

August 9, 2010

## **LONG RANGE PLANNING/MACHINERY & EQUIPMENT COMMITTEE REPORT**

The Long Range Planning/Machinery & Equipment Committee met Monday, August 9, 2010 at 6:00 p.m. in the Quorum Court Meeting Room, Third Floor, County Administration Building, 215 East Central, Bentonville, Arkansas

Committee Members Present: Harrison, Moore, Blaty, Stephenson

Others Present: Comptroller Richard McComas, Director of Public Services Chris Glass, Manager of Emergency Services Matt Garrity

Media: Tom Sissom - Daily Record

### **1. Call to Order**

JP Harrison called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

### **2. Fire Truck and Equipment Report – Benton County Fire Association President Jimmy Thompson and Gentry Fire Chief Vester Cripps**

Jimmy Thompson stated that after the committee decided last October that it would be too expensive to hire an independent company to perform an analysis of all of the county's fire trucks and equipment, a gentleman (whose name he cannot recall) with the same expertise stepped forward and offered to do the evaluation at no charge.

Jimmy Thompson said that they have developed a point scale by which to evaluate the fire trucks, based on year model, hours of usage, number of runs per year, and physical condition, and this data has been collected for every truck in the county. He added that all of the data has not been entered in the computer files yet, but every truck has been evaluated. He said that it had been important for them to get someone with no ties to either the county or the Fire Association Board to do the evaluation.

Jimmy Thompson noted that mileage for fire trucks will not seem as high as for other vehicles of similar age, but the hours of usage will be higher than normal, due to the fact that the trucks do not spend as much time running down the highway as they do parked with engines running at a fire scene.

JP Moore asked if they have been able to determine how many need to be replaced. Jimmy Thompson stated that they could not answer that yet.

JP Stephenson asked who determines which fire department receives a new fire truck. Jimmy Thompson said that decision is made by the Fire Association Board. He said that the departments that make the most runs per year generally need the newer equipment, while the equipment that gets replaced is handed down to the departments which make fewer runs.

JP Harrison asked which criteria get the highest priority in the evaluation scale. Jimmy Thompson stated that they generally consider the overall condition of the truck, and whether or not it can be repaired. He related how two fire trucks in need of repair came to be located on his personal property, after he was told they could no longer be stored at the County Road Yard. He

listed the needed repairs for the two trucks, and said that the repairs would likely have to be delayed until next year because they have used all of the money budgeted for repairs in 2010.

The committee reviewed the county's policy of budgeting each year for one new fire truck, one refurbished tanker, and the amount of money budgeted for repairs. Jimmy Thompson said that \$40,000 had been budgeted for repairs in 2010, but that was impacted by having to replace one of Rocky Branch's trucks which was totaled in an accident. He said they are using the insurance money along with money from the 2010 Budget to replace the chassis on the truck.

JP Blaty asked for clarification of why the two fire trucks were removed from the County Road Yard. Jimmy Thompson stated that he was told that the County Judge wanted everything removed from the property that was not going to be auctioned at the county's surplus property auction. He said he is uncomfortable with the fire trucks being at his farm, due to liability issues and how it looks to the public.

JP Blaty asked Director of Public Services Chris Glass to explain why the trucks were removed from county property. Chris Glass stated that he had been asked to meet with Jimmy Thompson at the Road Yard to assess which trucks had zero value and would be included in the auction. He said he understood that there had been several conversations between Jimmy Thompson and Properties Coordinator Marsha Graham, who is responsible for county property. He said the two trucks were identified as being usable, and at that time they were looking at the entire Road Department site as a possible location for the Juvenile Detention Center expansion, in addition to cleaning it up and ridding it of all of the excess property. He said that there were so many unusable vehicles and junk being stored at the Road Yard that some working vehicles were being stored outside. He said his recollection is that since the two fire trucks in question were still accountable to specific fire departments, they were going to be stored at those departments.

