

## Pinellas Park challenging EMS funding

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**PINELLAS PARK** – The City Council voted unanimously at its April 24 meeting to begin the conflict resolution process with Pinellas County over proposed changes to how the county’s emergency medical services system is funded.

This process is the first step toward taking the county to court over the proposed funding model, referred to as CARES 2. The city contends that funding cuts will have a negative effect on the EMS services it can provide its citizens.

“It’s not fair and equitable. It’s not fair and equitable to the citizens of Pinellas County and it’s not fair and equitable to our citizens of Pinellas Park,” said Councilor Rick Butler. “Thank God there’s a course of action we can take to try to make this fair and equitable, and I think that’s the direction we should choose to go in.”

He added, “It’s not that we’ve ever been scared before to do that, and we will continue to do that. Because as Parkers that’s how we are. We’re going to work on what’s best for our community, and in this case, this is what’s best for the county. I’m very proud to be part of this.”

Pinellas Park is the latest city to challenge the county over the proposal made by former Pinellas County Administrator Bob LaSala, who was let go from his position April 15, to cut around \$2.3 million from the county’s \$116 million EMS budget over the next three years. The new plan would slash the budgets of five of the area’s busiest departments – Largo, Clearwater, Pinellas Park, St. Petersburg and Lealman. In April, Largo and Lealman also voted to begin the conflict resolution process, and several other fire rescue departments have stepped up in support of their challenge to the county.

Pinellas Park currently offers 12 advanced life support units at six locations in its coverage area. The county’s funding cuts would reduce the number of units available during nighttime hours to just six.

If these changes move forward, the EMS services provided by Pinellas Park “may fall below the established level of service, harming the public and those in need of emergency medical services,” reads Resolution No. 14-04, which permits the city to challenge the county and was approved by the council April 24.

To maintain this level of service without money from the EMS Authority, the city would be required to use its general fund and possibly raise taxes.

“Sometimes a voice from a government like this lets the county know that we understand what the people want and we’re going to try to get it,” said Councilor Jerry Mullins.

The city’s contract with the Pinellas County Emergency Medical Services Authority is set to expire Sept. 30 of this year.