

**MINUTES OF A WORKSHOP OF THE GILCHRIST COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS HELD March 28, 2005.**

The Gilchrist County Board of County Commissioners, in and for Gilchrist County Florida, convened in a regular meeting on Monday, March 28, 2005 at 5:00 p.m. in the Board of County Commissioners Meeting Room located at 210 South Main Street, Trenton, Florida, with the following members present to-wit:

**Commissioner Mitchell Gentry, Chair**  
**Commissioner Randy Durden, Vice-Chair**  
**Commissioner Sharon Langford**  
**Commissioner Tommy Langford**  
**Commissioner Kenrick Thomas**

**Others in attendance were:** John McPherson, County Attorney, Joseph W. Gilliam, Clerk of Court, Janice Wasson, Deputy Clerk, Sam Ferguson, Director of Finance, John Ayers, Alan Mikell, John Thomas, Ron Mills, Billy Cannon, Justin Watson, Lee Schaltenbrand, Brenda Schaltenbrand, K. R. Hudson, Naomi Hudson, William Riffle, Jerry Kareem, Joan Stephens, David Janie, Brittany Lee, Delight Curtis, Bruce Thompson, Troy Breton, Marilyn Bruce, and Mark James.

**Call to Order:**

Chairperson Gentry called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

**Agenda Changes:**

Additions:

- (1) Settlement offer from Cragg's Construction of \$128,279.10

**Motion** by Commissioner Durden, seconded by Commissioner Tommy Langford, to add the settlement offer to the agenda. The motion carried unanimously. **Motion** by Commissioner Durden, seconded by Commissioner Tommy Langford, to accept the settlement offer by Cragg's Construction. The motion carried unanimously.

**County Administrator:**

Mr. McQueen presented an overview of the 1, 3, 5, 10 year plan for fire assessment, and the incentive program for volunteer fire fighters. Mr. McQueen offered the Commissioners his research on the fire assessment proposals.

**Proposal #1**

Presented by Ron McQueen (Chairperson Gentry's): Single Family Residences, \$85 flat rate; Commercial Property, \$50 minimum for property up to 10,000 square feet; Commercial Property over 10,000 square feet, \$250 flat rate with an additional \$.01 per

square foot for square footage over 10,000. Vacant Property, will be divided into three categories: Ag Use (currently exempt under the Ad Valorem Tax), \$5 per parcel; Timber/Silviculture flat rate \$10 per parcel; Vacant property (unlimited acreage), \$12. Hazardous Property, \$500 flat rate per site.

Mr. McQueen referred to a letter received regarding the Property Appraiser's software stating that if a request is made, it will cost \$2,000 to prepare the projected revenue. Commissioner Sharon Langford questioned when the software would be available. Mr. McQueen stated that when the decision is made to go with the proposal, then they will order the software.

Commissioners Tommy Langford and Sharon Langford, discussed different figures received on commercial property, and Commissioner Tommy Langford questioned the ability to retain true figures. Mr. McQueen stated the difference could be because no tax bill is processed for a bill of under \$12.

Mr. McPherson asked for clarification on the exemption of churches and industrial property being included in commercial property. He also asked for clarification on a 5 acre tract paying the same as a 500 acre tract, and the rationality of benefit and cost of fighting the fires to the parcel owners, and requested the Board give some consideration to this. Some discussion was made on Forestry arrival and county participation, including the County providing the water and smaller truck service during forestry fire calls.

Chairperson Gentry stated that the main mission of the fire service is to save lives. Mr. McPherson recommended the Board consider the rational and legal justification of charging all different size parcels the same.

### **Proposal #2**

Presented by Ron McQueen: Single Family Residences, \$80 flat rate; Commercial Property, \$100 minimum for property up to 10,000 square feet; Commercial Property over 10,000 square feet, \$100 flat rate with an additional \$.01 per square foot for square footage over 10,000. Vacant Property, \$12 per parcel flat rate; Hazardous Property, \$500 flat rate per site.

