

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
UNION COUNTY, FLORIDA  
SPECIAL MEETING  
JANUARY 25, 2023

NOTE: If any person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at this meeting or hearing, he or she will need a record for the proceedings and may need to ensure that a verbatim record is made.

PRESIDING: Ryan Perez, Chair

RECORDING: Kellie Hendricks Rhoades, Clerk of Courts & Comptroller

ATTENDING: Commissioner Willie Croft; Commissioner Channing Dobbs; Commissioner Mac Johns; Commissioner James A. Tallman; James Williams, County Coordinator; Dianne Hannon, Board Secretary; Russ Wade, County Attorney; Pamela Woodington, Finance Director

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

Chair Perez called the meeting to order 5:00 pm. Commissioner Dobbs offered the invocation and led Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Lance Thornton, former EMS employee, informed the Board of the chain of events that led to his termination. He stated that he was accused of insubordination. He told the Board that he has worked through three directors at EMS, and that other employees are job scared. He encouraged Board members to pull his file, stating that he had no disciplinary actions in it. He felt that he had been disciplined and terminated for reporting problems with leadership. Mr. Thornton submitted a copy of a Facebook post made by Toby Witt, the EMS Director. He also stated that Mr. Williams told him that is a supervisor was messing up, he would be help accountable, but questioned where the accountability is. Mr. Thornton told the Board that they are losing staff due to leadership, and are about to lose more. He told the Board that Mr. Witt claims that he isn't qualified to know right from wrong. He said that he had been offered the job of the Fire Chief, but declined because he felt he wasn't ready for that and needed to learn more. He proposed a question to the Board that if he wasn't capable of knowing right from wrong, why would he be offered that position of leadership. He closed by asking the Board to review the wrong doings of Mr. Witt, Mr. Williams, and Lieutenant Broshar and do right for the people of Union County.

Carly Shaw Loznicka reported to the Board about disappointing service that she received from the EMS Department. She had a baby via caesarean section during the week of October 24, and then developed severe pre-eclampsia after arriving home from the hospital. She called 911 because her blood pressure was very high. Medics arrived. She happened to know one of them, and they were very nice. She said that they did not bring a stretcher inside, and that the blood pressure machine was broken and the manual cuffs they used were broken. She was asked to walk across the yard to the ambulance, and felt that she should not have walked given her condition. She stated that the ambulance was disgusting: blood and trash were on the floor, and the ambulance was falling apart and was unkempt. She reported this incident so long after the fact because of her health and dealing with a newborn baby. She said that she received a bill for \$1,200, and due to the poor service, stated that she would not be paying it. She noted that Mr. Williams was helpful in hearing and processing her complaint, but from talking to others in the community, she has found out that there have been multiple problems with the EMS service.

Margaret Ducksworth approached the Board and gave the details about a recent experience with the EMS Department, which she had previously relayed at the Regular Meeting on January 17, 2023. She said that since that meeting, some things have come to light. She said that she took her son to Lake Butler Hospital, and that they wanted to transfer him to another facility, but had to wait over 12 hours. She said that she heard Lt. Broshar instructing staff rudely to not transport him. She said that there was a time when the County had a great EMS service. She reminded the Board that Lt. Broshar had her removed from the hospital by security. She said that the

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County has a problem, and needs the state to conduct an internal investigation on Mr. Williams, Mr. Witt and Lt. Broshar. She questioned why the Board has leaders from other counties that create a hostile work environment. Hearing no further requests to speak, Chair Perez closed the floor to public comments.

#### **COURTHOUSE SECURITY ACCESS CONTROL**

Commissioner Perez recognized Judge Bishop to address the Board regarding courthouse security. Judge Bishop informed the Board of the need for access control to various doors throughout the courthouse. He said he has no opinion on the vendor used, but that we need a secure badge-access system. He was willing to answer any questions the Board had. Judge Bishop also stated that he understood there was discussion of creating a committee to handle the task. Commissioner Johns said that he had spoken with the Judge and the Sheriff, and would like to create a committee for the task, and was willing to sit on it himself, and suggested it include Mr. Williams, the Judge, the Sheriff and the Clerk. Security should be developed to their terms, and should be done as soon as possible. Judge Bishop reminded the Board that 30-40% of the criminal case docket is Department of Corrections inmate cases, where they commit crimes inside UCI or RMC, but have gang affiliations that are still on the street.

