

## **AI Summary**

### **Putting the Public at Risk - Part I: MSTUs**

#### **Lake City & Columbia County Don't Disappoint. Foot Dragging, No Information, Danger**

The article criticizes how Lake City, Florida, and Columbia County have handled proposed Municipal Services Taxing Units (MSTUs) for law enforcement and EMS. At the June 1 City Council meeting, both the Council and the public were unprepared because City Attorney Clay Martin delayed releasing the agenda until roughly 2 p.m. the Friday before — just one business day ahead — rather than the customary Wednesday. The article frames this delay as disrespectful and unnecessary.

County Manager David Kraus and County Attorney Joel Foreman attended to field questions, citing a July 1 deadline that requires the County to adopt its ordinance by June 18. Kraus argued the MSTU would be revenue-neutral — a County tax decrease offsetting the MSTU increase — but Councilman Jernigan and Mayor Noah Walker found the "balancing act" confusing. Foreman's explanation of a "hybrid public-private model" for EMS clarified little, beyond acknowledging that the County's north and south ends lack adequate service.

The article highlights the deep Council skepticism over the rushed timeline, with Councilman Carter, Councilwoman Young, and Councilwoman Harris all wanting more time and information. It also faults City leadership — the City Manager (who was out of town), Assistant City Manager, and chiefs — for keeping the Council uninformed about the EMS crisis. Police Chief Butler and Fire Chief Wehinger described dangerously long ambulance waits, including a recent child fatality. A Part II is promised.

#### **Three notable quotes:**

1. Community activist Sylvester Warren: 'Politics has got y'ail in this predicament, back-room deals have got y'ail in this predicament, and now y'ail want the city taxpayers to pay y'ail out of it. I don't think we should do it.'
2. Councilman James Carter: 'If anybody comes to the pooium and says, Hey, listen, we got to do a thing, and it's going to cost the taxpayers money, and also we got to hurry up, 'I'm going to pretty much say no to that every time.'
3. Police Chief Butler: "We often have to wait at least 20 to 30 minutes for an ambulance...we say seconds count..."