### **Proposal #3**

Budget presented by Commissioner Sharon Langford: \$87,358, salary for Chief, part of Ms. Moore's wages, retirement, life and health insurance, and workers comp; \$25,218, operating expenses; \$25,000, building and fire improvements; \$40,000, machinery and equipment; \$20,000, truck replacement (\$5,000 each Department); \$80,000, station budget (\$20,000 each station); \$50,000, contract with Fanning Springs and Trenton; \$28,188, Dispatch; \$1,664, Antenna; \$50,000, incentive for fire fighters @ \$50 per call to each station that responds; \$10,000, reserve. Totaling \$417,428.

Proposal presented by Commissioner Sharon Langford: Single Family Residences, \$55 flat rate; Commercial Property, \$70, small (less than 2,000 sq. ft.) \$100, medium (2,000 sq. ft. – 4,000 sq. ft.); \$130, large (4,001 sq. ft. – 6,000 sq. ft.); commercial property over 6,000 sq. ft., \$130 flat rate plus \$.01 per each additional sq. ft.; Motels, Base rate plus \$5 per unit; Nursing Homes, Base rate plus \$8 per licensed bed; Campgrounds, Base rate plus \$2 per unit; Parsonages, \$55; Churches, exempt; Gilchrist County Schools, exempt; Suwannee River Water Management, exempt; Hazardous Property, Base rate plus \$200; Vacant Property, Pasture/Crop, exempt; Timber, \$12 per parcel up to 120 acres; Parcels over 120 acres, \$.10 per acre; All other vacant parcels, \$12 per parcel with a cap of \$60.

Chairperson Gentry questioned placing Bell within the proposal when Bell has not weighed in on it, and considering it today.

Mr. McQueen stated that would be a decision between Boards, and Commissioner Durden agreed. Mr. McQueen also stated the cost of collection is approximately \$33,000. Commissioner Sharon Langford questioned if that cost was within our budget this year, and Mr. Gilliam answered yes. Commissioner Sharon Langford questioned if the costs are figured into the fire assessment, Mr. Gilliam answered no, because the county does not collect a special assessment under fire.

Commissioner Tommy Langford discussed a procedure for implementation and how to get to the level the county wants. He advised that he had spoken with Lee Schaltenbrand and received information on hiring a Fire Chief, budget for fire departments, purchasing new equipment, incentive programs and recruitment. About \$500,000 per year is needed to accomplish what the County would like over the next ten years, and to provide the level of service desired. He advised that he also spoke with Arthur Bellot in Dixie County, and discussed their actions, and gathered estimates on fire trucks, tankers, and equipment the county would need to bring the departments to that level, then how much it would take to bring it to that level. He did not prepare a handout of the estimates he received.

Commissioner Tommy Langford reviewed Dixie County's proposal: \$45 Residential; \$40 Commercial; \$12 and up on Vacant Land. Dixie County has 14,459, where Gilchrist County has 16,000 residents. Mr. McQueen stated Dixie County had twice as many parcels as Gilchrist County. Dixie County requires \$400,000 a year to fund its departments and one paid department. Commissioner Tommy Langford suggested that all figures be combined because the County needs a Fire Chief to perform training, provide incentives for the fire fighters, and purchase equipment needed to bring the service to the level the county desires. This would allow the departments to be brought up to par quickly, and allow the Chief to recruit volunteers and bring their training/personnel level up to where it needs to be. Commissioner Tommy Langford offered to prepare figures for the Board.

Chairperson Gentry spoke about the revisions to his proposal prior to submitting it to the Board. He stated most of the revisions were on the vacant property because he felt vacant property should pay something but should not pay as much, because what they are

receiving is not needed as much and they have fires that are put out by the fire department as a matter of course. He used information from a Fire Protection Study that the county received last year. He felt the study was very comprehensive, concise, and outlined a good plan as needed for Gilchrist County. After speaking to Mr. McQueen, Chairperson Gentry felt that \$466,000 will cover it but that it would get the county a long way, based on the 1, 3, 5, and 10 year plan with some modifications.

