

NORTH COUNTY FIRE & MEDICAL DISTRICT  
GOVERNING BOARD  
SPECIAL SESSION

Thursday, October 13, 2016

MINUTES

(Agenda items may have been taken out of order at the discretion of the Chairman.)

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The Governing Board Meeting was called to order by Board Chairman David Wilson on Thursday, October 13, 2016, at 1:00 p.m. at the District Administrative Office, 18818 N. Spanish Garden Drive, Sun City West, Arizona.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Board Chairman David Wilson, Board Clerk Russell (Smitty) Smith, Board Member Dick Cherry, Board Member Jack Meyer, Board Member Dawn Miller

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Fire Chief Rob Biscoe, Assistant Chief Mary Dalton, Assistant Chief Tim Van Scoter, Accounting Supervisor Coaleen Poland, and Administrative Coordinator Deb Johnson

Legal Counsel: North County Fire & Medical District Attorney Bill Whittington

Guests Present: Gabe Buldra and Ben Archer-Clowes, The James Vincent Group; Simon Davis, ESM Consulting Group; Luis Cordova, Rounds Consulting Group; Fire Chief Tom O'Donohue, Wittmann Fire & Medical District

Public Comment: Rosemary Abrami, Russell Holm, Maureen McGinn, Steve VanDaele, Norman Kramer, Richard Ahlgren, Estelle Smith, Gene Jordan, Al Patterson, Norman Benoit, Diane Cheney, Bill Hamel, Rod Ritter, Fran Noe, Chip Dashiell, Jim Smeets

Media Present: Chris Caraveo, Independent Newsmedia

**III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**IV. PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING THE PROPOSED CONSOLIDATION OF NORTH COUNTY AND WITTMANN FIRE & MEDICAL DISTRICTS**

- A. Staff Consultant presentation regarding proposed consolidation  
North County Fire & Medical Assistant Chief Dalton gave an in-depth PowerPoint presentation regarding the proposed consolidation which included the following

topics: Arizona Fire District Funding Restrictions, Fire District Consolidation / Shared Service Concepts, North County Operational Overview, North County Financial Goals and History, North County Current Financial Status / Challenges, and Consolidation Feasibility Analysis Process. Following this portion of the presentation, Gabe Buldra of The James Vincent Group and Simon Davis, ESM Consulting Group reviewed their consolidation feasibility analysis followed by Luis Cordova of Rounds Consulting Group's review of their valuation projections study.

- B. Assistant Chief Dalton summarized the comments received from the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors in reference to the proposed consolidation.
- C. Chairman Wilson opened the Public Hearing at 2:44 p.m. He requested that in order for everyone to be heard that individuals attempt to hold their comments to three minutes and that an attempt to answer any questions would be made at the end of the hearing. The following comments were made:
- Rosemary Abrami spoke in favor of the consolidation and stated that she felt the amount of the tax increase was trivial compared to the benefit. Ms. Abrami also stated that this consolidation is different from the Epcor consolidation because that is an outside group and the Fire District is part of the community.
  - Russell Holm stated that he felt the consolidation should be put to a vote of the citizens. He further stated that he believed that expanding into areas that do not have a tax base to cover their expenses is not what was coming up on some of the charts shown. He stated that before he retired, he worked for a city on the planning commission and they had a lot of requests for annexation in different areas and if they couldn't supply service and justify the tax base in those areas, they wouldn't do it.
  - Maureen McGinn spoke against the consolidation. She indicated that she believes the Fire District taxes will continue to go up. Ms. McGinn indicated that she feels the District needs to find ways to cut back. Ms. McGinn that she is on a fixed income and the little bit they get here and there and everything keeps going up.
  - Steve Van Daele indicated that he feels it is too soon to consolidate and that it would be better to wait until a future date. He stated he understands the concept of consolidation but if the Wittmann Fire & Medical District current tax rate is \$3.25 he doesn't see how lowering their tax rate will benefit North County Fire & Medical District residents.
  - Norman Kramer spoke against consolidation. He indicated that stated that what doesn't make sense to him is that the current district is 45,000 people and Wittmann is 5,000 people and the size of the District would double for these 5,000 people. He stated that all the other communities the District has acquisitioned are newer homes and better homes and bring more tax money in.
  - Richard Ahlgren voiced a hesitation regarding consolidation. He thanked the Board for acting as volunteers and working in the best interest of this organization. Mr. Ahlgren further stated that he's been here about 25 years and he thinks that we have one of the best fire departments that we can have and, fortunately, in his 25 years he's never had to use them and he hopes he doesn't have to. Mr. Ahlgren stated that the Board is elected

