

VALENCIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

EMERGENCY MEETING

MAY 25, 1999

M I N U T E S

The Emergency Meeting of May 25, 1999 was called to order by Chairperson Alicia Aguilar at 3:00 PM.

PRESENT

Alicia Aguilar, Chairperson
Aurelio H. Padilla, Vice-Chairman

Eloy G. Giron, Commissioner
S. T. Frank Pando, Commissioner
James Fernandez, County Manager
Thomas Garde, County Attorney

Press and Public

ABSENT

Helen Baca, Commissioner

Kandy Cordova, County Clerk

Chairman Alicia Aguilar stated the purpose of the Emergency Meeting is to discuss disaster relief for Valencia County. She said, "As you are all aware yesterday we had some flash floods, high winds and there are some areas in Valencia County that received extensive damage. There are some private residences that have been flooded. On the East Mesa we have problems with private septic systems that have failed and now the waste is floating on the water. We have families that are waiting to get into their homes and there is a lake of water surrounding their homes. We have had some damage to our roads and our Road Superintendent is working on that. We called this meeting today to discuss the extent of the damage and hopefully come up with some solutions and some answers."

Chairman Aguilar introduced Road Superintendent Louie Pena, Helen Cole, Fire Marshal and Emergency Coordinator John Cherry, Wayne Gallegos the Emergency Coordinator from Belen, County Manager James Fernandez, Carlos Montoya, Monica Mireles, Commissioner Frank Pando, Commissioner Eloy Giron, Commissioner Al Padilla and herself. She introduced County Attorney Tom Garde, Paula Weathersby and Sheriff Juan Julian.

Chairman Aguilar said there is a resolution on the agenda as well as reports from the Environmental Dept., the American Red Cross, Midwest C.A.T., Representative Heather Wilson's Office and Commissioner Giron said he would have a report from Senator Bingaman's Office.

Commissioner Eloy Giron made a motion to approve the agenda for the Emergency Meeting. Commissioner Frank Pando seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Chairman Alicia Aguilar said she called the Governor's Office and they transferred her over to Emergency Management and they transferred her over to Disaster Assistance and they transferred her to State Assistance and she spoke with Sheila Gwinn. She said she was very helpful in telling her to contact John Cherry who is the Emergency Coordinator for the County and Wayne Gallegos. Chairman Aguilar said she also called F.E.M.A. and talked with Allen Johnson and Bart Moore and for FEMA to help the County, the Governor would have to declare this area a Disaster Area. She said they have to start at the local level and declare it and then request the Governor's assistance. The Governor would then contact the President and the President has to declare a Federal Disaster. There is a process to follow. Chairman Aguilar said she did call Salomon Romero from E.I.D. because of the water and the septic systems. He said he might be a little bit late for the meeting, but he would be here.

John Cherry, Valencia County Fire Marshal stated, "As you are all aware, we had a tremendous storm come across. Yesterday afternoon I received a phone call from the National Weather Bureau indicating that there was a cyclonic type storm tracking from the Alamo Indian Reservation, which is Southwest of Magdalena, tracking toward the Belen area. They estimated the arrival of the storm would be within forty-five minutes. They estimated possible tornadoes, three-inch diameter size hail and high winds. At 2:30, I had it figured if they were correct in their estimation, it would hit in our area about 2:30. At 2:33 we had it. They did an excellent job of forecasting. Upon receiving the alert, we immediately notified the radio dispatcher for the City of Belen and all affiliated agencies to be on the alert that we may possibly have a problem. We put spotters on the West Mesa. The Sheriff's Office put a spotter off of State Road 6 on the West and my Deputy went up Sosimo Padilla on the Mesa. I went up Calle de Baca South of there. We did have two funnel clouds forming. I've heard contradictory reports from the news media and other people that there was not a tornado. I don't know what a tornado is, this is the first one I've seen, but it was a tornado to me. We had two funnel clouds, one large, the first report was, Sheriff Julian reported that it did land and hit the Los Chavez Area."

