

JOINT MEETING
ARCADIA CITY COUNCIL AND
DESOTO COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

OCTOBER 9, 2003

A joint meeting of the Arcadia City Council and the DeSoto County Commissioners was held on October 9, 2003 at 4:00 p.m. in Room A,B & C of the Way Building at 23 N. Polk Avenue. City Councilmembers attending were: Fazzone, Whitlock Johnson, Goodman and Heine. County Commissioners attending were: Neads, Garner, Welles, Hill and Altman. Also in attendance were: City Administrator Strube, City Attorney Holloman, County Administrator Chisholm, and County Attorney Holtzendorf.

City Mayor Fazzone called the meeting to order.

The Invocation was given by Pastor Lorenzo Dixon from the Assembly of Praise Church.

City Mayor Fazzone stated the purpose of the special meeting is to determine the feasibility of continuing discussions regarding a City and County Fire and Ambulance Services merger.

County Commission Chairman Neads then stated that the purpose of such a merger would be to better serve the public.

City Administrator Strube stated that there has to be a way to move forward and is looking for a consensus on how to proceed.

County Administrator Chisholm stated that the City and County have common issues. He believes that both agencies need to establish some common ground and that a merger would bring a higher level of service to the citizens of Arcadia and DeSoto County.

City Mayor Fazzone stated that they are not here to address or listen to any particular issues at this time. This meeting is to determine if dialogue will continue. Mayor Fazzone stated that he is in favor of the merger if it is fair to both sides. He is also in favor of using a consultant if necessary to help with the process. Mayor Fazzone stated for the record that he never said that he was totally opposed to a merger.

County Commissioner Garner agreed that a merger could be in the best interests of both the City and County.

County Commissioner Welles noted that the point of "issues" will settle issues such as how do we merge and how do we finance it.

City Councilman Johnson stated that unity is strength and that the City and County coming together would streamline the fire departments. Councilman Johnson would like to define the needs and financial goals. He also stated that all employees must be treated fairly and equally in the merger.

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City Councilman Heine noted that the City can not continue with the current budget constraints. Councilman Heine reported that the City currently answers 20% of the calls in the County.

City Councilwoman Goodman stated that this is a "historic step" and she would not have gone to the table last time if she did not believe that a merger could work; this needs to be in the best interests of the citizens.

County Commissioner Altman raised the issue regarding the difficulty of MSBU/MSTU at the current rate being applied to the City and the dollar amount it would raise. Commissioner Altman stated that if the money is not going to be there then a merger can not happen. The revenue from the City using the current County MSBU/MSTU rate is projected to be \$552,446.00, while expenditures are projected to be \$950,153.00. The County's projected revenue is \$1,572,850.00, while expenditures are estimated at \$2,369,644.00.

County Commissioner Hill stated that the City is currently funding their Fire Department as is the County and if a merger should happen within the next six (6) months then additional funds may be required for the first year.

City Councilman Whitlock who has been both a County Commissioner and is now a City Councilman stated that in order to move forward the problem must be defined. Councilman Whitlock noted that City of Gainesville and Alachua County have been working on a merger of their Fire and EMS Departments for over two (2) years and are now working with a consultant to help work out their issues.

City Councilwoman Goodman stated that the problems were defined during past discussions; however the problem then became communication issues which created distrust. Councilwoman Goodman believes that a committee should work out all of the details.

County Commissioner Welles believes that the major problem is being able to afford the merger.

County Commissioner Garner suggested a committee comprised of staff.

City Councilman Johnson reiterated the need to prioritize what needs to be done such as define the problems, costs and needs.

City Mayor Fazzone stated that he would like to have appointees to the committee be appointed by each elected body at their next regular meeting.

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County Commissioner Chairman Neads stated that both Fire Department Chiefs along with the City Administrator and County Administrator should be on the committee.

Mayor Fazzone agreed.

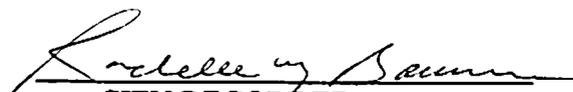
County Commissioner Welles suggested that in order to keep the committees small only one (1) member of the City Council and one (1) member of the County Commissioner along with both Fire Chiefs and the Administrators be joined by a citizen representing the City and one representing the County.

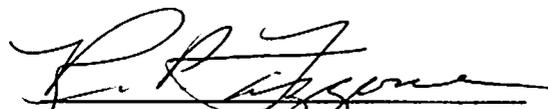
City Councilman Johnson then moved to form a committee consisting of the City Administrator, City Fire Chief and one (1) City Councilman, the County Administrator, County Fire Chief and one (1) County Commissioner along with one (1) citizen representing the City and one (1) representing the County; seconded by County Commissioner Garner and carried.

Former City Fire Chief Tony Messina addressed the joint body stating that he loves the idea and effort. He stated that a needs assessment is very important and asked who would chair the committee.

County Commissioner Chairman Neads stated that the chairman of the committee should be either the City Councilman or County Commissioner who has been appointed to serve on the committee and chosen by the other committee members once it is formed.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.


CITY RECORDER


PRESIDENT