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Levy County accepts two unions' proposals



Labor attorney Wayne Helsby speaks to the Levy County Board of County Commissioners.

By Jeff M. Hardison © Sept. 21, 2016 @ 11:37 p.m.

BRONSON -- After conferring out of the view of the public, the Levy County Board of County Commissioners decided to agree Tuesday morning (Sept. 20) with two unions' sets of requests.

As members of government boards meet to confer with each other as they seek to reach an agreeable collective bargaining decision with unions, those boards are allowed to meet out of the public view (out of the sunshine). There are exceptions and exemptions to Florida Government-In-The-Sunshine Law (which generally seeks to force government to conduct business and keep its records in public view).

The exemptions to the Sunshine Law have increased over the years.



Levy County Department of Public Safety Director Mitch Harrell (center) listens during the County Commission meeting on Tuesday morning (Sept. 20). Firefighters, EMTS and paramedics are part of the union.

On Tuesday morning, labor attorney Wayne Helsby first sought for the Levy County Board of County Commissioners to ratify a collective bargaining agreement between the County Commission and Levy County Professional Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians IAFF (International Association of Fire Fighters) Local #4069.

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Renate Cannon asks a question Tuesday (Sept. 20). She is known to watch government groups and to ask questions to assure she understands what they are doing.

One point in this new agreement is a 3 percent increase in pay for the paramedics and EMTs after both parties the commission and the union, ratify it. Helsby said the union has ratified the agreement.

Another factor was a previous prohibition from bargaining unit members speaking to anyone outside of the agency, including county commissioners, when they had an issue in regard to operational matters.

This is a chain of command item. Now, however, none of the individuals are prohibited from speaking with people outside of the Levy County Department of Public Safety about operational issues they may have a complaint about. Helsby said the workers are strongly recommended to follow the chain of command to report disagreement with operational issues.

The new rule does not prohibit the worker from contacting a county commissioner now, however, if they find no satisfaction after going through the chain of command with complaints about operational issues.

There were finer points in this agreement, too, which takes effect on the heels of the agreement that had an expiration date in September of 2014. Although the previous agreement had expired, Florida law simply carried that as status quo into this point where a new agreement was reached between the two parties, Helsby said in response to a question from Renate Cannon.

This agreement is good through Sept. 30, 2017, Hellsby said, and it is not retroactive to when the previous agreement expired. The County Commission permitted the attorney to answer the member of the public. Cannon is among the relatively well-known local residents who ask questions of various government entities.

The County Commission voted 4-0 to ratify that Paramedic-EMT IAFF #4969 agreement. Commissioner Mike Joyner was absent.

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Levy County Commissioner Rock Meeks



Levy County Commissioner Danny Stevens

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Levy County Commission Chairman John Meeks



Levy County Commissioner Lilly Rooks

The second action sought by attorney Helsby was the ratification by the County Commission of a Memorandum Of Understanding between the commission and the Northeast Florida Public Employees' Local #630 Laborers' International Union of North America, AFL, CIO.

The agreement for this group is from Oct. 1, 2014 through Sept. 30, 2017, Helsby said, but that agreement does allow for "limited re-openers" in regard to the last two years of the agreement.

The limited re-opener involves wages, provisions related to compensatory time and the union

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requested a change in the longevity procedures.

After several meetings, a 3 percent across-the-board increase in pay was agreed upon effective Oct. 1 through Sept. 30, 2017, Helsby said.

There is an agreement now for accrual of up to 80 hours of compensatory time, he continued, provided that it is used within the quarter of the year when it is accrued.

The longevity pay remained as it was, he added.

The County Commission agreed to those revisions 4-0.

Commissioner Mike Joyner was absent.

Retiring EMS Worker Honored



Paramedic Cathy Wilson officially retires at the end of Fiscal Year 2015-16 on Sept. 30, but the Levy County Board of County Commissioners on Tuesday (Sept. 20) honored her with a presentation of a framed certificate of appreciation for her loyal dedication of service to the residents and visitors of Levy County. Wilson is wrapping up her high-risk job after 20 years in Emergency Medical Service. She also served with the Levy County Sheriff's Office as a dispatcher. This photo captures the moment when (from left) County Commissioner Lilly Rooks, County Commissioner Rock Meeks, Wilson, Chairman John Meeks and County Commissioner Danny Stevens paused to recognize Wilson for her service. County Commissioner Mike Joyner was absent.

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