

COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Monday, January 14, 2002

7:40 P.M.

The Honorable Columbus County Board of Commissioners met on the above stated date and time at the Evergreen Elementary School Cafeteria for the purpose of hold a Public Meeting for the Evergreen Community to hear the opinions of concerned citizens regarding the purchase of a new fire truck for the Evergreen Fire Department.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Amon E. McKenzie, **Chairman**
C.E. "Gene" Wilson, **Vice Chairman**
Spruell R. Britt
David L. Dutton, Jr.
Bill Memory

APPOINTEES PRESENT:

James E. Hill, Jr., County Attorney
Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator
June B. Hall, Acting Clerk to Board

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Sammie Jacobs
Lynwood Norris

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Chairman Amon E. McKenzie called the public meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. Reverend Gains delivered the invocation. Chairman McKenzie stated this meeting was scheduled to hear the concerns of local citizens of the Evergreen Community in regards to the purchase of a new fire truck to be utilized by the Evergreen Fire Department and to settle the dispute arising out of this purchase. I understand there has been some misunderstanding among the local concerned Evergreen citizens and the Evergreen Fire Department Personnel. I would like to know if a spokesperson has been appointed for the two (2) groups here tonight. Larry Hinson stated their spokesperson was William Hall Williamson. Chief Glen Price stated he would be the spokesperson for the Evergreen Fire Department. Chairman McKenzie asked the spokesperson for the concerned Evergreen citizens to stand and state the concerns they had.

I. William Hall Williamson (spokesperson the concerned Evergreen citizens):

following is a list of concerns we have toward the purchase of the new fire truck by the Evergreen Fire Department -

- A. The biggest issue we have is the attitude displayed by Mr. Connelly toward the community.
- B. What has the County Commissioners done about the investigation from the SBI?

In response to this question, Chairman Amon E. McKenzie stated the SBI investigation is still ongoing. They scheduled a meeting with him and he did not show. The results, when finished, will be submitted to the District Attorney's Office which is Rex Gore. I understand that this process is a lengthy one and we cannot rush it.

- C. We would like a full audit of the Evergreen Fire Department done back as far as 1995.
- D. What about the rumor regarding money loaned to members in the Evergreen Fire Department?
- E. People disabled or drawing disability serving in the Fire Department. We believe there has been discrimination toward some citizens being able to serve. The State charter states anybody eighteen (18) years or older living in the Evergreen Fire District can be voted on for membership. When I was serving on the Evergreen Fire Department, it was required to have a twenty-four (24) man roster or better. I understand that a twenty (20) man roster has been submitted with two (2) junior firefighters listed and two (2) firefighters from the Cerro Gordo Fire District. I feel we have more than adequate people to be able to submit more than enough name for

the roster.

- F. I am informed many of the citizens have been eliminated from the Evergreen Fire Department merely on small technicalities. One (1) person was eliminated that had a college degree from Clemson and was told he was being eliminated for lack of hours.
- G. Request the Evergreen Fire Department spokesperson to answer these concerns that I have expressed.

After the spokesperson for the concerned citizens of the Evergreen Community has finished stating their concerns, Chairman Amon E. McKenzie asked the spokesperson for the Evergreen Fire Department to stand and speak.

II. Glen Price, Fire Chief (spokesperson for Evergreen Fire Department): in response to the questions and concerns stated by William Hall Williamson, the following was stated -

- A. In regards to the elimination of certain personnel in the Evergreen Fire Department, it was due to them not having sufficient hours to validate their certification. On June 1st of every year, we need the hours to submit to the State. This has always been the standard procedure. We do not have time to run down each person for their information. If they have not submitted their hours, we cannot hold the report back for them.
- B. We presently have a rating of 9S.
- C. I am requesting that Jimmy Connelly, President of Evergreen Fire Department, speak at this time. He stated the following:

1. **Jimmy Connelly (President of Evergreen Fire Department):**

- A. We would like to better the community we live in.
- B. By purchasing this fire truck, we feel we would be able to get the insurance rates down from where they are now.
- C. Would like to set a fee district.
- D. The fire truck in question is an E-1 Truck which we purchased from Ken Proctor with C.W. Williams and Company, Incorporated.
- E. The loan we acquired for this purchase is a tax-free loan.
- F. We have a document that needed to signed by Chairman Amon E. McKenzie which he refused to sign. I would like to know why you refused to sign this document we need.

