

**MEETING OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
SITTING AS THE GOVERNING BODY OF FIRE DISTRICT #1**

SPECIAL MEETING

JULY 27, 2004

The Regular Meeting of the Board of the County Commissioners of Sedgwick County, Kansas, was called to order at 7:47 P.M., on Tuesday, July 27, 2004 in the County Commission Meeting Room in the Courthouse in Wichita, Kansas, by Chairman Thomas G. Winters; with the following present: Chair Pro Tem David M. Unruh; Commissioner Tim R. Norton; Commissioner Carolyn McGinn; Commissioner Ben Sciortino; Mr. William P. Buchanan, County Manager; Mr. Rich Euson, County Counselor and Ms. Lisa Davis, Deputy County Clerk.

ROLL CALL

The Clerk reported, after calling roll, that all Commissioners were present.

Chairman Winters said, "Next item."

PUBLIC HEARING

A. PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING THE 2005 SEDGWICK COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #1 BUDGET.

Mr. William P. Buchanan, County Manager, greeted the Commissioners and said, "Commissioners, you have seen the 2005 Fire District budget. I'm recommending a tax increase in this budget to move much more swiftly on the relocation of five fire houses. I believe this all can be accomplished in a timely fashion. It is my belief that we will be able to serve the residents of the Fire District in a way that is improved and better and I think we can do that for a modest increase of 1.87 mills. It would be appropriate, Mr. Chairman, for you to open the public hearing to have the public now discuss that financial plan."

Chairman Winters said, "All right. Thank you, Mr. Manager. At this time, we will open the public hearing and accept public comment on Fire District #1 2005 budget. Is there anyone in the room this evening who would like to speak to the Fire District budget? Is there anyone here in the room who would like to speak to the Fire District budget, our Item A on today's meeting? Seeing no one . . . Again, one last chance, anyone here? Seeing no one, we will close the public hearing and move on to the next item."

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B. AUTHORIZATION FOR THE COUNTY MANAGER TO PUBLISH A NOTICE OF HEARING ON THE PROPOSED 2005 SEDGWICK COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #1 BUDGET.

Mr. Buchanan said, "Commissioners, you have the motion in front of you, which is a total budget for the fire district of \$12,879,742, that was equivalent approximately to 18.57 mills or a tax increase of 1.87 mills over 2004. I would recommend you approve that Motion."

Chairman Winters said, "Thank you. Commissioner Sciortino."

Commissioner Sciortino said, "Again, I'm assuming I'm correct, this is the same as the county thing. What we're doing is legally setting a cap that nothing stops us from reducing it down or what have you. But as you explained it to me, this increase is necessary to maintain, in essence, the same level of fire service that citizens in our fire district have come to expect."

Mr. Buchanan said, "In this case, sir, it would not only maintain but once the relocation of the fire houses occur, I expect fire service to the residents of the district to improve, because they'll be better located."

Commissioner Sciortino said, "Great, thank you. That's all I have."

Chairman Winters said, "Okay, commissioners, is there other discussion? Commissioner Norton."

Commissioner Norton said, "Well, I will support the Motion, but I have grave reservations that we should spend that extra 1.87. For constituents in my part of the County, they won't get any better service from what we're going to do and they'll be paying more money. I mean, 10,000 people in Haysville won't benefit one bit from moving all the other stations around and spending this money right now, in a very tough time.

One of my concerns is that if we keep raising that mill levy, we are going to push some communities, the larger ones, to do just like Derby has done, and that's move out on their own. Now, Derby was already on their own, but they had the chance to join us and they ran the numbers and it was compelling for them to not be part of the fire district.

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The second part is that I continue to be an advocate for consolidation and we're not having that discussion, we're just continuing to try to take care of the fire district as a stand-alone entity. And I think there's going to be a time, if we don't take bold action to change and consolidate, whether it is functional consolidation or real consolidation, we are going to get less than desired results five- ten years down the road. So, I will support it because it doesn't mean that we have to live with that, we could go under, but this will set the ceiling and I will be supportive of that. But I do have reservations that I've expressed. Thank you, Mr. Chair."

Chairman Winters said, "All right, thank you Commissioner. Commissioner McGinn."

