

Newspaper Inquiry on Consolidation Proposal May 10, 2011

(Here are Sheriff Larry Ashley's answers to questions he received reference a proposal to review consolidation of law enforcement services with the city of Fort Walton Beach for those interested. The Sheriff's answers are in green.)

I have answered the NWFDN inquiry in green underneath your questions. As a clarifying statement, the Sheriff's Office is neutral on this issue however we will be happy to assist city and county officials in their efforts to collect data for consolidation analysis if requested to do so. I believe any consolidation initiative must come from the citizens. Providing options and making them available to the public allows our citizens a voice in determining the best approach. Please call me if you need clarification on any of my remarks. I have a speaking engagement at 6 PM however I should be done by 8 PM

* Can you clarify what you understand the proposal to entail?

I don't have any specifics regarding Councilman Griggs' proposal. I will presume that he will seek consensus from the council in requesting a proposal and cost estimate for the contracting of law enforcement services with the Sheriff's Office, similar to what we provide for Destin, Mary Esther and Cinco Bayou.

In light of our current economic conditions we can either cut services, raises taxes, or consolidate. We however have no desire to offer a service to an unwilling client. This has to be a city initiative and a city desire.

We are currently attempting to standardize and right all of our current contracts for service in so much as we subsidize or absorb additional cost in each of them. This cannot continue as we approach this year's budget process.

* Have you discussed this with Griggs, and how long has this idea been on the table?

Councilman Griggs and others have contacted me in regards to consolidation questions. I campaigned on consolidation as a means of cutting cost while maintaining a standard of service. I have since been approached by a number of city and county leaders in this regard.

Analysis of a Contract with the Sheriff's Office has been in the city's strategic plan for some years now. You can look at the 2010-2011 budget for the Police Department and see it listed there.

The idea of consolidation of law enforcement services in our cities has been discussed for the last 20 plus years. It has and continues to happen all across our state and country. I can ensure you the idea did not originate from the Sheriff's Office. I am a proponent of consolidation where it makes sense. Again, this has to be a city initiative with grass roots support.

*** Did the idea originate with the Sheriff's Office or did Griggs make the proposal?**

This proposal (whatever it may be) did not originate with me, however citizens, Tea Party members, county, and city leaders from various municipalities have frequently discussed this issue with me. Again, the idea of consolidation of law enforcement services in our cities has been discussed for a number of years. This issue has also been previously proposed and voted on by former city councils.

*** How does the father-son relationship between your Deputy Director of Administration Stan Griggs and Councilman Bobby Griggs play into the proposal?**

It has no bearing on the issue. This is a decision for the citizens of Fort Walton Beach to make.

*** How would this arrangement benefit or challenge the Sheriff's Office? What are the benefits to taxpayers?**

Consolidation will have little effect on the Sheriff's Office. This would benefit the city taxpayer in lowering the per capita cost of law enforcement services for its residents. Consolidation will not necessarily help the county taxpayer in any substantial or meaningful way other than having a larger contingent of forces to mobilize when dealing with large scale disasters. In addition, purchasing and communications benefits will create some other positive aspects as well as having a larger number of personnel to pull specialized duties from. Consolidation would eliminate the need for two communications centers, two records centers, two computer systems, two administrations, two Special Response Teams, two K-9 Units, two of all support functions, just to name a few..

*** How much the Sheriff's Office would charge the city to provide law enforcement coverage? A ballpark is fine.**

(I have no idea and do not want to participate in an exercise in futility. If City Officials reach a consensus and desire a cost estimate I'll examine the issue then.) Basic economies of scale however clearly dictate that through the elimination of duplicative services, we could do it for less. If a proposal is requested one will be provided. It will then be for city officials and residents to determine what type of services they desire and if our cost estimates are worth the change required.

*** How would staffing be affected by the OCSO absorbing the FWB Police Department?**

Much of the cost savings associated with consolidation is realized by ending duplicative services such as supervisory and management positions. I don't have any numbers because we haven't to date received any request to explore it. Of course we would give retention preference to the current staff as warranted in our needs assessment.

*** If the city approved the proposal this year, presumably during the 2012 budget talks, how soon could the change take place?**

(I don't know what the proposal is or what it would include, so I can't answer this at this time). I do know that they have this item on their agenda for Tuesday May 17th

Given the required information and taking into consideration swap over cost of uniforms, vehicles and communication services we could probably provide a needs assessment and cost estimate within 60-90 days.

Kari C. Barlow