Joint Meeting
City/County

October 14, 2004

The Columbia County Board of County Commissioners met in a scheduled joint meeting with the City Council of Lake City. The meeting was called to order by Councilman George Ward at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioner Montgomery delivered the invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America followed.

Commissioners In Attendance: George Skinner, James Montgomery, Jennifer Flinn, Ronald Williams and Dewey Weaver.

Others Present for the County: County Manager Dale Williams, County Attorney Marlin Feagle and Deputy Clerk Sandy Markham.

Councilmen In Attendance: Eugene Jefferson, George Ward, John Robertson, and Mike Lee. (Mayor W.R. Kirkland was absent)

Others Present for the City: Manager Joe Cone, and City Attorney Herbert Darby.

I. Minutes for joint meetings held on July 07, 2004 and August 11, 2004 were presented and found to be in order. There were no requests for corrections or additions.

II. The key topics to be discussed were increased funding for the Fire Department and for Recreation.

(a) A proposed Interlocal Fire Agreement was presented for consideration. The terms of the agreement are basically the same as the earlier Fire Agreement, which expired in September 2000. The most significant change is the operational cost sharing provision, which would be an increase for the county. Instead of funding 55% of the cost, the new agreement proposes the County fund 69% of the operational costs.

The increase is based on fire call statistics for the past four years. Mr. Cone reported that up to 70% of the fire calls received over the past four years have been outside the corporate limits of the City. The population factor was taken into consideration since the County is growing at a much faster pace than the City.

Commissioner Flinn said that she feels the county should at the very least begin paying a more significant amount towards fire, but feels ultimately, fire services should be fully taken over by
the County. She would like to see a full time fire department in the southern end of the county. Whereas she believes the VFD's do a wonderful job, she feels the money would be more wisely utilized if it were pooled and poured into full time, manned fire departments.

Mr. Cone feels there has been a communication breakdown that needs to be corrected if there is going to be a continued joint Fire Department. He used as an example the County's decision to purchase seven new pumper trucks without any discussions with the Fire Department Chief. He encouraged the County to make more of an effort to keep them informed, and refrain from being a unilateral fire entity.

Commissioner Williams recalled recommendation of the Fire Committee and a discussion between that Boards where it was agreed that the percentages paid in for fire would stay the same this year, and next year attempts would be made to implement a county wide uniform fire assessment so that every citizen would pay their fair share. The City agreed that next year that the County had planned to fund a larger portion of fire, but explained the budget is currently strained and an adjustment is needed for the 04-05 year as soon as possible. It was pointed out by the City that even though there have been discussions of implementing a county wide uniform fire assessment, there has been no formal action to move in that direction. Commissioner Williams expressed although there has been no formal action, he believed it had been a consensus of the Boards. Mr. Dale Williams explained the problem is that the County's budget process is complete and there were no funds set aside to provide for a City fire adjustment. The City suggested the County amend it's budget, and utilize a portion of the money allocated for the pumper trucks to assist with fire services. Mr. Williams replied that would be a decision of the Board of County Commissioners, but if they agree, it would have to come from contingency, reserve or take from something already funded.

(b) The City stated the situation with recreation is very similar. They would like the funding arrangement to be changed since they feel from the standpoint of usage, the contributions from the City and County are disproportionate. The City calculates their contributions to recreation at 77.3% and the County's contribution at 22.6%. The County believes there are other things to be factored into the percentages and it needs to be explored further. It was agreed that recreational needs are growing rapidly. The City and County will work together to ensure cost sharing is equitable for recreation. The first step towards resolution will be to refer the matter to the Recreation Committee for consideration and recommendation.

Action decided upon:
The County will call a special meeting as soon as possible to consider a fire adjustment for fiscal year 04-05. As soon thereafter as possible, a joint meeting between the City, County and Fire Committee will be held. The recreation matter will be referred to the Recreation Committee to sort out some of the issues, and then a joint meeting will be held with that committee.

Mr. Dale Williams suggested that the 05-06 Fire Budget preparations should begin right away in order to follow the schedule and be ready in February. He reminded them that a study would have to be conducted to determine rates.
Commissioner Flinn she will be out of town for a week in mid November. She asked that the meetings be scheduled so that she is able to attend.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

ATTEST:

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George Skinner, Chairman
Board of County Commissioners

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P. DeWitt Cason
Clerk of Circuit Court