

AT A WORKSHOP OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY  
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN  
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 4:00 P.M.,  
THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:

**Present:** Brenda Holt, Chair, District 4  
Dr. Anthony “Dr. V” Viegbesie, Vice Chair, District 2  
Eric Hinson, District 1- appeared remotely  
Kimblin NeSmith, District 3  
Ronterious “Ron” Green, District 5  
Edward Dixon, County Administrator  
Clayton Knowles, County Attorney  
Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk  
Hannah Pope, Clerk’s Office

**1. Welcome**

Chair Holt welcomed everyone to the workshop at 4:00 p.m.

**INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chair Holt asked for a moment of silence then lead in the Pledge of Allegiance to the U. S. Flag.

**CITIZENS REQUESTING TO BE HEARD (3-Minute Limit)**

*Due to COVID-19 and the efforts of the Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners to continue the practice of social distancing, Commissioners want to continue to hear from citizens under the Citizens Requesting to be Heard section of the agenda.*

*If citizens have any questions, comments, or concerns, please email*

*[CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov](mailto:CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov) and anticipate receiving a response within 48 hours.*

*The Board of County Commissioners would like to thank everyone for their patience and flexibility during this time.*

**GENERAL BUSINESS**

**2. Gadsden County Volunteer Fire Department Funding Presentation (Keith Maddox, Chief, EMS)**

Mr. Dixon introduced the above item for the Board. Chief Maddox has laid out the process of the contracts, process and different fire departments for the commission.

Chief Maddox stated that this was to help in the Board’s decision to fund the Volunteer Fire Departments.

There are 15 total Fire departments in Gadsden County. Out of the 15 departments there are only 4 Professional Fire Departments. There are 6 of the 11 Volunteer Fire Departments that are not-municipal in unincorporated zones. There are a few paid positions within the municipalities that are connected to dispatch, officer, or other forms of public safety. The Quincy Fire Department is the main professional fire department for the county. The Florida State Hospital Fire Department will only come off the property to aid in extreme cases. The Forestry Fire Department responds to primarily forest fires. The Gadsden County Emergency Services are primarily supportive and administrative. They have some paid fire fighters but they have limited equipment because they are primary mission is advanced medical care.

That the current distribution of the of how the individual departments receive funds. The is a Consumer Price Increase (CPI) that is given annually. The recommendation is to continue with current funding, maintain the CPI increases, possibly fund major equipment needs in the budgetary process.

Chief Maddox stated that looking toward the future they should be phasing in equipment that is needed such as a Pumper tanker that performs a dual role. Pumper tankers would be deployed in areas that do not have adequate hydrant coverage. A pumper tanker carries a large amount of water yet it can function as an engine.

Chief Maddox recommended standardization of equipment. The safety packs would include air packs, bunker gear, and NFIRS reporting software. This would allow for assistance between the departments. For the unincorporated areas, there is not good data for those areas which hinders grants so they would utilize new reporting software and replacing the legacy equipment.

Some of the issues the departments are facing are bringing in new volunteers, retaining volunteers, facilitation of minimum training classes, and outreach programs in the high schools to promote firefighting and volunteer work and educate about professional career opportunities.

Consider language mandating all county funds be kept in a separate account and not intermingled with other funds. Require all unexpended funds at the end of the fiscal year be carried forward into the departments upcoming budget or forfeited back to the County. Also, consider capping the amount of funds that can be carried forward.

Some of the Volunteer Departments have concerns of the municipality's management of County funding for the volunteers. Other concerns are about obtaining life safety equipment, reduction in number of volunteers, and lack of access to training.

Future actions to improve fire response in the County is integration of interchangeable equipment, facilitation of training, improve cooperation between departments, increase the air filling systems, and bunker gear cleaning systems.  
There is a need for more special washers and dryers to get the potential carcinogens out and need a special pipe to keep from degradating the equipment that is used.

There are FEMA grants that are for different types of fire aid. There are the Firehouse grants which the County does not have to match any of the funds. Then there is the SAFER grant that allows Fire Departments to put fire safety personnel in the public to give the County time to cover the cost.

*Commissioner Viegbesie exited the workshop at 4:19 p.m.*

*Commissioner Viegbesie reentered the workshop at 4:20 p.m.*

Chair Holt asked Chief Maddox if there had been any information that had been left out. Chief Maddox stated that they are working on a obtaining a training tower, safety equipment, bunker gear, and air packs.

