

**CALHOUN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
WORKSHOP – VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS
APRIL 10, 2017**

PRESENT AND ACTING:

**DANNY RAY WISE, CHAIRMAN
GENE BAILEY, VICE-CHAIRMAN
DARRELL MCDUGALD
DENNIS JONES
JERAL HALL**

**MATT FUQUA, ATTORNEY
JOE WOOD, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS
CARLA A. HAND, CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT AND COUNTY COMPTROLLER
SARAH WILLIAMS, CLERK ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

The workshop was called to order by Chairman Wise at 6:00 p.m., CT.

Members of the Clarksville Volunteer Fire Department, Mossy Pond VFD, Nettle Ridge VFD, Kinard VFD, Magnolia VFD, and West Side VFD attended the meeting, along with the City of Blountstown Fire Chief Ben Hall. Altha VFD joined the meeting later due to working an emergency. Chairman Wise stated this workshop has been called to find out what the volunteer fire departments are in need of, and how the Board could possibly help.

Chairman Wise stated the Board was made aware at the last regular Board meeting there is a need for new pumper engines. Mr. Gilbert McDonald of Magnolia VFD stated, as discussed at the last Board meeting, the pumper engines of most of the VFDs are old and have reached the end of their useful lives. The engines break down regularly and some are old enough that parts are not available to fix them. Mr. McDonald stated these pumper engines are critical for fighting fires. Mr. McDonald stated they are searching for a way to fund buying or leasing new pumper trucks. Mr. McDonald stated he has provided the Board with information from a company who has offered to lease trucks to the County for seven (7) years for \$305,000 per year instead of paying for the trucks up front. At the end of the seven (7) year lease period the County could then pay the remaining value of the trucks, or lease a new set of trucks. Mr. McDonald stated he does not know where the funding would come from, as the County does not have any dedicated funding for the volunteer fire departments. Mr. McDonald stated Calhoun County is the only county in the state that does not have dedicated funding for volunteer fire departments. Mr. McDonald stated the lease payment of \$305,000 includes servicing the engines every six months. Mr. McDonald stated there are no certified technicians to service the trucks in this area. Mr. McDonald stated the company will come to the volunteer fire departments and service the trucks the first time, and then the trucks will have to be driven to DeFuniak Springs every six months for servicing. This will keep the trucks in good shape by the end of the lease period if the County were to decide to purchase the trucks. Chairman Wise asked Mr. McDonald if he has checked with any other companies other than this one about a lease option. Mr. McDonald stated this is the only company they have checked into to

get an idea of the pricing on a lease option. Chairman Wise asked the volunteer fire departments how old each of their pumper engines are. Magnolia VFD stated their truck is a 1980 model. Nettle Ridge VFD stated their truck is a 1977 model. Kinard VFD stated they have a 1993 model and a 1985 model. Mossy Pond VFD stated they have a 1978 model and a 1980 model. Clarksville VFD stated their main pumper is a 2005 model. Attorney Fuqua stated he thought Altha had a relatively new pumper engine. Mr. McDonald stated he is not sure how old the engine is, but thought it is about seven (7) years old. It was determined later in the meeting when a representative from Altha VFD was able to attend; their pumper engine is a 2004 model. Commissioner Bailey stated someone should also check pricing on used pumper engines. Mr. McDonald stated there are used trucks out there, and the pricing depends on the age of the trucks. There was further discussion about the value of pumper trucks.

Commissioner Bailey asked the volunteer fire departments about their bunker gear. Mr. McDonald stated the useful life is only about five (5) years, and Magnolia's gear is about twelve (12) years old and guesses many of the other volunteer fire department's bunker gear would be in that same age range. Mr. Doug Harrell, Chief of West Side VFD stated NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) suggests replacing bunker gear every seven (7) years because the fire retardant chemicals in them break down whether used or not. Chairman Wise asked what volunteer fire department has bunker gear that would pass inspection. Kinard VFD stated they received new bunker gear this past year through two (2) separate grants. There was further discussion about bunker gear. Commissioner Bailey asked if anyone had an estimate of how many sets of bunker gear are needed for each department. Chief Harrell stated a set for every fire fighter is needed. There was further discussion about what level fire fighters need to have self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBAs). Chairman Wise asked if the SCBA units the volunteer fire departments have are certified or out of date. Mr. McDonald stated Magnolia VFDs SCBAs are out of date. Chief Harrell stated SCBAs are supposed to be inspected annually, which is about \$50 per unit, and he spends about \$600 per year on these inspections. The bottles must be recertified every three (3) to five (5) years depending on if they are fiberglass or aluminum, which is also about \$50 per unit, and if not done the bottles cannot be refilled until they are recertified. Chief Harrell stated he has a spreadsheet with the breakdown of the typical costs for a fire station, and provided the Board with a copy of the spreadsheet. Chairman Wise asked the remaining volunteer fire departments in attendance what their bunker gear and SCBA statuses are. The consensus from the remaining volunteer fire departments was their gear is out of date. Chairman Wise stated it seems like the \$7,500 the Board budgets for each fire department is not enough to cover their expenses.

