



MINUTES
Cochran City Council
February 18, 2020
Special Called Meeting @ 6PM

City Auditorium 102 North Second Street Cochran, GA 31014

Present: Mayor Billy Yeomans Mayor Pro Tem Jones
Councilmembers: Rufus Veal, Carla Coley, Keith Anderson, Andrew Lemmon Gary Ates

Call to order by Mayor Billy Yeomans @ 6:00PM

The invocation was given by Councilmember Ates followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Councilmember Anderson.

- I. Call to Order by the Mayor**
- II. Invocation**
- III. Pledge of Allegiance**
- IV. Attendance**
- V. Adopt Agenda**
- VI. Agenda Items**

Mayor Yeomans opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the meeting. He stated this is a special called meeting and the only thing that can be and will be discussed is the item on the agenda.

Mayor stated the item. He made it clear there would not be a vote made at this meeting by the Councilmembers. He stressed to the audience this meeting was to discuss a study of consolidation or leaving the police department the way it is now. Mayor Yeomans read the rules that would be followed during this meeting. They are as followed:

This is not a Public Hearing,
No Public input.

Anyone causing a disturbance or confusion will be asked to leave the building.

This is a business meeting, and everyone is expected to conduct themselves in a businesslike manner.

Mayor Yeomans went on to explain the purpose of the meeting. He stated the meeting was called by himself by the request of several Councilmembers and several concerned Citizens. The concern was during this transition of the Police Department, it may be a good time to consider a study of consolidation of law enforcement services. The six Councilmembers are the Policy Makers of the City, it is their decision to decide which direction the City Police Department may need to go. Council has the opportunity to make the decision as followed. 1) Leave as is and continue to move on. 2) Looking into appointing a committee to study future consolidation which could take 3 to 6 months for study to be concluded. Currently the City has 18 packets of applicants who have applied for the Police Chief's Position. If a study is chosen, do we proceed with interviews while the study is taken place? Once the study is completed, the Council will be presented with the results of the study and Public Hearing's will follow and then a vote. Mayor Yeomans stated hopefully the Citizens of Cochran and Bleckley County would be the ones to make the decision. Would the City hire another Police Chief knowing there could be a consolidation and if a new Chief is hired, do we tell him that the City is conducting a study of consolidation? Mayor stated it was asking a lot to stay Interim Police Chief for this entire process when it could last a year or longer.

ITEM# 1 – Presented by City Manager, Richard Newbern Consider a study of consolidation of law enforcement

Mayor Yeomans opened up the meeting to the Council for their thoughts and concerns.

Councilmember Anderson – Mr. Anderson stated at the end of the day we still need a Police Chief to serve and protect Cochran. He was in favor for the study, but he also stated he was in favor of hiring a Police Chief. If the Council decides to move ahead with the consolidation, the citizens of Cochran should be the ones to vote and it should be placed on a ballot instead of the Council members to decide.

Councilmember Ates – Mr. Ates stated his opinion was nothing wrong with conducting a study, that is not saying there will be a consolidation. He feels like the citizens should vote as well. He does not agree with the interview process. He expressed there was already a man in the Interim Position, and he should be appointed Chief and then proceed with the study. If Jeff does not do a good job, there would be a time while doing the study to find another Chief. He was against bringing someone from out of state or out of town and hiring them to be Chief.

Councilmember Coley – Mrs. Coley stated she has been doing a lot of research the past couple of days, and she found why cities and counties consolidated law enforcement. Typically, one of three reasons and she is asking which of the three reasons is the case in this situation. 1) Fragmented Law Enforcement. She stated our law enforcement is not fragmented. The best she can understand is the City and County do not duplicate services, they have a mutual aid agreement and they help each other out when needed. 2) Physical Challenge – Mrs. Coley stated the City budget is healthy, they City is not experiencing a physical challenge and we have not been looking at ways to save money. The first thing she wanted to ask from which ever Councilmember was asked for the vote for the study. What is the reason we are asking to conduct a study? Councilmember Ates stated one reason is, this situation was discussed way back many years ago. Many Councilmembers and Mayors before discussed consultation. Mrs. Coley explained a White Paper was conducted in 2014 and at that time it showed there was not a cost savings and in the White Paper it didn't discuss redundancy in the services or fragmentation of service.

