

LEHIGH ACRES FIRE CONTROL AND RESCUE DISTRICT

SPECIAL MEETING

MINUTES

June 23, 2009

The June 23, 2009 Special Meeting of the Lehigh Acres Fire Control and Rescue District Board of Commissioners was opened at 6:05 PM by President Berndt. Present were Commissioners Berndt, Adams, Guzman, and Barrett. Chief Don Adams, Assistant Chief Jeff Haugh, Administrative Assistant Susan Platas, Finance Specialist Anita Kressel and Secretary Jill Marcolini, and Attorney Richard Pringle. Commissioner Hemingway had an excused absence.

After the Pledge of Allegiance, Commissioner Berndt asked Chief Adams to give the invocation.

Commissioner Berndt stated this is a Special Meeting of the Lehigh Acres Board of Commissioners to discuss the short falls of this year's budget. The agenda topics are: a presentation by Mr. Jeff Tuscan of Tuscan & Associates, possibly take action on Budget Workshop & Hearing Dates, discuss Damon Shelor "Blue Ribbon" Panel and all other business to come before the Board of Commissioners.

PUBLIC COMMENT (On Agenda Items)

Mr. Dave Wheaton, Lehigh resident commented on the fact that he voted for the Board Members that hired Chief Adams. He suggested to the Board to take Mr. Shelor's suggestion of the "Blue Ribbon" panel that would consist of business citizens in the community to review the budget.

Kathy Kruse, Lehigh resident commented on the ambulance service of the District and how it saved her life being transported to an area hospital in a minimal amount of time. What would happen if citizens waited for LCEMS for treatment? She would like the Commissioners to look at every resource available before layoffs.

Rick Anglickis Lehigh resident commented on the first ambulance that was bought here in Lehigh by an area telethon. He stated fundamental changes must be made in the "Blue Ribbon" panel. A change in ambulance service here in Lehigh would be putting lives at risk.

PRESENTATION

Mr. Jeff Tuscan, auditor from Tuscan & Associates made a presentation on behalf of the District discussing property values and the District's financial condition. Mr. Tuscan stated it was suitable the District have 25% of the budget in reserves. He explained with a power point review of the drop in property values, which affect the ad valorem this year. He asked the public if they had any questions. None noted.

Budget Workshop and Hearing Dates:

Chief Adams stated at the previous Board meeting that a hand-out was given to all Commissioners of August and September calendars with the scheduled Budget Workshop and Hearing Dates. He has asked Commissioners to take a look at the calendars with their own schedules so the Board can vote on the specific dates. Commissioner Guzman made a motion to accept the August 6, 18, and 27 (if needed) Budget Workshops, the tentative budget hearing on September 9, and the final budget hearing September 24th. Commissioner Adams second. Motion Passed.

Chief Adams then stated he would like to hold another special meeting at the same place (East Lee County High School) July 14th (after the hard numbers have come in from the property appraiser) to go over with the Board the core of service we need for the community to build on for the future. Commissioner Guzman made a motion to schedule a special meeting July 14th at 6:00PM at East Lee County high School to discuss the District Budget and core service for Lehigh Acres and any other District business that comes before the Board. Commissioner Adams second. Motion passed.

Damon Shelor – “BLUE RIBBON” PANEL

Mr. Damon Shelor Lehigh resident addressed the Board regarding his suggestion the District to look into a “Blue Ribbon” panel to review the budget and look for recommendations to help the situation with the District short fall. Commissioner Berndt stated he agrees with Mr. Wheaton and Mr. Shelor and would welcome a panel apart from the Board with solutions and suggestions while the District works through this. The Board would provide the panel with information and records if requested. Mr. Shelor stated he has a committee of four citizens so far, two from Chamber of Commerce and two from Community Counsel. He is hoping to have a panel of six. Commissioner Berndt stated to Mr. Shelor that he will look forward hearing from the panel. Commissioner Adams suggested to Mr. Shelor the panel make a presentation at the July 14 meeting.

Chairman Berndt asked Attorney Pringle to look over the District’s revenues & expenditures and to look for revenue sources. Mr. Pringle stated to the Board a brief review of revenue resources such as:

- Raising the millage to 3.5 mills with a special election.
- Increase Ambulance user fees
- Using ambulance fees as a security for a loan, Attorney Pringle stated credit is tight at area banks right now.
- District cannot purchase bonds, only for capital use only.

Commissioner Guzman addressed the public and the Board with his synopses of the District’s history with its ambulance service, stating times we had a surplus of funds in the District we had an increase in service, technology and employment. We provide the best ambulance service but we cannot place the fire fighters in harms way, he stated. We need to take a look at ad valorem taxes and we can provide fire service equivalent to everyone else, and do away with ambulance service. Commissioner Guzman stated we need to look at a 5 year plan and focus on fire service.

Commissioner Berndt stated we need to figure out what the bottom number is, if we can use our reserves. His concern was for the District to go through the lean months that Mr. Tuscan stated, between October and December, and decide or figure out what level of reserves will be available.

Walt Stevens President of Local 1826 addressed the Board to hold off on all layoffs until the “Blue Ribbon” panel meets with the Board and the District hears from the SAFER grant. This grant is apparently on president’s Obama’s desk ready to sign. He would like the board to stop all layoffs until all avenues have been looked at; at least until the July 14th special meeting.

Commissioner Berndt stated he will be the one to stand up to slow down the layoffs of the 9 firefighters beyond July 15. He is presenting the idea of slowing down the layoffs and considers an extension of the second and third phases.

Commissioner Adams suggested the Board and Chief Adams slow down the layoffs until October 31, when hurricane season is over. Much discussion between the Board members and Chief Adams by putting a hold on layoffs until the hard numbers come in July 1st and another schedule special meeting for July 14, 2009. No motion made.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Sonny Haas Lehigh resident stated he welcomed Mr. Shelor's "Blue Ribbon" committee. You have Bruce Boyd, a former Fire Board Commissioner with much experience. You will have a neutral, professional he is the best. He will find the numbers for you. He will be fair and be honest. To our board members and Chief, Mr. Haas stated he would like the Chief to lead and "Rock and Roll" and to earn his salary. To the Board; listen to your community and listen to your blue ribbon panel. He thanked the Board and Chief Adams for not laying off fire fighters.

Stephen O. Sloan reserved his comments about fiscal responsibility and addressed then Board regarding Lehigh Acres Fire/Rescue saving his life, when he had heart problems, the ambulance came to his home is less than 5 minutes. He stated you would not be able to get that service with Lee County EMS. He stated he would have never made it, those 5 minutes makes a difference in saving a life. The Lehigh Acres Fire Fighters' and Paramedics are the best in the world.

Kristen Mercurio Lehigh resident commented to the board about ambulance response times. She stated in one occasion it took an ambulance 25 minutes to get to a scene. BC John Wayne answered her concerns regarding the situation when 5 ambulances are out at the same time so the District has Lee County EMS standing by to assist. She also had questions concerning ambulance fees and write offs if some patients cannot pay their bill.

Shelly Norman questioned the Board concerning layoffs and asked the Board questions regarding the time frame on the decision. She stated some Board members stated to hold off on the layoffs until July, some said September. She wanted to know which was correct. Chief Adams stated his direction is to write a letter to all the employees that were to be laid off in July and to hold off on all layoffs until the July 14th meeting when the Commissioners can make a decision. Ms. Norman stated, if we go back 15 to 20 years of manpower, we are not going to even provide the minimum of the safety that we need.

COMMISSIONERS COMMENTS

Commissioner Adams: Appreciate the public coming out; he invited them to the regular fire board meetings. What ever the decisions the Board makes effects us also. Hopefully we will make the right decisions.

Motion to adjourn 8:25 pm

