Office of the Mayor

February 26, 2016

Commissioner Revels, Chair
Board of County Commissioners
1769 E. Moody Blvd
Bunnell, FL 32110

Dear Commissioner Revels:

Contrary to what you may have read in the local media, Palm Coast has no desire to implement its own 800 megahertz radio system, separate and apart from that of the County. We wish to remain a part of a comprehensive, county-wide communications system that serves the needs of all local governments and their various departments; not just police and fire, but public works, utility, etc. Just as all personnel from different agencies should be able to communicate, I am asking to open the channels of communication among elected officials to discuss the future of a public safety radio system.

In spite of a recent briefing by county staff on some of the issues surrounding the proposed news radio system, I have several unanswered questions. The answers to these questions are vital to the planning efforts of the Palm Coast City Council.

Depending on the cell phone carrier, probably everyone in Flagler County has experienced “dead spots” where they lose cell phone coverage. Probably all of us have found that in certain buildings our cell phones don’t work. For cell phone users, this is an inconvenience. For emergency personnel this can be a “life or death” issue.

Similarly, I was told that one of the first issues that needs to be resolved is the ‘standard” to which the new system will be designed. Only once it is determined how much “penetration” into existing and future buildings is desired and how extensive the geographical coverage is to be, can we determine the need for additional radio towers. Just as Flagler County experienced pushback from residents against proposed radio tower sites in the County, I am concerned that Palm Coast may experience similar resistance if additional radio towers are required within our City limits. Palm Coast needs to begin planning, NOW, for such anticipated needs.

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I have been told that broader coverage can be accomplished by a relatively small number of “tall” towers or by a larger number of shorter towers. Is there a cost differential? Do community input and aesthetics play a role in the decision-making? If there is a cost differential for shorter towers will Palm Coast be asked to make up the difference? We need to know this NOW!

I understand the new system will require all cities in Flagler County to upgrade their own radio equipment. Palm Coast needs to fully understand the impact the County’s plans will have on our existing radio equipment and the associated costs. The City has an ongoing five- and ten-year capital improvement plan that allows us to prepare for important capital projects without issuing debt. We need a specific plan, NOW, to deal with the costs and timing of this radio upgrade to assure our future financial obligations will be fully funded.

I was told that the proposed new system, P-25 and P-25 *phase two*, will provide significant additional capacity to the system. In the past, the County has requested funds from Palm Coast to pay for capacity increases. To the best of my knowledge there has been no mention of such assistance with this upgrade. Will Palm Coast be asked to contribute to the cost of the new system? Again, we need to know this NOW!

I believe the best way to answer these and other questions is to convene meetings, NOW, involving ALL participants in the new system. Certainly, as users of the system, you would want our input on the fundamental issues such as the new system standard, etc. Once this is determined, the other questions can be properly answered.

I am writing to ask for your assistance in helping us to get answers in a timely manner so that Palm Coast can begin planning appropriately. I am requesting a series of meetings between the Board of County Commissioners and the cities within Flagler County to discuss these issues.

Regards,

Jon Netts
Mayor

CC: Palm Coast City Council
Flagler County Commissioners
Mayor Provencher, Flagler Beach
Mayor Robinson, City of Bunnell
Mayor Emmett, Town of Beverly Beach
Mayor Bobonis, Town of Marineland

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