Mrs. Coley stated typically when a study of consolidation it's in a larger area where the City takes up most of the County or you have a very small City that is not financially stable. Things she stated the Council needed to think about, look at if we lose the service in the City, the Council will not have any say over the services in the County and which is fine under a good Sheriff. Things you have to consider if a new Sheriff is voted in and they do not wish to patrol the City, the Council would not have a say in that. Also, the cost the City has to pay to the County for the delivery of services which typically is the same as what is being paid for services now once you take the cost and then subtract the fine, seizures and forfeitures and the revenue that is being brought in and that is something Mrs. Coley is asking the Council to consider. Also, loss of municipal fines with the municipal court as the potential loss of the ability to have Code Enforcement as well. Councilmember Coley stated she talked to several City Managers, there are currently in the state of Georgia 8 cities with a population of between 2,500 and 10,000 that have consolidated Law Enforcement, 3 of those cities have a population between 5,000 and 10,000, talked to 4 out of 5 of those 8 cities that currently have consolidated law enforcement and 3 of the 4 say that consolidation started out great but for various reasons it has not worked well. Two of the cities are trying to revert back. One of the cities is Monticello another one whom she promised would not disclose their name, and the other city was Washington Georgia, all have population less than Cochran. Also, you have the White Paper which says several cities have started consolidation but have reverted back. Blakley Georgia they consolidated in 2001 and last year they decided to go back. Most of the reasons they have reverted back, things didn't work out as well as they thought, again this is not against Sheriff Coody, this is speaking of these counties and cities that the Sherriff didn't patrol in the city like that they felt like they needed or they didn't get the Code Enforcement like they felt like they needed. Mrs. Coley said another thought for The Council to consider, there is a potential loss of Municipal court, loss of programs that this Police Department currently provides is very different than what is provided in the county. Councilmember Coley expressed that she has a concern for the law enforcement officers who have the tenure, that also are close to retirement or they have insurance as well. The thing that stuck out the most with her was, being a Chairman of the DDA, she talked to the City Manager from Monticello and he said that city was not a current GICH community, don't have a redevelopment plan, currently do not have all the benefits from the state funds and the reason is they don't have it because we don't have the ability within the city to enforce city codes due to the loss of the Code Enforcement and the loss of Municipal court. While filling out applications for that money, there is a check box and it gives points and without law enforcement we would not be able to check those boxes to receive grant money. Primarily at this point if things were solid, we may consider a study, but another concern of mine is Interim Chief is doing a great job, but if we say we are considering study of consolidation and we decide to hire a Police Chief, which she agrees that is what we need to do because this study could take anywhere from a year to two years, what qualified candidates would want to come in and take a Police Chief position when they don't know if they will have a job in a year and a half. The other part of that if we consider a study then we have told these guys (Police Officers) we don't know if they will have a job in one to two years. Councilmember Coley and Councilmember Veal had a brief discussion. Councilmember Coley states she doesn't think a study should be done at this time.

Councilmember Jones - Stated he has talked to several people about this. The merger of the school system has always been thrown up; need to remember the school system was not a merger. The City voted to abolish the City school system and the education of the children fell on the county Board of Education. This is not going to be like that. The City is still going to have to pay the Sheriff's Department X number of dollars annually. City taxes will not go down immediately, but County taxes may go up. It will be a gradual process. Neighboring City, Hawkinsville, pays Pulaski County \$58,000.00 per month and comes over 600,000.00 yearly. If we do a study we need to look at the financial aspects of it and we need to look at some guarantee of employment of some of the officers we have if we consolidate and if we can't look after our people and look after our tax payers then we don't need to do a study.

Councilmember Lemmon – He stated he has been listening to all the concerns. He stated he has talked with other Councilmembers about Jeff Trawick Interim Chief and agree to go ahead appoint Jeff Chief but he feels like the city needs to do the study. He asked Richard about the individuals who applied for the position and if he has started interviews yet. Richard replied no. Councilmember Lemmon suggested to go ahead with the study of consolidation and if it comes to the point to vote, put it up for the voters to vote on it. He was proud to see the Mutual aid Agreement between the City and County. He stated again for Richard to appoint Jeff and the meeting was called to do a study so do the study. Far as he is concerned it may be cost saving, that is the reason for the study. Councilmember Lemmon stated consolidation is a good thing if it is done right. A lot of people in the City will wonder how it will affect taxes. Hopefully this study will be over in a few months and he stated he wanted things done right. Go ahead and do the study of consolidation then so be it. If its not the right thing to do, then we will not do it. He believes in doing what is right. He stated he was elected by the citizens and he wants to look out for the citizens.

Councilmember Veal – Mr. Veal stated he was for the study because it is just that, a study. He also would like to keep Chief where he is. He does not agree with Richard doing interviews, he does not want to bring anyone in until the Council can decide what to do. He is for the study but keep the chief we have in place right now. Doing a study will let the Council see the financial part of consolidation. Once again, turn it over to the citizens to see how they feel. He does not want the decision to be the Council decision.

Councilmember Coley wanted to make two points of correction. Two things that were said, she wanted to make sure-

1-The reason for the study was cost – The reason for the study is not cost. Again, the city is financially sound. So, the reason for the study is not cost.

2- Sited the reason for the study was for protection – She feels like she is very well protected by the Law Enforcement Officers. The study about consolidation of law enforcement officers did not fall by the wayside. The White Paper showed there was no direct financial benefit. Only thing that appeared to be looked at in that White Paper showed there would be an 8,600 savings to the City if the law enforcement was consolidated. There's a reason small cities keep their local control.

Mayor stated his job was to lead the City and be a spokesman for the City and be a progressive pusher for the city polices. So, whatever the Council decided, whether he agrees or not, he backs the Council and the Citizens of Cochran.

Mayor stated he promised the public transparency and the meeting tonight was about as transparent as you can get.

Mayor asked Council what decision was going to be made.

Councilmember Ates made the motion to conduct the study for consolidation. Councilmember Veal seconded the motion.

Motion passed 5-1 - Veal, Anderson, Ates, Jones, Lemmon – (5) Yes Coley – (1) No.

Councilmember Ates made a motion to adjourn with Councilmember Jones seconding the motion.

Adjourned @ 6:35PM

(SEAL)