

**AT A WORKSHOP OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS IN AND FOR GADSDEN COUNTY,
FLORIDA ON FEBRUARY 15, 2024 AT 4:00 PM, THE
FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

Present: Ronterious Green, Chairman, District 5
Alonzetta Simpkins, Vice-Chair, District 2
Eric Hinson, District 1
Kimblin NeSmith, District 3
Brenda Holt, District 4
Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator
Clayton Knowles, County Attorney
Adriana Quijada, Deputy Clerk

Call to Order, Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Green called the workshop to order at 4 p.m. Chair Green provided Invocation and then led into the Pledge of Allegiance.

CITIZENS REQUESTING TO BE HEARD ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

The Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners welcomes and encourages public participation at all meetings of the Board. Citizens are free to speak for up to three (3) minutes on non-agenda items. Public comments and participation are also encouraged for items on the agenda. Additionally, if you are unable to attend a meeting in person, comments from the Public can also be submitted via email to CitizensToBeHeard@gadسدencountyfl.org until noon on the date of the meeting. Comments submitted after the deadline, but prior to the meeting, will be added to the official record, but the County cannot guarantee that Commissioners and staff will have adequate time to review comments prior to the meeting. Citizens are further encouraged to participate via Zoom using the credentials on the County's website.

Chair Green read aloud the above statement.

John Browning, 408 China Berry Lane

Mr. Browning stated he was with Concord Volunteer Fire Department and stated he heard Chief Hood talking about insurance and paying premiums on the trucks. Mr. Browning mentioned that they have 12 certified firefighters. They would like to request funding for their department of \$75,000 so they could put a paid-on-call system in place.

Mr. Browning also mentioned there not being enough money in the stipend program. He stated if they run 62 calls and the stipend runs out, people will start to not respond to calls.

Jim Roberts, 2875 Mt. Pleasant Rd.

Mr. Roberts, Mount Pleasant Fire Lieutenant, appeared before the Board. He stated they had issues with the liability part of the insurance. He stated it seemed like they were double downing on the

liability piece of it, where the County is providing it and they also provide it. He stated they are fire departments first, not just a non-profit.

Robert Maxwell

Mr. Maxwell, member of Wetumpka Volunteer Fire Department, appeared before the Board. He stated they were formed in 1987 to provide fire protection. He stated over the years, they have purchased several trucks. He stated there was no County money that has gone into their truck payments and the maintenance.

Kendrah Wilkerson, 711 N. Main St. Havana, Danny Hunter, 202 E Lake Road

Ms. Wilkerson, Town Manager of Havana, Chief Hunter, and Chief Russo appeared before the Board. They have made requests for changes.

Ms. Wilkerson mentioned the fifth “Where As” on the contract where it stated at the end of the sentence “in the immediate vicinity” and asked to either strike that language or define what the immediate vicinity is.

Commissioner Hinson stated the County dropped the ball. He stated it would be fair to just have another workshop so they could go through it and not rush it.

Chair Green requested to come back to this and have a separate workshop due to the many changes they want to make. He stated there was no problem if they want to present it now but he would prefer to have more time.

Ms. Wilkerson stated she met with County staff on Tuesday. They redlined it with their comments thinking that this was a workshop designed to be a discussion. She thought this was the workshop to be heard.

Commissioner NeSmith asked Chief Hunter and Chief Russo if they both had an opportunity to meet with Chief Hood and go over the original. They both stated yes.

Chair Green stated he would get with the admin office to schedule a workshop with the Town of Havana, City of Gretna and Midway.

Commissioner Holt stated Chief Hood and the County Attorney needed time to go over this as well. She also mentioned that this was not the County's fault.

Tabatha Nelson, 216 Country Club Drive

General Business

1. Discussion and direction regarding the Fire Services Contracts

Ms. Daniels presented the item and stated the discussion will be led by EMS Director Chief Hood. Chief Hood appeared. He stated they have obtained some ideas and concerns about the contracts that were in place. He mentioned that in their packets, they have been provided with the list of concerns that every unincorporated department and municipality has brought to them. Chief Hood went through the packet with the Commissioners.

Chair Green asked if they had any numbers on what the insurance would look like. Chief Walker stated he heard it would be a crazy amount.

Commissioner Simpkins appeared at 4:11 p.m.

Chief Hood stated it would be due diligence in the County's behalf to put a clause in there as it relates to what happens if the vehicle gets totaled.

Chief Hood mentioned the County paying repairs for non-county owned vehicles exceeding \$1,000 but not to exceed \$10,000. This concerned the unincorporated departments because it could cost \$30,000 for repairs.

Chief Hood stated that with the municipalities and unincorporated departments, it used to say that the records were due by the 10th day at the end of each quarter and they were requesting to be changed to 30 due to bank statements not being received on time.

Chief Hood stated in the unincorporated areas, it was suggested for an increase of 37,500. They were also requesting a 3-year contract versus a one-year contract with the unincorporated areas.

Chief Hood mentioned the Stipend program. He stated this would funnel through the County. The unincorporated areas have a stipend program for a max of \$7,500 annually. Chief Hood mentioned training programs that they were trying to implement in the County.

Chair Green asked about the incentive part of it. He thought that it could be a little complicated to submit and then wait for payment to come from the Clerk's office. As long as they were getting the required documentation, he thought it would be a lot simpler for the fire departments to pay their own people the incentives and give the County proof that they have done that.

Commissioner Holt asked about the purpose of the 24-hour notice. Chief Hood stated for County-owned facilities, there should not be a requirement for a 24-hour notice. The County does not own all of the buildings. Commissioner Holt asked which ones do they not own. Chief Hood stated Wetumpka, Concord, and was not sure about the others.