Mr. McQueen outlined the 10 year plan: First year – hiring a Fire Training Coordinator to begin directing training, certifications, coordination of purchases, and record keeping with volunteers as addressed; building a county-wide central facility (the property has already been acquired next to the EMS station in Bell and the County is currently working on getting the survey) for a training center \$75,000-\$90,000 on a building with a slab; Hiring of several 40 hour personnel at least one of those positions; Meeting and Training area, \$50,000; Training aids, \$10,000 to \$25,000.

Mr. McQueen cautioned everyone of the delay in collections (estimated 2006), and that the county will have to move slowly in the first year. It will only be until the third year until you know if the revenue stream is going to be as anticipated. In the beginning of the third year the county will need to evaluate new equipment needs and prioritize those needs. He estimates a realistic useful truck life of 20-25 years. Mr. McQueen stated that Dixie County accomplished this with about \$466,000.

Commissioner Sharon Langford asked if the building in Bell was within this year's budget. Mr. McQueen stated that \$75,000 had been set aside, but that he estimated a cost approximately \$125,000, and raised the issues of the trucks, stating that the trucks need to be evaluated currently.

Mr. McQueen referred to other counties within the state having paid fire stations and providing a percentage program as an incentive for volunteers.

Commissioner Tommy Langford suggested that if the county cannot have two full-time paid personnel, then hire two or three people, Monday through Friday, 8 – 5, to give the County a start, and to have personnel on hand to fight a fires. Mr. McQueen stated this proposal was included the first year of the plan, third paragraph; hiring two personnel to respond Monday through Friday, 8-5 p.m., when volunteer resources are strained. These individuals would operate from a central location. Depending on the budget it may be necessary to start with one (1) position.

Discussion was made regarding the plan, budget, re-evaluations, call load, funding, and growth. The issue of the Fire Chief responding to fires during the day was discussed, training times at the stations within the County, and whether the Fire Chief position is a one or two person position. Mr. McQueen gave his opinion that the position was a two person position, and stated the population increases would most likely determine the effects.

Commissioner Tommy Langford recognizes a mechanic being an essential part of the proposal accepted.

**Public Participation:**

Marilyn Bruce, Gilchrist County Tax Collector, asked that the Board to be mindful that any changes on the Tax Bill will require software changes, and money to be collected on her side. Ms. Bruce questioned if the Fire being moved with special assessment and if EMS is being moved with her taxing authority. She asked if there would be a cap on the millage. Commissioner Durden stated the issue of the cap would be addressed during budgets. Mr. McPherson suggested an inter-local agreement with Tax Collector and Property Appraiser to address these costs.

Bruce Thompson wanted to compare Commissioner Sharon Langford and Commissioner Tommy Langford's proposals as presented. He commented that consideration needed to be given to the age of the equipment the County currently has, and replacement. Also, that \$460,000 is a good start, but is slightly more than half of where the County needs to be.

John Rance Thomas asked who is going to provide the one set of figures for the number of residential units in the County to give the Board an idea of what will be charged per residential unit? He discussed the different figures received as data, and stated that \$80 - \$85 is acceptable. Mr. Thomas stated he did not disagree with the amount, as long as everyone else pays it also. He stated that a 5 acre parcel was more likely to have a residence, and be in danger, than the 500 acre parcels. He raised the issue of overburdening the County. He stated that he would like to see the municipalities within the County participate, because they will benefit from the service also.

Mr. Gilliam stated that Property Appraiser's Office must submit figures to the Board by July 1 of each year concerning residential units. Chairperson Gentry agreed, and stated that he did not use the municipalities within his proposal.

Lee Schaltenbrand, Spring Ridge Fire Department, applauded the efforts of everyone, and stated if the right person is hired for the Fire Chief position, he will be able to take on more and more responsibilities as the plan progresses. Mr. Schaltenbrand stated that he may not be able to respond to every fire, but surely major fires, and hopes that the County pays the position accordingly. He questioned the placement of two people, if two are hired, in the same location, stating that it would be more beneficial to have them at separate locations.

