**Fire Commission Meeting**

**Immokalee Fire Control District**

**Board Meeting**

March 31, 2015

These Minutes are a summary of the meeting. Any further information can be obtained by the tape. The minutes will follow the order of the Agenda.

Present Commissioners: Anderson, Goodnight, Keen and Olesky; Chief Paul Anderson, Board Attorney Kenneth Thompson, Leo Rodgers, Alma R. Valladares, Josh Bauer, Raul Dimas, Tom Manning and Members of the Public.

1. **Call Meeting to Order**

Meeting called to order at 6:35pm by Commission Chair Goodnight

1. **Pledge of Allegiance**

Lead by Commissioner Goodnight

1. **Moment of Silence**

Lead by Commissioner Goodnight

1. **Proof of Publication**

Copy of publication confirmation included in Commission packet

1. **Establish a Quorum**

Quorum established by Commissioner Goodnight

1. **Approval of Agenda**

Commissioner Olesky motioned to approve the Agenda and Seconded by Commissioner Keen. Motion carries unanimously.

1. Business of the District
2. **New Business**
3. **County RFP for provision of fire and rescue services to dependent district and MSTU areas**

Chief Anderson mentioned that Collier County sent out a request for proposals to all the independent Fire Districts requesting to submit proposals to take over fire protection in the areas of Collier County that are not currently within boundaries of an independent fire district. The four dependent taxing districts in the beginning which was: Isles of Capri, Goodland, Ochopee and Collier District One. Marco Island requested that Goodland be taken out of the picture as it has provided coverage for that area for years. Goodland has been removed as an option for coverage; leaving Isles of Capri, Ochopee and District One. It doesn’t make any sense for us to do anything with Isles of Capri because of the location. Greater Naples has already taken part of Isles of Capri along with their Ad Valorem taxes. They are going to submit a proposal to take over all the dependent districts at this time. The county sent a large package out and we looked at some of the information. It doesn’t make any sense for Immokalee to take over another fire district unless it benefits Immokalee. We already have first response agreements with Ochopee and in that area. If it would help with cost sharing; he looked at the numbers and it’s still not clear. In order for it to work for us is, there would have to be a millage rate increase in both Ochopee and District One. Ochopee is currently at 4 mills and District One is at 2 mills. His proposal is that Ochopee would go up to 4.3 and District One to 2.5. This would allow Immokalee to recover about $96,000 of the cost. It would be paid for through us taking the responsibility of that fire protection. The way he figured this is that District One doesn’t have any services provided. Ochopee covers District One. Currently, District One revenue is a combination of Ad Valorem taxes and payment in lieu of taxes for the federal land. That revenue is currently distributed between Ochopee, Isles of Capri and Greater Naples. Greater Naples has a small portion of District One and they get paid for that. They distribute the funding of $77,400 to each other dependent districts. Greater Naples covers a really small area for $77,400 and that’s a pretty good deal.

The positions within Immokalee Fire District would see an increase work load from this happening for himself, Fire Marshal and the Training Captain. So, he took 10% of the cost of those 3 positions and assigned it to Ochopee and 5% of the cost of those 3 positions assigned it to Mile Marker 63 Fire Station on Alligator Alley.

So, in the proposal, basically 15% of those 3 positions is covered by this proposal for Immokalee which, this is a savings to Immokalee. In doing that, he included some salary adjustments to bring us up. Ochopee currently has a Division Chief of Operations. So, our proposal would bring our Training Captain up to Division Chief and bring our Fire Marshal up to the pay scale of their current Division Chief. That would bring Chief McLaughlin as an Assistant Chief. His proposal is not just to manage it but to merge into one fire district. Greater Naples also doesn’t want to just manage it but to merge and have one organization. The first year would be to manage it with the understanding that we would then merge into one fire district. He would bring all their employees over at their current rank and salary. They wouldn’t lose their rank or money. Commissioner Keen asked how does their firefighters pay compare to our firefighters pay. Chief Anderson mentioned that with the incentive pay and being here a couple of years, our guys are making about the same as Ochopee firefighters. Commissioner Keen mentioned that in her opinion, incentive pay is incentive pay; it’s different than regular pay. Chief Anderson mentioned that this won’t happen until October 1st anyway. If we can work it out in the budget to give our employees 2% or 3% pay raise increase, this would work towards bringing them up to what Ochopee makes. Ochopee’s starting pay is higher than our starting pay. We can work all this out if we chose to do this.