Greg Burkett from Nettle Ridge VFD stated he has done some research and averaged the past three (3) years of expenses for the fire department. Mr. Burkett stated they spend an estimated \$1,650 in fuel every year, \$3,000 for equipment repair and maintenance and over \$5,000 for new equipment. The average amount spent per year is \$12,000. Mr. Burkett also stated they have to hold numerous fundraisers in order to have enough funding to pay for their needs. Mr. Burkett asked if there were any way they could take their trucks to the County yard for oil changes and various repairs since the County has facilities to handle this type of maintenance. Mr. Burkett stated they applied for a grant to purchase a fire truck for two (2) years in a row, put in many hours of research and work, and were not been awarded the grant. Mr. Burkett stated it would be very helpful if the County Road Department could help with oil changes and other repairs.

Chief Harrell explained the spreadsheet he provided the Board with in detail. The spreadsheet was set up to show the typical costs of a fire department, and reasonable lifetimes for the equipment used by a fire department. Chief Harrell stated the final cost for one fire department per year would be \$52,500 based on the items listed in the spreadsheet. Chief Harrell stated the costs listed are based on new equipment prices, and some money could be saved with used equipment. Chief Harrell stated he has already almost spent his budget of \$7,500 on repairs for trucks at West Side VFD, and has not bought fuel yet. Chief Harrell stated the volunteer fire departments need an annual budget they can count on, so they can keep their equipment in good repair and keep up their training in order to better serve the community. Chief Harrell stated six (6) or seven (7) years ago the volunteer fire departments tried to hold a workshop much like the one tonight and only two (2) Commissioners attended the workshop. Mr. Harrell stated he is grateful for all the Commissioners coming to the workshop tonight and showing interest in the volunteer fire departments, where there was little interest in the past. Chief Harrell provided the Board with a spreadsheet he prepared for the Commissioner's workshop seven (7) years ago. Chief Harrell stated he contacted counties in the state with populations under 25,000 and listed their per capita incomes, household incomes, square miles, the number of fire departments, the average amount of funding per volunteer fire department, and how the individual counties funded fire departments. Chief Harrell stated the average amount of money awarded to individual fire departments seven (7) years ago in these counties was \$37,000. Chief Harrell stated Calhoun County's average per fire department was \$3,222. There was further discussion about the spreadsheet.

Chairman Wise asked Blountstown Fire Chief Ben Hall how the City fire department is funded. Chief Hall stated the City Council funds the fire department through their general fund. Chairman Wise asked what the annual budget is for the City fire department. Chief Hall stated the annual budget is approximately \$121,000, which includes his salary and the salary paid to the other fire fighters per call. Chairman Wise asked if the City calls the volunteer fire departments when they need help. Chief Hall stated they do, and they go help the volunteer fire departments when needed. Chief Harrell asked Chief Hall the average amount per year a fire fighter is paid per call with the City. Chief Hall stated they are paid \$25 for a daytime call and \$30 for a nighttime call, and depending on the amount of calls, they are paid an average of \$600 to \$800 per year. There was further discussion about full time paid fire departments.

Attorney Fuqua asked the Board if there was any interest in having an Attorney come and give some cost estimates for implementing a Municipal Service Benefit Unit (MSBU) assessment for fire services. This could be placed the ballot and voted on by the citizens of the County at the next election cycle. Chairman Wise asked if this would be different from a sales tax. Attorney Fuqua stated this assessment would go on everyone's advalorem tax bill. Chairman Wise asked how this would be different from the half-cent sales tax (Emergency Fire Rescue Services and Facilities Surtax). Attorney Fuqua stated the Emergency Fire Rescue Services sales tax provision would require the County to cut their advalorem tax revenue by the Emergency Fire Rescue Services and Facilities Surtax revenue generated. The MSBU assessment for fire services does not reduce the County's advalorem tax revenue. There was further discussion about funding. Commissioner Jones stated he would like the attorney to come speak with the Board about the possibility of a MSBU.