JP Moore asked where the departments do their repair work. Jimmy Thompson stated that a few departments have personnel who are qualified to do repairs, but most of them have to send repairs out. JP Moore asked if it would be possible for the Road Department mechanics to perform some of the repair work, which could then be billed back to the Fire Departments more cheaply than what they would pay for outside work. Jimmy Thompson stated that in the past, the Road Department was very willing to help out, and there are mechanics on staff that are qualified to do some of the work.

Jimmy Thompson noted that the departments are responsible for routine maintenance, but the Association has occasionally had to step in with funds to assist them – even buying fuel at times.

JP Moore requested that the files being presented this evening be combined into a single spreadsheet so that all of the data can be viewed together, possibly in time for the next meeting. He added that the driving point behind this whole exercise was that nobody seems to know exactly how many trucks the county owns, how old they are, how many hours of usage they have, etc, and the committee needs that information to determine how many new vehicles are needed each year.

Jimmy Thompson stated that the tanker that they have decided to repair was actually sent in by one of the departments to be auctioned as surplus property, and the Fire Association Board has now implemented a policy that the departments must follow in order to discard a truck or piece of equipment.

JP Stephenson agreed that it is imperative that the Board be in agreement before a piece of equipment is auctioned off. He said one of his concerns for quite some time is that no one seems to know the status or viability of any of the equipment. He said that he is amazed at the number of volunteer fire departments, and noted some problems that the Maysville Fire Department

experienced several years ago. Jimmy Thompson agreed that there had been some bad situations in the past, but that sometimes people keep talking about them as if they are current, when the problems were actually resolved some time ago.

JP Stephenson asked if the current policy of purchasing one new truck and refurbishing a tanker will get the departments through another year. Jimmy Thompson stated that he does not believe in the practice of asking for more than you need in hopes of getting what you actually want. He said he will never ask for something unless they absolutely need it, and in fact they have submitted almost the same budget for the last several years. He noted that the 5-year note that allowed the county to purchase 13 new trucks all at once was the biggest thing that had happened to the fire departments, and said they were all disappointed when it was not renewed last year.

JP Stephenson noted the trying economic times for everyone, and said the Quorum Court would love to put a new fire truck in every department in the county, but if they can get one that works and does the job, it will have to do.

Jimmy Thompson noted the differences in equipment and safety requirements between the time he started in the fire department and today.

JP Stephenson stated that they need to get the two fire trucks off of Jimmy Thompson's farm and to another fire department or some other suitable location. Chris Glass stated that they had thought the trucks would go to the fire departments they belonged to, but he is certain the County Judge would not want the trucks to remain on Jimmy Thompson's farm, so for the time being he suggested that they be moved back to the Road Department until some other solution is reached.

JP Moore asked if the Fire Services' 2011 Budget is very similar to their 2010 Budget. Jimmy Thompson stated that the budget is submitted by the Department of Emergency Management. Chris Glass stated that the numbers they are looking at now indicate that it will be pretty close to the current budget, and perhaps even a little less based on revenues collected. He said they also took money out of other departments to accommodate the purchase of a second fire truck this year. JP Moore asked about the percentages of fire dues collected by some departments, and stated that they need to make sure that each department, especially the ones whose dues are not being collected by the county, redoubles its efforts to increase the percentage of collections from their members.

Jimmy Thompson expressed concern that if county funding is removed, the fire dues would have to be increased to an amount that most people could not pay. JP Moore stated that he is not talking about removing all county funding; he just feels the departments can improve their revenues by collecting a greater percentage of their membership dues.

JP Stephenson stated that he would like to see every department in the county have its dues collected with the property taxes, because as a resident of Siloam Springs, he is paying taxes for the privilege of having fire trucks, and those trucks go out into the county to assist the rural fire departments. Jimmy Thompson noted that the county-owned trucks that are in city fire departments make far more city runs than runs out in the county. He said that the fire departments are very good about working together, sharing equipment, and assisting each other on calls. He added that he felt that within the next 10 years, all of the fire departments will be collecting dues along with property taxes.

JP Harrison asked if equipment can be transferred from station to station in the event one of the departments has a truck that needs extensive repairs. Jimmy Thompson stated that it is done frequently, but the paperwork can get complicated.

