

**AT A WORKSHOP OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN
COUNTY, FL ON FEBRUARY 8, 2023 AT 4:00
P.M., THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS
HAD, VIZ:**

Present: **Kimblin NeSmith, Chair, District 3**
 Eric Hinson, Vice-Chair, District 1
 Brenda Holt, District 4
 Alonzetta Simpkins, District 2
 Ronterious "Ron" Green, District 5
 Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator
 Clayton Knowles, County Attorney
 Crystal Jimenez, Deputy Clerk

Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Nesmith welcomed everyone to the workshop at 4:06 p.m. He had a moment of silence for the invocation and proceeded with the pledge of the U.S. Flag.

Amendments and Approval of Agenda

There were no amendments.

COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AND COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 BY VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE.

Citizens Requesting to be Heard on Non-Agenda Items (3-minute limit)

Anyone wishing to speak on agenda items or non-agenda items should schedule or notify the County Administrator's Office before attending the meeting and will be asked to follow the Gadsden County Public Meetings Citizens Access Guidelines. Also, Public comment for Commission meetings can be submitted via email to CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov until 11:00 a.m. on February 8, 2023. Comments submitted after the deadline, but prior to the meeting, will be added to the official record, but the County cannot guarantee that Commissioners and staff will have adequate time to review comments prior to the meeting.

Chair Nesmith read the above statement aloud.

Mimi Robinson, 111 Grove Rd, Animal Control -

Chair Nesmith read the speaker form aloud. Commissioner Green gave clarity on it.

General Business

1. Welcome

(Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator)

Mr. Dixon welcomed everyone for the presentation on EMS. Chief Hood is director of Emergency Management Services. Chief Davis runs the EMS division and Chief Walker runs the fire division. They will walk through what they are experiencing now and what the outlook will be.

2. Presentation regarding Gadsden County Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

(Kris Hood, Chief of Emergency Medical Services)

Kris Hood presented the presentation on where they at, where they have been and where they want to go.

They were named provider of the year in 2022 by HCA.

He said the staff deserves all the credit. There are 40 full-time and 23 part-time employees. There are 28 employees that are dual certified.

He thanked the board for the wage increases they received. For the first time in 6 years, they are fully staffed.

They have TCC and Chipola students to do ride-alongs.

5 primary station locations:

Quincy (2)

Chattahoochee

Midway

Havana

They have 10,000 calls per year. He went over the short- and long-term goals. He gave credit to Allan Meeks and his staff. There are 11 total county departments.

ISO (Insurance Services Office) creates rating for fire departments and their surrounding communities. They update agreements appropriately. He started establishing a 1 report system. They want to ensure a minimum of 4 personnel respond to a fire call. They want to add a total of 12 career staff to GCES.

Commissioner Simpkins stepped out at 4:59 p.m.

Commissioner Simpkins returned at 5:02 p.m.

Equipment needs –

- Replace officers' response unit
- EMS Unit Replacement
- Additional Bunker gear to outfit current employees
- Continue to apply for grants to obtain additional fire response vehicles

Commissioner Green echoed Chair Nesmith and congratulated them on the recognition. He said they are one of the first counties to be recognized and that is definitely a positive and good recognition to receive. He asked who is responsible for writing the grants within their department? Chief Hood said EMS grants is done by him in coordination with the grant coordinator with the county and Chief Walker does the fire grants with the county department. Commissioner Green said he is hoping that someone in the county is working close with them to get more money. They talked about possibly doing some stipends for the volunteer firefighters. He asked if they get the safer grant, can it be used for volunteer firefighters? Chief Hood would have to do some research on volunteers.

Mr. Dixon said he hopes the safer grants will extend the paid service. They hope to utilize other funds for volunteers for stipends, education and bonuses. Commissioner Green asked if there are any major issues with the current billing company? He wanted to know why they are bidding out now. Chief Hood said their contract is up for renewal in August. They have not gone out to bid in 34 years. They want to ensure that they are getting the best bang for their

buck. Commissioner Green said hopefully once upgrades done to the Robertsville station, they can have a ceremony to involve the community to see the facility.

Commissioner Hinson said they talked about gas tax a few years ago. They were thinking about maybe lowering or increasing gas tax. The max is 6 cents, he asked where are they now? Mr. Dixon said 5 and 6 cents and they are not at the max. Commissioner Hinson said if they change the gas tax, the board has opportunity annually.

Commissioner Holt said it was a good presentation. She said she needs to look at some numbers on what it would cost to encourage volunteers to become certified. Mr. Dixon said they have been meeting with the local chiefs and the other cities to begin the process on how they can encourage volunteers to become certified. Commissioner Holt said they need to look at numbers to get paramedics and EMT's to be dual certified. She asked if the fire stations belong to the county? Chief Walker said the only building that is county owned is Robertsville, Greenshade Dogtown, Mt. Pleasant, Gretna and Sycamore. Commissioner Holt said they need to have reports from everyone. Chief Walker said they report to them quarterly. Commissioner Holt said for EMT's and paramedics, many don't go through school. She said municipalities is something to consider. They can look at funding that can tie to increase certifications. She said they need to market it after getting a plan. She also brought up the logistics of computer software. She asked if they are using the same software? Chief Walker said they are using the software provided by the Florida Fire Marshall office. Commissioner Holt asked how do they make sure 4 certified people are present at a fire call? Chief Walker said it is called the incident command and whoever is the higher-ranking officer in the fire department in charge of that scene will make sure that happens. Chief Walker said when ISO comes out, they look at the roster, pull the report, and they will make sure they have certified firefighters. Commissioner Holt said they need to look at gas taxes. Where that gas tax coming from, is from those areas that are selling gas. MSBU is district tax. That is something that could be used for other things.

Chair Nesmith said when they come up with avenues, it is all in the way they present it. He asked if MSBU is familiar to them? Mr. Dixon said it is Municipal Services Benefit Unit and the other one is the Municipal Service Taxing unit. He said the difference is how they are applied. Chair Nesmith asked if they are currently utilizing those current avenues for revenue? Mr. Dixon said no. Chair Nesmith asked if they are potential revenue generating sources? Mr. Dixon said yes. Chair Nesmith asked about the breakdown of the EMT/Firefighter salary. He asked if that is for one dual certified staff person earning \$15.50 an hour annually? Chief Hood said yes, for one person. Chair Nesmith asked with the safer grant that allows EMS to hire up to 12 persons, how would it impact that \$1,028,370.06? Because the safer grant is just for firefighters, but those individuals can be dual certified. Chief Hood said correct. Chair Nesmith said that may not be a cost to the general fund the first year. Chief Hood said the safer grant is tiered year per year.

Commissioner Simpkins said the presentation was awesome. What stood out to her was the emphasis on the staff willing and wanting to work in the culture they created. It speaks volume and is very important because a lot of times it is not about the money. So, she thanked them. She asked how the volunteer firefighter's equipment is paid for? Chief Walker said they

purchase their equipment by money funded by the county. He said some departments apply for grants. She said in regards to the paperwork in the reporting, do all of the chiefs meet? Chief Walker said they try to meet every quarter. Commissioner Simpkins said she does not stay within 1,000ft from a hydrant or water source. Chief Walker said ISO looks for a water system, like a swimming pool. If they can get 15 ft of a body of water, it would work. He said they have 3 dry hydrants, which they can connect to suction water to fill trucks. They don't like using it because it gets trash in the tanks. Commissioner Simpkins asked if the reporting affects the ISO rating, the way the report is written. Chief Walker said they make sure there are 4 certified firefighters. Chief Hood said it is to ensure they have a systematic something in place to make sure it is done right every time. Commissioner Simpkins said when they look at the calls, in Quincy, they are the only paid fire department. She asked if they have looked at working with them with their firefighters as it relates to staffing? Chief Walker said the City of Quincy fire department placed a guy at Robertsville and they put a stipend for them to go with firefighter and no one responded. Mr. Dixon said they have met and they will get back with them. They have to reassess their relationships to improve their relationships. If they reconstruct somethings, they can get out of that house and get into a building with the fired department. They can figure out how to help Havana build their station and to accommodate whatever their future relationship is. It makes no sense that they have two certified firefighters sitting across the stress in EMS trailer. They have the ability but they do not have the relationship that allows that. Commissioner Simpkins believes it is important to build relationships with municipalities. ISO ratings is affecting everyone and they need to work together to provide public health and safety to the citizens.

Chair Nesmith asked if they are all capable to write their individual grants? Chief Hood said yes. Chair Nesmith asked if there is a suggestion to them? Chief Walker said yes. Chair Nesmith said with the meetings, they can encourage them to do that. He asked Mr. Dixon if they have identified where they need fire hydrants and can they tie that to infrastructure? Mr. Dixon said yes, but it is not that simple.

Commissioner Green said they are having their community workshops and it would be great if they could have the team come out to start training for citizens who want to come. That way they can learn basic lifesaving skills as well.

Commissioner Holt asked when will they do ISO ratings? Chief Walker said the chiefs have to request them to come out.

Chair Nesmith had the volunteer chiefs introduce themselves. Lester Beach spoke from the Havana Fire Department. He is the chief of Havana for 12 months, and been in the department for almost 15 years. ISO has been the focal point for a lot of people. He said the insurance is going up but only 20% of the increase is related to ISO. Quincy is a 4 on ISO and he told them to ask the people of Quincy and see if their insurance has not gone up. He wants people to understand that is not the only impact in their increase. They talk about budgets and trying to supplement. He said one of the biggest ways to supplement is to pull resources from the areas needed. He said there is no recruiting and retention.

Mr. Dixon said they need to give the chiefs the opportunity to grind through this. They need to find a set of principles they can all work by. Chief Beach extended an offer to the board to attend the next chief meeting.