Commissioner McGinn said, "Thank you. And I too am going to support this for publishing purposes. This is not saying that we're going to approve the 1.87 mills. I want everyone to know that I certainly support our firemen and I certainly support the relocation of our fire departments. Because of community growth, they've kind of all ended up being in similar locations, and so we certainly need to re-analyze that.

I guess I'm going to need more discussion on this before we finalize this, because I think that perhaps we can work within the dollars that we already receive to make these changes. So I will support this for publishing purposes but I hope to have a little more discussion about this before we vote to raise this mill levy. Thank you."

Chairman Winters said, "Thank you. Commissioner Sciortino."

Commissioner Sciortino said, "Well, and that's the point that I wanted to make clear, that we were just setting a cap. We haven't approved or finalized that there's going to be this 1.8 mill increase over 2004. But the one thing that I see is in our rural areas, economically they couldn't afford, by and of themselves, any kind of fire service or any kind of fire service that would be even marginally adequate and when we live in a community, the more congested areas of our community or the more urban areas of our community, yes they are subsidizing the more rural areas of our community to have at least adequate fire service.

This rearranging of the stations, that does intrigue me because as Wichita has grown, some of our fire stations that were out in the hinder lands are now inside the city limits of Wichita and to me, it does make sense for us to consider moving those closer to the rural citizens, the farmers and what have you, up in . . . well, in the rural areas so that maybe we could even get to them in time of need quicker and maybe help them better.

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If we could do that and not raise the mill levy, then I'm going to be all for that, but if indeed that's what it's going to take to be able to improve our efficiency in delivering the service to those that are in need, I'm going to keep an open mind. But that will be something we can discuss in detail . . . August 11th is the date we finally set in stone, is that correct?"

Mr. Buchanan said, "We'll be prepared to discuss it at the next hearing, next week."

Commissioner Sciortino said, "Okay, great. Okay, that's all I had. Thanks."

Chairman Winters said, "All right, thank you. Well, I guess two things I wanted to interject at this point, is one, I think we probably do need to have perhaps another presentation or another thought process to help us work through this to decide where we are, because dovetailing on Commissioner Sciortino, you know the example that I've used in years past of saying, you know if we look at Saint Francis, Kansas and Atwood, Kansas in the far northwest part, corner of the State of Kansas, if the State of Kansas including us didn't help build state highways to Atwood, Kansas they wouldn't have state highways in Atwood, Kansas. But they do have a state highway that goes to Saint Francis and Atwood and we all participate in that, even though they are rural parts.

But you both raise valid questions that we need to be keenly aware of and begin to think and process. Commissioner McGinn."

Commissioner McGinn said, "Well, just a comment to Commissioner Sciortino's about the areas that have a great density certainly are helping the more rural areas, but they're also receiving service quicker. Their house is probably going to be saved and those in the rural areas it's questionable. And so, there is a little bit of risk benefit there as well. And so, I think that's something that we have to talk about and I think we do eventually need to think about unifying many of our fire entities that are out there and see if it makes sense that we can all work together as a team, such as our EMS, you know public safety without boundaries. Thank you."

Chairman Winters said, "Thank you. Commissioner Unruh."

Commissioner Unruh said, "Thank you. I guess we've established pretty well that we're in favor of the motion that's suggested here and this is not the real debate, but everyone is weighing in on it, so I suppose I will too. If the real debate comes later . . ."

Commissioner Sciortino said, "Just don't mess with the 4-Hers, okay."

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Commissioner Unruh said, “Well, I see that they’re passionate about 4-H, but I’ll just make a comment similar to what’s been made, you know, that Fire District #1 is . . . we treat it as a unified whole. It’s a funny shape. It’s kind of like a donut, but all the people that are parts of it have to share in the decisions that we make for Fire District #1.

So I realize that some folks feel like maybe they’re paying for services that they are not going to receive benefit for, but they’re still a part of Fire District #1 and in our system, you know, you can’t just opt out when it’s most convenient. And I know that that’s not what you’re suggesting, but it’s the way the system is. Everybody in Fire District #1 is going to have to pay the same mill levy increase if we proceed with this.

