

MINUTES OF THE GLADES COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
WORKSHOP ON HELD FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2014 AT 9:00 A.M. IN THE COUNTY  
COMMISSIONERS MEETING ROOM, GLADES COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MOORE  
HAVEN, FLORIDA

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The Glades County Board of County Commissioners met on Friday, May 23, 2014 for a Workshop regarding possible implementation of a MSBU for Fire Services at 9:00 a.m. with the following Commissioners present:

Donna Storter Long, Chairman  
Paul Beck  
Tim Stanley  
Russell Echols

Others present:

Julie Mann Braddock, Administrative Secretary  
Sandra H. Brown, Clerk of Court  
Paul Carlisle, County Manager  
Bob Jones, Public Safety Director  
John Ahern, City Council  
6 citizens

Chairman Storter Long called the workshop to order at 9:00 a.m. She stated there were forms available at the side table for anyone's comments or questions. She stated these would be addressed at the end of the meeting.

Sandi Melgarejo, Project Coordinator - Government Services Group, Inc., stated her company had been selected to do a fire assessment study to give the Board some options regarding possible implementation of a MSBU for fire services. She stated she had met with each Commissioner individually, as well as County staff, to brief them on the study. She explained that a fire assessment was a charge imposed against real property to pay for fire services provided by local governments. She stated there were case law requirements for the assessments. She stated the courts had said that the assessment had to benefit the property and be fairly and reasonably apportioned to the properties. She stated the goals of the fire assessment were revenue, diversification, accountability, and equity. She gave an overview of the County's market value versus taxable value. She stated market value was not always representative of what the taxable value was because of the various exemptions that were available. She stated approximately 40% of Glades County's properties, based on the taxable values, paid less than \$10.00/year to fire services. She explained that 1 mill generated approximately \$400,000.00. She stated the adopted budget for this year was \$386,719.00. She stated 60% paid less than \$25.00/year, 30% paid between \$25.00 - \$100.00/year, and approximately 8% paid over \$100.00/year. She stated the historical demand methodology was court tested and approved and most recently upheld in the Desiderio Corporation case in 2010. She stated this methodology was the most widely

adopted. She stated the historical demand (call data) was the driving factor and was based on the initial response; therefore, all calls were treated equally. She stated there was one rate for single family residential structures regardless of size. She stated staff had looked at the service delivery which was provided through first responders; apparatus and fire flow was available for a 191,400 non-residential sq. ft. cap; and the benefit area was the entire county including the City of Moore Haven. She stated the County currently had an inter-local agreement with the City of Moore Haven and they compensated the County to provide their fire services. She stated the County would have to consult the City as to whether or not they wished to be included in the MSBU for fire services. She stated the fire department's budget had also been reviewed. She stated they had looked at status quo and enhanced services. She stated the cost apportionment - call/incident data had also been reviewed. She stated every parcel apportionment and the preliminary assessment roll had also been looked at. She referred to page 9 of the hand out. She stated this was the fire department's current status quo budget. She stated this budget included 2 paid fire fighters that worked Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. and the City of Moore Haven's \$14,000.00 yearly contribution. She stated a proforma enhanced assessable budget had been created. She stated this enhanced budget added an additional 5 fire fighters for a total of 7. She stated this would enable the County to have 3 shifts Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. with one floating position. She stated the cost of a tanker/pumper had also been included in this budget. She stated this budget included an increase in fuel costs. She stated the 5 year average budget with miscellaneous assessment expenditures was \$866,336.00. She explained that the County did not have to go to that level they could go with 4 paid fire fighters for a total budget of \$681,000.00.

Mrs. Melgarejo explained the cost apportionment. She stated one year of call data had been reviewed. She stated non-specific calls had been taken out of the data. She stated of 334 calls 278 were made to residential properties; 37 were made to non-residential properties; and 19% were made to land. She gave an overview of the parcel apportionment. She stated the residential category included single family, multi-family, and mobile homes and would be charged based on a per dwelling unit basis; the non-residential category included commercial, industrial/warehouse, and institutional properties and would be charged on a square footage (capped at 191,400 sq. ft.) basis; and the land category would be charged on a per parcel basis for anything under 160 acres and on a per parcel plus a per acre charge for anything over 160 acres up to 640 acres.