2. **Chairman Amon E. McKenzie:** in response to the above stated inquiry, Chairman McKenzie stated the following:

- A. I did not refuse to sign the document;
- B. I did, indeed, refrain from signing the document due to much controversy that has been voiced;
- C. We, as County Commissioners, are under contract to service the entire community;
- D. It is the normal procedure to have a Public Hearing first and I understand that a Public Hearing was not conducted prior to this purchase;
- E. We, as County Commissioners, would like to resolve this conflict first before signing the document;
- F. Numerous Evergreen residents are voicing complaints about the procedure that was used in the purchase of this fire truck;
- G. I have been informed the President of Evergreen Fire Department stated that the fire truck had already been ordered and there is nothing you can do about it; and
- H. In a purchase of this magnitude, the entire community should be included in the decision made.

3. **Elsie Carter:** inquired about the age of the present fire truck being used, the cost of the new fire truck being purchased and at what interest rate

4. **Chief William Price:** in response to Ms. Carter's inquiries, he stated the following:

- A. We now have a twenty (20 years old truck which pumps one thousand (1,000) gallons per minute and holds one thousand (1,000) gallons.
 - B. We desperately need a dependable backup truck
 - C. The new truck will pump one thousand two hundred fifty (1,250) gallons per minute and holds one thousand two hundred fifty (1,250) gallons and has a rating of one thousand five hundred fifty (1,550) gallons.
 - D. At the present time, we do not have a reserve truck for backup.
5. **Larry Hinson**: I understand the fire hydrants will be color coded with the capacity of filling a fire truck at the rate of four hundred (400) gallons in a time frame of four to five (4-5) minutes. In addition to the filling time, you would have to include travel time. It appears that this would result in mostly travel time.
6. **Jeff Taylor**: the loan for the new fire truck will be twenty (20) years at a rate of four and 7/10 (4.7%) percent.
7. **Kenneth Proctor (representative from E-1 Fire Truck Company)**: stated the following:
- A. I have been placed into a precarious situation and am here only as a representative of the company where the new fire truck was purchased. I will share with you the facts about the new truck.
 - B. The last fire truck purchased in Columbus County was purchased by Roseland.
 - C. We have spent five to six (5-6) months negotiating this purchase.
 - D. This is a tax-free loan.
 - E. In our negotiating, I was informed that this purchase needed to be as cheap as possible.
 - F. I was asked to contact United Financial Company for the financing of this fire truck.
 - G. One (1) criteria for a tax-free interest loan is to hold a public hearing.
 - H. This fire truck in question is now sitting in Rocky Mount with the Evergreen Fire Department logo on the sides ready to be picked up.
 - I. This truck has a rating of one thousand two hundred fifty (1,250) gallons per minute.
 - J. The life expectancy of this truck will be fifteen to twenty (15-20) years.
 - K. The tank is guaranteed for life. If, for some reason, there is problem, we will fix and pay two hundred and 00/100 (\$200.00) dollars per day during repair.
 - L. The chases on this fire truck is valued at sixty-four thousand and 00/100 (\$64,000.00) dollars and the pump is valued at fifteen thousand and 00/100 (\$15,000.00) dollars.
8. **William Hall Williamson**: inquired as to why the fire truck they now were using could be updated to save money in lieu of purchasing a new truck.
9. **William Price**: even if we did do updates on the truck we now use, we would still have a 1963 fire truck.
10. **Rodney Fields**: I want to ask the County Commissioners the following question: "If the Evergreen Fire Department follows through with the purchase of this fire truck and then gets in financial trouble, will our taxes go up to help pay for this truck?"
11. **James E. Hill, Jr., County Attorney**: in reply to Mr. Fields' question, Jim Hill stated if this situation did occur, the Evergreen Fire Department would have to come back to the district and hold a public hearing which would require a majority vote of the citizens.
12. **Hubert Edwards**: I have a question. If there has not been a public hearing held, why can't we have a public hearing tonight on this matter.
13. **Chairman Amon E. McKenzie**: in reply to Mr. Edwards request, Chairman McKenzie stated that we could not hold a public hearing tonight.
14. **Paul Willoughby**: inquired if a public hearing has not been held on this matter, when will a public hearing take place?
15. **L.C. Carter**: we've been told we now have a twenty (20) year old fire truck and by the time

