

MINUTES OF A JOINT MEETING OF VINTON TOWN COUNCIL AND ROANOKE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS HELD ON TUESDAY, JULY 21, 2009, AT 5:00 P.M. AT THE VINTON WAR MEMORIAL, 814 WASHINGTON AVENUE, VINTON, VIRGINIA

VINTON TOWN COUNCIL Bradley E. Grose, Mayor
(Members Present) Robert R. Altice
Carolyn D. Fidler
W. Wesley Nance
William E. Obenchain, Jr.

STAFF PRESENT: Chris Lawrence, Town Manager
Consuella Caudill, Assistant Town Manager
Elizabeth Dillon, Town Attorney
Darleen Bailey, Town Clerk
Barry Thompson, Finance Director/Treasurer
Beth Austin, Human Resource Manager

ROANOKE COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS: Michael W. Altizer, Chairman
(Members Present) Joseph P. McNamara
Joseph B. "Butch" Church
Charlotte A. Moore

ROANOKE COUNTY STAFF: Clay Goodman, County Administrator
Dan O'Donnell, Assistant County Administrator
Diane Hyatt, Assistant County Administrator
Becky Meador, Clerk
Paul Mahoney, County Attorney
Elaine Carver Chief Information Officer
Teresa Hall, Public Information Officer

AGENDA

- A. 5:00 - DINNER
- B. 5:30 - CALL TO ORDER
 - 1. Vinton Town Council
 - 2. Roanoke County Board of Supervisors
- C. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS: Mayor Bradley E. Grose
Vinton Town Council
- D. OPENING REMARKS
 - 1. Mayor Grose
 - 2. Chairman Michael W. Altizer
- E. DISCUSSION ITEM
 - 1. Proposed Merger of 911 Centers

F. ADJOURNMENT: Vinton Town Council
Roanoke County Board of Supervisors

At 5:50, following the call to order by Mayor Grose and introduction of officials from the Town and the County, Mr. Lawrence, Vinton Town Manager, welcomed the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors and staff members. He introduced the steering committee members from the Town and the County and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to provide background information to both governmental bodies and to receive direction as the steering committee moves forward with discussions on the proposed merger of the Town's and the County's 911 Centers. Mike Altizer, Chairman for the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors, thanked the panel for their work and called his Board to order. It was noted that one of the Board Members, Mr. Richard Flora, was out of town.

Mr. Lawrence introduced Elaine Carver, Chief Information Officer for the County and a member of the steering commit, to present information on the proposed 911 merger concept. Ms. Carver advised that the steering committee believes the proposed merger would result in potential cost savings for CAD systems, hardware, radios and many other things. She stated that the Town and the County would be partners in the process to keep up with technology needed to provide citizens from both localities with the best possible systems and equipment to dispatch calls. She explained that, currently, when the Town receives an emergency medical call, there is a small delay in the response time as the call has to be sent to the County's Emergency Medical Dispatch system and then forwarded to the appropriate agency.

Ms. Carver noted another benefit would be the potential for more back-up as the Town usually has only one or two dispatchers on a shift while the County would have four or five dispatchers on a shift. She advised that the 911 Center in the County has a very good record on answering calls as the County Board of Supervisors has invested in technology and staffing. Ms. Carver pointed out another benefit, the potential for enhanced services such as a 311 system where a citizen could call to get answers to non-emergency questions.

She explained that the idea for the concept resulted from a call she received from Chris Lawrence, late in March, after he had asked John Chambliss if the County would be interested in looking into the possibility of merging the two dispatch centers. After getting a positive response from Mr. Chambliss, she met with Chris Lawrence, Chief Cooley, and Pat Shumate for the first time in early April and out of that meeting, the steering committee was formed along with several staff subcommittees to see whether the idea was worth pursuing.

Ms. Carver advised that the steering committee made a trip to York County, (the dispatch center for Williamsport, Williamsburg, York and Poquoson) as well as Albemarle (dispatch center for Charlottesville, UVA, and Albemarle County) to see how their mergers had worked out. She went on to say that the common theme that came from the site visits was improved services to the citizens, cost savings and the fact that they all felt it was the best thing for their perspective localities.

Ms Carver reported that she received the following comments at the site visits:

From Chief Charles Werner, Charlottesville City Fire Department - "...having our fire dispatch transferred to a regional center has been one of the best, efficient and effective decisions that I have ever made."

From Robert W. Tucker, Jr., Albemarle County Executive – "...while merger of your communication systems will need "buy-in" by all area emergency responders and there will be issues to work through, our agency is a very good example of a success story and one you can definitely learn from."