"I was able to observe it and it was definitely a funnel cloud coming down. We had another funnel cloud forming to the South of this one aiming for the Jarales, Rio Communities Area, but it dissipated and went back up. It didn't develop. We immediately went to work and assessed the properties and alerted the Fire Departments. We have Seven County Fire Departments and six of them were active in some respect. We were conducting traffic control, clearing of highways; Highway 47 was totally blocked. At Highway 47 and Tavalopa, a pregnant lady with a three year old child had pulled in there with a new van and parked under a tree to escape the tremendous hail that was coming down and then the tornado blew the tree down on top of her car. They were injured and we transported them out. We had 14 mobile type homes affected. Out of the 14, there were four uninhabited mobile homes. They were not lived in and were not anchored and they were turned over. We had seven RV type mobile homes that were affected. The balance was habitated mobile homes. Those were demolished. We transported by ambulance and by Fire Rescue Unit 12 people to the Albuquerque Hospital Facilities. The most seriously injured person came out of the Los Chavez area; it was a seven-month pregnant lady. Her mobile home did not blow over; it blew off of the foundation and tilted. They are surmising that possibly her TV fell on her. She had a broken leg and abdominal injuries. She was the only one that was retained overnight for observation and a determination if they were going to induce labor and take the child. There might be a problem there. We had a broken arm from a lady off of Tavalopa. The rest of the injuries were minor cuts and abrasions from flying glass. We had a tremendous amount of damage to the West Side in the Los Chavez Area through to the Tome Area. Much of it was structural damage to carports, horse trailers, you name it. We saw everything. There were a lot of windows broken out, a lot of damage to houses and naturally they got flooded from the storm itself, the rainwater and hail. On I-25, we had an estimated 2 inches of hail. I-25 was closed down for a while. We had tremendous assistance from all agencies, the Road Department responded immediately, the State Highway Dept. responded immediately, the State Police was handling their side of it. We could not get to all emergencies immediately due to road conditions, hail conditions or blocked roads. PNM was out with the electrical. They provided us with three crews. We had a tremendous gas leak in the MeadowLake area; the floodwaters eroded out from under the line and a car went into it and busted the pipeline. We had numerous reports of propane tanks leaking due to being shaken away from the mobile homes. Fortunately we did not have a fire. I had reserved one Fire Department as a back-up to handle fire suppression if necessary."

"I believe that all agencies cooperated 100%. My total estimation of it is that we did a bang-up job with the short time and what we had to work with. We are faced with quite a bit of damage. The infrastructure of the County was damaged. We had road damage. Most of our damage is private citizens and private areas."

Commissioner Eloy Giron stated, "We have all of these agencies here before us to report to us. I thank Mr. Cherry for reporting to us at this time. We have a resolution before us and just like Commissioner Pando stated, we probably do have the rains coming again this afternoon. I was in MeadowLake, that's my district, until 9 o'clock last night. We have some families out there without water and electricity. Some of them, their homes have washed away and some of them settled. We have some in El Cerro Mission that have called me this morning that their septic systems have been washed away and it has run into their water wells. I don't know how aware they are that we have Red Cross set up here, but I also mentioned that I was in contact with Senator Bingaman's Office and there is a process that they want us to follow. I think time is of the essence. I would like to approve the resolution as soon as possible and make sure it gets facts and is forwarded to the proper authorities at this time."

Chairman Aguilar said, "I agree with you, but I thought, for the record we would go ahead and get a report of the damage and allow Mr. Gallegos the time to report to us on the process."

John Cherry said, "We called for Red Cross assistance last evening. Today they are setting up relief areas. People are donating blankets and clothing and things of this nature. We have this set up for disbursement. We have a Sheriff's Reserve Officer manning as well as a volunteer. I understand the Red Cross also has assessment teams going around the area. Some people are under stress and we are trying to set up a de-briefing team to come down and go with these people and try to relieve some of the stress that these people are living under. If I missed anyone I apologize and I need to publicly apologize; I didn't have time to notify the Commissioners. I did try to contact the County Manager and I did get that accomplished late last night."