Commissioner NeSmith stated there were 2 issues they have. He asked the Attorney if any volunteer fire departments currently have any liability insurance. Mr. Knowles stated not to his knowledge.

Commissioner NeSmith stated this commission has spoken passionately about this. He wanted the first responders to have all the tools. There were many issues that are different in each fire department. He stated it would have been easier with just one Gadsden County Fire Department.

Commissioner Simpkins asked the County Attorney if they had liability for the volunteer fire departments. Mr. Knowles stated they have their own liability policy that is like an umbrella policy for the county. Chief Walker stated he spoke with a representative from Pat Thomas and she said that the fire department are covered under the county liability insurance. Commissioner Simpkins asked if there were currently covered under their policy and the insurance company is saying that they could continue to be covered under their policy? Chief Walker stated that was his understanding that he got from the representative. They were trying to get them to do a letter saying that but they were not

able to. Chair Green stated when they spoke earlier, he was hoping for some type of letter. Chief Walker stated Mr. Thomas wanted to be here but he was out of town and could attend the regular meeting on Tuesday.

Commissioner Hinson stated there were a lot of lingering questions and that was why he asked for this workshop. He asked if they could add additional amount to cover the insurance. They could pay for it and give them a timeline.

Ms. Daniels stated if they are currently being covered under the County liability insurance, they are already covering that.

The County Attorney stated FACT provides their liability coverage and FMIT provides the coverage for their vehicles. He stated that the vehicle coverage is there and he would like to hear more from the carrier with respect to how the general liability piece works. He wanted to make sure the Board understands that those are separate lines of insurance and they need to make sure they understand that not only are the vehicles going to be insured for liability but also for the acts that these departments take are also insured under their policy as well.

Chair Green stated to allow for the County Administrator to provide more information and talk more on this at the regular meeting on Tuesday.

Commissioner Hinson asked if they could get three quotes from different insurance agencies so they could have a better rate as well. The County Attorney stated they could do that; FACT and FMIT are going to be the best.

Mr. Roberts stated in regard to trucks out of service, the County could provide them a piece of apparatus to replace that temporarily while the repairs are being made.

Mr. Paramore stated he spoke with John Pat Thomas and Mr. Thomas was willing to have a conversation with the Chair on Monday. Mr. Thomas stated the individual firefighter is covered under the GL Policy along with the County's Workers Comp policy. What was in question was the non-owned County Apparatus.

Commissioner Simpkins stepped out at 5:22 p.m.

Commissioner Simpkins returned at 5:22 p.m.

Commissioner Holt stated on page 9, they should fill out the tax form. Chief Hood stated they were requesting to give them the amount in whole and they distribute the stipend to their department versus the Clerk's Office cutting checks to the firefighters. The County Attorney verified that the department would get a 1099 from the County for the stipend amount plus whatever else the Board funded.

Commissioner Simpkins believed they need to give the stipend to the volunteer fire departments. She stated they are supposed to complete a roster each time there is a call. The roster gives them a record of who reported to fires.

Chair Green stated there may be some departments that do not use all \$7,500. They maybe need something in writing.

Commissioner Holt asked Chief Hood what would be his best scenario on this. Chief Hood stated there are departments that want to have 1099 with the individual firefighters and there are other departments that want the County to give the money upfront and let them distribute it. Chief Hood believed they have a better way of tracking funding if it was held within the County.

Commissioner Simpkins stated they were talking about \$7,500 for the year. They were not doing that much tracking. They were at a dilemma because some of the firefighters want them to do a 1099 and others just want to receive the \$7,500. Her preference would be to just give each department their \$7,500.

Mr. Roberts stated for them, it was about the people available to do the work. They do not have staffing available to manage all of that. He wanted the County to manage that piece of it by issuing the 1099.

Chair Green asked the County Attorney if it was possible to make that optional. Mr. Knowles stated the easiest way to do it was to find out which departments want to be 1099 and which departments could do it on their own. They could change the language to reflect it.

Ms. Daniels went on to the next section and stated it involved the municipalities. Chief Hood stated most changes are the same. There was a red line through Havana; they presented their own contract.

Ms. Wilkerson stated when they met with staff, they had prepared an alternate contract. She stated for purposed of this conversation, go ahead and include Havana in this contract. They had similar concerns. They made the same changes and requests in this version.

Chief Hood mentioned the stipend program and stated that the Town of Havana did request the stipend program to be \$25,000 annually instead of \$5,000.

Commissioner Holt stated if they have firefighters trained, they need them to be where they are needed and be mobile. Commissioner Hinson believed it was more convenient if someone lives in that area. Commissioner Holt stated she said that because it would improve ISO rating.

Commissioner Simpkins asked Chief Hood if he met with Chattahoochee and Greensboro and if they were fine with the contract. Chief Hood stated that was correct.

Commissioner Simpkins stated they have dragged this out; they met at tri-eagle a few months back. They need to get to a point where everything is not an emergency and not wait until the last minute.

Chief Hood brought to their attention that the contract also lists Chattahoochee and Greensboro with the Town of Havana. He wanted to be transparent; he had concerns about new contract that was presented 30 minutes ago showing Chattahoochee and Greensboro. Chair Green asked Chief Hood if he could reach out to Chattahoochee and Greensboro so they could be on the same page.

Commissioner Simpkins mentioned the Town of Havana extension. Chair Green stated it is on the Agenda for Tuesday.

Motion to Adjourn

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR GREEN DECLARED THE WORKSHOP ADJOURNED AT 6:33 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

**RONTERIOUS GREEN, Chair
Board of County Commissioners**

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk