

FRUITLAND PARK CITY COMMISSION WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES
March 2, 2017

A workshop meeting of the Fruitland Park City Commission was held at 506 W. Berckman Street, Fruitland Park, Florida 34731 on Thursday, March 2, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.

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

Also Present: City Manager Gary La Venia, City Attorney Anita Geraci-Carver, City Treasurer; Jeannine Racine-Michaud; Deputy Police Chief Dennis Cutter, Police Department; Interim Fire Chief Don Gilpin; Lieutenant Tim Yoder; Chris Lewis, Madison Leary, and Michael Goins, Firefighters; Parks and Recreation Director Michelle Yoder; Community Development Director Charlie Rector, and City Clerk Esther B. Coulson.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Cheshire called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

At Mayor Cheshire's request, Ms. Coulson called the roll and a quorum was declared present.

3. FSAC'S PROVISION OF FIRE SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS

At Mayor Cheshire's request, Mr. La Venia referred to the February 22, 2017 Fire Services Advisory Committee (FSAC) minutes; conveyed its recommendations, with one dissenting vote, at its February 22, 2017 meeting for the city to keep its fire department in-house, and relayed its unanimous decision to convert to a hybrid system with fulltime paid employee firefighters and volunteers 24 hours. (A copy of the minutes is filed with the supplemental papers to the minutes of this meeting.)

The city commission considered its implementation of a ratio on the combination of a fire assessment and ad valorem taxes.

In expressing appreciation on the committee's work, Vice Mayor Gunter believed what is best for the city to be conducting fire services in-house for \$175; expressed his disagreement with the committee's recommendation who he felt that the whole aspect was not reviewed, and relayed his conversations with the City of Mascotte's Fire Department Chief Randy Brasher on the problems in covering a percentage of its budget from the city's general funds.

Commissioner Bell cited concerns on the committee allowing city commission members to appear to address issues which he believes taints the committee's decision-making. He indicated that the hybrid system or its lifespan was not addressed, and mentioned his uncertainty on the sentiments of paid firefighters and volunteers working together in a hybrid system. He mentioned the need for larger equipment for bigger buildings; conveyed

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the consultant's statements that the city cannot rely upon mutual aid to satisfy its responsibility, and felt that if the city proceeds with the assessment, the effective method is to fund at 100 percent. Commissioner

Commissioner Lewis voiced his appreciation of the FSAC's work; mentioned his previous discussion with his representative appointment on the committee, and believed that adequate information was presented to support its decision. He indicated that his viewpoints have nothing to do with his son who is a volunteer firefighter; believed the lowest cost option at reduced expense in providing fire services and medical protection is Lake County, and explained reasons why he supports his previous opinion that the better level of service to the residents is to retain the fire department inhouse with the direction that it needs to be staffed (not by volunteers) and funded through the city's budget in order to be effective.

Commissioner Ranize indicated that the tragedy suffered by his son and his vision from an early age to volunteer for the fire department has no bearing on his decision. He expressed the following concerns:

- the county's replacement of its county manager;
- the selection of its public safety director in the hopes that it is not the individual from south Florida to take his place who does not respond service calls if a volunteer firefighter is on the scene of an incident;
- the imminent Lake County Fire Rescue/Lake Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Consolidation Study;
- the viewpoints of the county's two newly appointed elected officials;
- the Town of Lady Lake's longstanding volunteer fire department which was taken over by the county where the town's commercial buildings are not supported by the county's fire rescue vehicles; thus, questioning the closest response units to be dependent on The Villages Public Safety Department;
- the reference made by Mr. Steve Whitaker, FSAC member, at its March 31, 2017 meeting highlighting the county's service proposal/deployment; the three Lake County Fire Rescue Stations within close proximity of each other, and the coverage for the city and the potential outcome of the previous incident that took place on Picciola Road and Lake Unity Road requesting the responding units whereby no one was monitoring the City of Fruitland Park except its volunteers;
- the recent article regarding the county's outdated equipment and the inability to meet the National Fire Protection Association's standards where he indicated it reliance on The Villages Public Safety Department (a copy of which is filed with the supplemental papers to the minutes of this meeting), and

- the spreadsheet showing the fire department's FY 2017-18 budget reflecting approximately \$563,000 which he supports; thus, the city affording same which he cannot commit said funds to the county recalling the number of previous incidents when the county did not provide assistance.

Commissioner Ranize expressed his appreciation to the FSAC and indicated that the committee was not provided with figures to determine whether the provision of city fire and rescue services would be fair to the residents. He recognized the tremendous growth to the city which will take time to generate revenue; emphasized that every effort ought to be made in working the various figures, and explained the lessons he learned from the FSAC whereby the city owes it to the residents to attain a plan with absolute final figures.

