

Valencia Association of Local Elected Officials (VALEO)
Tuesday November 16, 2022 6:00 PM
Los Lunas Transportation Center 101 Courthouse Rd. Los Lunas, NM 87031

Minutes

Call to Order – Valencia County Commission Chair, Gerard Saiz

- Commission Chair Saiz called the VALEO meeting to order at 6:00 pm

Pledge of Allegiance

- Sheriff Denise Vigil led the Pledge of Allegiance

Introduction

- Representing Valencia County: Commission Chair Gerard Saiz, Commissioner Joseph Bizzell, Sheriff Denise Vigil, Clerk Mike Milam. Representing the City of Belen: Mayor Robert Noblin, Councilor Frank Ortega. Representing the Village of Los Lunas: Mayor Charles Griego, Councilman Chris Ortiz. Representing the City of Rio Communities: Councilor Jim Winters, Councilor Lawrence Gordon.
 - Also Present: Valencia County: Undersheriff Jeff Noah, Grants Manager Jeremias Silva, P&Z Commissioner Phillip Sublet, County Manager Danny Monette, Chief Administrator Lichelle Armstrong, Public Works Director Lina Benavidez. City of Belen: Chief James Harris, City Manager Roseann Peralta, City Councilor Steven Holdman. Village of Los Lunas: Village Administrator Greg Martin. Rio Communities: City Manager Dr. Martin Moore. Bosque Farms: Chief Andrew Owen.

Review of Minutes

- Minutes were reviewed by all. Commission Chair Saiz asked if there were any issues or comments with the previous minutes. With no objection, the minutes are approved.

New Business

❖ Discussion on Homelessness in Valencia County

- Commission Chair Saiz opens the floor for talk and discussion on homelessness in Valencia County. Passes to Undersheriff Noah.
- Undersheriff Noah opens with a breakdown of the current situation and the issues everyone is facing from the homeless. He wants to bring it up here (at the meeting) because there aren't any current solutions. The group needs to see if anything can be figured out before it becomes a bigger problem.
- Grants Manager Silva states that every entity in the county needs to work as one and set a regional goal with a subcommittee of members representing all groups. Federal funds can be made available if the approach is unified because there is no perfect solution. There are homeless camps along the river and what many of them want is to be left alone. Maybe it's a social problem, housing problem, mental health problem, or drug problem. Law enforcement can't fix the problem alone. Right now the problem is out of sight, but it is becoming more concentrated in cities. Some ideas: trade work, mental health facility, shelter-but there is an issue in them staying clean, but can there be incentives for them?
- Chief Owen mentions upcoming meeting in Belen to talk about same issue. "Out of sight, out of mind" problem, but shelters bring the problem closer. The county can't allow things to be lawless, compassion is needed. If they are just sent away, it only perpetuates the problem. Community needs to be involved in helping.
- Sheriff Vigil states that the homeless are being moved around too much. The whole community needs to come together to discuss the issue. We need some consensus, even if it's not 100%.

- Chief Harris talks about squatters and the potential issues they may cause. The jurisdictions don't currently have enough resources to help and officers and EMTs are not always available, and constituents aren't always aware of these issues. It will become more dangerous over time. Mental health is a real issue and there is only so much everyone can do to help without the laws changing.
 - Chief Owen states that the Supreme Court has tied everyone's hands when it comes to how to handle/aid homeless.
 - Grants Manager Silva mentions that 95% of fires in Bosque last year, were started by the homeless. If communities can show that they are unable to grow due to the issue, funding can be available.
 - Commissioner Bizzell asks what the process is if issues are along the Bosque?
 - Undersheriff Noah informs the group that MRGCD says motorized cars aren't allowed when patrolling/monitoring. And how does law enforcement know if someone is just walking or doing/planning something inappropriate without profiling?
 - Manager Monette states that MRGCD continually puts it back on local government.
 - Sheriff Vigil states that three years ago MRGCD said it was a local problem, but if homeless were arrested for trespassing they would not go in and clear out the camps. It is always the same problems and answers from MRGCD. The county can't make decisions for MRGCD property especially when they have said they wouldn't support it in court. Entities can't keep passing the buck with MRGCD being unresponsive, not always getting access to the Bosque, and dealing with changing expectations.
 - Mayor Griego restates that it is pointless to issue trespassing citations, and that law enforcement needs ability to hold individuals with mental health issues. If there are facilities built, where? People don't want it near them. State involvement is needed to get authority/resources/help.
 - Grants Manager Silva states that tiny homes in ABQ are not being filled because of the rules associated with living there. People don't want to follow the rules.
 - Sheriff Vigil discusses legal issues: panhandling vs. jay walking, citations won't do anything permanent, one day holds won't fix anything, and the homeless have the right to assemble.
 - Councilman Ortega restates that there aren't enough resources. States that the homeless should be identified (literally), especially the veteran homeless, but they don't like authority – it could be personal or scare tactic.
 - ▲ Chief Harris states that there are legal issues with that and law enforcement tries, even with vets, but they don't want the help.
 - Chief Harris goes on to state that counties and cities can't grow with the current problem. Resources need to be provided to get them away from drugs, not encourage or facilitate via needle exchanges.
 - Councilman Ortega suggest non-law enforcement unit.
 - ▲ Chief Harris responds that social workers in other areas are quitting these groups.
 - ▲ Ortega reiterates that VA assistance for homeless is necessary.
 - Chief Owen asks when the obligation ends? If help is given to the homeless and transportation given to take them to shelters/hospitals and they're full, then what?
 - Mayor Noblin brings up suggestions of needing short-term solutions. Long-term solutions are great, but short-term is necessary for long-term to succeed. There aren't humanitarian services available. Can we get the homeless back to a place they would like to be (near family, support)? If we get grant funding for shelters, the issue becomes who is in charge/responsible.
 - ▲ Sheriff Vigil responds that the issue exists of what happens when grant money runs out.
 - Councilman Ortega brings up the need for churches and clergy to be involved.
- ❖ Running low on time, Commission Chair Saiz asks if there is at least a consensus to get together and start with a "subcommittee"-type of group to discuss the issue further?
- Mayor Noblin suggests that each organization provide a list of resources available.

- Commission Chair Saiz says that Grants Manager Silva will take the lead for the formation of a committee.

❖ VALEO 2023 Calendar

- Dates and sponsors are discussed and the following is decided/approved:
 - ▲ 02.21.2023 (February 21, 2023) will be hosted by the Village of Los Lunas
 - ▲ 05.16.2023 (May 16, 2023) will be hosted by the City of Belen
 - ▲ 08.15.2023 (August 15, 2023) will be hosted by the City of Rio Communities
 - ▲ 11.21.2023 (November 21, 2023) will be hosted by Valencia County

Next Meeting

- Next meeting is determined and agreed upon to be February 21, 2023 – hosted by the Village of Los Lunas

Adjourn

- Commission Chair Saiz adjourns the meeting