by Sun City West and he thinks that all of the Board wants to do their best for Sun City West and that there isn't any doubt in his mind about that at all. He indicated that he would like to be all the projections from the consultants but he has his doubts. Mr. Ahlgren expressed that he thinks the District has to inform people more than it is doing. He stated the mailing sent by the District to District residents doesn't really tell anybody very much in his opinion. In 2000, his fire district taxes were \$300, in 2016 they are \$646. Mr. Ahlgren recognized that things cost more and he understands things are happening that weren't projected before. Mr. Ahlgren indicated that he feels the Board is responsible for Sun City West and not responsible for going out other places.

- Estelle Smith spoke against the consolidation and had just a few questions. She asked if nothing new is being added, how is the District going to serve 45 additional miles and get the same service that they get now.

(Recorder battery exhausted)

- Gene Jordan - spoke against consolidation
- Al Patterson – spoke against consolidation

(New battery in recorder)

- Norman Benoit spoke in favor of the consolidation. He stated that the District is trying to survive long term – for at least the next 10 years. He stated that these two fire districts have tried to decide what is the best for both of them. He stated that when you look at it at first, everything goes to Wittmann but if you look at the figures after three years, everything starts coming back down and current District residents get less to pay. Mr. Benoit indicated that if you look at what these gentlemen have been doing on the District Board, they have been taking very good care of the residents' money and he believes in their expertise. Mr. Benoit stated he respects the report that came out and those figures. Mr. Benoit indicated he understands that the best service costs money.
- Diane Cheney spoke in favor of consolidated and stated she has lived here 23 years. She expressed that she has used the District's services, they've been wonderful, and her husband has too. She wants that kind of service to continue and if she has to pay a little bit more to retain that service, she is willing to do so.
- Bill Hamel has lived in Sun City West since 1989. He stated that he was on the Fire Board for 14 years. He got on the Board with the idea that he wanted to stop the annexations. After he got on the Board he realized that it was one of the best things to do, it has saved the Sun City West residents a lot of tax money. Mr. Hamel expressed his confidence in the District staff and stated that every effort the Chief makes is to keep the taxes as low as possible and keep the Fire District as good as possible or better. He added he is not involved with Wittmann and didn't want to comment whether the Districts should or should not consolidate but that he believes that the Board and the staff is doing everything they can to keep the taxes as low as possible and he agrees that long range is something the District has to think about.

- Rod Ritter spoke in favor of the consolidation and stated that he has lived in Sun City West since 2001. He’s been in public safety since 1965 with two departments. After he moved here and retired, he had the necessity of someone calling the ambulance for him after a bad fall. While he was conscious and laying there watching the people treat him, he saw the type of care he was getting. He has never seen any better care throughout his career than what he received. He became a certified fire inspector for the District. He spends from 50-100 hours a month volunteering because he sees what they do, sees how they care, sees the service they give, and he hasn’t seen any other place he’s worked for where they get as much bang for their buck as they do in this District right here.
- Fran Noe stated that she is a resident of Cross River. She stated some numbers that she thought she understood from the presentation. She stated she was not against the consolidation.
- Chip Dashiell spoke against consolidation and stated that he seconds what everyone has said about what a fantastic fire department Sun City West has and that he has also benefitted from its services. He expressed that he can’t figure out how consolidating with Wittmann will be helpful in the long term. He stated he certainly doesn’t think it’s going to be helpful in the short term. Mr. Dashiell said that most of the residents are on fixed incomes and came to Sun City West to retire and their incomes are not going up. He asked what can be done to deal with the fixed income issue.

Board Chairman Wilson asked staff and the consultants present to address some of the questions raised by individuals commenting during the Public Hearing. Consultants Gabe Buldra and Simon Davis responded to some of the questions. Fire Chief Biscoe and Assistant Chief Dalton also responded to additional questions.

- Jim Smeets stated that he hadn’t heard anyone give an explanation of whether a consolidation is more responsibility to the District than an annexation. District Attorney Bill Whittington answered the question for Mr. Smeets.