Secondly, on the idea of consolidation, you know, I’m very pleased that the City of Wichita, their fire department and our fire department are working together to try to at least test the waters on a functional consolidation on Station #38. I know they’re still working on that, but I think they are still working on it and that progress is being made and I think that’s going to be a real good test case for us to see how much further we go. And if we could know the end from the beginning, well we could make that leap, but we don’t. We’re going to have to take some steps to get there.

And then lastly, you know I think that moving the stations is probably something that we’re going to have to do. The consultant report that we’ve got indicates that that’s the appropriate thing to do, so the question is not . . . the question is not ‘Are we going to pay for it?’, the question is ‘Do we need to do it?’ and if we do need to do it, then we’ve got to pay for it.

Probably I’d have to have Commissioner McGinn show me how we’re going to do that without a mill levy increase, but maybe . . .”

Commissioner McGinn said, “I have some ideas.”

Commissioner Unruh said, “Okay, good. Well, I’ll be happy to hear those, but since this is not the debate tonight . . .”

Commissioner Sciortino said, “And we’re not having a debate, you understand.”

Commissioner Unruh said, “I will say thank you very much and that’s all I have to say.”

Chairman Winters said, “All right, Commissioners, we have a Motion that sets the upper limit of the tax rate . . . mill levy on the Fire District, but we are not setting the budget today, we’re just publishing and it, again, will be work between now and August the 11th. Is there any other discussion on this Motion?”

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Commissioner Sciortino said, “We haven’t made the Motion yet. Would you like me to make it?”

Chairman Winters said, “Yeah, would you make the Motion.”

MOTION

Commissioner Sciortino moved to authorize the County Manager to publish a notice of public hearing for Sedgwick County Fire District 2005 total budget of \$12,879,742. The total budget includes a legal budget of \$12,864,742 with \$10,934,718 in budgeted ad valorem taxes (\$11,331,314 with delinquency), which is approximately equivalent to 18.57 mills or a 1.87-mill increase over 2004, subject to review and technical adjustments.

Commissioner Unruh seconded the Motion.

Chairman Winters said, “We have a Motion and a Second to the Motion. Is there any discussion?”

Commissioner Sciortino said, “Yeah, I just need a clarification. What did that paren 11,000,000 delinquency mean? I’ve said it twice now, the County and the Fire, and I don’t know what I’m talking about.”

Mr. Renfeng Ma, Budget Director, Division of Finance, greeted the Commissioners and said, “Commissioners, if all taxpayers pay ad valorem taxes as we’ve planned, we don’t need that number. There is always a delinquency factor in there. And over the years, in the Fire District, our collection rate is about 97%, meaning when you levy \$100, you may get \$97.”

Commissioner Sciortino said, “Okay, and this is the amount of money that is presently delinquent, covering over past years?”

Mr. Ma said, “This is with the delinquency. If you need \$100, you really need to tax about \$103 in order to get the full 100.”

Commissioner Sciortino said, “There’s \$11,331,000 in delinquency.”

Mr. Buchanan said, “No. Let me try to explain this. We have a delinquency rate, so we need to raise the mill levy higher to take into account the delinquency. We really only need \$11,000,000.”

Commissioner Sciortino said, “And that’s why we’re asking for the 12 million-eight and we’ve

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factored in the 3% delinquency.”

Mr. Buchanan said, “Yes.”

Commissioner Sciortino said, “Got it. Thank you.”

Chairman Winters said, “Are there any other questions on this Motion. Seeing none, Madam Clerk, call the vote.”

VOTE

Commissioner David M. Unruh	Aye
Commissioner Tim Norton	Aye
Commissioner Carolyn McGinn	Aye
Commissioner Ben Sciortino	Aye
Chairman Thomas Winters	Aye

Chairman Winters said, “Is there other business to come before the Fire District? Mr. Manager? Mr. Euson? All right, the Fire District meeting is adjourned.”

C. OTHER

D. ADJOURNMENT TO ITEM D OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

There being no other business to come before the Board, the Meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
SEDGWICK COUNTY, KANSAS**

THOMAS G. WINTERS, Chairman
Third District

DAVID M. UNRUH, Chair Pro Tem
First District

TIM R. NORTON, Commissioner
Second District

CAROLYN MCGINN, Commissioner
Fourth District

BEN SCIORTINO, Commissioner
Fifth District

ATTEST:

Don Brace, County Clerk

APPROVED:

_____, 2004