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Looking ahead to a total transformation of Pinellas' EMS system



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LARGO -- Members of a committee designed to select an accountant to evaluate proposed changes to Pinellas' emergency medical services system spent much of Monday's meeting trying to thrash out the scope of their duties.

The committee, created by state Sen. **Jack Latvala**, R-Clearwater, has three members representing the county's interests and three representing interests of cities, fire districts, fire chiefs and the authors of a plan that would allow firefighters to take patients to the hospital. That plan, known as the **Sanford-Millican** plan after its authors, and a proposal by Pinellas County Administrator **Bob LaSala** were to be the focus of the study.

LaSala, who is not a committee member, said he saw the committee's job as a narrow one -- select an accountant and dissolve once the contract was signed.

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But some committee members - those on the city/fire side - had different ideas. They believed that the committee should follow the process all the way through, which includes having the chosen accountant report to them periodically. The fear, they said, was that the county would "steer" the accountant to a biased conclusion against Sanford-Millican.

One member, St. Petersburg Mayor **Bill Foster**, said he believed the accountant should look at more than the LaSala and Sanford-Millican plans. Foster said St. Petersburg, which supports fire-based transport, does not necessarily agree with all aspects of Sanford-Millican. The accountant, he said, should look at a broader range of the options under the general heading fire transport.

But Pinellas County Commissioner **John Morroni**, another committee member, worried about the cost, which will be paid from county EMS funds.

Foster responded that the committee is looking at a complete transformation of the Pinellas EMS system, so members should take their time and look at all options. He reminded other committee members that they are not only looking at an expensive, complicated system, they're looking at a system that literally affects peoples' lives.

"All of us will be gone by the time (the system) changes again. ... This is big. We can't afford to make a mistake," Foster said. "We can't afford to screw it up. Let's do it right the first time."

-- Anne Lindberg, Times Staff Writer