



CITY OF FREEPORT
WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

January 26, 2023, 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Freeport City Hall

Council Members Present: Mayor Russ Barley, Councilwoman Elizabeth Brannon, Councilman Bud Day, Councilman Tracey Dickey, Councilman Eddie Farris, and Councilwoman Elizabeth Haffner.

Staff Members Present: City Attorney Clay Adkinson, City Manager Mark Martin, City Clerk Kathie Gatewood, Finance Officer Sara Bowers, Planning Director Latilda Hughes-Neel, Senior Planner Samantha Graves, Wastewater Supervisor Paul Johnson, and Human Resources Generalist Chris Quinley

City Clerk's Note: Councilman Dickey was absent with notice.

1. **Meeting called to order**

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Mayor Barley in the Council Chambers of Freeport City Hall.

2. **Walton County Mosquito Spraying Fee Discussion**

Mayor Barley introduced Scott Caraway from the Walton County Public Works Department. Mr. Caraway provided the Council with background information and details of North Walton County Mosquito Control, which is under the Public Works Department. He said in the 1960's the North Walton County Mosquito Control was funded by the general fund with contributions from the cities. He said around 1987, Walton County Commissioners funded the department by setting a millage rate for the unincorporated areas to fund the program. He noted that the program is a state of Florida approved program with strict requirements they need to report to the state. He said their service area is all lands north of the Choctawhatchee Bay in Walton County, including the municipalities. He briefly summarized the services the department provides. Councilwoman Brannon asked if the department sprays on private property, to which Mr. Caraway replied yes, they do, providing they receive a resident call asking for assistance from North Walton County Mosquito Control.

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He explained that when the Commission established a millage rate for the unincorporated areas it did not include municipalities, and it has been this way since 1987. He said the City of Freeport currently houses an ambulance for the county and that offsets some of the mosquito control costs and the City of Defuniak Springs pays about eleven thousand dollars a year. He mentioned that the City of Paxton is now paying a millage rate just like the unincorporated areas. Three quarters of the departments funding comes from the millage rate from the unincorporated areas and the City of Paxton. He said the meeting today is to start the conversation between the city and the county about funding mechanisms to ensure everything is equitable for all parties involved.

Councilwoman Brannon thanked Mr. Caraway for coming to the meeting and for their email exchanges prior to the meeting. She said she understood the numbers are based on a millage rate from 1987 but that she questioned some of the numbers given for Freeport's contribution, which would be about \$361,000.00. She said the amount would be per house, but if a house was over \$500,000.00 their taxes would be increased by \$250.00 per year, and if it were a million dollar home their taxes would be increased by \$500.00 per year for mosquito spraying. She said a hundred thousand dollar home, which there are not a lot of, their share would be \$50.00 more a year. She said it did not sound equitable. Mr. Caraway confirmed what Councilwoman Brannon said is correct. He said the \$361,000.00 amount given was just an example based on current property values in Freeport, and would be how money the millage would generate if put in place today. He said that was an example of current costs and not what the county is asking for. Councilwoman Brannon said based on that information, she believed that is what the county would be presenting and asking for at this meeting and that the number would only increase each year as property values increase in Freeport. Mr. Caraway said the current budget is at \$983,000.00 and they will be starting discussions with the City of Defuniak Springs as well and if both cities paid the same millage rate as the unincorporated areas and Paxton that would generate about \$500,000.00 per year which is about half of their budget. Councilwoman Brannon said she looked at the numbers and it Freeport's portion would be about 38%, which Councilwoman Haffner agreed is what she thought as well. Councilwoman Brannon expressed that she does not think a millage rate is the way to go and believes it should be done by rooftop for about \$15.00 a year. She said she researched the costs of chemicals, and it looks like the department is completely top heavy on personnel and buildings and it looks like the department budget is 75% personnel, buildings, and equipment.

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Mr. Caraway replied that there is one director and seven technicians in the department, and they have a large area. He said because Freeport is a low-lying area that the effort to treat it is more concentrated than other areas of the county. Councilwoman Brannon said based on their conversations that Mr. Caraway stated technicians spend about 8-10 hours a week in Freeport, to which he confirmed was true for spraying only. Councilwoman Brannon asked if spraying was performed about 8 months a year, to which he replied spraying occurs from about the end of April to maybe the first of November. He noted that the department spends more time on larva control, which is most important in Freeport than spraying.

Councilwoman Haffner asked what Mr. Caraway felt was the City of Freeport's fair share when it comes to mosquito control, to which he replied that he did not have a number in mind. He wanted to start the conversation with the city and meet with the county finance department to come up with a fair amount. Councilwoman Haffner said she preferred that the city pay for mosquito control and not add to residents property taxes as they are already upset by them. She mentioned the \$361,000.00 amount was unreasonable for Freeport and is open to discussing what could be a reasonable amount now that she understands more after hearing him speak. Councilwoman Brannon requested a total amount of what is spent in Freeport city limits only, and Councilwoman Haffner agreed. Mr. Caraway said his department will work on that and get an approximation of total costs. Councilwoman Haffner said she wants to see numbers for all aspects of the costs. Councilwoman Brannon said she was pricing the chemicals and bricks used and the amounts and it was a huge difference.

Councilman Farris agreed with Councilwoman Brannon and Councilwoman Haffner and would also like to have the department come back with proof of costs before anyone can sit down and discuss funding and what is fair for inside the city limits. Councilwoman Brannon agreed and expressed that with the costs increasing and a possible tax increase in the future that she could not pass this onto the property owners. She said many Hammock Bay residents contract with businesses for mosquito spraying and may not know that the county provides the service if they call. Mr. Caraway informed the Council that Hammock Bay requested to have their own larva control program, but their department still sprays the community.

Mayor Barley called for public comment. Chuck Elton, Jr., Freeport resident, asked what the current millage rate is for the unincorporated areas.

Mr. Caraway replied it was 0.4912 and for a \$100,000.00 home that would equate to \$49.12 a year.


Hammock Bay resident Sarah Hoffman said when she personally called North Walton County Mosquito Control that she was not offered any services or explanation as to why other than they did not have funding. She asked what the difference is between North and South Walton County Mosquito Control and how their rates are determined. She said South Walton County Mosquito Control seems to have an abundance of funds that allows them to offer yellow fly traps kits and so forth. He replied that their millage rate is 0.22 which is lower than the county that they have a larger taxable base. He said North Walton County Mosquito Control is unable to provide the yellow fly traps but does provide education on how to make your own.

Councilwoman Haffner asked Mr. Caraway what the next steps were and let him know the city budget is set until the next year. Mr. Caraway said he would be meeting with county officials and would coordinate with City Manager Martin once they have more information to provide the Council.

3. Adjournment

Mayor Barley motioned to adjourn, and the meeting adjourned at 6:02 p.m.

Minutes were prepared by City Clerk Gatewood and approved by the City Council on February 14, 2023.



Russ Barley, Mayor

ATTEST:



Kathie Gatewood, City Clerk