**Commissioner Johns moved to create a committee for courthouse security consisting of himself, Judge Bishop, Sheriff Whitehead, Mr. Williams and Clerk Rhoades. Commissioner Tallman seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.**

Mr. Williams asked the Board to consider sole sourcing the proposal from Empire for \$54,983. Clerk Rhoades stated that it is over \$30,000 and therefore does not follow the purchasing policy, as sealed bids are required over that amount. Commissioner Johns asked Attorney Wade what could be done to legally move forward. Attorney Wade answered that the Board can waive its own policy.

**Commissioner Tallman moved to waive the purchasing policy for this item. Commissioner Johns seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.**

**Commissioner Tallman moved to accept the proposal from Empire for \$54,983. Commissioner Johns seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.**

#### **EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**

Chair Perez recognized Toby Witt, EMS Director to address the Board. He gave an overview of his time in Union County. He was the director in Hamilton County, and this is the only job that he would have left for. He said he does business in Union County and went to school here. He told the Board that after he was offered the job, but before he started, he assisted Mr. Williams with getting coverage for the County when no staff was on. He has reduced mutual aid needed, and had to make changes regarding the clearance process to get ambulances staffed, and he brought in Lt. Broshar, who is a 25-year veteran. Mr. Witt apologized to Mrs. Loznicka, stating that we have old units, but like all other counties are having a hard time getting new ones, and that he has addressed the cleanliness issue. He also said she should not have been made to walk to the ambulance, and was sorry that it happened to her. Mr. Witt addressed the complaint made by Mrs. Ducksworth, stating that under his directorship, the policy has been changed from only alerts were transported out of Lake Butler Hospital to transporting as long as another truck is available for 911 calls, as someone in Lake Butler Hospital has access to medical care, and one ambulance should be available for someone that has an emergency at home. He said that immediately after the call to transport her son, a 911 call came in, and Lt. Broshar had to make a decision. He reviewed the situation of the 911 call, and determined that it could wait for him to check in with Lake Butler Hospital to let them know that a 911 call had been received, and that they would respond as quickly as possible. He concluded that Union County EMS acted in accordance with policy, and Mr. Thornton disagreed with the decision. He addressed the incident reports that were submitted in the previous meeting.

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Mr. Dobbs addressed a comment made during public comments, stating that he is deeply offended at the accusation that someone is lining their pockets with the revenues from EMS, and adding that the General Fund has contributed \$850,000 in a single year to EMS because it's not self-sustaining. Mr. Williams told the Board that Mr. Thornton was terminated when he refused to return to work, and that he reached out to legal counsel and followed their recommendation.

Mr. Thornton submitted an article in the Lake City Reporter where Mr. Witt spoke to Columbia County, and questioned differences in treatments where the symptoms were the same. He said that Mr. Witt lost his cool in the room with other employees, and that the director was belligerent. He stated that he was suspended because he refused to work under Lt. Broshar. Mr. Witt addressed the question about the difference in treatments.

Tita Mungia, former EMS employee, told the Board about an incident involving Lt. Broshar intubating a patient. After the call, she tried to review with the team and was shut down from attempting to train over the matter. She said that no training was offered even after asking, and that it is better in Bradford. She has grown as a medical provider, and stated that under Mr. Raulerson's interim directorship, he got on to her for a situation, but that she grew from it. Mr. Witt said that he pulled the medical report of the incident in question, and backed up the actions taken. He added that training is available on every shift and that every other month, a training is scheduled.

Chairman Perez said that is one of the first times he's dug into a lot of info. He said he's pulled the CAD, talked to Lake Butler Hospital, and talked with many others, and in the end, there's a lot of he said-she said, none of which can be proven. The concrete evidence that he has is that the Ducksworth call came into 911 at 8:22, and a truck was there at 10:22. He is lacking in knowledge of deviation from policy, but that he is concerned that employees needed to come to the Board. Chairman Perez said that he would like a concrete grievance policy, and that HR was a new position added after the grievance policy was written, and that grievance should not end in one person. He added that HR should report directly to the Board so that employees can talk to HR and HR report to the Board. He said he has received both praise and criticism for all employees involved. Chairman Perez asked Mr. Thornton what he wanted, and Mr. Thornton answered that he wants to work other places without this being on his record. Chairman Perez stated that he supports the directors and policies, and told Mr. Thornton that if he suspects malpractice, that it should be reported to the appropriate agency, as this Board does not have the knowledge to properly investigate that.

