

JULY 16, 2013 – SPECIAL MEETING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a special meeting on Tuesday, July 16, 2013, at 5:00 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. Gerry Demers, Interim County Administrator, and Ms. Dede Hinote, Interim Assistant County Administrator, were also present.

Chairman Pridgen called the special meeting to order to continue the public hearing regarding the Fire Services Assessment Study.

Ms. Camille Tharpe, Government Services Group (GSG), briefly discussed the assessable budget summary and different cost apportionment funding scenarios. They took the FY 2012-2013 adopted budget and removed all costs associated with EMS services and came up with an assessable budget for FY 2013-2014 of approximately \$4.8 million. They then looked at the calls of service using the historical demand model for five categories: residential, industrial/warehouse, commercial, land, and institutional.

Mr. Gerry Demers, Interim County Administrator, provided and discussed the revenues vs. expenditures for the fire services provided by the seven fire stations. He explained that the intent of increasing the fire services fees is to reduce the difference between the revenues and expenditures of approximately \$4 million.

Chairman Pridgen explained that there were several valid concerns presented by the citizens at the July 9, 2013 meeting. He recommended considering charging a seven cent fee per acre for vacant land rather than the fees provided in the assessment study. He stated that a one cent sales tax could also be considered as a solution.

Commissioner Comander questioned if the funds collected south of the Choctawhatchee Bay with a one cent sales tax could be used for other services in south Walton since they have an independent fire service. Commissioner Imfeld answered that the funds collected for a one cent sales tax for fire services would have to be used specifically for that purpose.

Commissioner Imfeld spoke in favor of the recommendation to consider a seven cent fee per acre for vacant land instead of a base rate in addition to acreage costs. Commissioner Comander agreed. Commissioner Imfeld expressed concern with the suggestion to consider a one cent sales tax due to time constraints and the need to hold a referendum.

Several audience members spoke in opposition of the proposed increase in Fire Rescue Services fees and several recommendations were made, including doubling the current fees, basing the fee on the value of the property/dwelling, and decreasing the fees for vacant land.

Mr. Demers explained that there is a hardship exemption qualification for those on a limited/low income. Attorney Hoshihara explained that there is an option for those property owners who have several contiguous parcels to combine those into one.

Attorney Mark Davis, Interim County Attorney, entered the meeting at 5:51 p.m.

Attorney Hoshihara briefly explained why vacant land cannot be eliminated from the assessment because it was determined that vacant land was 13% of the call volume.

Commissioner Imfeld questioned if it would be feasible to charge seven cents per acre for vacant land. Attorney Davis felt that would be legally defensible.

The Board discussed the need to increase the fee for fire services because those expenses have increased but the collected fees have remained the same, and recommended charging a residential fee of \$50-60 and reducing the vacant land fee to seven cents per acre.

Ms. Tharpe explained that the rates would be changed proportionately for a reduction in commercial, industrial, and institutional categories as well.

Commissioner Comander felt the need to continue the public hearing to allow further review of a reduced assessment.

Motion by Commissioner Chapman, second by Commissioner Comander, to close public comment and continue the public hearing on the Fire Services Assessment Study to the July 23, 2013 meeting in DeFuniak Springs at 9:00 a.m., or soon thereafter. Ayes 5, Nays 0. Pridgen Aye, Comander Aye, Imfeld Aye, Chapman Aye, Meadows Aye.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

ATTEST 
Alex Alford, Clerk of Courts
and County Comptroller

APPROVED 
Kenneth Pridgen, Chairman