From Sheriff J. D. "Danny" Diggs, York County – "This merger has been "nothing but win-win for all involved."

Following Ms Carver's presentation, Mr. Lawrence pointed out that Albemarle County has had over 20 years of success with their merged dispatch system. It was noted by Ms. Carver that the issue driving each of the governments to consider merging their communications system was the need for a joint radio system which Roanoke County and Vinton currently have.

Mr. Lawrence advised that sub-committees were created to focus on key areas; police, fire and rescue, public works, human resources, technology and logistics. He further advised that each committee was comprised of representatives from their respective agencies including senior people as well as entry level people. He explained that each committee was asked to identify key areas of discussion, opportunities and challenges without attempting to come up with solutions, recommendations or financial implications.

The Town Manager reported that the Police Committee identified four major areas to be considered including response times, CAD systems, radio call handling and administrative procedures. He noted that neither Police Department had any significant areas that would be difficult to overcome but there were items that would need to be addressed.

The second committee, Fire and Rescue was made up of representatives from the Town's career EMS staff, the County's career EMS staff, the Town's Volunteer Fire Department and First Aid Crew as well as the Town's dispatchers. Mr. Lawrence noted their major items of discussion were response times, procedures, the CAD system and administrative items. He pointed out that one thing they identified was the opportunity to improve services due to no longer having to be "double dispatched".

Mr. Lawrence advised that the Public Works committee is important because this is one area of responsibility that is different for the Town. (The County does not have a public works department.) He noted that their major area of discussion was their High-Band radio communications system. Again, no significant problems were anticipated by that committee.

The Town Manager reported that the Human Resources committee's major areas of discussion were policies, salaries, benefits and the culture of the two organizations.

Mr. Lawrence noted that technology and logistics was an area where the Town and County currently have a strong relationship in terms of radio systems, computers, and networks. He went

on to say that Roanoke County works very closely with the Town on radios, computers and networks systems. No significant hurdles or roadblocks were identified in this area.

At the conclusion of the presentation by Ms. Carver and Mr. Lawrence, both thanked staff for their work and opened the floor for questions and comments from both governing bodies.

Mr. McNamara inquired about the financial impact to the County for the office space that would be needed and Ms. Carver replied that if the governing bodies approve the concept, they would bring a proposal back to them in September with a report that would include financial impacts and all the detail information they would need to make a decision. Mr. McNamara asked that the report include current costs and combined costs to the County.

Mayor Grose stated that he would like to see the process continue and would also like to be provided with figures showing the anticipated costs. He stressed that Council wishes to maintain or increase the current high level of service to citizens while realizing cost savings with the proposed merger.

Mr. Church thanked everyone and commented that it looks like it would be “doable” but costs would be a factor. He asked if Albemarle and York Counties were similar to Roanoke County and Vinton in size or geographically. Mr. Lawrence responded they were and it was the reason the sites were chosen even though there were some differences as well. Mr. Church stated that he did not feel personnel and human resources would be an obstacle due to the fact that it would be a small town working with a larger county and the fact that the two governments have been working so closely together for many years. He went on to say that he felt it would eliminate the duplication of services and would help everyone involved. He was in favor of continuing their study of the proposed concept.

Mr. Obenchain stated that he was 100% in favor of pursuing the study but questioned whether the steering committee would be able to come up with answers to all of the questions by the end of September.

Mr. Nance felt that the committees did a good job on “issues spotting” and felt it was an issue that should be fully investigated.

Mr. Altizer commented that the plan has to work for both localities and recommended they go forward with the study. He also recommended that the committee report back at the end of August as to whether more time would be needed to complete the study. He felt it was important to go forward to see what the cost savings would be and how the Town employees would be integrated into the County system. He thanked the employees for their work.

Mr. Altice stated that everyone is looking to provide the best service for their community and he felt the proposed merger would be a step forward.

Ms. Fidler stated that she felt that Council has a responsibility to the citizens to look into the issue and supported continuing with the study.

Mayor Grose stated that he wanted to get as much public input as possible before the concept goes to Council for a vote even though this might affect the time line somewhat. Mr. Lawrence advised that he felt it would be in both the County's and Vinton's best interests to have another joint meeting when the study has been completed so that both bodies receive the same information at the same time. Mr. Altizer felt another joint meeting would be a good idea. Ms. Carver responded that the committee would make sure both bodies are kept up to date as to whether the Committee will be able to meet the September deadline.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

APPROVED:

Bradley E. Grose, Mayor

ATTEST:

Darleen R. Bailey, Town Clerk