JP Harrison asked for information regarding a tanker that was replaced in Gentry with one of the new trucks. Jimmy Thompson stated that both of the tankers in Gentry were scheduled to be refurbished six or seven years ago, but were delayed because the Board is always concerned about sending new equipment to the department of a Board Member. He said some have even offered to resign from the board in order to keep their departments from being skipped over for equipment replacement. He said several of the departments are very good about taking older trucks, repairing them, spending their own funds to get them in good shape, and then sending them to other departments whose equipment is in even worse shape. He noted that there have been instances when departments are given their choice between several fire trucks, and then complained that they were given poor equipment.

JP Harrison asked if any of the fire departments are currently considering putting dues on tax statements. JP Stephenson stated that the only thing the Quorum Court can do to encourage the practice is to stop funding all departments that do not collect dues through the property tax statements.

There was lengthy discussion concerning elections to put fire membership dues on tax statements, and whether there is any method other than elections by which that can be accomplished. County Attorney George Spence stated that he would research that question.

JP Harrison stated that he would like to see a single spreadsheet containing all of the information that has been gathered. Matt Garrity stated that once the spreadsheet is compiled, he will be able to look at CenCom's records to determine the number of runs each truck has made.

JP Moore stated that he would like to have a recommendation on which trucks need to be replaced now, and which ones can wait until next year, so they can develop some type of replacement schedule.

JP Stephenson stated that this is not necessarily pertinent to the fire truck issue, but since they now have this data, which can be expanded, and in light of everything that has gone on at the State level, he would like for the Quorum Court to have access to a complete list of every motorized vehicle that Benton County owns, either with the mileage or hours of use on it, including helicopters, motorcycles, and motorboats, because he does not see how they can go on year after year and not even know what they have. JP Moore stated that Properties Coordinator Marsha Graham has that information. JP Stephenson stated that he is also talking about who has each vehicle, and what department it is assigned to, and who drives it home. JP Moore stated that Marsha Graham could probably provide that in one day. Chris Glass stated that he thought that would be possible. JP Stephenson added that he wants to know if they are being driven home, as there are some that are assigned to be driven home, and he is not saying that is wrong.

JP Harrison stated that in compiling all of the information, he would also like it noted if a truck has been transferred to another department, to see if they are getting the most use out of it for the county.

JP Stephenson stated that by the time the trucks are moved around from place to place and are finally sent to auction, they are worn out, but this is the first time he has ever heard of the county even having an auction in 2010. He said he knows they cannot buy anything, but they can at least be made aware of it, and he has not seen it advertised, he has not seen any notices, he has seen nothing. He said if they were simply informed that one is occurring, they could go and see what is being disposed of.

Jimmy Thompson stated that it is sometimes difficult to find out information about everything being auctioned, and he does not like to see anyone ripped off. He said there should be a way to keep track of everything, even though the auction is strictly "buy as is".

He added that he does not favor replacing trucks on a schedule, such as every 10 years, because a truck could be in great shape after 10 years, and some people will get rid of it, just because its 10 years are up.

JP Moore stated that he had not been talking about replacing trucks on a time schedule, but finding a way to determine which ones need to be replaced to provide guidance for the Finance Committee so they can plan the budget accordingly.

Jimmy Thompson stated that they are developing a list of which trucks can be repaired and for how much, whether it is \$5,000 or \$10,000, and so on. He said that they can only provide rough estimates.

JP Moore stated that they should be able to get pretty close on their estimates, especially with the information provided by the evaluations. He cautioned that the information will have to be kept up-to-date; if they do not, it will be outdated in two to three years. Vester Cripps stated that now that they have the information, it will be easy to update it. JP Moore added that that will include re-evaluating the fire trucks every year.

Jimmy Thompson explained some problems in tracking the fire trucks, because they have been custom-made, so they do not have serial numbers on them. He said that he also discovered at the auction that some of the county's ID numbers on various equipment did not match the inventory.

The committee discussed a timeline for getting the requested information. Matt Garrity stated that it should not take too long to get the information on the vehicles, with the exception of mileage, which will take longer.

### **3. Public Comments**

None

### **4 Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m.