Mile Marker 63 Station is different in and of itself. It is totally funded by toll money from the Interstate. Those firefighters and trucks are dedicated to Alligator Alley. They can respond from toll plaza to toll plaza but can’t leave the Interstate. They wouldn’t be in the mix to come to Immokalee if we needed help with a fire or anything. Commissioner Goodnight is asking can Ochopee firefighters choose to come to Immokalee for a shift and Immokalee firefighters go to Ochopee for a shift. Chief Anderson mentioned that yes they can. That would be in the plan as well. It would reduce the possibility of mandatory overtime because right now, there have been instances where the staff that’s on shift has to cover on overtime. It would add to the pool of people we have to fill vacant slots.

The benefits for us other than the monetary paying a percentage of the 3 staff positions we have. We would get an Assistant Chief as well as an Operations Chief that could assist with things here. One of the benefits to them would be that we have a Training Captain that would train them. We would also be able to extend our volunteer program that we are working on to try to recruit some volunteers in the Ochopee area. Commissioner Goodnight asked does Ochopee has office staff. Chief Anderson mentioned that they do have an Administrative Assistant. Commissioner Goodnight asked if that person would assist Alma with the workload. We are not expecting to lay anyone off or change the positions to where they no longer have a position are we? Chief Anderson mentioned that this would be in the budget.

Commissioner Anderson asked if there would still be a millage increase. Chief Anderson mentioned that he has asked the county several times for clarification on about 8 line items in the budget that they are showing for Ochopee and Mile Marker 63. There’s funding in these line items that could be some start-up cost for Mile Marker 63 and might not be funded next year; which would make that money available to put somewhere else or put it in reserves. If enough of that money is available, if that money is start-up money for the new station or replacement of equipment in Ochopee and doesn’t need to be funded next year; then there may not need to be a millage increase. He won’t know that until he gets the answers from the county. Right now, Chief McLaughlin writes the budget for the mile marker 63 station and he turns it into the state and the state puts that money into the budget.

Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that the new station if funded by tolls, so are they getting millage money for that. She doesn’t understand how there is going to be money left over. Chief Anderson mentioned that right now some of the money that he has questions about is in the Ochopee budget. Looks like it’s lumped into one sum in the budget. There’s money that’s earmarked for other contractual services and he doesn’t know what other contractual services are. Doesn’t know whether that needs to be funded or not. The county is taking almost $40,000 from Ochopee and $1600 from District One and they are back charging for some administrative costs, which may also be available to put somewhere else in the budget instead of a millage increase.

Commissioner Olesky asked how hard it is to get to District One. Chief Anderson mentioned that it is very hard to get into. Most of it is wildlife. They have to go through Golden Gate to get there. Commissioner Olesky asked if we would get that money. Chief Anderson mentioned that we would have to negotiate with Greater Naples because their station is a lot closer than anybody else’s.

* 1. **Public comment**

Jeremy Morgan, President of Local 3670 mentioned that as far as he knows, is that Station 75 is from the state money; the county has to fund that money for 45 days and then we receive that money back from the state. We pay and then we get reimbursed from the state which, we still have 3 ½ years left on that. Also, the pilt money in lieu of tax money; from his understanding, he mentioned that they are going to be needing about $500,000 for this next year. He is asking if that is part of the audit fee or getting that pilt money or is that going to be made up from District One.

Chief Anderson mentioned that that is one of the things he needs clarification on. Where the Pilt money is coming from, how much it is and what the Pilt agreement is. In the current years’ budget, there is $519,000 transferred from the county general fund to Ochopee. In speaking with Chief McLaughlin, he mentioned that he is not sure how much is pilt money or if the county in addition to the pilt money is subsidizing fire protection for Ochopee on top of the building as part of that $519,000.

* 1. **Public comment**

Jeremy mentioned that the only reason the county gets the money is because we are in federal lands so, the county decides what they want to do with it. Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that all the money should be coming out of pilt because when she was a commissioner she went to Washington to speak before congress and they got $1 million from them a long time ago. Jeremy Morgan mentioned that with what they are going through with Naples, they welcome speaking with us about this. Also, about keeping our jobs and everything. We also haven’t heard anything from Naples. He appreciates it and thanks Immokalee Fire Control District. Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that we are more alike than Naples.

