be heard the now resigned Chairman, Mr. Roger Hadley would call a meeting of the Animal Control Board. She said that most complaints were resolved prior to meetings. Ms. Smith said that she thinks there may have been only three meetings needed over an eight year period. She said that she believes all three were resolved in the Animal Shelter's favor.

Mrs. Susan Hadley raised her hand and was called forward to speak. Ms. Hadley is a member of the Humane Society Board, and also the ACB addressed the issue. She said the original intent was that each commissioner would have a representative on the ACB. She said that the board initially met on a quarterly basis, but it became very discouraging for members to routinely schedule time away from their families and travel to the meeting only to find out there was no business. She said that no one wanted to meet just to be meeting. Eventually, it came to a point where the chair was able to resolve many of the issues over the telephone without having to call a meeting of the entire board. She told the Board that the ordinance is a very good ordinance and the few times it has been used, it has worked. She said that a lot of time and thought went into preparing that ordinance over a period of two years and that she does not see a need to make changes. Ms. Hadley said she would be happy to continue in her service as a member of the ACB.

Commissioner Porter said that with the growth the county is experiencing, she believes there will be matters to discuss aside from complaints such as the standing of the shelter, donations, occupancy at the shelter, etc. The Commissioner said that just because the meeting is short doesn't minimize the importance of the meetings. She said it is each commissioner's responsibility to appoint members that will be dedicated to the cause. The appointed ACB secretary should report excessive absenteeism and vacancies to the Board of County Commissioners. Commissioner Porter agrees the ordinance is a good ordinance and that the Board is worth having in place. She did suggest that the bylaws state the ACB must meet quarterly, and also that an annual report be submitted to the Board of County Commissioners just as many agencies do.

Ms. Hadley responded that she did not feel the ACB should meet just for the sake of meeting, and should not have to find things to discuss just so a meeting could be held. She

reminded all that the purpose of the ACB is to concern themselves with and resolve conflicts. Their purpose is not to concern themselves with donations, occupancy, etc.

Emergency Medical Services/Fire

County Manager Williams explained that the County's EMS operating permit expires at the end of March 2008. The EMS Director has requested some direction as to how the county will apply for its next license as it relates to the service area. Currently, the Certificate of Need ("CON") includes the City of Lake City, the unincorporated area, and the town of Fort White.

The County Manager and Commissioner Williams were appointed in a prior meeting to a committee with the purpose of working with the City on the issue of emergency medical services within the city.

EMS was projected to hit 10,000 runs this year, which is an excessive amount of runs versus the staff. This has created additional problems and concerns.

There has also been concern expressed that there may be too much fire response to rescue assist calls. There needs to be a way to better measure the response of rescue assist as is provided through fire.

Commissioner Williams said that the most recent meeting [date not provided] was not as productive as he had hoped. Commissioner Williams explained: The County's position was that the County pays its portion of rescue from a shared revenue that the City, County, and Fort White receive from the state. The City questions why EMS cannot be paid for from the general fund of the County, a fund the City residents contribute to. It was explained to the City that there simply are not sufficient funds to do so. The City is interested in the idea of asking the Sheriff to reduce the services within the incorporated area. By reducing the Sheriff's services, that savings could be placed on the EMS expense in behalf of the City. The City's dilemma is that they have not budgeted for these services. In order for the City to pay EMS, they would have to cut services in other areas. The County's dilemma is that there are not sufficient funds from the shared revenue to pay this cost for the City and the County. The County receives constant inquiries asking why the County is subsidizing rescue within the City of Lake City.

County Manager Dale Williams agreed with Commissioner Williams explanation and added there is going to be even less money next year to work with since the passing of Amendment #1 on the January 29, 2008 Presidential Preference Primary. He said not only will the County not be able to fund any new programs from the general fund, it is very likely there will be a cut of some currently being funded. The state shared revenue [half cents sales tax distribution] is complicated in that a portion of what is received must be used to fund or subsidize services countywide, and a portion is not. All of that portion of the half cent sales tax that was earmarked for the unincorporated area was being used in subsidizing EMS. In the meeting, there was discussion as to whether the City would be interested in getting back into the rescue business. The County Manager said he gathered from the meeting that there is no interest. A meeting was requested before the end of the month. An email has been received from the City Manager informing the County that they were not able to discuss the EMS issue at the last City Council Meeting due to time constraints, but that they are interested in keeping the dialogue open and hopefully reach a resolution.