Commissioner McDougald stated he received an email about a fire hydrant damaged earlier in the year, and asked Chief Hall if he knew anything about the incident. Chief Hall stated the incident went through

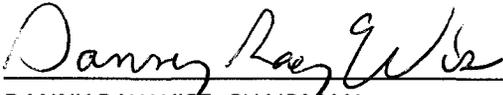
City Hall, not the fire department, so he does not know the details. Chief Harrell stated he was notified a hydrant was broken, but he is not sure exactly what happened. Chief Harrell stated some of his volunteers were involved in the incident. Chief Harrell stated they were checking hydrants in their district because it is not good for hydrants to remain unopened for long periods, and when this particular hydrant was opened, it stuck and would not shut. Chief Harrell stated they tried to shut the hydrant, and when they could not they called the City. There was further discussion about fire hydrants. Chairman Wise asked if the City charges the volunteer fire departments to fill their water tankers. Chief Hall stated they do not send a bill for anything to do with the volunteer fire departments. Chief Harrell stated there is no better help to the volunteer fire departments than the City of Blountstown Fire Department. Chief Harrell stated the City Fire Department also fills their air bottles when needed, and has helped the volunteer fire departments with various needs. There was further discussion about the cost of radios for fire departments. Commissioner McDougald asked Chief Harrell about the fire hydrant, and asked if it was a bad hydrant that was stuck, because the City is now taking the position West Side Volunteer Fire Department damaged the hydrant. Chief Harrell stated the City is telling them they broke the hydrant. Chief Harrell stated they opened the hydrant and could not get it to shut, and in the process of trying to shut it, something broke. Commissioner McDougald asked how many people were involved. Chief Harrell stated one person opened the hydrant, and when he could not shut the hydrant he called for help and two (2) others showed up and tried to shut the hydrant. When they could not shut the hydrant, they called the City. There was further discussion about fire hydrants.

Chief Harrell stated he has some information to share about the MSBU. Chief Harrell stated when the volunteer fire departments were looking into financial help years ago they spoke with some representatives from the Florida State Fire Chief Association and several other places about the MSBU. Chief Harrell stated the MSBU could only be used when it will benefit a piece of property, and fire protection is a benefit to any property. There was further discussion about how to raise money for the volunteer fire departments. Attorney Fuqua stated his suggestion would be to put the MSBU on a ballot and let the citizens of the County decide whether this is something they would be interested in doing for the volunteer fire departments. Greg Burkett from Nettle Ridge VFD stated if the fire department had to close its doors because they no longer had the equipment or fire fighters needed to fight fires, the entire northeast corner of the County would be without fire protection and homeowner insurance would increase. Mr. Burkett stated the people of the County need to be aware of this before they vote on this issue. There was further discussion about insurance and the MSBU.

Commissioner Bailey asked if all the volunteer fire fighters were trained first responders. Chief Harrell stated some are trained and certified first responders, and some are not. There was further discussion of situations the volunteer fire departments are called to in emergencies such as medical calls and other calls such as trees down in the road. Chief Harrell stated all volunteer fire fighters should be certified as Fire Fighter 1, but this is a considerable time commitment for those looking to become certified. Chief Harrell stated there is an online portion of the course and a portion of the course with an instructor. Chief Harrell stated the total Fire Fighter 1 course is 256 hours, plus a 40-hour first responder course, plus a forestry course that is about 16 hours. Chief Harrell stated he only has two Fire Fighter 1 certified volunteers in his department out of about ten (10) volunteers. Attorney Fuqua asked how a house fire is handled, since there must be two (2) others outside the structure if two (2) go inside. Chief Harrell

stated they could not go in the structure until another department responds so they will have the two (2) outside the structure. There was further discussion about fire department ratings. Chairman Wise stated he feels the Board has a better idea about the shape the County's volunteer fire departments are in, and the Board will have to do some research on how to fix the problems the fire departments are having. There was further discussion about the volunteer fire departments. Chairman Wise stated the special assessment (MSBU) would take time to be put on a ballot for the people of the County to vote. One of the volunteer fire fighters stated it could take up to two (2) years for the special assessment to come into effect. There was further discussion about the special assessment. Commissioner Bailey asked if another workshop could be scheduled at the Countywide Fire Department Meeting at Scotts Ferry Volunteer Fire Department. Commissioner Bailey stated there would be more volunteer fire fighters in attendance to provide input to the Board. There was further discussion about other funding options for the fire departments. Commissioner Bailey asked Attorney Fuqua what he knew about a utility franchise fee. Attorney Fuqua stated this is a fee a County charges a utility company to use their right of way. Attorney Fuqua stated this is something everyone would pay for, and would go into the County's general revenue fund. Commissioner Bailey stated additional revenue is needed from somewhere to fund the volunteer fire departments. There was further discussion about the utility franchise fee and other funding options. There was consensus from the Board to hold a workshop at the Countywide Fire Department Meeting at Scotts Ferry Volunteer Fire Department on April 17, 2017 at 6:00 p.m., CT.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m., CT.


DANNY RAY WISE, CHAIRMAN

ATTEST:


CARLA A. HAND, CLERK