

# LEHIGH ACRES FIRE CONTROL AND RESCUE DISTRICT

## SPECIAL MEETING

### MINUTES

**July 14, 2009**

The July 14, 2009 Special Meeting of the Lehigh Acres Fire Control and Rescue District Board of Commissioners was opened at 6:00 PM by President Berndt. Present were Commissioners Berndt, Adams, Guzman, Hemingway and Barrett. Chief Don Adams, Fire Marshal Ken Bennett, Finance Specialist Anita Kressel and Secretary Jill Marcolini. Attorney Richard Pringle, Attorney Mark Lawson and members of the Local 1826, DVP Mike Pernal, DVP John Wayne, President of Local 1826 Walt Stevens were also in attendance.

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

Commissioner Berndt stated the purpose of this special meeting is to discuss and possibly take action on anticipated District revenue and expenditures for fiscal year 2009-2010; tax rates for trim purposes to discuss and possibly take action on current matters, including financial matters and staff restructuring. Agenda topics are: a presentation by the Blue Ribbon Committee, Attorney Mark Lawson, flat fee assessment taxing and all other business to come before the Board of Commissioners.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT (On Agenda Items)**

Shea Watson a Lehigh resident and nurse at Gulf Coast Hospital emergency room stated since Lehigh has their own Ambulance service the patients receive faster medical attention. She stated the Board should trim the budget, use reserves or grant money, and do whatever ever it takes, but do not lay off the paramedics and EMT's. Ms. Watson also concerned about the longer wait time for LCEMS to arrive at a serious situation.

Amanda Coka a Lehigh resident and Real Estate Agent spoke about the community getting mis-informed on the procedures the banks take on foreclosed homes and the back taxes on the homes. She also stated if the District lays off fire fighters, people are not going to be buying property here in Lehigh.

### **PRESENTATION: Blue Ribbon Committee**

Rick Anglickis Chairman of the Blue Ribbon Committee started the power point presentation first by discussing our present situation, with the 48.7% short fall in property value assessments. He went over the present budget and what the outcome would be with using all the District's reserve. The District would still be 7.18 million short. Each person on the Committee (Bruce Boyd, Laurie Jerriey, Mike Weston and Rick Anglickis) went over the process of what they looked at, action to be taken, personnel (lay offs), operations, union personnel, and committee recommendations. For 2010-11 the Committee recommends a balanced budget not to exceed \$ 13.049 million dollars. The District would still run 5 fire stations and 5 rescues, with 17 firefighters and 9 administrative employees to be laid off by August 1, 2009.

The Committee thanked the Board for allowing them to access information. He also thanked Chief Don Adams and Finance Specialist Anita Kressel.

Commissioner Berndt thanked the Committee and stated a good deal of information has just been presented. Attorney Pringle asked the Committee to provide a copy of the presentation to the Board and any handouts given. Commissioner Berndt asks the Board for any discussion.

Commissioner Hemingway stated that he has been in contact with elected officials involved with information on the SAFER grant and its process. The process, he stated, has been revised and leaves Lehigh Acres in a good position for this grant.

#### **ATTORNEY REPORTS:**

Attorney Pringle had follow-up reports from the previous special meeting, June 23, 2009

- 1) After further review, the cap for the millage for Lehigh Acres is 3 mills
- 2) The District can refinance on the construction loan on the two new stations
- 3) The citizens of Lehigh Acres can vote on a special assessment fee on the community's 125,000 properties

Attorney Pringle then introduced Attorney Mark Lawson. Mr. Lawson spoke on the recommendation and procedure of a mail-in ballot for and assessment fee tax. Mr. Lawson stated he would have to speak with the supervisor of elections on the cost for the District. Attorney Pringle stated a resolution could be presented at the regular Board meeting scheduled for Thursday, July 16, 2009. Commissioner Guzman made a motion for Attorney Lawson and Attorney Pringle to continue to look into facts regarding the assessment fee and prepare a draft resolution. Commissioner Hemingway second. Motion passed.

Chairman Berndt then asked Chief Adams if he had any comments or recommendation for the District.

Chief Adams stated his recommendation would be to lay off 36 Firefighters, have open 4 stations and run 3 rescues. This would leave 72 fire fighters and 8 administration. Much discussion with the Board concerning the lay offs and asked Chief Adams on the amount of money the District would suffer if we stayed status quo until September 30th. The majority of the Board would like to hold off on lay offs until the information on the assessment fee is researched and we obtain more information on the SAFER grant. Commissioner Berndt stated it would be the Chief's decision to hire, fire or lay off personnel. Commissioner Berndt also stated he would like the laid off personnel to be called back immediately.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

- Sonny Haas thanked the firefighters in the audience for protecting his family with their service. He mentioned to the Board regarding the assessment fee vote and commented on the percentage of residents in Lehigh that are registered voters and the fact that only half turn out and actually vote.
- Kelli Wilson a Lehigh Acres Fire Fighter commented on getting paid for her sick time, after her lay off. She stated to the Board it was already budgeted for this fiscal year.
- Dave Wheaton Lehigh resident is concerned about paying the assessment tax. He stated to the Board that instead of looking for more money, the District should look at what they are doing.

- Cathy Kruse a Lehigh resident thanked the Blue Ribbon Committee and the Board for hearing their summary of the District financial situation. She thanked the firefighters for their professionalism during these trying times.
- Frank LaRosa a Lehigh resident stated these are trying times for the Board, not easy. He stated if the Board needed any information or if he can be of assistance to ask.
- Candace Holmes a Lehigh resident spoke regarding the expense on the new fire stations. She stated she is upset the way the District handles money, no confidence in Chief Adams.
- Shelly Norman is upset at the fact of shutting down stations and ambulances. She stated how can they protect the citizens when they won't be able to protect each other. She would like the District to hold off on layoffs until all the facts are in. "The smartest people have all the facts before they make a decision."

### **COMMISSIONERS COMMENTS**

Commissioner Berndt asked the Board for comments.

Commissioner Hemingway stated for the record he is in favor of keeping all employees status quo until September 30th. President Berndt also asked Commissioner Adams if he was still in favor of keeping employees until September 30th. He stated yes. He commented on the District employees calling in sick when they are not sick. Commissioner Guzman would like the layoffs to begin as soon as possible. Commissioner Hemingway asked Chief Adams regarding the refund money from the engine that was cancelled last month. Chief Adams answered his concerns. Commissioner Barrett stated to keep personnel until October 1. Commissioner Berndt stated he would agree with the September 30th. He wants the District personnel to do the right thing and come to work, while the Board is doing everything they can to save each and everyone's position.

Motion to adjourn 8:45 pm