Commissioner Tommy Langford stated that Mr. Schaltenbrand is willing to provide information, qualifications, etc. in helping the Board hire the right person for the Fire Chief position. Commissioner Sharon Langford requested that Mr. Schaltenbrand be part of the interviewing process.

Mr. Gilliam raised discussion of cost and necessity of brush trucks. Mr. Schaltenbrand

stated that brush trucks and tankers are needed. Discussion was made on the delivery of equipment in connection with this plan, and command and control responsibility of the Fire Chief position. Mr. Schaltenbrand also voiced his concern with the purchase of new equipment without having qualified personnel to use them.

Joan Stevens commended the Board on their efforts.

John Rance Thomas stated the Board needs to consider impact fees, capital outlay, population growth, and revenue stream.

### **Commissioner Reports:**

Commissioner Thomas stated that although he is new to this process, he thinks the county is on the right tract. He stated the County may one day see EMS and Fire come together, and work out of the same building. The growth of the County and the safety of the people has become an issue with Fire, and this is his main concern.

Commissioner Tommy Langford thanked everyone for their participation, and stated the Commissioners are trying to come up with a plan that provides a level of service to protect the County. In three to five years, the County will be able to look back and know they were headed in the right direction.

Chairperson Gentry stated most people want an enhanced fire service, and hoped that the Board addressed that issue today. He voiced his appreciation for the direction he received from the people in the County.

Commissioner Durden thanked everyone for coming out and giving their input, allowing for much progress. He stated he thinks the Board will be able to come up with a plan before they leave tonight.

Commissioner Sharon Langford thanked everyone for participating. Commissioner Langford stated that she likes the idea of everyone having to pay, but thinks that the Board should consider what we are paying right now for EMS.

Discussion was made by Commissioner Durden, Mr. McPherson and Mr. Gilliam regarding whether a County Ordinance or an Initial Assessment Resolution is needed.

**Motion** by Commissioner Durden, second by Commissioner Thomas, to direct Mr. McPherson to prepare an Initial Assessment Resolution with the following figures to be considered in a public hearing. Single Family Residence, \$85; Commercial Property, minimum of \$100 for property up to 10,000 sq. ft. (\$.025 per sq. ft.); Commercial Property in excess of 10,000 sq. ft., \$250 base plus \$.01 per sq. ft.; Vacant property, minimum of \$10 and \$10 per parcel with no cap; Hazardous Site, \$500 per site.

Discussion was made on other county assessments, collections from special assessments, vacant property assessment, and the possible burden placed on the residents of Gilchrist

County. The inclusion of Bell was also discussed along with timberland. The public in attendance were asked if the single family residence fee would be in excess, the public answered no, however Commissioner Sharon Langford asked for a reduction to \$65 for single family residence. Public discussion was made on impact fee in connection with Fire Assessment, and the possibility of bring the Single Family Residence back before the Board at a later date. It was mentioned that EMS generates approximately half of it's budget and that the fire assessment would not be taking anything away from EMS. Mr. Kenneth Hudson stated that he was not concerned with the other Counties data, but what this county needs. The Commissioners stated impact fees can be discussed at the April 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Amended Motion** by Commissioner Durden, seconded by Commissioner Thomas, reducing Single Family Residence to \$80, and the initial assessment resolution is to be brought back to the May 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Schaltenbrand spoke concerning the extra money in the EMS budget, and Fire attendance to fire and rescue calls. Commissioner Sharon Langford asked when the Fire Chief advertisement would be published. Discussion was made on the Committee, sunshine laws, and interested citizen input. Commissioner Sharon Langford asked for the top three applicants to be brought before the Board for selection. Mr. McPherson cautioned the Commissioners on the process in hiring the Fire Chief in connection with the sunshine Laws. Mr. McQueen stated the job description is for Fire Training and Volunteer Coordinator, and was written by Lee Schaltenbrand.

Commissioner Sharon Langford moved to adjourn at 7:00 p.m., the motion was seconded by Commissioner Durden and carried.

Approved

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Mitchell Gentry, Chairperson

Attest

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Joseph W. Gilliam, Clerk of Court