Commissioner Simpkins believes it is important to have a conversation and come together to have a plan. She said each area may have different needs but they need to come together to come up with a plan.

Commissioner Hinson said in the next meeting, could they let them know why there is a huge gap between the City of Quincy and all the other fire departments. Mr. Dixon said paid firefighters. They need to revisit the old set up and reallocate resources. Chief Beach said if they are supporting whatever department, they have to be listed on that roster. Mr. Dixon said it is not a new budget item for them. Commissioner Hinson said sometimes people do not accept what you have to say because of what has been reported in the paper. He said the goal is to include everybody in and not discourage people or make them feel uncomfortable. Chair Nesmith said it was very informative.

Commissioner Green stepped out at 6:00 p.m.

3. Presentation regarding Animal Control Services

(Allan Meeks, Facilities Manager)

Mr. Dixon said Allan Meeks was present to present the Animal Control presentation.

Allan Meeks, head of Animal Control, said he has been in this position for 3 and a half years. Animal Control is an effective enforcement and shelter management. The shelter opened in April 2001 and they have 32 kennels.

Commissioner Green returned at 6:04 p.m.

The business hours are 8am – 5pm, Monday-Friday. The fees were adopted by the board in 2007. In March 2022, they transported only 2 dogs. Since then, the county has transported 338 cats and dogs. That is a record number for animal control.

The County is serviced by three animal control officers required to take a 40-hour course. Mr. Meeks introduced the 3 employees, Willie Saucier, Jeff Carnely and Ricardo Jenkins. The Health Department will notify animal control about animal bites. They will locate the animal, they will need to determine if the dog has rabies and vaccination, if not, it will need to be quarantined for 10 days. They have only had one case of rabies in 27 years. The Humane society knows they cannot save all of the dogs, but they are starting to move forward. They are no longer euthanizing everything.

Attorney Knowles asked how she found that picture on the slideshow. She said she googled pet care.

Chair Nesmith said he has a speakers form from Mimi Robinson. Commissioner Green said she has left and has reached out to him several times in regards to this. Chair Nesmith read the

speaker form. Mr. Meeks said they look at the animals and they take all adoptable pets. They test them and treat them. They have to be spayed and neutered. It is a big deal.

Commissioner Green clarified that a dog bit her and they contacted animal control. They are concerned because there is an elderly lady and cannot get visitors because people are afraid of the dog roaming the street. They called animal control and left messages and she has not received a returned call. He sees they have listed the business hours and he asked if there is someone there during business hours that are answering the phones according to the business hours. Mr. Meeks said animal control phone number is 850-875-8658. Sometime last year, animal control, IT, and Mr. Dixon got together because if you ring that number, it is going to 3 phones, which is the 3 employees they have. Commissioner Green said he will relay the message to her as he understands her concern was the communication level. Mr. Meeks said she called in once on a county commission meeting and contacted the attorney. That was back in the fall. He said her complaint was about the dog biting her. They have to quarantine the animal and if the dog had rabies shots, the dog is still not considered dangerous unless it bites someone twice in 12 months. He said maybe they need to work on the ordinance and update them.

Commissioner Green said he lives in the city limits of Quincy and he asked if there is an ordinance or rule where they have neighbors with chickens and they roam the neighborhood. Mr. Meeks said that could fall under a nuisance animal and it can be addressed because it is a domestic animal. Commissioner Green said maybe if they give them some eggs it will be fine. Mr. Willie Saucier said for him to make sure the livestock is not zoned.

Commissioner Holt asked about the rounding of domestic animals when they are returned, is there a fee charge to the owner? Mr. Meeks said yes. Mr. Meeks said if it is listed on the fee charge, it will be charged. They do not charge by the hour. Commissioner Holt said that is why they need to look at the ordinance. She asked if there is a fee if trapping animals in other city limits. Mr. Meeks said they get 8 hours a week, if they go over, it is a \$35 pick-up charge. Commissioner Holt said she gets calls about no one showing up. She said for the leash law, it needs to be updated. People are not paying attention to that. There needs to be something with teeth in it. Mr. Meeks said if they pick them up, they write fines. Once they get to the third stage, it is not by the dog, it is for each occurrence. So, if they have multiple dogs, it can get quite expensive. She asked Attorney Knowles to see if there is a law to defend themselves. He said he was not aware, so she asked him to put it in writing and send it to them. She commends animal control employees. Mr. Meeks said they have an agreement with Midway. They have had them on sight at times and they give support to animal control.

Commissioner Hinson talked about livestock. He said he was on planning and zoning and they had a miniature horse, the issue was if they could keep it. They had a debate for months.

Commissioner Green said this was a good meeting. Everything is taken seriously but this laughter was good.

Motion to Adjourn

Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners
February 8, 2023, Workshop

**WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR
NESMITH ADJOURNED THE MEETING AT 6:36 P.M.**

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

KIMBLIN NESMITH, Chair

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk