

SPECIAL MEETING
CITY COUNCIL AND COUNTY COMMISSION

MARCH 8, 2005

A Special Meeting of the Arcadia City Council and the DeSoto County Commission was held on March 8, 2005 at 6:00 p.m. in the County Commission Chambers located at 201 East Oak Street. Council Members attending were: Whitlock, Heine, Fazzino, Goodman and Johnson. County Commissioners attending were: Neads, Allen, Garner, Hill and Wells. Also in attendance were: City Administrator Strube, City Attorney Holloman, County Administrator Fisher and County Attorney Holtzendorf, several City Firefighters and City Recorder Baumann.

County Commission Chairman Neads called the meeting to order and stated that the purpose of the joint meeting is to discuss the possible merger of emergency fire and ambulance services. Mr. Neads noted that sometime in 2001 or 2002 both boards decided to move forward with merger talks; however that project was later terminated. County Commissioner Neads and City Council Member Fazzino began the talks again and a special committee was established to review the possibility of a merger.

City Mayor Whitlock stated that this has not been an easy process.

County Commissioner Allen moved to consolidate the City and County Fire and Ambulance Service; seconded by County Commissioner Wells. This motion was passed by all County Commissioners. The City Council did not vote on or for this action.

County Commissioner Garner stated that both sides need to agree and feels this would be beneficial to both the City and County.

City Mayor Whitlock noted that if it had not been for Hurricane Charley the merger talks would be further along then they are as the committee had sent out requests for proposals (RFP's) for a consultant.

City Council Member Johnson is for consolidation although he does not feel that there is enough data and would like to see a plan of action first.

City Council Member Heine agrees that the consolidation must be done and believes that this should go back to the committee to work on. Heine then moved to refer the issue of a merger between the City and County Fire and Ambulance service back to the committee for study and a recommendation; seconded by Goodman. This motion was passed by all City Council Members.

County Commission Chairman Neads agrees that this should go back to some form of committee.

City Council Member Goodman stated that the reports from the committee were hopeful and agrees it should be turned back over to the committee. She then stated that from the hurricane experience there is a lot that both bodies need to look at. We need to come to the table as a group to see if 1) this is going to be good for the citizens and 2) if this is good for the employees.

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County Commission Chairman Neads agrees that both bodies need to work together. He then stated that Representative Katherine Harris suggested that the City and County go on a retreat.

City Council Member Heine asked how many RFP's were received and was informed that six (6) companies responded.

City Council Member Fazzone noted that at the meeting of January 13, 2004 they questioned the good of a merger if no savings are realized. Fazzone then stated that at the February 10, 2004 meeting City Fire Chief Rutherford suggested that the City expand their service area and that he was not in favor of a merger. Fazzone then reported that none of the four (4) dispatchers who transferred to the County when the County took over dispatching services are still employed with the County. Fazzone stated that this adds to the fear City employees have of job security if a merger occurs. Fazzone reported that six (6) companies were scheduled to meet with the merger committee on September 14, 2004. Due to Hurricanes Charley and then Frances and Jeanne the meeting did not occur. Fazzone stated that he is not in favor of a merger until he can approve the method that will be used.

City Council Member Goodman stated that everyone needs to be careful when working together and not to point fingers or put words in other mouths.

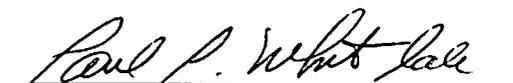
It was noted that the City will contact the six (6) companies to see if they are still interested in being interviewed. The next fire merger committee meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 12, 2005 at 3:00 P.M. in the City Council Chambers.

City Council Member Goodman asked if the consultant hired should suggest that services to the citizens of DeSoto County could be improved by a means other than consolidation would the County be in favor of it and was informed that they would.

County Commission Chairman Neads asked if the City would be interested in having a retreat and was informed that they would. County Administrator Fisher will get with City Administrator Strube to make suggestions as to a location and date for a joint retreat.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.


CITY RECORDER


PRESIDENT