

Columbia County Board of County Commissioners
JOINT MEETING
August 18, 2009

The Columbia County Board of County Commissioners and the Lake City Council met in a scheduled meeting in the conference room at City Hall at 6:00 p.m.

IN ATTENDANCE:

County Commissioners Present: Chairman Stephen Bailey, Ronald Williams, Jody Dupree, Dewey Weaver and Scarlet Frisina.

City Council Members Present: George Ward, Jake Hill, Melinda Moses, Eugene Jefferson, and Mayor Stephen Witt.

Others in Attendance:

For the County Commission: County Manager Dale Williams
County Attorney Marlin Feagle
Asst. County Manager Lisa Roberts
Deputy Clerk Sandy Markham

For the City Council: City Attorney Herbert Darby
Interim City Manager Dave Clanton
City Clerk Audrey Sikes

ORDER

The meeting was called to order. Mayor Witt opened with prayer. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America followed. Clerks for the City and the county took roll.

AGENDA

The agenda was reviewed and accepted as published.

INTRODUCTION

Mayor Witt introduced the new City Manager, Wendell Johnson.

911 COMBINED DISPATCH CENTER

County Manager Williams introduced 911 Director Doug Brown. The County Manager gave a brief update on the project. The 911 Committee meets weekly and will continue to do so until the project is complete. Anyone wishing to attend should feel free to do so. The 911 Interlocal Agreement has been approved by the Sheriff, City and the County and is in the process of being implemented.

COLUMBIA COUNTY UTILITY COMMITTEE

The inaugural Utility Committee Meeting was held earlier in the day. The Committee consists of three County Commissioners and two City Councilmen; Commissioners Dupree, Frisina and Bailey, and Councilmen George Ward and Eugene Jefferson. County Manager Williams reviewed the Utility Committee Meeting. For details, see the Utility Committee Minutes of August 18, 2009.

NORTH FLORIDA UMBRELLA BROADBAND GRANT

The City Manager said that each governmental authority in the 14 regions have appointed a represented to this Board. Todd Manning represents Columbia County and City Manager Wendell Johnson represents the City of Lake City. The first meeting was held on August 07, 2009. The grant application process has been extended until August 20, 2009. The amount of funds requested is approximately \$32,000,000. The funding awards will be announced on November 07, 2009. The money will be used to extend broadband services throughout the 14 county regions. Additional information will be provided as it develops.

PREVIOUS ISSUES

Commission Williams recalled at the prior meeting the City advised that once a new City Manager had been hired that some old issues needing to be addressed would be addressed with the new Manager and then addressed with the City Council. [The commissioner was not specific]

Mayor Witt replied that the Manager has been made aware of the issues and will be looking into various options and discussing those options with the Council.

REGIONAL UTILITY

Commissioner Dupree said the County is in the process of initiating a utility, and is also working on an Economic Development Plan. He asked, before the County gets too far along, what the City's position is on revisiting the issue of creating a GUA.

There was discussion that this would be a good issue for the Utility Committee to take up and bring back before the City and County. There have been other proposals, but for the county, the biggest obstacle has been not being able to negotiate a wholesale water rate.

Since the last discussions, both the city and the county have new Boards with new ideas. Commissioner Dupree would like to see the issue of a regional utility brought back to the table for discussions. He would like to see if it would be possible to work together, before the two entities move in opposite directions spending large amounts of money.

Commissioner Williams does not oppose bringing the issue back to the table once more, but was steadfast in that the county needs to continue moving forward with utilities whether it be with or without the City very soon.

Commissioner Weaver said he is open to anything reasonable to both sides, and that he would be open to take the issue up once more. Mayor Witt agreed and said in the past no proposal was developed that was feasible for both the city and the county.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Commissioner Williams answer a question from Citizen Stewart Lilker saying that the county needs all of the sewer capacity it can get. Mr. Lilker said that it is understandable to "want all you can get," but encouraged the county to be realistic and make efforts at determining the initial gallons of sewage capacity needed, as well as the estimated long term capacity needs before engaging in a project. He pointed out capacity costs (materials, personnel, etc.), and someone will have to know what the county's anticipated need will be. Mr. Lilker point out that the City knows the current

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Prepared by Sandy A. Markham

capacity of its plant, and that they have plans to build a new plant according to their anticipated future capacity needs.

Mr. Lilker told the City Manager that there is a lot of excitement about his arrival, and that he has only heard good things about him.

Mr. Lilker complimented the City on the way their budget is prepared and expressed to the County that they should take a look at it if they have not. He said that unlike the County, the City does all of their budget work in-house. He offered to provide copies via e-mail to any of the commissioners who were interested in looking at it.

Mr. Lilker said that he recalled that on May 21st the county sent a letter to the city regarding EMS funding. He said that the second item of paragraph 2 there is a mention of the county not supplying EMS services to the City. He said that it seems absurd to him that if a county resident, who pays taxes, finds themselves inside the city limits needing help that the units would not go into the city to assist the county resident. He pointed out that it doesn't matter where a person lives when they get into an accident on the interstate; rescue will respond. He asked the County to meet with the City again to work this out. Then, if it can't be worked out, the issue should be taken before the courts for a final decision. He said either the City should be required to pay a portion of EMS or they should not.

Commissioner Weaver recalled that when the City and County initially began discussing the EMS funding issue that the City said they were going to seek an outside legal opinion regarding how EMS is funded, and if the county was correct or incorrect in their position. The Mayor replied the City has never received a final opinion. The Commissioner asked if outside council was ever hired for an opinion. The Mayor replied, "We never did get as far as getting an opinion."

Mr. Lilker expressed concern with the county's future plans to move out of the downtown area. He said that if an economic impact study has been done on the move that he would like to see the numbers. He said it seems that nobody except the Board finds it wise and prudent to move the county offices to Lake Jeffery Highway. Commissioner Dupree said it is best to be concerned with the citizens' best interest over the needs of the downtown merchants. Commissioner Williams said there were no problems with the City when the County moved to the Lake City Medical Center for three years.

Councilman Ward informed Mr. Lilker that there is a meeting on September 1, 2009 at 2:00 p.m. at the courthouse annex where a discussion will take place regarding possibly purchasing possible purchase of the Blanche Hotel to use for county offices.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

ATTEST:

Board of County Commissioners

P. DeWitt Cason
Clerk of Circuit Court