Commissioner Beck questioned the amount charged for 2 sections of land. He asked if the assessment would be doubled.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated it would depend on how many parcels were included. She stated that it was her understanding that a parcel was limited to 640 acres. She explained that the owner could apply for an exemption on contiguous parcels if the Board chose to do so. She stated only 13% of the land properties were over 160 acres. She stated the assessment rate calculations were as follows: residential - \$149.00/year; non-

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residential - \$0.03/square foot; and for land the per parcel charge would be \$9.03 plus an additional \$0.04/acre for properties over 160 acres and less than 640 acres. She stated the maximum per parcel would \$28.23/yearly. She gave an overview of what the rates would be for the status quo budget, an enhanced budget with 4 paid fire fighter positions, an enhanced budget with 7 paid fire fighter positions, and a funding enhanced (services only) with 5 new fire fighter positions.

Chairman Storter Long questioned how the per parcel charge had been figured.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated this helped smooth the costs out. She stated there was a cost to run the engines out to these properties.

Chairman Storter Long questioned how mobile home parks and RV parks would be assessed.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated these parks were licensed through the Department of Health. She stated they reconciled the Property Appraiser's data with the Department of Health's records to make sure all of the rental spaces were captured. She stated the parks were then charged on a per space basis. She stated the Board could provide a vacancy credit (exemption) for spaces that were vacant. She stated this was an annual process. She stated mobile homes parks were treated like residential properties and RV parks were treated like commercial properties.

Commissioner Beck questioned how the vacant lots would be treated. He stated this number would be very fluid.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated the RV Park owner would have to apply and produce an affidavit stating how many spaces were available for rent and how many had actually been rented.

Vice Chairman Stanley asked if the \$149.00 included the new fire truck/pumper. He asked if the other totals had included the fire truck/pumper.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated these figures did include the new fire truck. She stated the truck could be taken out if the Board wished. She stated the next page gave several alternate assessment rate scenarios. She stated page 17 referred to policy direction. She stated if the Board wished to move forward with the MSBU they would need to give their notice to proceed fairly quickly due to statutory deadlines. She stated County Manager Carlisle was currently working with the City of Moore Haven as to whether or not they wished to be included in the implementation of a MSBU for fire services. She stated the Board would need to decide on the rates and any exemption policies. She stated all of the scenarios presented assumed that the County was going to exempt government properties and institutional tax exempt properties (e.g. churches, et al). She stated the Board would need to decide if vacancy credits would be given for the mobile home/RV Parks. She stated the final fire assessment roll certified to the Tax Collector by September 15, 2014. She stated an Ordinance would need to be adopted

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and published 10 days prior to adoption. She briefly explained the various implementation schedule options. She stated all of these scenarios were based on the Board's regularly scheduled meetings.

Chairman Storter asked County Manager Carlisle to read the comments/questions from the public.

County Manager Carlisle read the first question – Are RV Parks figured at the commercial rate or the non-residential rate.

This question was previously answered.

County Manager Carlisle read the second question – Will this re-open fire station 6 providing fire service for people who reside south of the River? e.g. 32 minutes for pumper trucks to arrive and only Hendry County responded.

Chairman Storter Long stated the Indian Hills station was manned by volunteers and had been closed. She asked Bob Jones, Public Safety Director, where the 3 teams would be stationed.

Mr. Jones explained that the east district consisted of Lakeport and Buckhead Ridge and would be stationed in Buckhead Ridge; the west district consisted of Ortona and Muse and service to the Port LaBelle area and would be stationed in Muse; and the central district would be stationed in Moore Haven and would service Palmdale and Indian Hills. He stated the County had mutual aid agreements with all surrounding counties. He stated volunteers would also be dispatched.

Chairman Storter Long asked what time of the day most of the fires had occurred.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated this data had not been looked at.

Commissioner Beck asked what the percentages were for each of the districts.

