

Garland County
Public Health, Welfare & Safety Committee Meeting

Minutes

April 22, 2019

Members Present: Chairman Larry Raney, Vice Chairman Jimmy Young, Justices Esther Dixon, Jimmy Sorrells, and Matt McKee

Members Absent: Justices Thomas Anderson and Jason Braziel

Also present: Citizens, Elected Officials, Staff, and Media

A regular meeting of the Garland County Public Health, Welfare & Safety Committee was held April 22, 2019, at 5:30 P.M. in room 201 of the Garland County Courthouse.

Justice Jimmy Young led the opening prayer.

Chairman Raney called the meeting to order and asked to change the order of the agenda by moving the discussion of the Spay & Neuter Voucher Program to the first order of business. With no objections, the order was changed. Chairman Raney gave a brief overview of the program and noted it had a 57% participation rate. Raney stated that all the funds appropriated are not being utilized. Raney then introduced Dr. Bob Zepecki, a local veterinarian, to talk about microchipping animals. Zepecki said that the Spay & Neuter Program is the best one he has seen in 40 years and stated that this is the only county in Arkansas that he knows of that offers this program. Zepecki also stated that there is really no way to track an animal after they have been spayed or neutered, except by inserting a microchip. Microchips are tiny transponders, about the size of a grain of rice that can be implanted in your pet's skin and can be scanned anywhere in the United States. Zepecki noted that he has talked to four companies about the price of the microchips and would like the committee to consider adding it to the voucher program in the future. Zepecki stated that the microchips respond to a specific frequency and prints out a number that tracks back to your animal. He also stated that registering the chip is a free service. Zepecki suggested taping the microchip to the voucher to distribute them or splitting the cost with the veterinarians who are accepting the vouchers. Raney asked the committee to consider the suggestion to add microchipping to the Spay & Neuter Program. Judge Mahoney added that the Sheriff's Department is going to make a stronger effort to hand out more vouchers. Mahoney suggested that if the committee moves forward with adding the microchips to the program, the county could fund it, but not provide or be responsible for the microchips or needles. Chairman Raney asked for any other comments; with none, the discussion ended.

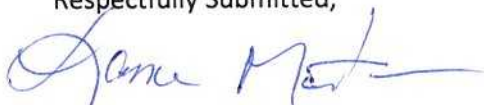
Chairman Raney introduced the next order of business, the Lake Hamilton Fire Protection District dues. Raney stated that more fire departments are having their fire dues added to their property tax bills. County Tax Collector, Rebecca Talbert, stated that there are five (5) different fire department levels, but her office only collects for two (2) types, the volunteer fire departments and the fire protection districts. County Attorney, John Howard, stated that the law regarding the tax collection in certain fire departments and improvement districts was approved on April 17, 2019. Howard noted that this bill only applies to fire improvement districts. Talbert stated that at this time residents could pay their taxes and opt out of paying the fire dues without any penalties. Starting January 1, 2020, if the fire dues are

not paid when taxes are paid, a delinquent notice will be issued to the property owner. Talbert's office will also notify the fire districts of all property owners who failed to pay their dues, and those districts will be responsible for the collection of said dues. Howard stated that the Quorum Court has no flexibility on this process; they can only clarify what the law states. George Pritchett, a county resident, stated that a fire protection district would become a taxing agency by making the dues mandatory. To respond to Pritchett's comment, Howard read section 1c of the newly passed bill, which states that a property owner shall pay the taxes under this subchapter as a prerequisite to paying his or her ad valorem real property taxes. Pritchett stated that he spoke with the Lake Hamilton Fire and Rescue Department and it was his understanding that the departments only wanted the tax collector to collect their dues, turn the funds over to them and provide a list of delinquent residents. Pritchett stated that the department did not want to become a taxing agency. The new law is forcing residents to pay their dues and opens the fire protection districts to freedom of information requests. Pritchett also noted that volunteer fire protection districts are not professionals and are not held to the same standard as the city fire department. Justice McKee stated that the county did not legislate this law, but will look at issues that may develop due to the passage of the law. Ted Burns, a county resident, stated that the volunteer fire departments will now be a professional group, but are not a professional group of people. Burns stated that the amount of dues collected varies depending on the district and there is no equality. He stated that more transparency is needed by the fire districts. In regards to how the dues are assessed, Howard read another section of the bill, which states if the annual benefits assessed exceed one hundred dollars (\$100) per parcel, the quorum court of the county in which the fire protection district lies shall review and approve or disapprove the reassessment. Burns stated that the 70 West Fire Protection District is currently collecting 42% of the addresses in the district and expects an increase with the passage of Act 461. Justice Sorrells asked if the fire protection districts have to adhere to any regulations. Talbert stated they are required to submit a transparency report on funds collected and used. Phillip Montgomery, a local attorney representing Lake Hamilton Fire Protection District, 70 West Fire Department, and Piney Fire Department, noted that the emergency clause in the bill explains why this issue passed the legislature. Montgomery also noted that the statute guides how the commissioners control and run their fire protection district. Chairman Raney asked for any other comments; with none, the discussion ended.

Chairman Raney introduced the next order of business, a retrospective of the nuisance ordinance. Shelly Tucker, Environmental Inspections Division Manager, stated the ordinance has helped close more nuisance properties cases than with the prior ordinance. Judge Mahoney stated that the Environmental Inspections Department is working with property owners, has received better compliance with them and commends her department for the job they are doing. Addressing a questions of pro-active engagement versus complaint driven response, Tucker noted that when out in the county, the department will stop for an illegal burn or dump, but does not actively stop when noticing a nuisance property. Chairman Raney asked for any other comments; with none, the discussion ended.

A motion to adjourn was made by Justice McKee: the motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lanie Martin
Garland County Finance Director