

Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Robin Willadsen-Lancien, and I went to Harts Bluff and graduated from Mt Pleasant High School in 1985. To clear up any question as to why I have an interest in or if I have any investment in Titus County issues; I am beneficiary to approximately 6 acres on County Road 1612 which has been held in our family since my grandparents settled in Titus County in 1932, over 90 years ago. Additionally, I hold the Durable Power of Attorney for my mother, Mildred Willadsen, who is the grantor of the property mentioned and is a registered voter in Titus County. All mentioned deeds and documents are on file with the County Clerk, as well as Mildred being in court with us this morning, so I am speaking with her blessings.

All references and documentation are available on request.

Given that Judge Cooper and the Commissioner's Court decided to reopen the subject of the fire department after Ex-Judge Lee and the Commissioner's Court at that time had already settled it, residents of the county are now in a precarious position beginning October 1, 2024. After reading the agenda posted for today's court, I would like to address two items:

1. Item number 3 on the agenda, to consider and possibly approve the contract between Fire Chief Solutions and Titus County.

In doing my due diligence research on Mr. Loyd, I discovered that his company Fire Chief Solutions shows as permanently closed at 3726 Parkwood Ln, Denison, TX 75020.<sup>1</sup> On the Request for Proposal Mr. Loyd listed the address 202 Tulane Ave, Gainesville, TX 76240 which is a residential area.<sup>2</sup> Does the company not have a brick and mortar office front and is being run from his home instead? The name Fire Chief Solutions shows no designation as to its entity type anywhere I have seen. When I searched the Secretary of State website no LLC, PC, LLP, INC or DBA is listed under that name Fire Chief Solutions as being registered either as a Texas registered company or a "foreign" registration which would be a company registered in another state but registered as doing business in the State of Texas, as required.<sup>3</sup> When I searched the United States Copyright Office website,<sup>4</sup> there was no record of any such company yet on his webpage

<http://www.firechiefsolutions.com/><sup>5</sup> he states that it is copyrighted. I received the same result when I searched the United States Patent and Trademark Office.<sup>6</sup> Once again when I searched the Better Business Bureau<sup>7</sup>, no such company is known. Where is Fire Chief Solutions registered and why can I not find any reviews? I did find his professional presence online through Linked In<sup>8</sup> and while it did state his education and certifications, it was out of date because it says he is still working for the city of Coppell. When I looked into his most recent employment, I in fact found “ he retired from Coppell in 2016<sup>9</sup> and moved to Denison<sup>10</sup> which resulted in the City Council being scheduled on Monday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to ‘ discuss the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment of duties, discipline, or dismissal of, or to hear a complaint against, a public officer or employee” during an executive session — in this case, Fire Chief Gregg Loyd was the employee discussed. There is no explanation as to why Loyd is no longer with the department; a city spokesperson said there would be no immediate comment.<sup>11</sup> I respectfully ask the Judge and our Commissioner’s do you know why Mr. Loyd was released? Is Mr. Loyd going to be able to dedicate the time needed to Titus County as he is a full time employee of the state?

In reading the Request for Proposal #2024-03<sup>2</sup>, Mr. Loyd has the salary rates for Fired Department employees listed coming to a payroll estimate of \$664,837.00. Just looking the at Firefighter base rate of \$40,000.00 per year brings into question the validity of Mr. Loyd’s estimates. Commissioner Applewhite stated at the Harts Bluff School Board Meeting that, “...our fire department will be top notch...not hiring people that are going to be underpaid.”<sup>12</sup> yet Mr. Loyd’s proposal comes in with estimates that are just that, underpaid. According to Zip Recruiter, a web-based job site, the base salary for an Entry Level Fire Fighter in Texas is \$51,032.00 per year.<sup>13</sup> That is a difference of \$88,808.00 including the employer’s portion of Social Security and Medicare taxes other wise known as FICA for the 7 recommended firefighters. For the 3 recommended firefighters ranked Captain, Salary.com<sup>14</sup> states the average salary is \$88,891.00 per year as opposed to Mr. Loyd’s recommendation of \$47,000.00.

For those 3 personnel, it would be an increase of \$48,174.00 including FICA. I believe it can be drawn from just these two firefighter position costs, that if the county upholds Commissioner Applewhite's statement about providing competitive wages the budget provided by Mr. Loyd will fall extremely short just from the cost of manpower and extend well over the current budget for fire protection once actual upkeep and maintenance costs are included. That or the county will not pay competitive wages and the people hired will questionably be the "best" as Judge Cooper has said they will be. Has Mr. Loyd given the contingency if his proposal cannot meet its stated goal? Must you still pay his fee for failure to being able to acquire personnel at those prices?

