

August 13, 2009

**LONG RANGE PLANNING/MACHINERY & EQUIPMENT
COMMITTEE REPORT**

The Long Range Planning/Machinery & Equipment Committee met Thursday August 13, 2009 at 5:00 p.m. in the Quorum Court Meeting Room, Third Floor, County Administration Building, 215 East Central, Bentonville, Arkansas

Committee Members Present: Moore, Blaty, Harrison, Stephenson

Others Present: County Attorney George Spence, Comptroller Richard McComas, Director of Public Services Chris Glass, 9-1-1 Administration Coordinator May Kay Sullivan, Chief Deputy Don Townsend

Media: Tom Treweek - Daily Record: Ryan McGeeney - Morning News

1. Call to Order

JP Harrison called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. Reverse 9-1-1

a. Code Red Presentation

JP Harrison stated that Jill Mason of Emergency Communications Network would be making a presentation from her Florida home office via telephone. Jill Mason reported on the Code RED and the Code RED Weather Warning systems, and the process by which Code RED is programmed to contact all or some citizens within a selected area by phone or e-mail. Jill Mason stated that the system is internet-based, that there is no infrastructure for the user to maintain, and added that all aspects of the Code RED system are maintained in-house by the company.

JP Stephenson made motion to continue to pursue an investigation of a system of this type, and because of the nature of the system itself and the amount of money involved, to put it out for competitive bid, and to forward the motion to the September 8, 2009 Committee of Thirteen agenda, seconded by JP Blaty.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

JP Moore questioned if a fee could be charged on cell phones by 9-1-1 to pay for this service. County Attorney George Spence stated that the 9-1-1 fee is already designated. Comptroller Richard McComas stated that the 9-1-1 fee is already in the budget. JP Moore questioned if the Quorum Court could attach a fee on telephones or cell phones to pay for this service. County Attorney George Spence stated that he did not think so, because the law that set up the cell phone tax has probably not caught up to this technology. He added that he would check into it.

JP Stephenson stated that they should explore the possibility of some of the municipalities participating in the system as a means to abate the costs.

3. County Dive Team Ordinance: Director of Public Services Chris Glass

Director of Public Safety Chris Glass stated that the draft ordinance has been revised by County Attorney George Spence to reflect a state requirement that the board contain five members.

He said the ordinance recognizes the existence of the two dive teams, orders the consolidation of their assets, and creates a board which would have total authority over the dive team, and would consist of representatives from the Sheriff's Department, the Volunteer Fire Association, and the 9-1-1 Administration Board. He said the board will be responsible for the administration of discipline and setting qualification and training guidelines for the team. He said the board would also be responsible for making any changes to the policy that might be necessary in the future.

Chris Glass said that there is still a significant part of the water season left, so they would like to see the ordinance forwarded to the next Quorum Court agenda to be adopted as an emergency ordinance. He said that although they are confident that the problems that were documented in newspaper articles between the two existing teams have ceased, they would like to see the new dive team and policy in place before the boating season starts up next year.

JP Moore asked if all the parties involved support the ordinance. Chris Glass stated that they are, and that he has email communication from Kevin Monroe of the Fire Association indicating that he would like to see the ordinance move forward. He said that Chief Deputy Don Townsend is present to speak regarding the Sheriff's Department's position.

JP Stephenson made motion to bypass the Committee of Thirteen and forward the draft ordinance directly to the August 27, 2009 Quorum Court agenda, seconded by JP Moore.

County Attorney George Spence stated that it may be necessary to vote to suspend the rules at the Quorum Court meeting to approve bypassing the Committee of Thirteen. JP Douglas requested that Chief Deputy Don Townsend address the committee regarding the ordinance.

Chief Townsend stated that the Sheriff's Department has worked with Chris Glass and members of the Fire Association to rectify any problems that they had in the past. He said that the major problem they had in the past was when a situation turned from rescue into recovery, as there are many evidentiary requirements that law enforcement must follow, such as the chain of possession of evidence. He said they have developed a certified curriculum of evidence recovery for the single dive team, as well as procedures for logging evidence so the previous issues that caused problems will be eliminated.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Other Business:

JP Douglas stated that he would like to discuss Fire Protection out in the county, as they are about to begin budget meetings. He said that the county budgeted \$780,000 in 2009, and \$500,000 of that was the final payment on the purchase of new fire trucks, which was amortized over 5 years. He said they know they are going to have to cut expenses, but he

said that during a recent visit to one of the rural fire stations, the Fire Chief showed him their equipment, and JP Douglas described the mechanical problems they are having with it. He said he knows that they do not have money to purchase new trucks, but they need to look at what is needed to make the equipment that they have workable and safe. He said instead of spending \$200,000 on one new truck, they might be able to take the same \$200,000 and repair 10 trucks, and get them workable.

