

APRIL 29, 2013 – SPECIAL MEETING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a special meeting on Monday, April 29, 2013, at 4:00 p.m., at the Walton County Courthouse in DeFuniak Springs.

The following Board members were present: Commissioner Kenneth Pridgen, Chairman; Commissioner Sara Comander, Vice-Chair; Commissioner Bill Imfeld; Commissioner Bill Chapman; and Commissioner Cindy Meadows. Mr. Mark Davis, Interim County Attorney; Mr. Gerry Demers, Interim County Administrator; Ms. Dede Hinote, Interim Assistant County Administrator; and Mr. Alex Alford, Clerk of Courts, were also present.

Chairman Pridgen called the meeting to order to discuss the Fire Study completed by Government Services Group (GSG) and Nabors, Giblin and Nickerson.

Mr. Gerry Demers, Interim County Administrator, explained that the reason for conducting the study was to look at the cost for Fire Services and for direction from the Board on how to proceed with the funding sources we have. GSG provided several rate increase scenarios and discussed what percentage of total costs is needed to cover the total cost of fire services provided by the county.

Ms. Camille Tharpe provided and discussed the Fire Study. They have worked hard to update the program every 3-5 years if possible, however the 2003-04 study has been in place for several years. The 2007-08 updated study was not approved. She stated that there are two case law requirements for the special assessment that the services or facilities have to provide the special benefit to property and the fees charged must be a fair and reasonable apportionment. She discussed the apportionment methodology and the different fire department services. The service delivery for the different departments was also discussed and the County funds provided to the different departments for FY 2012-13. The cost apportionment for fire services were provided

for the different categories: residential, industrial/warehouse, commercial, land, and institutional. Several preliminary assessment rate scenarios were provided for consideration ranging from 6.5-100% of the total fire service costs for the FY 2013-14 rates.

Ms. Tharpe advised that some direction is needed from the Board regarding the City of Paxton, a rate selection, an exemption policy, vacancy credits for mobile home/RV parks, and any other issues that may arise. She presented an implementation schedule to conduct public hearings and rate approval.

Commissioner Imfeld stated that it had been nearly two decades since there had been a rate increase. He felt that the concept of a cap on the increase was a good idea and the increase needs to be phased into over a series of years.

Motion by Commissioner Imfeld, second by Commissioner Comander, to discuss the option for a 25% of total fire service costs rate.

Commissioner Comander explained that the only alternative would be to cut the services that are provided. She questioned if the rate could be increased to 25% of total fire service costs for residential and 50% for commercial. Ms. Tharpe answered that could not be done.

Chairman Pridgen asked for public comment.

Ms. Mary Neilson stated that the residents in the south end have consistently paid higher rates and recommended a minimum increase to 50% of total fire service costs.

Mr. Bob Hudson explained that all residents should have fire protection services. He urged the Board to consider some calculation for land and an increase to 50% of total fire service costs. He questioned why the City of Paxton had not been paying the taxes for fire services.

Commissioner Imfeld stated that staff had brought that to the City of Paxton's attention and they will have to correct the issue.

Commissioner Meadows questioned if the millage rate could be reduced across the board. Mr. Hudson stated that without knowing exactly what the property values are going to be that is hard to determine but it appears there was approximately ¼ mill that is being taxed throughout the county to pay the difference. Commissioner Meadows felt that it would make more sense to reduce the millage rate and increase the fire rate instead of increasing the fire rate every year. Mr. Hudson explained that the taxpayer concerns are to increase the rate in a fair and equitable way.

Commissioner Meadows stated that she would like to wait until after the tax revenues are calculated and consider the budget cycle before making a rate decision.

Brief discussion ensued regarding the amount of land acreage and rate charge.

Commissioner Chapman questioned how a house on ten acres would be charged. Ms. Tharpe answered that the primary use would be structure and would only be charged for the structure, not both the structure and the land.

Commissioner Chapman felt that those residents in the Liberty and Argyle Fire District should also be charged a rate increase and they should give those districts a year to make the change.

Commissioner Imfeld stated that by eliminating funding to those two districts they could fund two smaller stations east and west of Freeport. He felt that those districts should be able to fund at their level if they increase their rates and become totally independent.

Attorney Mark Davis, County Attorney, questioned the hardship exemption. Attorney Lynn Hoshihara explained that the hardship waiver has not been drafted and the county would fund that amount. Those fees do not accumulate over the years and would be on a year by year

basis. Attorney Davis asked if the rate resolution would be adopted each year. Attorney Hoshihara confirmed that an annual rate resolution would be adopted.

Mr. Hudson questioned if other counties have the hardship exemption with a Fire Rescue MSBU. Attorney Hoshihara answered that there are. Mr. Hudson questioned why there is a need for a hardship on a Fire MSBU but not on property taxes. Commissioner Chapman answered that there is the homestead exemption for property taxes.

Commissioner Imfeld stated that he would like more information as to what constitutes the hardship exemption. Attorney Hoshihara explained that the threshold exemption for extremely low income families is that a family of four must make less than \$17,000 a year.

Mr. JB Hillard stated that the Board should notify the tax payers how the additional funds will be spent within the County.

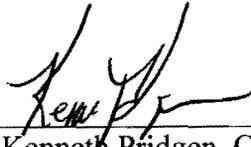
Brief discussion ensued regarding the need for equitable rates and services.

Commissioner Imfeld directed staff to review the options for the 25-39.5% of total fire service costs rate ranges, the possibility of providing stations east and west of Freeport, coordinate with Liberty and Argyle Fire Districts to match the increase, and provide clarity on the hardship exemption qualifications and who would approve that exemption.

Mr. Demers asked for direction on the cap for the notices. Commissioner Imfeld felt that the 25-39.5% range was adequate. Commissioner Meadows felt that the cap should be at 100%.

Motion by Commissioner Imfeld, second by Commissioner Chapman, to adjourn the meeting at 5:18 p.m. Ayes 5, Nays 0. Pridgen Aye, Comander Aye, Imfeld Aye, Chapman Aye, Meadows Aye.

ATTEST 
Alex Alford, Clerk of Courts

APPROVED 
Kenneth Pridgen, Chairman