2. Item number 7, to consider and possibly approve the appointment of Jerry Ward as Titus County Emergency Management Coordinator, Full-time.

I do not have personal knowledge of Mr. Ward other than he is Chief of Tri Lakes Volunteer Fire Department, so I did a web dive on him as well. Mr. Ward has a much smaller internet presence than Mr. Loyd and much of it is related to his participation in the volunteer fire department and ownership of Jerry's Smokehouse. His Facebook page shows no information as to his professional education and/or certifications.<sup>15</sup> Linked In, a commonly used business networking website, also has no record of Mr. Ward. What I have discovered is that since his appointment, the Hazard Mitigation Plan still has not been submitted to the state while the City of Mt. Pleasant's under the direction of Chief McRae is only awaiting FEMA approval. Note, while employed as the EMC of Titus County, Chief McRae was not responsible as an individual for completing those reports, the County Court at the time chose to go under contract with Ark-Tex Council of Governments.<sup>16</sup> Mr. Ward and the Court must still rely on the same contract with Ark-Tex Council of Governments (ATCOG)<sup>17</sup> that was in force when Chief McRae the EMC. According to ATCOG, no specific date of completion is available other than maybe August. Additionally, the County's Emergency Management Plan has several annexes that are potentially out of date as well, I ask the court when will those be

remediated? I personally was under the impression that Mr. Ward, as the newly appointed EMC, would be able to make the filings himself due to a text conversation with Judge Cooper in which he told me personally, "I hire our own EMC and he handles keeping them up to date"; but I was clearly under the wrong impression. Which lends the question, how many such filings does Mr. Ward have experience in completing? In lack of finding Mr. Ward's qualifications, I researched what are the typical qualifications required of an Emergency Management Coordinator in Texas. What I first found was that a Bachelor's degree in a related field AND ten (10) years of experience in emergency management or a similar public safety-related field, with significant experience in management and emergency planning is typically recommended.<sup>18</sup> To confirm this I looked at current job offers for this position listed with for various counties in Texas listed on Indeed, a popular job search website. Looking through the positions there is a common theme of it being desired that applicant hold a Bachelor's degree in emergency management, public administration, or a closely related field and various certifications such as FEMA's Professional Development Series, the Advanced Professional Series Previously trained in NIMS (IS-700, 800, 100, 200, 300, and 400) and be a Certified Emergency Manager (CEM).<sup>19</sup> Does Titus County have similar expectations in education and experience? Was this position posted on a public job site? Why would the Court decide to hire someone with considerably less education and certification than the person they released and pay them more? What are the contingencies if Mr. Ward is unavailable due to unexpected events as he is the only EMC? Under the past EMC there were 3 Deputy Chiefs and 6 Captains to serve as Assistant EMC's in case he was unavailable.

I have listened to hours of Commissioner Court videos on YouTube, the Harts Bluff School Board Meeting posted online, read countless documents, spoken with Ex-Judge Lee, various other involved parties and have even texted with Judge Cooper about the quality of service the new Titus County Fire Department will offer. He assured that it would be "the best". For the reasons stated above, I am not convinced that is true.

I for one am disappointed in the amount of incorrect and misconstrued information being perpetuated, even by our elected officials. People who were placed in their position to do the voting public's will, not just fulfill their personal agendas while telling people in their district not to tell them how they feel they should vote. Last time I checked, that's called the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment and Voter's Rights which are typically encouraged in the United States.

In closing, I would like to remind the court of Judge Cooper's statements: "There is no possible way to put a fire department together in one year."<sup>20</sup> And "Government is a slow process, a slow, slow process."<sup>21</sup> The clock is ticking gentlemen and ladies and as our court intends to continue with creating a county fire department, are the lives of residents in Titus County not worth negotiating for at a minimum, a gap policy until a county fire department can properly be established instead of having to rush to beat a deadline and hiring questionable and underqualified people? Even using 2021 statistics of a population of 31,183<sup>21</sup>, the \$1.3 million dollar contract is only \$42.00 per year, per resident: less than a meal for a family of four at David Beards. But alas, I'm reminded by Commissioner Applewhite's statement at Harts Bluff, "after all that has been spent with the city and we have nothing to show for it, well some lives and stuff maybe but no trucks"<sup>23</sup>. I'm confident if you asked the families of those people saved, those lives are priceless.

## References:

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