Chairman Perez concluded that he would recommend that HR be changed to report directly to the Board and Mr. Thornton's employee record be cleared. Commissioner Dobbs agreed. Commissioner Tallman commended Mr. Thornton for speaking out, and stated he knew him to always be a good kid. He added that EMS is an important and difficult job, but he has to support the directors. **Commissioner Dobbs moved for HR to report directly to the Board, and Commissioner Tallman seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.**

**Commissioner Dobbs moved for Lance Thornton's employee record be cleared.** Board members discussed the matter, agreeing that they would like his employment file not contain a termination. Caden Massey, EMS employee, addressed the Board on Mr. Thornton's behalf, and tried to clear up that he did not abandon his post. Patricia Harris, Union County citizen and EMS employee, and she stated that she listened to the entire incident. She said Mr. Thornton's meeting was on a Tuesday, and the next day was told he was sent home, and that she never received any paperwork regarding the situation. Commissioner Tallman interjected that sometimes tensions get high and you need to leave a situation. He said to Mr. Thornton that the reality is that he can't come back to work here right now, and asked what he wanted. Mr. Thornton answered that he lives here, and doesn't want to see people treated how they are in the reports that he gave, and that he wants accountability for Mr. Witt. Chairman Perez answered that the Board can only do so much, and if he thinks anyone is in danger, he encouraged him to report it to the proper medical agency.

**Commissioner Dobbs moved to have Mr. Thornton's employee file cleared. Commissioner Johns seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.**

**Commissioner Dobbs moved, and Commissioner Cannon seconded, to approve the fuel card policy as presented. The motion passed unanimously.**

**CREDIT CARD PAYMENTS ACCEPTED OVER THE PHONE**

Mr. Williams said that there is a need for credit card payments to be taken over the phone. Pamela Woodington, Finance Director, stated that it was originally set up for payments to be made over the Internet, but those forms have not been completed yet. Board members stated that payments can be made over the phone anywhere, and it should be that way here. Clerk Rhoades said that the technical capability is not there, but if the Internet forms are made available, staff taking the payments could use that system to process a credit card payment from a phone conversation. Mr. Williams said he would get those forms working.

**RURAL COUNTY DAYS**

Upon a request from Mr. Williams, **Commissioner Tallman moved to approve the release of a check for \$750 for Rural Counties Day. Commissioner Johns seconded the motion. All commissioners voted for the motion.**

Mr. Williams also asked that the Board grant him the authority to sign all task work orders for all pre-approved grants for companies accepted by the Board. Clerk Rhoades indicated that Attorney Wade already has a resolution drafted that will grant that authority.

**COURTHOUSE RESTORATION GRANT**

Mr. Williams told the Board that we have received a \$50,000 grant for design for courthouse restoration, and that the construction portion will require a match, but it has not been awarded yet. He stated that the County has until 2026 to expend the courthouse security appropriations. **Commissioner Dobbs moved to accept the restoration design grant, and Commissioner Johns seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.**

Upon the recommendation by Mr. Williams, **Commissioner Tallman moved for Phil Bishop with North Florida Professional Services do the design, as there is already a continuing services contract and he is familiar with the building. Commissioner Dobbs seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.**

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Williams discussed that he can't get prices on state contract for vehicles, as they aren't available. Commissioner Tallman indicated that he talked to Wilson Whidden, building inspector, and he doesn't want a new truck, but just requested the rear brakes be fixed. Mr. Williams wanted the Board to allow him move forward with purchasing vehicles. Commissioner Johns indicated that he should get prices and report back. After other discussion, Commissioner Johns reiterated that he should get prices and report back to the Board. Chairman Perez agreed that no action should be taken.

Chairman Perez adjourned the meeting at 7:12 pm.

*Adopted by vote of the Board, February 20, 2023 regular meeting*