Mayor Cheshire stated that he would support charging less to the residents than what was provided to the county (\$667,000) and recollected Commissioner Lewis' reference at the July 28, 2016 special meeting identifying unstaffed or inadequate coverage when responding to services calls in the fire department.

Mayor Cheshire stressed the desire to fulfill the deficiencies to protect the residents and wait for the city's growth where he was concerned was not addressed at the FSAC and voiced his concurrence with Commissioner Ranize' remarks on the potential city growth; otherwise, transfer the city's fire and rescue services to the county if the city's efforts fail. He addressed the requirement to determine the fire department's personnel needs; questioned the definition of flex fire personnel, and mentioned his preference to implement same utilizing the fire assessment fee.

4. FY 2017-18 – FIRE DEPARTMENT

- a. Budget**
- b. Three Additional Firefighters**
- c. Volunteers**
- d. Revised Fire Assessment vs. Ad Valorem**

Interim Chief Gilpin and Assistant Chief Yoder explained how existing volunteer firefighters and full time personnel -- who is not committed to another fire department -- could be utilized to fulfill the gap of one and-a-half-hours and recommended up to three individuals which could be reassessed up to four years.

In response, Vice Mayor Gunter referred to The Villages-News entitled: *Firefighters Worried About High Rate of Turnover at Villages Public Safety Department*; pointed out its department losing 109 employees in five years, and recognized The Villages Professional Firefighters Local 4770 International Association of Firefighters who recently held a bargaining session on the firefighters' compensation package. He recognized the city's starting pay to be less than what The Villages are paying; questioned the potential tenure, and predicted the city's high turnover rate. (A copy of the article is filed with the supplemental papers to the minutes of this meeting.)

Interim Chief Gilpin pointed out his recent meeting with City of Leesburg Fire Chief David Johnson and relayed the employees' preference to his proposal -- that he implemented in

his former role and which was successful in the City of Eatonville -- that they would accept on their days off a \$15 hourly rate without benefits or overtime working part time flex duty guaranteed from one of three assignment slot system coverage within the 24-hour period.

After discussion and in response to Commissioner Bell's inquiry, Interim Chief Gilpin referred to Lake EMS utilizing a flex personnel on a similar assignment slot system where some of its employees currently work for the City of Fruitland Park's volunteer fire department. He suggested extending the concept to other eligible professional firefighters in other municipal departments.

Following further discussion, Commissioner Ranize reviewed the revised fire assessment versus ad valorem calculations per resident for the FY 2017-18 budget on the fire department's volunteers only prepared by Ms. Racine-Michaud and determined that the assessed costs would be approximately \$290 in full assessment. (A copy of the document in question is filed with the supplemental papers to the minutes of this meeting.)

Subsequent to extensive deliberations and in response to Mayor Cheshire's inquiry, Interim Chief Gilpin recommended 24 hours coverage (five to 12 hour shifts from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. 365 days a year at a minimum) initially with one flex personnel with an update to provided to the city commission.

After further discussion, the city commission discussed with Ms. Racine-Michaud the three flex personnel with 24-hour coverage and worker's compensation, at an hourly rate of \$15 at an operating budget of about \$340,000 whereby the majority of the city commission agreed with retaining the fire department in-house.

5. LAKE COUNTY PROPERTY APPRAISER'S -2017 TAX ROLL CALENDAR

Following extensive deliberations, Mayor Cheshire noted the majority of the city commission's position for the fire department to proceed with the flex schedule.

In response, Ms. Geraci-Carver addressed the need to adopt the initial assessment resolution establishing the fire assessment rate by July 13, 2017 and Ms. Racine-Michaud referred to NAL test file on the Truth-in-Millage (TRIM) notice received this day from the Lake County Property Appraiser's Office which needs to be uploaded by The Government Services Group Inc., consultant retained by the city, to place it on the TRIM which she believes to be the process the city intends to take.

Following extensive deliberations, the majority of the city commission agreed on the need for a fire assessment.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no further business to come before the city commission.

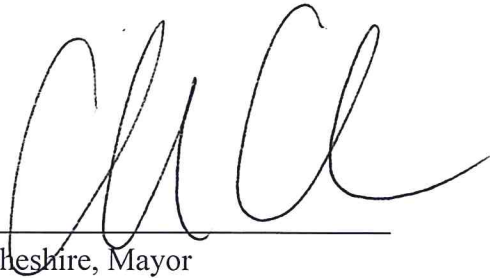
7. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

The minutes were approved at the August 24, 2017 regular meeting.



Signed _____
Esther B. Coulson, City Clerk



Signed _____
Chris Cheshire, Mayor