Josh Bauer, Vice President of Local 4657 mentioned that since he just got those numbers and hasn’t had a chance to review them. He agrees with what Chief Anderson is saying, that if it benefits Immokalee Fire Control District. He doesn’t see anything wrong with it. Ochopee just hired 9 firefighters and their starting salary is considerably more than ours. They have more staffing per truck and they get paid more. So, if this were to go through, for us to sign off on this, there would need to be some sort of agreement. Immokalee firefighters would have to be brought up to the same pay scale. That way, we are all equal. We enjoy working with their guys and we would enjoy bringing them on. Right now, 3 office individuals are getting pay raises; which, he can understand the amount of workload. The firefighters that are here every day take care of this district are still the most under paid and highest worked. That is our concerned. Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that she speaks for the board when she says that they understand and hear them and they are working on it. Josh Bauer mentions that they appreciate that.

* 1. **Public comment**

Jack Johnson mentioned that he had the pleasure of serving under the founders of Immokalee Fire Control District. He worked with some of them when he was young. He served as a commissioner for 8 years and he has read our mission statement. Every one of those 3 facts points out that this fire department was established to serving this community. It wasn’t established for other communities, it was established for this community. Over the years, there have been struggles obviously. On the consolidation issue, we spent an amount of hours combating that; with the only argument being that, we weren’t being controlled of our area because we are a community. He questions the common sense of trying to govern fire control 42 miles from his house but if he is surrounded by him being in control of my community because he lives here and he knows what’s needed and what goes on in his community.

He feels that it’s a little presumptuous to feel like we can figure out what needs to be done with other communities. When you get the federal government, county government, dependent districts together, fire locals, unions, that’s asking for problems in his opinion. Financially, he pays 3.75 for his fire control by coverage. If he wants to have someone in this department or be serviced by another department then, he wants to pay what he is paying now. Why should he pay more than everybody else; he has a problem with that. He doesn’t know why, when we begin to establish continuity in the workforce, in the administration; why we want to throw such a complicated mess added in an effort to gain a little more money. He doesn’t know if the risk is worth the reward. Legally, he would question. We said we would do this on a contractual basis and after that, incorporate the districts. He wants to know, who is going to get to vote. When he gets to vote on expanding our boundaries as we have in the past. Secondly, all the recent referendums that he has read; in regards to tax increases it specifically said that those funds were to be used within the district. He would question the legality of attending a contractual agreement outside the district but that’s just him. For that and other reasons, he is opposed to that.

Chief Anderson mentioned that he wants to answer some of those concerns. First with the Immokalee Firefighters; the money that we would get from managing a fire services there, that would be up to the board how we would use that money. Obviously, it would be a good amount of money to give our fire fighters a raise and try to bring them up to the pay that Ochopee does before the two districts merge. He can see how it can create some animosity between some firefighters if there is not pay carry. He doesn’t know if Ochopee people, because it’s a dependent district know that they will get to vote. He thinks that the county can just sign off on another independent district **Aden sing** that district. It does take an act of the State Legislature to change the boundaries of the Immokalee Fire Control District. In order to do that, the residents of Immokalee would have to vote on it. It would be a referendum on the ballot asking the Immokalee voters if they want to bend backwards within their fire district. Commissioner Keen mentioned that Ave Maria would also have to vote whether they want to expand the boundaries of their district to absorb Ochopee and District One. Then, it would go to the State Legislature for enabling that for a new fire district. Attorney Thompson mentioned that this might be a 2 year process. Chief Anderson mentioned that yes, we wouldn’t be able to merge right away because it’s about 1 ½ process to get all this done and thru the legislature. The only way to do this is to have a contract with the county for fire protection there. It would be a functional merger and not a legal merger because we would absorb all their employees with our employees and staff that station.

The other option, is if we want to; leave the Alligator Alley Station to the county and just do Ochopee.

We would take over Ochopee and District One. There is not a lot of revenue to be gained from Alligator Alley Station because the budget is funded by toll money and there’s not a lot of taxes. We would have some administrative fees and we would be getting $25,000 for managing that one fire station and the nine people. That is going to be up to the board. It certainly is going to be a lot of hard work on our part to get this thing prepared and submitted by April 16th. On one hand it’s a lot of work and we would really be doubling the size of our organization. We have 24 employees here and they have 24 employees, we have 3 fire stations and they have 3 fire stations.

Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that this is her concerned, with what we are going through with

the county with all this consolidation talk and with what you know is going on with Greater Naples;

She believes that if we sit back and don’t do anything, we are going to be taken over. When they say that they are going to put it in the ballot; it means that it’s going to be a county-wide ballot. There is no way in hell that Immokalee can outvote the county. This is her concern. The more we try to take in and try to do, the more that we got on our side to show that we don’t have to consolidate with Greater Naples. Chief Anderson mentioned that because we are an independent district, no matter what they vote on that end of the county, there still has to be more than 50% of the Immokalee voters to vote to merge. Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that more than 50% could be there in Ave Maria. Because they vote more than the people in Immokalee do. Just look at your numbers. She is looking at it in a political point of view and from what the voters’ things say.

She just sees it as, not knowing that we are going to get it, because she has a feeling that because of Henning that, it is going to be real difficult because the commissioners are going to have to vote on it. She doesn’t think we should sit back and not try to do something about it. To her, the best way to describe it is like playing tic tack toe. Every time they put an x we have to put an o.

Chief Anderson mentioned that being in the fire service his whole life, he wants to see things done right as far as other departments. He thinks that we would be in a better position to treat the employees in Ochopee the right way. He can’t speak for Greater Naples but if it’s anything like the plan for Isla Capri; they are not looking out for the best interest of the other employees. Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that they are looking out for the best interest of number one, which is their employees. Also, she represented Ochopee district for 8 years and has a real love for that area and she doesn’t want to see those people out there messed up.

Chief Anderson mentioned that we wouldn’t be able to tell Ochopee what to do because they still have a Chief and an Operations Chief that also works down there Monday thru Friday. The proposal is that their operation will not change much. Maybe bringing some volunteer members in the organization down there and putting some paramedics on some fire trucks. Commissioner Anderson mentioned that if status quo down there; then, we wouldn’t gain anything by having that administrative assistant. Chief Anderson mentioned that we would. He would have to look at the operations and see what it is that they are doing. If we bring them on as our employees then, the administrative assistant would be working in this office instead of down there. She may work there one day a week down there and be here the rest of the week. The same as the Operations Chief and Chief McLaughlin. They would be down there most of the time but they would also be spending some time during the week here. Commissioner Anderson asked Jeremy Morgan if the administrative assistant lived down there. Jeremy Morgan responded yes. Commissioner Anderson mentioned that we would be asking her to commute some 45 miles each way, if she doesn’t already and we don’t know what is included in the pilt money. Commissioner Keen believes that Ochopee would be better off with Immokalee than with Greater Naples. The problem is that, we still don’t have our guys where they need to be yet and we are going to pay other people more money to do the jobs they are already doing. Another thing, it takes everything we can to do our jobs done here. She is mentioning to Chief that he works all the time; so, how can he do another area. Chief Anderson mentioned that he would have some help part of the time anyway.

* 1. **Public comment**

Mr. Joseph Brister mentioned that he hasn’t made up his mind either way. Basically, he just wanted information because that is the way to make a decision. Obviously, we don’t have near enough. Financially, unless he is incorrect; one, we have to count our money from the county. Two, we have to count our millage rate. Three, we have to count the number of people in Immokalee approving this and four, that’s not going to go away. Once we merge, they are not going to work less than Ochopee. It is a major concern when people don’t get paid the same. That leaves us understaffed when one of the trucks have to go to Ochopee. Will that leave us shorthanded here? Also, if we merge, don’t they have a say so on what happens here in Immokalee?

Chief Anderson mentioned that no it won’t leave us shorthanded and we do that now when they need a truck regardless and yes, they would for the first year until we merge. Attorney Thompson mentioned that this will take about 2 years or so for the merge. We would have an inter-local agreement with the county to manage it and see how it works out in the first year then, see if you want to pursue it the second year. If we manage them, they would still remain employees of their district but we would manage it for them. Then, later on they would merge. Chief Anderson mentioned that our proposal be that they could remain county employees and we could manage the operations but that is really no different what they are doing now.

Chief McLaughlin right now is 3rd in charge, he reports to Dan Summers the Director, who reports to someone else. It appears that the county is trying to get out of those districts and give it to one of the independent districts. The proposal they are talking about is merging into one county-wide department. If tax revenues go down, they can always pull from other areas. We have one pot of money to offer each fire department, we are not the county that can make a decision if we want to buy a fire truck or a garbage truck. Commissioner Keen mentioned that her understanding when we give the fireman their 3% raise which brought them back to the 10% before they were let go and this is not counting incentives. Because incentives is something different in her mind. That we had to hunt in the budget to do that. So, how are we going to be able to pay them up to what Ochopee is paying their guys with the budget we have right now; which would have to be soon? Chief Anderson mentioned that there are $96,000 off of those districts coming to Immokalee. We would have to do this October 1st, 2015. The proposal right now is showing us absorbing other employees and all of the Ad Valorem revenue comes to us. This money can be used to boost the pay of our firefighters. Commissioner Anderson asked what would be the total salary we would see. To him it seems that there are too many unknowns. Chief Anderson that he doesn’t know right now. We are saying that we don’t want to consolidate because we want to contain control with our district but we are opening ourselves up to voters in another district replacing our board members.

Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that if we ask the State Legislature to re-district us then, we can but that’s not part of what the county is proposing. The county is not asking us to re-district, they are only asking us to manage it. Chief Anderson mentioned that yes they are wanting us to re-district. They put all options on the table. They want us to submit a proposal of what we want to do. He knows that Greater Naples proposal is that the districts will be merged into one. The county is looking to streamline all of these separate MSTU’s out there. If not, merge into another independent fire district. Commissioner Olesky mentioned that he would like us to pursue down there. Also, how long would it take for our firefighters to get up? Chief Anderson mentioned that if we had the money, October 1st, 2015. It would be at least $100,000. Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that our Ad Valorem taxes are going to increase significantly because of the number of buildings being built in Ave Maria. So, she is seeing that this fire district is going to become a lot more profitable than what we have been in the past or what we are right now with us putting money in the reserves which, in the past we didn’t have money in the reserves.

Commissioner Anderson mentioned that if we do that and give our guys more money which, they deserve, of course but that will leave more money out of reserves. If we get to the point where we don’t merge and build our reserves and at some point lower our millage rate then, it leaves Ave Maria residents with buying more expensive homes to question: why would they then want to merge with Naples 10 years or 15 years from now for the potential higher millage rate if we can get ours lowered but if we keep ours at the 3.75 millage then. Chief Anderson mentioned that the pay difference is around $6,000.00 a year; so, 21 staff x 6,000 would be around $126,000.

Commissioner Goodnight is asking when the county expecting us to take this over. Chief Anderson mentioned that we have to submit the proposal April 16, 2015 but it would start October 1, 2015. He has preliminary budgets set up but he doesn’t know that the numbers that they gave us are true to what’s going to be available. They have so much stuff lumped in together. The main one is the money transferring from the general fund. He doesn’t know how much of that is for payment in luv of taxes from the federal government.

* 1. **Public comment**

Jack Johnson mentioned to question the motivation for doing this. He doesn’t know where we are at on Ave Maria but one of the things that concern him is, that there is a tremendous amount of construction and to his knowledge we still don’t have a station down there. He doesn’t know how that is going but Immokalee continues to grow.

He has seen mergers with companies that do the same thing and sell the same products by the same people, all the same, do everything the same but the number one common denominator is the local service to all of us. Employees were unhappy and Administration was unhappy. Logistics didn’t work and that is scary. Why do we want to consider this if our past and our mission statement is to service my community? Commissioner Anderson mentioned that he would like to see another meeting and look at the numbers. In order to make a decision we don’t know how much amount of money we would have to increase in pay towards salaries. Commissioner Keen mentioned that we don’t have the actual numbers. Commissioner Goodnight mentioned that Chief Anderson needs to work on this and bring it back for the April 9th meeting at 6:30pm and try to send it by April 16, 2015.

* 1. **Public comment**

None

**Commissioner Olesky motioned to have a Special Meeting on April 9, 2015 at 6:30pm to continue the discussion and seconded by Commissioner Anderson. Motion carries unanimously.**

1. **Concerns of Commissioners**

Chief Anderson mentioned that the just came from the groundbreaking for Boys and Girls Club of Immokalee and it’s going to be an amazing building. Some good people stepped up and gave a lot of money for it. Lipman Inc. gave 500,000 and 2 other couples gave $1 Million. They have about $4 Million to start with.

1. **Public Comment**

None

1. **Adjourn Meeting**

Meeting adjourned at 7:44pm

**Next Scheduled Meeting(s):**

**Next Regular Board Meeting: April 16, 2015, 6 p.m.; Ave Maria Stewardship Development District, Ave Maria Master Association Office, 5076 Annunciation Circle, Suite 103, Ave Maria, FL 34142**