

**FRUITLAND PARK CITY COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
MINUTES
July 28, 2016**

A special meeting of the Fruitland Park City Commission was held at 506 W. Berckman Street, Fruitland Park, Florida 34731 on Thursday, July 28, 2016 at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Mayor Christopher Bell, Vice Mayor John L. Gunter, Jr., Commissioners Christopher Cheshire, Ray Lewis and Rick Ranize.

Also Present: City Manager Gary La Venia, City Attorney Anita Geraci-Carver, City Treasurer Jeannine Michaud-Racine; Fire Chief Michael Laming; Assistant Fire Chief Don Gilpin; Fire Department Lieutenant Tim Yoder, Kevin Ducharme, Chase Roddenberry, Sean Parker, Madison Leary, Christopher Lewis, Fire Department; Community Development Director Charlie Rector, Public Works Director Dale Bogle; Parks and Recreation Director Michelle Yoder, and City Clerk Esther B. Coulson.

1. CALL TO ORDER, INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

After Mayor Bell called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Mayor Bell requested that Ms. Coulson call the roll and a quorum was declared present.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Michael Warren, City of Fruitland Park resident, gave reasons why the fire special assessment tax ought to be fairly distributed amongst residential properties regardless of property size.

With respect to remaining status quo for the fire department, Vice Mayor Gunter expressed his satisfaction with its current functions; otherwise he believes Lake County Public Safety Department ought to take over if the city opts towards the implementation of a fire service special assessment residential rate at \$175 per unit.

Commissioner Cheshire voiced his agreement with Vice Mayor Gunter's remarks; noted that the fire department did not propose a budget request for additional items at the July 11, 2016 budget workshop, and confirmed that he has not received any complaints from the fire department staff, Mr. La Venia, or members of the public.

Recognizing the dedication of the fire department volunteers, Commissioner Ranize outlined the following:

- the problem with the number of people required to perform the service as currently when the fire department has no staff coverage, the city relies upon the volunteer staff to travel from their places of businesses or residences to the fire station, get their equipment/vehicles and tend to the scene of the incident;

- the considerable amount of time and effort to provide service recognizing that over the past ten years the city's culture has drastically changed; thus, the fire department volunteers previously retained wanted compensation and be supplied with equipment;
- the issue of the city losing control if the city commission decides to allow the county's public safety department to take over the city's fire department -- referencing previous newspaper article on *Does Lake County's Fire Department Provide Ample Service* citing staffing deficiencies, outdated fire stations and equipment and not meeting current minimum standards to provide services;
- the city being allowed to increase the residents current assessment by approximately \$200 per unit rate and questioned the county raising the fee with the city having no control, and
- the justification to the historical Fruitland Park resident (receiving the city's volunteer fire service) paying the same millage rate as The Villages resident (receiving fulltime 24-hour-a-day, seven days a week full staff coverage with a quick response time for fire services protection); thus, voicing his concurrence with Mr. Warren's earlier comments.

Commissioner Ranize questioned the city commission's forecasted plan and decision to remain with the volunteer fire department or the choice for a hybrid system that was previously addressed.

Commissioner Lewis referred to the city commission's discussions at its July 14, 2016 regular meeting and indicated that he would have a problem if the fire department remained status quo. He reviewed the statistical information he received from the fire department's chaplain, Dr. George A. Mulford III, Grace Bible Baptist Church, outlining unstaffed or inadequate coverage when responding to a service call; a copy of which is filed with the supplemental papers to the minutes of this meeting.

Commissioner Lewis outlined the ranges in city residents' comparative millage rates according to districts; believed that addressing staffing levels ought to be a priority which ought to be immediately incorporated with the city's plan and FY 2016-17 budget, and agreed with Mayor Bell's previous suggestion that an equitable approach would be through ad valorem.

Commissioner Lewis expressed concerns on budget process which he referred to as the plan; reviewed the appropriated funds allocated to the police department, Fruitland Park Library and the fire department, and gave a comparison on their importance and level of service delivered to the citizens which he believes ought to be addressed during this fiscal year.

Mayor Bell noted the problems he has with the special fire assessment; recognized the stage of the city's population growth, and mentioned the ad valorem the city commission is undertaking through the budget process. He referred to his original statements on leaving the special fire assessment in the fire department's budget through ad valorem which is an annual budget decision and noted the uncertainty of retaining full time staff in the future.

Mayor Bell relayed the fire department's response to his previous request on any current problems that they are responding to service calls; noted the recent years on the city's attempts to maintain continuous staff coverage, and indicated that he would leave the department at status quo and continue to fund same from ad valorem taxes.

In response several inquiries posed by Commissioner Cheshire, Chief Laming explained that if the fire department is understaffed, the county -- who has not agreed to the E911 communications plan and changed its methods from the automated system -- has recently utilized the mutual aid agreement which could be an imminent issue. He explained that staffing at the fire department has increased over past years due to the increase in call volumes and noted the likelihood of the volunteer firefighters being injured as a result. Chief Laming explained that county staff is notified; recognized the changes in providing service based on the automated agreements where The Villages and the county are opting to closer entities around the area where it should be affecting the city's fire department.

After Vice Mayor Gunter commended the fire department for their performance, Chief Laming explained in response to his inquiry noting the volunteer firefighters who are also employed in the public works department that said department is also short-staffed; outlined the times of availability which have since improved over the years in responding to service calls, and anticipated that the fire assessment fee would help fund the firefighters' position; thus, the reason why he did not make a request to fund additional staff during the last budget workshop.

Commissioner Lewis requested that the city commission consider the implementation of additional funding in the FY 2016-17 budget to retain full time firefighters to staff the fire department.

Vice Mayor Gunter expressed concerns on the difference in fire assessment residential parcel apportionment calculated by Government Services Group Inc., consultant retained

by the city, for service delivery; the difference in comparison to the county's, and recalled, at a public meeting years ago, on the promise made on the lowering of taxes.

Following extensive deliberations, Commissioner Ranize referred to the October 15, 2015 workshop and the city commission's consensus to implement a fire department hybrid system; authorize the consultant to develop and conduct a study on the special fire assessment fee, and voiced his concurrence with Mayor Bell to leave the issue now until the city commission has more control.

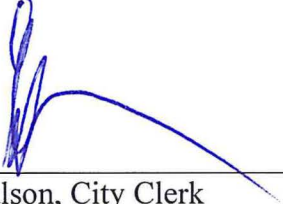
4. OTHER BUSINESS


There were no other business to come before the city commission at this time.

5. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the city commission at this time, on motion made, second and unanimously carried, the meeting adjourned at 6:33 p.m.

The minutes were approved at the August 11, 2016 regular meeting.

Signed 
Esther B. Coulson, City Clerk

Signed 
Christopher Bell, Mayor