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we need more able bodied people to serve.

29. **Resident (did not state name)**: there are no restrictions on firefighters.
30. **Johnny Fields**: stated that if his house was on fire, he did not want Evergreen Fire Department to come and put it out.
31. **Hubert Edmund**: if a firefighter pulls a fire hose and gets disabled, who is responsible?
32. **Buddy Davis**: I recommend the following to be done to eliminate confusion:
 - A. Change the Bylaws every year;
 - B. Last year the Bylaws were changed;
 - C. Enforce a ninety (90) day trial period; and
 - D. After ninety (90) days, be revoted on.
33. **Charles Bullard**: three very qualified people attempted to sign on the Evergreen Fire Department. Out of these three (3), only one (1) was voted in. I think this is discrimination.
34. **Chairman Amon E. McKenzie**: requested that an unofficial vote be taken on the new fire truck.
35. **William Hall Williamson**: presented an article that had been published in a newspaper to the County Commissioners for review.

Chairman Amon E. McKenzie stated it was the general consensus of the attendants that they supported the Evergreen Fire Department. It is evident that the Evergreen Fire Department followed the old policy of not having to hold a public hearing.

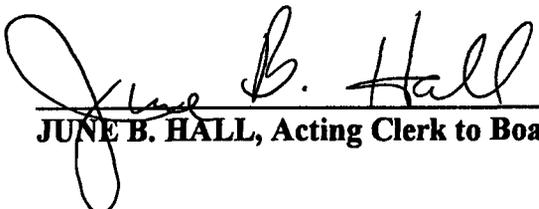
36. **Resident (did not state name)**: we were not asked a fair question earlier. We do support the Evergreen Fire Department, but we do not support the procedure they followed in the purchasing of the new fire truck.
37. **William Hall Williamson**: let's have a show of hands for the procedure followed by the Evergreen Fire Department for the purchase of the new fire truck.
38. **Terry Thompson**: I am definitely not against updating the Evergreen Fire Department. My biggest fear is our property taxes being increase to help pay for this truck.
39. **Tommy Avant**: I do not think that the citizens of the Evergreen Community will be notified of any changes if they occur.

After both parties had stated their concerns regarding the purchase of the new fire truck, Chairman Amon E. McKenzie announced that the procedure followed was indeed not the proper one, but the fire truck was purchased, had the Evergreen Fire Department logo on both sides, it was ready for pickup and at this point in time there was nothing that could be done to reverse this purchase. I do recommend in the future that if any endeavors happen of this magnitude that all residents be notified and have a chance to voice their opinions.

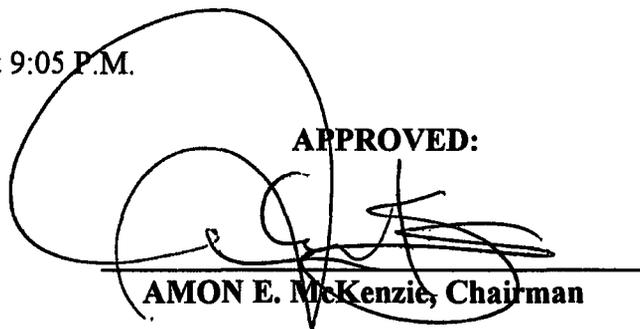
ADJOURNMENT

The Public Meeting was adjourned at 9:05 P.M.

APPROVED:


 JUNE B. HALL, Acting Clerk to Board

APPROVED:


 AMON E. McKenzie, Chairman

