

CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
AUGUST 29, 2006, 3:00PM  
SPECIAL MEETING

PRESENT: Commissioner Talmage S. Baggett, Jr.  
Commissioner Breeden Blackwell  
Commissioner Jeannette M. Council  
Commissioner John T. Henley, Jr.  
Commissioner Diane Wheatley  
James Martin, County Manager  
Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager  
Amy Cannon, Asst. County Manager  
Cliff Spiller, Asst. County Manager  
Grainger Barrett, County Attorney  
Marsha Fogle, Clerk to the Board  
Sheriff Earl Butler  
Chief Deputy Cuyler Windham  
Sara VanderClute – County PIO  
County Staff  
Mayor Tony Chavonne, City of Fayetteville  
Councilman Keith Bates, City of Fayetteville  
Councilman Wesley Meredith, City of Fayetteville  
Karen McDonald, City Attorney  
Kyle Sonnenberg, Acting Fayetteville City Manager  
Fayetteville City Staff  
Connie Spell, Manager/ Clerk – Town of Stedman  
Press

The Board of Commissioners and Fayetteville City Council participated in a teleconference originated from the Georgia Institute of Government to receive information from officials in Athens-Clark County Georgia regarding “unified” government in that area.

Officials from Georgia shared their perspective and the issues faced as they worked toward consolidation or as they called it “unified” government.

Georgia officials said the key to consolidation is citizen buy-in of the concept. In fact, Georgia officials said the governments had tried several times to consolidate to no avail. It only worked when it was initiated by the citizens. Unification (consolidation) was approved by 57% of the voters.

Local citizen meetings were held to identify the issues. A charter was drafted setting out the overall function, but did not address details in merging. That was left to the governing board to work out. The charter did address the issue of employees and whether or not there would be any downsizing – no one would lose his/her job.

One of the catalysts that initiated the discussion of a unified government was the fact that water and sewer fees were different in the city and the county and the citizens felt the fees should be comparable.

**Some issues that were addressed:**

Disparity among the unified employees doing similar type jobs (it took about 5 years to address the disparity issue);

Law Enforcement – The city and county merged their police forces(the county had previously created a county police force); the Sheriff continued to perform his constitutional duties of courthouse security, serving warrants and oversight of the jail. Police car identification decals and uniforms were not addressed until later.

Municipalities – One municipality with a population of approximately 1100 was not part of the consolidation. It currently is landlocked and therefore, it cannot grow through annexation.

Fire Departments – the Clark County Fire Department merged with the City to provide services. (They did not have volunteer fire departments)

Roads/Streets – The county had maintained some of the roads, the city some of the roads and the state some highways.. They receive little state money to assist in maintenance.

Governing Board: 10 members (worked out so minority representation is assured)

**Some of the positive outcomes:**

Planning and economic development is easier;

Broader financial base;

Single policy-making process;

Workforce is more skilled;

Removes the excuse that “we have always done it this way”;

One-stop government; and

Only one entity to hold accountable.

Critical to consolidation is citizen buy-in and committed elected officials.

The tax rate did not decrease because of consolidation; however the millage rate decreased (went from 15.75% to 12.80% in a sixteen year period) Millage is \$1 per

\$1,000 of assessed value which is 40% of market value. An example that was used: A \$200,000 home would be valued at 40% or \$80,000.

In responses to a question from the County Manager, it was noted that population pre-unification was 90,000 (evenly distributed between the city and county). Last census figures indicate a population of 104,000. The geographic size of the county is 121 square miles.

Harry Hayes, Georgia Institute of Government, noted the importance of including state officials in the process.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 4:20PM