Donations may be taken to 351 Rio Communities Blvd. in Belen or 515 Don Pascal in Los Lunas.

Wayne Gallegos stated, "From the National Weather Service, they flew over today in a helicopter, they estimated damage was caused by a funnel cloud. We are here today to declare an emergency. This is the process. All of the response part has taken place. I believe we are in a recovery stage right now. These funds will help and assist you with public property, roads, culverts, bridges, anything to do with county or city-owned property. To help the people, the source here is the Red Cross. They will be number one in helping your private citizens. In order for FEMA to come in and help, you have to have two million dollars in damage. It was a good feeling to have the State saying, whatever you guys need. From the Governor's representative whatever you need, from National Guard to helicopters, they were available since yesterday. You need to sign the declaration. We need to start the record from yesterday on the road damage, people that worked overtime, everything on paper, it needs to be documented and turned in on official forms."

"Right now you are going to declare the disaster right here in the County. We will go into different categories of debris removal. When we get all of this together, the packet goes back to the State and the State is going to look at it along with D.F.A. Until you get a signed declaration from the Governor, nothing will happen. It is not going to happen overnight. There is a process that you have to go through."

Commissioner Frank Pando made a motion to approve Resolution 99-26. It is a resolution declaring portions of Valencia County in a State of Emergency. Commissioner Eloy Giron seconded the motion.

Chairman Alicia Aguilar asked Paula Weathersby to read the Resolution into the record. **(See Exhibit A)**

Motion carried.

Chairman Alicia Aguilar asked if the rental fees for graders, trucks or pumpers, would be reimbursable. Wayne Gallegos said you also need to include the people you have already used, the Road Dept., the overtime that they put in and their equipment that was used. You are allowed so much cost. The State Highway Dept. and their engineers will come in and see the work that has to be done. The job of the County is to see that the job that has taken place and the response is recorded properly.

Commissioner Eloy Giron said, "Mr. Pena and Commissioners, yesterday it was just like all over the East Side of the Mesa we had all the flooding and it ponded in our heavy traffic areas. Are we going to prioritize that as a Commission or is the Road Dept. going to go ahead and prioritize that? Some of those ponds have not been drained yet."

John Cherry said it also covers the use of the vacuum septic trucks. He said that is the best bet to disperse of the water. It also covers the cost of additional soil dirt. He suggested using that pretty heavy. They may be able to come away with better-conditioned roads than when they started. The State will reimburse for those.

Commissioner Giron said there were numerous accidents yesterday on MeadowLake Blvd. The Sheriff's Dept. was very cooperative with assistance.

Chairman Aguilar said, "The first step is the Resolution and now we contact the State. The State will then look at our situation and the extent of the damage. They will then contact the Local Government Division to check on the financial ability of the County. If the County's financial ability is that which is not able to take care of the disaster, then the Governor contacts the President." Wayne Gallegos said the process has begun with the action taken today.

Chairman Aguilar recognized Salomon Romero and David Sanchez from the Environmental Dept. She said she had some concerns regarding the septic systems and the contamination to the wells.

Salomon Romero said they had received some reports that some of the people are concerned about their drinking water wells. They are recommending that if the people believe their wells are contaminated, they should boil their water or buy bottled water for drinking purposes. They will be around to assist the people in explaining how they can disinfect their well and flush it out. They will also make an assessment of their waste system. He said their phone number is 865-9797 and their office is here in Los Lunas.

Commissioner Eloy Giron said he would like to see the News Bulletin and the Journal South report on Mr. Romero's statements. He said he has received 5 or 6 calls on septic systems that have washed away.

Commissioner Frank Pando recommended that KARS Radio be asked to broadcast the request to boil the drinking water as a public safety announcement.

Chairman Alicia Aguilar said the other concern is the debris that is all over the place. There are trees, limbs, and tar paper and metal. The County Manager said they have developed a pass for the individuals that are affected to take their debris to the Transfer Station at no cost to them. He said they would need their address and name so that they can keep track of the cost because the County has to pay for the cost of the disposal. They are also working with Waste management on remote sites for the people to bring their debris to.

John Cherry recommended that the Tome-Adelino Fire Department and the Los Chavez Fire Dept. could be used as a site for the containers so that the people could bring their debris. They have plenty of space for the large containers.

Sheriff Juan Julian commended Louie Pena and the Road Dept. for the job they did in the emergency situation. He said it is nice to see that there are people in Valencia County Government that do care. The Road Dept. worked along side his department. Sheriff Julian apologized to the Commission and the County Manager, he said he authorized the Red Cross to come into the Courthouse. He said he thought it needed to be done and it has worked well. It was set up in his office, but his office is not big enough.

A gentleman in the audience said his trailer was one of the ones that sank up in MeadowLake. It was due to the road not draining properly. The water was coming off the road into his yard. It is unlevel and he wants to know what is going to happen. He said it wasn't just due to the rain. It was what came off of the road and into his yard.

Chairman Aguilar said for him to get together with the County Manager and give his name and address and they would get together with the County Attorney and see what can be done since it is a private residence.

Chairman Aguilar thanked Road Superintendent Louie Pena and Road Projects Coordinator Helen Cole for doing everything they could possibly do regarding the storm. She also thanked John Cherry and Sheriff Juan Julian for all the work they did. She said in working together, hopefully they can come up with a solution that will benefit all of the residents.

John Cherry said he is going to recommend that the departments get together and form a Disaster Game Plan. He said there were some weak spots that could be worked in a more effective manner.

The representative from the CAP Office said they have a van that will transport people who need help from the Red Cross. Their number is 865-9697. There will be a donation booth set up at Wal-Mart from Wednesday through Saturday so that anyone, who has a donation to give to aid the victims of the storm will be able to take it to Wal-Mart on those days.

A gentleman from Heather Wilson's Office said they were ready to help if this project gets to the Federal level.

Chairman Alicia Aguilar thanked the members of the County Commission for calling her on the severity of the storm and the problems that were caused by it.

Louie Pena said he has received numerous calls from residents requesting that the Road Dept. go into their yards to pick up debris caused by the storm. Chairman Aguilar said they cannot go into private residences and that is why they are working to provide bins where the residents can take the debris.

County Attorney Tom Garde said, "Basically the State Law is real clear. We cannot provide assistance to private property. That is the purpose of the Red Cross. Our limitations are to public roadways."

Commissioner Frank Pando said if the residents can get the debris to the roadway, then the County can pick it up.

John Cherry said there was a tremendous amount of private citizens that offered assistance. It was very enlightening to see the citizens come together to help each other.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Frank Pando made a motion to adjourn the May 25, 1999, Special Meeting of the Valencia County Board of County Commissioners. Commissioner Eloy Giron seconded the motion. Motion carried.

NOTE: All proposals, documents, items, etc., pertaining to items on the agenda of the May 25, 1999, Special Meeting (presented to the Board of County Commissioners) are attached in consecutive order as stated in these minutes.

VALENCIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

SS

ALICIA AGUILAR, CHAIRPERSON

SS

AURELIO H. PADILLA, VICE-CHAIRMAN

SS

HELEN BACA, COMMISSIONER

SS

ELOY GIRON, COMMISSIONER

SS

S. T. FRANK PANDO, COMMISSIONER

ATTEST: ss

KANDY CORDOVA, COUNTY CLERK

DATE: June 21, 1999

For an official copy of these minutes and attachments see Commission Book 34 Page 588