

City grilled about firemen's letter, resignations

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...sion comes out. Some will not like what we do, but that is part of a representative democracy."

Billinger said the city had met with the county commission on Tuesday, and heard that some city volunteers have applied to join the county fire department. He said some of these are highly trained, and with them working with the county, if the city has to call on the county for help with a fire, they will cover all the bases.

The first question from the floor was if the city is going to change its alcohol policy?

Daniels said when the commission hired Wayne Hill as city manager, one of the first things he asked was to have all the city policies reviewed.

"Wayne has been looking at the employee handbook," Daniels said. "Some changes will be made very quickly."

Daniels said the commission had talked about this when they were talking to Hill about the situation.

No specific discussion about reviewing the city policies had been brought up in open commission meetings, but Hill said he had asked the commission about reviewing the policies when they offered him the job in 18 months ago.

Another question was, "If the city doesn't have control, why not disband the city fire department?" Billinger said combining the city and county departments is one of the things on the table.

Daniels said there were some logistical questions dealing with firehouse locations and response times, but he said there are programs that might be worked out.

"I want to thank the guys who stood up to take the burden of the city," said Tina Roe. "We have a petition about this, but want you (Hill) to know is not personal against you."

"I have lived here for 50 years. I

am proud of all the guys, both the old group and the new group.

"We are trying to push forward to get new businesses here, and this is a black eye."

"I appreciate the comments," Daniels said. "What is best for citizens is what we are making decisions based on. We are thinking of the people and what we feel is the best interest of all."

Former City Commissioner Dean Blume asked how long this issue had been known to the city.

"What we are hearing is that this has been going on for some time," Blume said. "Did you call an executive session?"

Billinger said the commission had talked with Hill. Daniels said the first they knew was when the city got a letter from the firemen on Jan. 26.

"You did not know about the problem before?" Blume asked

Daniels said they expected some of the volunteer firemen to come to a commission meeting last month, but they did not show up. An hour later, he said, they turned their resignation letters in to Chief Gilmer on Tuesday, Feb. 20.

Former City Commissioner Curtis Hurd asked if any of the volunteers has talked to the commissioners.

Daniels said two talked to him on Feb. 19, about coming to the city commission meeting before the resignations, but no volunteers showed up at the city meeting.

"Mr. Hill, how long had you know about this?" Blume asked

Alcohol policy questioned at city-county joint meeting

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News

Should emergency workers take a call after drinking, as a city policy allows?

No, says Lt. Kevin Winston of the Kansas Highway Patrol, who said at a joint city-county meeting last Tuesday he thought the city should consider reviewing their alcohol tolerance policy.

Lt. Winston said he felt it would be better for everyone if it was a zero tolerance. No one should be on an emergency run after taking a drink, he said.

City Attorney Jeff Mason said the city is reviewing its personnel policies, including the alcohol policy.

Current policy allows firemen and other workers to take a call if they have been drinking as long as their blood alcohol is below .02. That's a much tighter standard than the state limit for driving, which is .08, but many agencies tell workers to stay home if they've had anything to drink.

City Fire Chief Scott Gilmer was suspended for a month in January after he was found to be over the limit on a call, then reinstated. All 12 volunteer firemen have turned in letters of resignation in protest.

Rural Fire Chief Alan David said he wanted to be sure a revised mutual aid agreement had a provision to be sure who is in charge at an emergency, and al-

low a chief to pull his men out of an unsafe situation.

County Attorney Bonnie Selby said she thought the proposed agreement could be modified to fit the needs of the county and city.

Sheriff Kevin Butts said he would like to see a provision in the agreement for a zero tolerance of alcohol for anyone at a fire or accident scene.

A question was raised about the effect of the fire department resignations on the home insurance costs in the city.

"I visited with the Insurance Services Office people," said City Manager Wayne Hill. "They are not going to change the rating for a year. A representative will make a visit in a few months, but does not anticipate any change in the next year."

"I have that in writing."

"That is whether we enter into an agreement or not?" Selby asked.

"That is what they said," Hill said. "They will come out to review the training, and we have a year to get things straightened out."

Winston asked when the year starts.

"It has started," Hill said.

The Insurance Services Office, a national organization, reviews property and liability risks. Its ratings are used by insurance companies, government regulators, and other companies and organizations.

"Not until I got the letters," Hill said. Fairbanks said there are lots of rumors, especially in a small town. "This is a fact," Blume said, "what I am hearing. When did you know?" "I did not know until I got the letter," Fairbanks replied. Billinger said he did not know exactly when he got the information. "Why wasn't it discussed in executive session?" Blume asked. "It was discussed in executive session," Billinger said.

Senators, congressman write letter of support

LETTER, from Page 1

to the nearest Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Hays. Goodland is centrally located for many of these veterans, and it also provides easy access due to its central location at the intersection of Interstate 70 and Kansas Highway 27."

They said the Goodland hospital is "fully capable of providing a wide range of health care services beyond primary care," pointing out that it also has telemedicine equipment in place and a fixed-wing air ambulance service. "What is most compelling," they wrote, "is that the members of the Goodland community have been steadfast and enthusiastic in their support of providing the care to our nation's veterans. "The community's dedication to veterans, coupled with the strategic location and ample medical resources, makes Goodland an ideal location for a VA outreach clinic."

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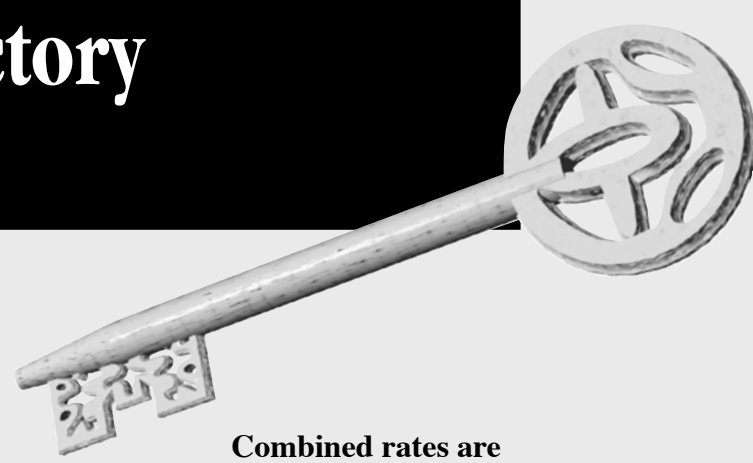
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