Chief Maddox introduced the volunteers for the different fire departments.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked Chief Maddox if there was a fire station missing from the financial report. He did not want any fire station left out and asked if it was being used for other purposes. Chief Maddox stated that this was the most up-to-date information.

Commissioner Green asked did they know the amount of grant funding the County received for the volunteers.

Chief Maddox stated that he did not have that on hand but he would get them that information. Commissioner Green stated that he wanted to know how they were going to get the program for high school students developed.

Chief Maddox stated that they are talking with Tallahassee Community College and Chipola College for development of those programs.

Chair Holt asked if there was an option for class credits for students if they attended those programs.

Chief Maddox stated that they do not have that option at this time.

Chair Holt stated that it would be good for training and recruitment. Chair Holt asked if there were any scholarships available for students if they participated.

Chief Maddox answered not at this time.

Commissioner NeSmith asked about the Chief's funding recommendations and asked if he recommended the County continue the funding at the current rate. Chief Maddox answered yes, yet there are other needs may occur though. Commissioner NeSmith asked if there would be more information regarding this issue before budget discussions. Chief Maddox answered yes, that the stations are putting together a list of the major items that need to be addressed. Commissioner NeSmith asked Chief Maddox about the CPI.

Mr. Dixon explained that the CPI gives them an idea of the price of equipment with the rate of inflation. Mr. Dixon stated that this is the basic funding for the year and that the Fire Departments still need the same equipment even if they don't get the same amount of calls each year. That they need to get some software to keep up with the number of calls to keep cost to calls ratio. They need find where the best place to invest in such as new gear and trucks. The County is to committed to fight the same fire.

Commissioner NeSmith asked about the request for funding from the different departments. Chief Maddox stated that they will get all of that information and then meet with the County Administrator's Office. Commissioner NeSmith asked if they would need more money based off the needs of the different departments. Chief Maddox stated that they could deploy as an agency, Gadsden County Emergency Services to centrally locate for all the departments or may realize that there was an individual need that could benefit all of the departments. Commissioner NeSmith asked if legacy equipment was a nice way to say old or outdated equipment and Chief Maddox said it was. Chief Maddox stated that they need to clear definitive plans in phasing in the new equipment. This is expensive equipment so it has to be phased in so it can be done as fiscally responsible as possible. This is to prepare so there is not a gap in life saving equipment.

Chair Holt wanted to know about the needs in training certifications.

Chief Maddox stated that training volunteers' numbers may not be exact now on the report. Every department has a set of volunteers that have not met minimum standards and need the training.

Chair Holt asked about price to get them to the proper certifications. Chief Maddox stated that the price varied by who put on the training. Chair Holt stated that up-to-date training would look good for grants. She also asked for an inventory of the equipment by where they are in the County, when they were purchased, and how often they are used. Also, how many calls did the department receive in 2020. Chief Maddox stated that he gets this information from the Fire Marshal. He stated that this information is not very valid since some departments could not get the reporting systems running. He believes that the number of calls was around 3000 for the County. Chair Holt asked for the price of software. Chief Maddox said it could be several thousand dollars for the software to update all departments. There was something that they were working on that may be a solution already in play.

Chair Holt asked would it be cumbersome to have all calls go through 911 and would it solve the problem. Mr. Dixon said it would be easier, but that 911 dispatchers would have to call the individual fire departments. Chair Holt asked do they not have the same radio system for all departments. Chief Maddox stated did not know if all of them had signed on at this time. Chair Holt asked about how many trucks are in the County and what was the price for new trucks. Chief Maddox stated that it was based on the supply of hydrants in the areas. Tankers are an art and science because of lack of hydrants rural area. That is another type of training that is required for this county.

Assistant Chief Dan Hunter from the Greensboro Volunteer Fire Department was called upon to speak. He distributed the 2020 report to the Board. The report showed the wants and needs of the department. Asst. Chief Hunter echoed the importance of high school outreach stating that he was in a similar program that was for a professional level position not just volunteer. He also stated that Greensboro has a need for volunteers. They do not have people to operate on fires and more than one department is called out to meet requirements. The department provided coverage to areas outside of their municipality. Asst. Chief Hunter stated since Greensboro covers 14 miles of I-10 that most of their calls are on the interstate regarding vehicular accidents. Advances in technology have made their jobs easier and there is pressing needs in communications. The department was looking at \$1,100 alone in portable radios. They have to have radios for each volunteer.

Commissioner Green asked what was being done to invite and promote new volunteers. Asst. Chief Hunter stated that in recruitment they are using social media, face to face engagement, and the local newspaper. He stated for retention they are building a community and that it is a family within the group of volunteers.

Commissioner NeSmith stated that in the needs list was tanker repairs and asked if it was currently working.

Asst. Chief Hunter stated that it worked but was not working properly. He stated that 20 years of use for a fire truck was the equivalent of 40 years of use on any other vehicle. There have been minor repairs made to the tanker to keep it operational.

Commissioner NeSmith asked Chair Holt about a comment she made regarding the radios. Chair Holt answered that the County has a contract with Motorola for towers and radios so that all emergency services would be on the same system. The contract was for \$2.5 million dollars. Commissioner NeSmith asked if hand radios are currently being used for EMS. Chief Maddox answered yes. Commissioner NeSmith asked if there were handhelds for all of the departments. Mr. Dixon stated that system was not online yet. Chief Maddox stated that they have an allotment of handhelds. This is a by department need and it comes down to what they can afford. Commissioner NeSmith asked how many handhelds are allotted in the contract that was signed. Chair Holt stated that those are for multiple emergency services and that this issue should be included in an update meeting for the radio contract. This way all emergency services have that information.

Commissioner NeSmith asked about the tires that were listed in the needs request. Asst. Chief Hunter stated that they are nearing replacement. There is a Department of Transportation requirement on when they need to be replaced and they are nearing that requirement. Commissioner NeSmith asked if these are the tires on trucks. Asst. Chief Hunter answered yes. He also stated that the tanker truck has ten tires and brush truck has six.

Mr. Dixon stated that they need to know how they were spending the money once it was allocated. They needed to get ahold of that information for further consideration. He stated that it is easy to determine the funding for those who are outside of municipalities since they are not funded by both the municipalities and the County. Asst. Chief Hunter stated that there are recurring expenditures in the document such as insurance, repairs, utilities, maintenance, and fuel.

Commissioner Hinson did not have any questions.

Chair Holt introduced Mr. Jim Roberts from the Mt. Pleasant Volunteer Fire Department.

*Commissioner Green exited the workshop at 5:05 p.m.*

Mr. Roberts stated that their departments call volume in 2019 was 75 calls and that the call volume in 2020 was 156 calls. The Department runs primary fire yet they also handle traffic incidents and downed trees. This Department has the lowest annual income from the County.

*Commissioner Green reentered the workshop at 5:08 p.m.*

Mr. Roberts stated that they spent more money than was in their budget. To supplement the County allotment this Department holds fundraisers and have had a Community Day. They just installed a Flag pole for the station. Mr. Roberts also stated that there is a large need for equipment and standardized equipment for inter-department cooperation. He thanked the Board for the radio system. Also, that training is important for the volunteers and it needs to be volunteer friendly.

Commissioner Viegbesie stated that he wanted an update on the radio system. They need an update on the agenda as soon as possible.

Commissioner NeSmith asked Chief Maddox since he is in constant communication with the departments, do they all have budgets to give to the County Administrator.

Chief Maddox stated that they are trying to get that information to the County Administrator when they get it.

Commissioner NeSmith asked would that budget be broken down for that year.

Chief Maddox stated that would be a smart idea and that he will get with the County Administrator.

Chief Maddox stated that all of the fire departments let EMS crews work with them to help cover the area because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chair Holt asked who owned the Mt. Pleasant Volunteer Fire Department.

Chief Ed Cullifer stated that the Fire Department owns the land and the County owns the building. He also stated that there is a 99-year lease and that lease started 20 years ago.

Chair Holt asked where the funding was coming from for the departments.

**Jeff Price, Sr. Management and Budget Analyst**, said it is coming from Small County Surtax.

Chair Holt stated that when looking at equipment needs, priorities need to be set. The Board needs a list of payments that are going out from the departments. That would allow for production to be shown for grants.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked when submitting their budget requests to make it line item and they could increase or decrease item by item and it would be helpful to the board.

Chair Holt stated that she wanted to see where all of the departments are located.

**3. Review and Discuss January 19, 2021, Regular BOCC Meeting Agenda (All)**

There was no discussion on this agenda item.

Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners  
February 2, 2021-Workshop

**MOTION TO ADJOURN**

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR HOLT DECLARED THE WORKSHOP ADJOURNED AT 5:25 P.M.**

**GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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**BRENDA A. HOLT, Chair  
Board of County Commissioners**

**ATTEST:**

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**NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk**