

STEBEN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING
March 10, 2014

The Steuben County Commissioners met on Monday, March 10, 2014 at 9:00 a.m. in the Commissioners Room of the Steuben Community Center. Present this day were Commissioners Ronald L. Smith, James A. Crowl, and Loretta S. Smart. Also present were Kim Koomler, Steuben County Auditor, Donald J. Stuckey, County Attorney, and members of the Steuben County Council, and a full capacity crowd in the Commissioners Room.

The meeting was held to discuss the E911 situation and post the job description for the E911/Communications Director. The Commissioners also wanted to set up time for interviews for the Veteran's Service Officer and Commissioners' Assistant/Deputy Auditor positions.

Commissioner Smith addressed all those present and explained that they would only allow Sheriff Troyer and Cindy Snyder to speak during the meeting regarding the E911/Communications department. Commissioner Smith stated that control of the E911/Communications was turned over to the Commissioners in March, 1991. The Director of Communications reports directly to the County Commissioners. Commissioner Smith stated that social media has been used frequently during the last few days. Commissioner Smith said that the Commissioners are very concerned about the safety of the citizens and will not put the citizens in jeopardy by not having a properly staffed 911 and EMS departments. "It is properly staffed and it will be." Commissioner Smith was present in the 911 Center several times throughout the weekend along with Commissioners Crowl and Smart.

Commissioner Smith said that the Sheriff and the Communications Director Snyder came to him on Tuesday and told him that the Communications Department would be losing three individuals in the 911 Center. An Executive Session was held on Thursday, March 6th, which included the Commissioners, Rick Shipe, President of the County Council, Sheriff Tim Troyer, Communications Director Cindy Snyder, and County Attorney Donald Stuckey. The question was asked, "is the 911 Center properly covered, are they properly staffed and is there a crisis." Commissioner Smith said the answer was that they were properly covered, and they were properly staffed. When they left the Executive Session Commissioner Smith said that he did not see any need to alarm the public for which they should feel at risk at that time.

Within four hours after they left the Executive Session, there was a communication through social media, the press and the radio station saying that the County was at great risk and the phone began to ring. Commissioner Smith said that at that time as a Commissioner he felt "betrayed" because they had been in Executive Session the Sheriff and Ms. Snyder had told him they were "covered". Commissioner Smith said he had visited 911 Center several times over the weekend along with Commissioners Crowl and Smart and everyone working was professional and efficient. There are issues that need to be worked out, but the public was never in at risk. The Commissioners will work through this. "It is inappropriate to usurp and take power..." We have a Constitution of the State Indiana and County Ordinances and the Commissioners will abide by those, and if there is justifiable reason to change things they will do so. "Please do not put words in my mouth, the mouth of the press or anyone else and say that Steuben is at crisis."

Commissioner Crowl said that he was made aware of the problems at Communications in the Executive Session on March 6th. There is a problem, but it can be fixed. Commissioner Crowl said he is in and out of the 911 Center frequently and everyone is very professional. Commissioner Crowl said they are short on staff, but they have 30 applications and 13 have had background checks. It will be fixed. Commissioner Crowl said that to say that public safety is at risk is wrong. The people in Communications are very professional and do their jobs. Commissioner Crowl said that the Sheriff has one person on his staff that is certified as a 911 Dispatcher. The Sheriff said he has four people. Commissioner Crowl said that public safety has never been at risk.

Commissioner Smart said that the County Commissioners have run Communications since 1992 and it has been done very well. Commissioner Smart said that there is a balance between departments to keep things equal and not overload one department and expect them to do an efficient job. The Commissioners hold Department heads accountable for their department and staff. There is certification and licensing of all techs and personnel in Communications. Qualified people have been contacted to be in place to be working. The Sheriff's resources are no more than personnel he has gratuitously given us today. Commissioner Smart said that the citizens of Steuben County have never been in a crisis with 911.

Commissioner Crowl asked if they needed a motion since nothing would be changing. Mr. Stuckey said that they would need a motion to post the Communications Director's position, but as far as the issue at hand or what they are speaking to, the answer would be "no".

Sheriff Troyer said that he respectfully disagreed with the Commissioners' assessment of the situation. Sheriff Troyer said he feels that there is a crisis in Steuben County. Not because of the last twenty-four or forty-eight hours or the last week. The crisis is over a period of time, a ten to twelve month window. Issues have been brought up. Sheriff Troyer said that he agreed with the Commissioners that the personnel in the 911 Center are professional people and his deputies must respond. Sheriff Troyer stated that he meant no disrespect to the personnel in the 911 Center. Sheriff Troyer said that it is for the betterment of Steuben County and the people they serve. Sheriff Troyer explained how his department is trained to serve and have a shared interest in the public safety of the citizens. Sheriff Troyer reviewed department procedures for his staff and the importance of good communications with Dispatch when his deputies respond to calls. Sheriff Troyer requested that control/management of the E911/Communications be returned to the Sheriff's Department. Sheriff Troyer noted that the Commissioners will still have authority over details for all departments such as large expenditures, long-term planning, building maintenance concerns and the infrastructure of the County.

Commissioner Smith commented that he is "extremely proud" of the Sheriff's Department.

Cindy Snyder, Director of Communications, said that she did go to the Sheriff and to the Commissioners to ask for assistance. Ms. Snyder said that her department is down on the number of staff. Ms. Snyder said there have been problems the last ten months, but she thinks the Commissioners need to do the right thing.

Commissioner Smith said that they will take the input from the Sheriff and Ms. Snyder into consideration will not rush to judgment. Commissioner Smith said that the Commissioners will not take it into consideration, pass an ordinance and make a switch at this time. It would be totally inappropriate. The Commissioners need to deliberate and think things through before making a decision. It would be a short coming by the Commissioners if they did not do this.

Commissioner Smith said that people will be properly covered and people will be manning the 911 Center. Steuben County is not in a crisis situation. The item listed as "Discuss E911 Status" on the agenda has been discussed and E911/Communications Department is under the Commissioners and until the Commissioners "pass that torch" that's where it will remain. The Commissioners will deliberate and make decisions in the near future.

Commissioner Smith said that he does not have a letter of resignation from Ms. Snyder, but at the Executive Session she stated she was resigning her position and that she would be available until March 21, 2014. The Commissioners will post the job description, but until they have received a letter stating that Ms. Snyder has resigned they can do nothing more.

Mr. Stuckey stated that because of the budget, E911/Communications could not be changed until the first of the year.

The Commissioner set up interviews for three people for the Veterans Service Officer position for Wednesday, March 19th at 9:00, 9:30 and 10:00 a.m. Interviews for Commissioners Assistant/Auditor Deputy were set up for three people to be interviewed at 10:30, 11:00, and 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, March 19th.

The Commissioners discussed the request from the Board of Aviation for an additional appropriation of \$20,000 for the utility bills at the airport. Ms. Koomler told the Commissioners that they could use the line item in Cum Cap Development for Repair, Remodel, Equip for the utility bill for the airport. It could be used for the additional for the airport to pay the bills. Commissioner Smart said she did not think it would be appropriate to continue funding the utility bills at the airport. Commissioner Smith said that he would hope that the next fiscal report from the Board of Aviation would show that they have funds to pay the bills. Ms. Koomler said they had asked her to see where they could fund the request for the additional. Commissioner Smith said that beyond this point, if the Board comes back they can tell them that they have been helped once, but you have the ability to use your own funds from now on. Ms. Koomler said they do not have any funds left over for an additional.

Commissioner Smart said that when the Board of Aviation came to them two years ago, it is not what the Commissioners were prepared to follow through with. Commissioner Smith said they would put it on the agenda for review at the next meeting.

George Pifer, Steuben County resident, said he did not think it is right for Falcon Aviation (FBO) to keep the rent for the new building and only give the County a percentage of the rent after it reaches \$4,000. Mr. Pifer said the Board of Aviation extended the contract with Falcon Aviation last May for another five years. Mr. Pifer said the FBO gets another \$36,000 paid to manage the airport. It is a private business. Mr. Pifer thought the appointees made by the Commissioners should be removed and new appointments should be made. Mr. Pifer would like to know how many jets and other airplanes have used the airport last year.

Commissioner Smith said they will discuss this at the next meeting. Ms. Koomler said that the additional request would not go to the County Council if the Commissioners chose to pay the request out of funds already established in the Commissioners' budget.

Elten Powers, a member of the Board of Aviation, stated that he understands that this is a one-time request to pay the gas bill for this winter, and he would not anticipate coming back for more funds.

Commissioner Smith tabled the discussion of the request for an additional of \$20,000 for the Board of Aviation until the next meeting on March 17th.

STEUBEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Ronald L. Smith, President, South District

James A. Crowl, Vice President, Middle District

Loretta S. Smart, North District

Attest: _____
Kim Koomler, Steuben County Auditor

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