Mr. Jones stated he had this data in his office.

There was a discussion regarding where the additional fire fighters would be located.

Commissioner Beck questioned if Hendry or Okeechobee counties had ever been called and not responded.

Mr. Jones stated they had not ever failed to respond; however, they had limited their response on occasion due to other calls. He stated they had called the tribe and had them not respond.

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Commissioner Echols stated he would support the hiring of 2 additional full time fire fighters with the caveat that the current millage rate of .08 would be eliminated and all of the costs for fire services be collected through the MSBU.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated the Board would legally have to fund the exemption buy downs through the general fund. She stated this would amount to approximately \$20,000.00.

Commissioner Echols stated he did not feel the Board should charge the governmental properties because they could not collect the funds; however, any one else would be charged for the services.

Commissioner Beck stated he would support 2 additional fire fighters. He stated the districts needed to be evaluated so that the additional fire fighters would be placed where they could best serve the county.

Mr. Jones explained how his current staff was placed. He stated he first looked at where he could get his best mutual aid response from and then any volunteers he had. He stated he kept his staff where the mutual aid was less likely to respond. He stated he had also been able to pick up a couple of new tankers from the Division of Forestry so the equipment could be backed out of the budget. He stated the Board needed to also look at replacing some of the trucks in the next 4 – 5 years.

Commissioner Beck stated he believed staff needed to review the numbers. He stated he felt the assessment would increase the tax base and the revenues. He stated Mr. Jones would know best where to place the additional fire fighters.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated if the tanker/pumper truck was removed from the budget and some of the fuel expenses the budget would be decreased by approximately \$50,000.00 - \$60,000.00/year.

Commissioner Echols stated the County would be doubling what they had. He stated he felt this could be justified and would be a growing step for the County.

Chairman Storter Long stated everyone was going to pay and everyone was going to expect someone to be placed in their area. She stated she would love to see everyone have a full station; however, it was just not possible. She stated if the County did not have someone in the east, west, and central districts they would be cheating the public. She stated the Board would hear from the public because they would feel that they were being charged more for no more services.

Vice Chairman Stanley expressed the same concerns. He stated he realized the County had to start somewhere; however, he felt that the people in his area (BHR) would be disappointed if they were charged \$117.00/year and all of the additional firemen were going to be stationed in Moore Haven. He stated at \$149.00/year there would be more fire fighters to serve the County.

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Commissioner Echols explained that some of the people had been paying anyways and would now be getting 2 more full time fire fighters for a small amount more.

Chairman Storter Long asked for a scenario so that the public and Commissioners could see the differences. She asked if the Board could give the public a 4 year cap and not change the assessment.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated this Board could not legally bind another Board to their decision. She stated the Board could say this was their intent.

Mr. Jones stated if the County chose to add the additional 2 fire fighters they would be stationed in the east district one month and the west district the next, so the people would be getting at least half coverage.

Vice Chairman Stanley suggested that this assessment and the placing of the 2 additional fire fighters be explained to the public very clearly. He suggested public meetings in each community after the notices were sent. He cautioned the Board about rushing into this.

Commissioner Beck stated this assessment would essentially be revenue neutral to the taxpayer and he would be getting twice the service.

Vice Chairman Stanley stated this was the people that were paying taxes. He stated look at the ones who are not paying and are now going to be asked to pay \$117.00/yearly and not see the benefit.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated GSG could assist the Board with public education and frequently asked questions. She suggested that the Board may wish to send the notices out 30 days prior to adoption of the final resolution along with a flyer outlining frequently asked questions. She stated the County could put additional information on their website and advertise neighborhood workshops prior to the public hearing to help answer some of the questions.

Commissioner Echols stated this Board was voted in to make hard decisions. He stated the Board should not be going out and doing a poll to see which option was more popular. He stated there would be times when the Board would have to do things that were not popular.

Chairman Storter Long stated the Board was required to have public hearings and the public may raise issues that the Board did not notice or that would affect the Board's decision. She stated she was ready to propose the enhanced budget with 6 paid fire fighter positions, leave the equipment and exemptions in the general fund, and reduce the millage rate by the difference.

Commissioner Echols stated he would support 4 new fire fighters.

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Commissioner Beck agreed.

Vice Chairman Stanley stated he would support 6 additional fire fighters.

Mrs. Melgarejo reminded the Board that they could not go higher than what was noticed. She stated they could send notice for the 6 positions and then reduce it later if they so wished.

Chairman Storter Long stated she would prefer that Mr. Jones and County Manager Carlisle put the language together for the insert that would be provided with the notice.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated she could work with staff and make recommendations.

Commissioner Beck stated he would not going support anything higher than 4 fire fighters.

Commissioner Echols agreed.

Vice Chairman Stanley stated he would go along with 2 additional fire fighters for a total of 4.

Chairman Storter Long stated she would agree.

County Manager Carlisle clarified that they would advertise for 2 additional fire fighters making the total 4 full time fire fighters and the millage rate would be removed except for the buy downs and equipment.

Commissioner Echols stated he would agree with the exemption for government parcels and the vacancy credit for the mobile home and RV Parks but felt that institutional parcels should pay.

Chairman Storter Long questioned an established accounting format or formula that would help the County with the vacancy credit for the mobile home and RV Parks.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated she would help prepare an application and get those distributed. She stated the Board would want to wait on this until after the public hearing because if the MSBU did not move forward there was no sense in distributing the applications. She stated she would be available to help the customer service staff answer any questions that may come up.

County Manager Carlisle asked the Board to pick the schedule they wanted to follow.

Mrs. Melgarejo reminded the Board that if they wanted to send the notices out 30 days before rather than 20 they could but an additional 10 days would have to be added to the notice date.

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Chairman Storter Long asked if the Board wished to make this part of a day meeting or night meeting or if they preferred to have the meeting on a separate day.

Commissioner Echols stated he would prefer a day meeting and if there were any issues the meeting could be continued until the afternoon. He requested that Mrs. Melgarejo create some average scenarios so that the public would have an idea of what they would be paying.

County Manager Carlisle stated Mrs. Melgarejo had provided him with a program that he could use to manipulate the numbers and create some scenarios.

Chairman Storter Long asked for any other public comments.

JC Long, Glades County resident, questioned giving the vacancy credits to the mobile home and RV Parks. He stated if credit was given the parks would be given a “free ride” for the time that no one was renting the lot; yet the County would be taxing people that own vacant land year round. He stated as an ex-cattlemen he was sure that these mobile home and RV Parks were making more money per square foot on their property than a land owner was with his cattle. He asked how this credit could be justified.

Mrs. Melgarejo explained that the parks would be paying for all of the other structures located on their property. He stated the vacant land was being charged for land only and no structures.

Jimmy Cianfrani, Glades County resident, questioned the people who had mobile homes that had not been paying taxes for years. He asked how the County would get these people to pay.

Chairman Storter Long stated there were tax liens that could be placed upon their properties and they would follow the same process as anyone else that did not pay their taxes.

Robert Murrhee, Glades County resident, expressed concern with the lack of service south of the River. He stated there was a vacant fire station there that was not being utilized. He expressed concern with a 32 minute response time to a fire at a neighbor’s home. He stated this was unacceptable. He stated only Hendry County had responded. He stated if the County was going to pay extra for fire fighters the residents should receive more service.

Commissioner Echols stated the residents were paying now out of the millage. He stated the vacant station was vacant because they did not have volunteers to man it.

Chris Shoemaker, Lykes Bros., Inc., asked if the assessment was on structures, acreage, or a combination of the two.

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Mrs. Melgarejo stated the assessment was on both. She stated agricultural land with no structures would be assessed at the acreage rate. She stated this amount would be assessed per parcel for the first 160 acres and then per acre after that. She stated at the maximum the rate the charge would be \$20.23 for a 640 acre parcel.

Diane Cianfrani, Glades County resident, stated it appeared that Commissioner Echols wished to reduce the millage and put everything into the MSBU so that the land owner really wouldn't incur a high additional expense. She stated Vice Chairman Stanley's concern with Buckhead Ridge would be moot. She stated the residents would have the millage reduced and they would be getting an additional service. She stated if the County was going to reduce the cost of equipment and fuel could the money saved be used to fund a part time floater.

Commissioner Beck stated if there were 4 fire fighters then the 5<sup>th</sup> would probably need to be part-time. He stated it would probably not hurt to look at the cost of hiring a part-time person. He stated he would want this assessment revenue neutral to the people who were paying for the service now.

Chairman Storter Long stated the assessment would not be much more for the people who were paying now but would be a great difference for the ones who were not paying anything at all.

Commissioner Echols stated the County's fire department would be doubling at 4. He stated this was a fast enough pace to grow. He stated the future Boards would decide if more services were needed. He stated this was a logical step and anymore would be over their heads. He stated the fire department needed to grow measurably and at a pace that was financially sustainable.

Chairman Storter Long stated if the people were paying for 4 there should be 4 fire fighters on duty and there would not be at all times.

Mrs. Cianfrani asked how often this would be addressed.

Commissioner Echols stated this would be evaluated annually.

Chairman Storter Long stated she was comfortable with 4 but wished the County could have full service. She stated the County was fortunate to have mutual aid from Hendry County and the Seminole Tribe.

Mr. Jones stated he had the option of using volunteers to cover shifts. He stated the money would be built into the budget.

County Manager Carlisle stated there was currently \$25,000.00 in volunteer pay in the budget. He stated only approximately \$7,000.00 had been spent thus far this year.

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Mr. Jones explained that the Buckhead Ridge area would receive the highest ISO rating because of the hydrant situation. He stated ISO ratings were also based on response time.

John Ahern, City of Moore Haven Council Member, stated the City was prepared to make a decision once they know what the County wanted to do. He stated the City would want to look at the information and rates and discuss them. He stated once the County made a decision he felt the City would support it.

Mr. Jones stated the City owned a percentage of one truck and the County paid the insurance.

Chairman Storter Long questioned the City of Moore Haven's \$14,000.00 yearly contribution.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated if the City consented to allow the County to implement and administer on their behalf the MSBU the \$14,000.00 contribution would be removed.

County Manager Carlisle stated if the Board did the 30 day notice the Ordinance would have to be adopted by the June 23, 2014 meeting.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated if the Board wanted to mail the notices 30 days in advance to give extra public education and information regarding the neighborhood workshops her firm would have to have time to process all of the notices. She stated there were 2 options.

Commissioner Beck stated the Board would need to give the City of Moore Haven time to deliberate and give a response.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated everyone in the City could be noticed. She stated their notices could read that it was anticipated that the City would consent to the assessment.

Chairman Storter Long asked how much of money the County had spent on fire protection for the City.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated based on the number of units and the rates used the City's contribution to the budget would be approximately \$95,000.00.

Chairman Storter Long asked what was actually spent on the City for fire protection.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated she did not know that the calls were broken down in this manner.

Mr. Jones stated one of the biggest benefits the City would see was when the EOC building was complete; the City would have 2 stations and a hydrant system which would help with their ISO ratings.

Chairman Storter Long asked if the Board wished to give 30 days or 20 days.

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Commissioner Beck stated he felt 20 days was sufficient.

Commissioner Echols agreed.

Chairman Storter Long agreed.

Mrs. Melgarejo stated the Board may wish to consider they would be adopting their millage. She stated they would not want to assume the assessment was going through, reduce the millage, and then be short.

It was the consensus of the Board to publish the Notice of Ordinance for the June 12, 2014 meeting and follow the first schedule listed in column one on page 18 of the handout.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further discussion Chairman Storter Long adjourned the workshop at 11:06 a.m.

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Donna Storter Long, Chairman

ATTEST:

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Sandra H. Brown, Clerk of the Circuit Court

Approved: June 10, 2014

THESE MINUTES ARE NOT A VERBATIM RECORD. TAPES ARE AVAILABLE FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN LISTENING TO THE ENTIRE MEETING.