JP Douglas suggested forming a committee to do a visual assessment of all of the Rural Fire Departments, to see what their actual needs are. He said the committee could consist of some Quorum Court members and should include Fire Marshal Will Hanna. He said the most efficient use of the tax dollars may not be to purchase new trucks, but to take care of the ones that they already have.

JP Moore stated he was appointed to a subcommittee in 2000 which examined this issue, and at that time the county was buying used fire trucks. He explained the problems with used trucks that were designed for use in cities, including the inability to handle the rough terrain in the county, and engines that were unable to pull hills. He said they began to buy trucks that were specifically built for use in rural areas, with larger engines, tougher chassis, and hose connections in the front and back for use in narrow driveways and lanes.

He said they all know they are facing tough budget cuts, and a proposal has been discussed in which the Fire Association will receive enough money to buy 2 trucks in each of the next 3 years, plus enough to buy a used tanker, and that will still allow a budget cut of \$400,000. He said the current method of obtaining a loan and paying it off in five years yielded 14 new fire trucks over the last five years, and the proposed funding method will net a total of 12 trucks over the next 6 years.

JP Moore spoke against refurbishment of old trucks, stating that the frames are prone to cracking, the chassis are worn out, and for the amount of money spent, they do not get very far ahead. He said that during individual conversations, members of the Fire Association seemed receptive to the idea, although we have not received an official position from them yet. He said that the Fire Association does not feel they should have to bear the brunt of the budget cuts, and he agreed.

JP Stephenson stated that there are other problems with the Fire Department to which JP Douglas is referring, and he cannot conceive of not being able to fix a battery so that it will stay charged, or to repair a pump so that it will not blow up. He said there are organized Volunteer Fire Departments which are funded by membership dues, and he is more in favor of helping those that are willing to help themselves, rather than just buying new fire trucks whether they are needed or not, when the Fire Department is not willing to do anything to offset the costs or take care of the maintenance.

JP Stephenson said that in his experience, you do not have to have everything you want, and although they have money in reserve, he does not want to spend it, and wants to see everyone rowing their share of the boat. He said the money they allocate comes from every citizen in the county, not just the ones who live in rural areas.

JP Douglas agreed that the Fire Districts should support themselves, and agreed that there comes a point when trucks are too worn out to spend any more money on them, and he does not feel that they should simply give them everything they want. He said he is simply advocating that they assess what their actual needs are, so that there is no lack of

communication between the local fire departments and the funding level. He added that he wants to be sure that they make the wisest use of tax dollars that they can.

JP Moore stated that he believes the fire departments are working on compiling a list, as was discussed at the last Fire Association meeting, and they usually have a pretty good idea of what their needs are. Chris Glass stated that they try to keep that up to date for DEM Coordinator Marshall Watson, because he watches for available grant funds.

JP Stephenson stated that as far as forming a committee is concerned, he felt that this committee would be the proper one to handle this issue, and asked if there are any grants available to assist the rural fire departments. Chris Glass stated that they compiling a list of what may be purchased with the 2007 and 2008 Homeland Security Grants which have already been awarded, and fire protection might be a possibility.

JP Stephenson asked if he understands correctly that they may be able to fund the Reverse 9-1-1 system out of one of those two grants, and not have to fund it out of the General Fund. Chris Glass stated that is correct.

Comptroller Richard McComas noted that the two grant amounts of \$147,000 and \$127,000 would not be enough to purchase fire trucks, and the amount of the Homeland Security Grant is being reduced every year. He also added in reference to the comments made by JP Moore, that in addition to the note payment, the county has purchased one new pumper and repaired one tanker each year, so the fire departments have received more than 14 trucks over the last 5 years. He said they have also appropriated money in the budget for the construction of fire stations, and that the budget is going to be very tight over the next couple of years.

County Attorney George Spence stated that since the motion regarding the proposed dive team ordinance stated that the intent is to bypass the Committee of Thirteen, is it the committee's desire to include an emergency clause in the ordinance.

JP Stephenson stated that they should prepare it both ways. County Attorney George Spence stated that he will prepare it with an emergency clause, and they can always choose to strike it. JP Moore stated that typically, if there is any controversy attached to something, the Quorum Court has tried to avoid the use of the emergency clause unless it is a true emergency, and he did not know if this situation qualifies.

Chris Glass stated that when the problems with the dive teams arose at Hickory Creek, it was his understanding that the Quorum Court wanted action taken as soon as possible. He said if the Court determines that they want to proceed with the normal course of action, then that is at their pleasure.

Public Comments

None

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 6:16 p.m.