County Manager Williams said that he recommends, and Commissioner Williams concurs, that should the City be able to provide the subsidies it owes the County for last year and agree on a new subsidy, that the money paid should not be used to supplant what is already being provided. Instead it would be recommended that the money be used for a floating captain position.

Commissioner Weaver said it is apparent that the County cannot continue to subsidize the City, and to continue doing so would prohibit the county from being able to move forward with needed upgrades and expansion of services. The Board will take up the matter at the first February meeting and make a decision at that time. Commissioner Weaver suggested the offer be reaffirmed to provide an EMS unit for the City to do a start up EMS.

The County Manager said it would be better if the service can stay combined.

Commissioner Bailey agreed that it isn't fair to ask county residents to foot the EMS bill for the city residents. He suggested that if the City does not find it necessary to find time on their meeting agenda to discuss EMS, then at that first February meeting, the County should file its CON for the unincorporated areas of Columbia County and Fort White. Then if the City decides to pay their portion, the County can apply for an amended CON to include the City. Commissioner Bailey said the County has extended opportunities to meet with the City on a regular basis regarding the matter, but it has fallen on deaf ears.

Commissioner Skinner said he supports one service. To split services will cause confusion, but he agreed that the City needs to pay their fair share.

Attorney Feagle explained there is nothing that would prohibit the County from amending the CON. Mr. Feagle said that if the CON does not include the incorporated area, the County is not required to service that area. Commissioner Porter asked the Chair to invite the City once more to sit down with the County next week before the Board's regularly scheduled meeting.

The County Manager said realistically speaking, he could not imagine the County ceasing to provide that service the day the new permit becomes effective. Instead, he asked, wouldn't the County send a notice saying that the service would be provided through a certain period of time? If the answer to that question is "yes", then it is not so imperative that the County and City meet prior to Thursday night's meeting. The Chair said he would like to see the services provided through the 2008 budget.

Commissioner Williams said that he would like to hear the Sheriff's comments on the request that the City is going to make to him [sheriff]. The commissioner did not elaborate on his request of the Sheriff. The Sheriff responded the problem is that the units travel through the city to get from one area to the other. If the county is traveling through the City and notices a crime or is traveling through and a police officer is in distress they will respond. The Sheriff said the department receives calls from within the City with requests for the Sheriff Department to respond, because the city residents do not trust the city to respond, or simply doesn't want them at their house. He said it would be very difficult to draw a line and ignore city residents' needs, especially if there is an officer in the area. Nonetheless, the request that the city is planning on making has not yet surfaced.

The County Manager said there are a number of counties that have agreements with the municipalities within their county that deals with "rebating property taxes." Adding patrol for a particular geographical area could be handled through a Municipal Service Taxing Unit or there could be a levy done countywide to increase millage.

County Manager Williams discussed that one of the City's arguments for rescue was that they felt they were contributing their part by having the City Fire Department respond for rescue assist calls within the city. As a matter of follow-up, the city manager indicated that 71% of all of the city fire calls were rescue assist. This presents the question as to whose behalf rescue assist is being provided, is something that Columbia County EMS requires, and is the rescue assist being provided at the level requested.

Commissioner Williams said the question of what is considered overkill in rescue response has presented itself in the past at Fire Committee meetings. The rescue assist response issue has been used in the past to justify the amount of money the county was paying toward subsidizing fire. He said that the overkill on the rescue assist has always been an issue with him.

Commissioner Skinner said that the Quick Response Units are essential. He said they are more geared toward medical than they are fires.

The County Manager recommended the EMS Director and Fire Chief be given an opportunity to draft a fair and reasonable set of standard operating procedures that will address

rescue assist calls. Once prepared, the proposed procedures will be considered by the Board of County Commissioners. It was explained that the goal is to attempt to adequately respond to an emergency without tying up all emergency equipment (i.e. a fire truck with a lift does not need to respond to someone who has tripped and skinned their knee).

Another consideration is the amount of response provided by the City of Lake City. EMS Director Rusty Noah reviewed statistics relating to the number of calls dispatched and the type of calls received from May 01, 2007 through January 08, 2008. See attachment to original minutes. He said there are informal response guidelines that are followed now, but nothing that has been actually approved by the Board of County Commissioners. EMS is not dispatching a fire truck to every scene, but the City is, at times, putting every piece of equipment they have on the scene of every call. The current set of procedures are different than that suggestion submitted by Fire Chief Atkins in that the Chief's proposal breaks everything down by zone. This will make it more difficult for the dispatchers, but will help to address some of the issues. Mr. Noah said the current goal is to try to keep the SOP as simple as possible for dispatchers. As a long term goal, it would be best for the City and County to have a separate SOPs. Another long term goal would be for the SOPs to be very zone specific.

Regarding the Quick Response Units ("QRU"). Mr. Noah said there are seven QRU across the county. These units carry extrication equipment and a limited amount of medical equipment. He said these units work well for getting to a scene very quickly for outlying areas. Generally speaking, it is not the tankers that are being dispatched for calls such as chest pain and a fall.

Commissioner Williams said that former City/County Fire Chief Johnson began the pattern of sending a tanker to every type of accident and the City has not ceased this practice since.

The County Manager suggested that he is not certain he would agree with all of the protocols that were submitted to 911. He suggested a copy be submitted to himself and the Board for review.

The Board concurred that when a person is in need they are more than happy to see as many emergency response vehicles as will come. But practically speaking, the county must be good stewards of the money by not obviously over responding. Good judgment and practical SOPs are a must in responding to the calls for assistance.

911 Advisory Committee Recommendations

The committee makeup is EMS Director Rusty Noah, County Commissioner Ronald Williams, Fire Chief Atkinson, Sheriff Gootee, and City Fire Chief Carlton Tunsil.

At the January 17, 2008 Board of County Commissioners meeting the Board was asked to fund a position for an IT Computer technician (approximately \$52,194 per year) and a secretary (approximately \$31,000 per year). Regarding the anticipated necessary dispatch growth, the Sheriff said that the current Positron System is not able to handle the new technology and there is a problem getting parts for the system. The estimated cost for a new Positron Viper System is approximately \$400,000. The radio consoles will be approximately \$250,000. Needed furniture is approximately \$71,000. Technical moving of the current configuration of the consoles is approximately \$50,000 (Approximate Total of \$771,000). It was noted that the Positron System and the furniture could be paid for through grant monies.

The Sheriff reported that Sgt. May has the application for the Rural County Grant complete that could assist with funding the update and expansion of the Dispatch Center. The application is due by March 1st and will be submitted for consideration at an upcoming Board of County Commissioners meeting.

The Sheriff was not able to attend the last Advisory Committee meeting. Commissioner Williams reported to him and the Board that in that meeting the last proposal was revised. The new proposal provides the following:

- The IT position will be contractual.
- The secretary position will include data updating.
- To seek out the best run 911 Center in the state and have them review the Kimball proposal and then have them to offer comment regarding the recommendation based on their experience.
- To have employees from that particular 911 Center to work for a certain period in Columbia County's 911 Center and then make recommendations for improvements.
- To meet with the City of Lake City regarding the Sheriff entering into an agreement regarding the City funding three dispatch positions.

The Sheriff has concern that that many times it is more expensive to contract than it is to hire, and also many times a contractual person cannot respond immediately and may have other jobs ahead of your call. The Sheriff also told the Board that there may be security issues with an outsider having access to sensitive and highly confidential information. He tends to lean more toward a full time, on staff person.

Commissioner Porter suggested the contractual person could provide training to the Sheriff's current IT person so that he could provide assistance with small problems and possibly help in the event the contractual person is not available.

Commissioner Williams said that he never understood in the original proposal that the Sheriff's IT person would be left "there" working, and then hire an IT person to strictly handle 911. The Sheriff and County Manager responded, that was indeed the original proposal. The Commissioner said that he was under the impression that one IT person would handle the Sheriff Department and the 911 Center.

The County Manager asked if he understood correctly that the Sheriff would be seeking three additional dispatchers for the 911 Center in next year's budget. The Sheriff said that if he could get what he needs, and if the city is not going to give him what he needs, he would likely seek three dispatch positions from the County. The goal is to get seven dispatchers on each shift. Currently, there are six. The Sheriff said if he can get 7 per shift, he didn't plan to ask for any more. Director Noah interjected that seven dispatcher are currently needed on each shift. The growth and call volume would have to be considered in the near future to determine next year's need.

Commissioner Williams pointed out the center will only situate a certain number of employees and it would not make sense to hire them but have no place to seat them. Eventually, another building will have to be considered.

Commissioner Porter asked if the City elects not to provide the dispatch positions and the fire dispatching was turned over to them, would we still need the three. Director Noah responded we will still need the three, because the calls will continue to come in through the 911 Center before being transferred to the City. Commissioner Williams said that transferring those

calls will eliminate some of the need to keep the County's dispatchers tied up on the line with a fire being fought in the city.

Commissioner Bailey asked what the dollar value would be for the revised proposal. The County Manager said that he is not sure what the dollar value is at this time, but it will be available before the 7th [month not provided]. Commissioner Williams said one of the things discussed by the committee was that instead of having an entry level secretary, that that person would have computer programming knowledge and be able to do data update. He said that would make that position's salary a little higher than what was originally discussed. The Sheriff said that "ball park" figures were that the IT person was "with benefits was around \$52,000, and the secretary, with benefits, was around \$31,000." Commissioner Bailey said that it was his understanding that the Advisory Committee's charge was to look into the Kimball Report and come back with an action plan that would include long range planning.

Commissioner Williams responded the committee's main objective for phase 1 was to "do a stop-gap that will stop the bleeding" and then phase 2 would include coming up with some long range plans. Commissioner Williams said that the long range plans will include a building and more employees and equipment.

Commissioner Bailey responded that he is having difficulty seeing how a secretary-data base person is going to help "stop the bleeding," whenever there are issues with the number of dispatchers, turnover rates, training, etc.

The Sheriff said there are people in training and a curriculum has been developed.

Commissioner Bailey asked why Emergency Medical Dispatch ("EMD") is not being used.

The Sheriff responded that there is not enough certified personnel to use it. The trainers are in the process of being certified at this time, and then they will be able to do in-house training, which will be more cost efficient. It will take approximately 16 weeks to get the instructors trained, before being able to train other staff. It would take at least a year before the EMD program could ever be up and running.

Commissioner Bailey said the system was put in for a reason, and if necessary the required personnel should be brought in to train the dispatchers right away. Commissioner Bailey said the Kimball report suggested the "cards" be put back into place, and it was the commissioner's understanding that they had been.

Director Noah explain that to his knowledge, the cards have not been put back into place. In the process of the evaluation of the Dispatch Center, Director Noah explained that Mr. Lake found that the cards were not being used correctly and that there was not sufficient certified personnel on staff to use them all the time. Mr. Lake recommended at that time that the cards be pulled and that staff cease using them, because it was a greater liability that the staff was not certified.

Commissioner Bailey said the EMD system is very much needed.

The Sheriff responded that he totally agreed but that the turnover rate has been tremendous and training has been an issue. The Sheriff said that great strides are being made and have been made since the Kimball report.

Commissioner Skinner asked if the Orbicom System would be compatible 5-10 years in the future "with what we see and know is coming, as far as people and the upgrade of communications."

Director Noah responded, that is would not be, and then explained that it is his understanding that Orbicom, as a corporation, does not exist anymore. In Director Noah's opinion, the county is on "borrowed time" with the Orbicom system. He reported that as early as yesterday that a technician had to be called to attend to the system as it almost had a catastrophic

failure. He explained that the proposal included information as to the replacement of that system as part of the grant. He said that whether or not the dispatch center receives grant funding will determine whether the county is asked to fund the system (\$250,000). Director Noah said a new system is needed. He said there are several vendors who have systems that have more expandability and will do what is needed at the dispatch center. While there is “ballpark” pricing for a new system, the exact system needed has not yet been determined by the committee.

The County Manager summarized that the Board will be asked to consider at the February 07, 2008 Board of County Commissioners meeting:

- (a) Hiring one IT person, and one secretary, or
- (b) Hiring a secretary/database manager, and authorize the sheriff to enter into a contract with a company (or individual) who can provide IT needs within the 911 Center.

Other things the Board will consider are:

- (a) Working with an experienced 911 Center who may be able to offer wisdom.
- (b) City fire remaining or being remanded back to the City.

Final Thoughts:

Commissioner Williams expressed that in the future, 911 needs operate independent of elected officials.

Commissioner Bailey has a problem with taking action when he cannot look at an overall plan and a long range plan. He said the Board has to get into the idea of doing long range planning.

All agreed the citizen protection is very important.

The Sheriff said the planning is slow, but it is meticulous, and that there will be a long range plan.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

ATTEST:

Board of County Commissioners

P. DeWitt Cason
Clerk of Circuit Courts