



MINUTES
OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING
with the EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMISSION
December 16, 2008

MEMBERS, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL

Mr. George Blanchard District I, Chairman
Mr. Thomas S. Crumpton, Jr., District II
Mr. Mario Suarez, District III
Mr. Marion E. Lyles, District IV
Mr. H. Frank Ables, Jr., District V

Oconee County Council met on Tuesday, December 16, 2008 at 5:00 PM in Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC with all Council Members [except Mr. Suarez], County Administrator Dale K. Surrent, Bradley A. Norton County Attorney and Elizabeth G. Hulse, Clerk to Council present.

Press:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting, date, time, place of meeting and agenda were posted on the bulletin board at the County Administrative Offices, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC, and the County Council website [www.oconeese.com/council]. In addition it was made available to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

Member of the press present: Ray Chandler-Anderson Independent, Peter Kent - WSNW Radio, Dick Mangrum-WGOG Radio & Brett McLaughlin-Daily Journal.

Call to Order:

Chairman Blanchard called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Workshop with the Emergency Services Commission to discuss ISO Study:

Mr. Blanchard welcomed Mr. Jay Heatherington, Emergency Services Commission Chairman, and representatives from Mizelle, Hodges & Associates, Inc. Mr. Heatherington introduced Mr. Frank Hodges, VP, and Mr. Robbie Robinson who presented a flyer outlining their company's credentials [filed with these minutes].

Mr. Heatherington made a brief opening statement and provided the Council with a handout [filed with these minutes]. He stated that he has seen a copy of the full draft report from Mizelle and that it clearly outlines where we are and where they feel the county should go in the future. Mr. Heatherington noted that he had concerns with some data and asked the Council to review all the material and the final report in detail and not to act in haste to implement or disregard anything in the report. He did state emphatically that he was seriously concerned that Seneca refused to cooperate with Mizelle for this report. At this point Mr. Heatherington turned the meeting over to Mizelle to outline key issues.

Mr. Robinson noted several key areas and stated that the County has excellent volunteer fire protection system in place at this time [and has for many years]. One area that was not fully tested involved flow testing on hydrants and was not done in places due to drought conditions and the perception that testing would waste too much water.

Key issues [summarized]:

- Mizelle was impressed with the amount of attention given to safety of the volunteers with improved personal protective equipment
- Fire Stations: most stations were noted to serve their purposes but a few need either renovations or replacement
- Unique Fire Protection Issues: noted the large area of county with single homes, condominiums in the eastern part of the county and a large multi-million dollar community in the northern part of the county. Each of these present their own challenges/issues related to fire protection.
- ISO plans to upgrade fire suppression rate schedule next year – several change will be beneficial to Oconee County. Example: Staff trained that respond to an incident not from their host station would be counted for ISO purposed as responding.
- Their report will not address medical services as they are run from OMC.

Recommendations [summarized]:

- System should be seamless between county and municipalities. Mizelle noted that it was “great to see” that the county had provided equipment to some of the municipalities to use to assist the county in the unincorporated areas of the county.
- Station 21 should be located between the three municipalities as this is the best way to get equipment on scene quickly. Mr. Robinson noted that when this recommendation was presented to the Emergency Services Commission at a meeting earlier in the week that there were concerns that municipalities can’t or won’t agree to this suggestion.
- Develop a strong water liaison key person to coordinate with the eight water providers in Oconee County.
- Mizelle met with key staff and noted that they all function to assist the volunteers serve the county. They do not envision not using the volunteer system. Mr. Robinson noted that the caliber of staff, volunteers and career staff was excellent reflecting an interest and motivation to do a good job.
- Maintain Emergency Services headquarters in the County Seat.
- Award ceremony / Volunteer recognition.

Mr. Heatherington closed with some brief statements. He noted that there are opportunities to move forward in small steps with these recommendations. Mr. Heatherington noted key issues that the Commission sees as needed to include integrated training, high quality communication capability, command SOP’s, etc. He commended Council for creating Emergency Services and stated that they improved fire protection in the county, however, political mistakes were made that created negative press and lingering mistrust in some areas. Lastly, Mr. Heatherington made several personal comments [noting that he was not speaking as the chair of the Commission] to include his disappointment that animosity between the county and the City of Seneca still exist and the negative impact this has had on operations and cooperation.

Discussion followed between Council, Mr. Heatherington and Mr. Robinson. Council voiced appreciation for the hard work on the study. Mr. Surrett asked Mr. Robinson to address how quickly after changes are made they would effect ISO ratings. Mr. Robinson stated it would require a minimum of three years of thorough records before an ISO rating change would be made. ISO is looking for consistency over time – not in the short term.

Adjourn:

Mr. Blanchard thanked everyone for their attendance and called the workshop meeting at a close at 5:57 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Elizabeth G. Hulse, Clerk to Council