

ORIGINAL
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BEFORE THE FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In Re: Resolution by City)
Commission of Haines City)
Requesting Extended Area)
Service (EAS) from Haines)
City Exchange to all)
Exchanges within Folk)
County.)
_____)

Docket No. ~~950699~~-TL
Filed: February 21, 1997

DIRECT TESTIMONY OF
BEN SAAG

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Direct Testimony of
Ben Saag
On Behalf of The City of Haines City
Before the Florida Public Service Commission
February 21, 1997

Q. Please state your name, business name, address and title.

A. My name is Ben Saag. I currently serve as Assistant to the City Manager/Main Street Director for the City of Haines City, Florida. My address is 32 North 6th Street, Haines City, Florida.

Q. Please describe your educational background and your business experience.

A. In 1990, I received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. In 1993, I received a Master of Public Administration degree from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois. For the past six years, I have been employed in municipal government. From 1991 to 1993, I served as an Administrative Intern in the Village Manager's office in Hinsdale, Illinois. From 1993 to 1994, I served as a Management Assistant in the County Administrator's office in Scott County, Iowa. Since May, 1994, I have been employed in my current position as Assistant to the City Manager/Main Street Director with the City of Haines City, Florida.

Q. Please describe your role as a community leader in Haines City.

A. As the Assistant to the City Manager/Main Street Director I have a great deal of

1 contact with the community. I specifically deal a tremendous amount with the
2 local business community through my role as Main Street Director. I have daily
3 contact with over 100 downtown merchants and business people, oversee the
4 operation of the Main Street Board of Directors, serve on three Chamber of
5 Commerce committees, and attend meetings of various boards, commissions,
6 and civic clubs throughout the City on a regular basis.

7

8 Q. Why is it appropriate that the Florida Public Service Commission be
9 concerned with the provision of countywide extended area service for
10 Haines City?

11 A. Having the daily contact with the local business community which I have, I see
12 the problems that many local business people have with conducting their
13 business under the current telephone system. Many smaller businesses depend
14 heavily on dealers and distributors who are located in the larger Polk County
15 communities of Bartow and Lakeland. Currently, if these smaller businesses
16 need to contact their distributors, they are forced to make a long distance phone
17 call or send a facsimile long distance to place an order or ask a question.
18 Further, many of the dealings which the Main Street program has are with other
19 programs in Polk County. It is often times necessary for us to contact these
20 programs or for these programs to reach us. Again, this currently requires a
21 long distance phone call or facsimile.

22

23 The Main Street office frequently receives visitors who need governmental
24 services from county offices or the local phone or electric companies. Reaching
25 all of these offices are long distance since the County offices are located in

1 Bartow, the phone company governmental liaison is located in Lakeland and the
2 electric company district supervisor is located in Sebring. Further, contact with
3 the main offices for the Lakeland Ledger and Tampa Tribune are both located
4 in Lakeland.

5

6 One of the primary functions of the Main Street program is to recruit new
7 businesses and industry to the community. It is difficult to recruit new
8 businesses to downtown Haines City when a business can open in downtown
9 Winter Haven (10 minutes away) and be able to call all of Polk County without
10 a long distance charge being assessed.

11

12 **Q. In what ways will the implementation of countywide extended area service
13 impact your business and community interest?**

14 A. Should extended area service be implemented, it would make recruiting
15 businesses and industry into the downtown Haines City area considerably
16 easier. It would offer a popular incentive that currently is not offered here, but
17 is offered in neighboring communities with similar demographics.

18

19 **Q. In what ways do you foresee the implementation of countywide extended
20 area service impacting the economy of Haines City?**

21 A. As previously stated, I believe that the implementation of extended area service
22 into Haines City would greatly increase the economic vitality of the community.
23 I believe that more businesses and industry would consider locating in Haines
24 City and that the flux of new business and industry would create a "snowball"
25 type of growth on the smaller retail and service oriented businesses in the

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downtown. The increased businesses and industry would add to Haines City's economy directly by way of property and sales taxes. They would also add indirectly by way of increased traffic through the area.

Q. Describe what you see as Haines City's growth potential with countywide extended area service for local telephone usage.

A. Haines City is by no means a land-locked community. Many annexation and growth opportunities exist outside the city limits. The addition of extended area service would add a tremendous incentive for these residents and businesses to annex into the City. There is also room for growth within the City limits of Haines City. This growth potential exists with both undeveloped and underdeveloped property.