Board Chairman Wilson closed the Public Hearing at 3:32 p.m.

## **VI. AUTHORIZATION TO HOLD AN EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**Board Member Meyer moved that the Governing Board convene into Executive Session pursuant to A.R.S. §38-431.03(A)(3) for those items listed on the agenda. Board Member Miller seconded the motion.**

Vote conducted. **MOTION CARRIED.**

AYES: Wilson, Smith, Cherry, Meyer, Miller  
NAYS: None

The Governing Board adjourned to convene into Executive Session at 3:33 p.m. The Special Meeting reconvened at 4:25 p.m. (Board Member Miller attended the rest of the Special Meeting telephonically.)

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Discussion & Possible Action re: adoption of Resolution 16-1013-1 approving the consolidation with Wittmann Fire & Medical District and determining the public health, comfort, convenience, necessity or welfare will be promoted by the consolidation

Board Chairman Wilson stated that the concept of consolidation is something that the Board hasn't entered into lightly. There was extensive thought and research by both the Wittmann and North County Governing Boards concerning this issue. Chairman Wilson further stated that when he was elected to the Board, his primary goal was to ensure that the District continue to provide the highest quality of emergency services to the residents that he represents at not only a reasonable cost but at a low cost. He stated that he also wants to ensure most importantly that the District is sustainable for the future; that is what's at stake with this consolidation. How are both Districts going to be sustainable for the future so the Districts can supply emergency services for the residents? This is a very different type of service from serving on the Board of a Recreation Center or a water district. The District Governing Board decides the type of services to provide to prevent the loss of life or the destruction of property. That's a very important mission and has a very different responsibility.

Board Clerk Smith stated that he thinks consolidation is a great idea and the District is on the leading edge in Arizona with this decision and that there are going to be a lot more consolidations in the future so the District is leading the way and appreciates the staff's efforts to make the consolidation work.

Board Member Cherry stated that since he received the information from the consultants regarding consolidation, he goes to bed at night thinking about consolidation, gets up in the morning thinking about it, and he sits and looks at the data. He stated that he was pretty well decided what he wanted to do regarding this decision before the meeting but he appreciated the comments from the public. He further stated that he wished the public would respond on a more regular basis to the monthly meetings so that they could be more informed regarding what the Board is trying to do for them. He thinks it would be important to them and they would better understand what goes on at the Board meetings.

Board Member Miller stated she respected all the public comments and that they weren't taken lightly; they were taken very seriously. Ms. Miller stated that the Board has looked at the issue in depth and that many hours have gone into it and everyone has worked very hard on it and the Board is just trying to look toward the future of the District and do the best for all those the Board represents.

Board Member Meyer thanked the people who came to the public hearing and echoed Board Member Cherry's comments and stated that he appreciated the comments from the public.

**Board Member Cherry moved to adopt Resolution 16-1013-1 approving the consolidation with Wittmann Fire & Medical District following the Board's determination that the consolidation would promote public health, comfort, convenience, necessity or welfare. Board Clerk Smith seconded the motion.**

Not further discussion. Vote conducted. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

AYES: Wilson, Smith, Cherry, Meyer, Miller  
NAYS: None

- B. Discussion & Possible Action re: adoption of Resolution 16-1013-2 declaring the North County Fire & Medical District and Wittmann Fire & Medical District consolidated and joined; declaring the name of the newly consolidated fire district to be North County Fire & Medical District; recognizing the newly consolidated District Governing Board; and authorizing the transfer of all assets and liabilities from Wittmann Fire & Medical District to the North County Fire & medical District. **Board Member Meyer moved to adopt Resolution 16-1013-2 declaring the North County Fire & Medical District and Wittmann Fire & Medical District consolidated and joined; declaring the name of the newly consolidated fire district to be North County Fire & Medical District; recognizing the newly consolidated district governing board; and authorizing the transfer of all assets and liabilities from Wittmann Fire & Medical District to the North County Fire & Medical District. Board Member Cherry seconded the motion.** No discussion.

Vote conducted. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

AYES: Wilson, Smith, Cherry, Meyer, Miller

Board Chairman announced that an additional duly noticed meeting would be held at 5:00 p.m.

## VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:34 p.m.

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Russell Smith, Board Clerk