

The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners and the City of St. Petersburg Council met in joint session at the Collaborative Labs at St. Petersburg College on October 31, 2011 at 8:46 A.M. to review and discuss the current Emergency Medical System (EMS) model and emergency medical service in the City and throughout the county, with the following members present:

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS (BCC)

Susan Latvala, Chairman
John Morroni, Vice-Chairman
Kenneth T. Welch
Nancy Bostock
Neil Brickfield
Norm Roche
Karen Williams Seel

CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG COUNCIL

Bill Foster, Mayor
Jim Kennedy, Chairman
Leslie Curran
Jeff Danner
Bill Dudley
Steve Kornell
Wengay “Newt” Newton
Karl Nurse
Herbert Polson

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks
2. Review and Agreement of Draft Ground Rules and Roles
3. Member Introductions and Expectations for Success for the Joint Meeting
4. Review of Joint Meeting Objectives and Agenda
5. Overview of the Briefing Book Development and Content Outline
6. Testing for Consent on Briefing Book Descriptions
7. Review and Discussion of City and County Perspectives on the “Problem Statements” and the Framing of a Shared EMS Challenge Statement
8. Review and Discussion of the Financial Forecasts – Questions, Implications, Issues
9. Review of the County Study and Resulting Proposal for Changes to the EMS System
10. Review and Discussion of the Operational EMS Scenarios-Questions, Implications, Issues and Potential Options
11. Summary of Issue Discussion
12. Discussion of Possible Next Steps and Potential Options
13. Closing Comments – Chairs of the County Commission and City Council
14. Adjournment

*

*

*

*

The Collaborative Labs at St. Petersburg College Real-Time Record for today's Joint Meeting contains a summary of the presentations and general session discussion, photographs, illustrations, and work session responses. A copy of the Real-Time Record has been filed and made a part of the record. The participants pointed out that some matters brought up throughout the day were for discussion purposes only and not necessarily intended as a statement of support or opposition.

*

*

*

*

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairmen Latvala and Kennedy welcomed the participants and expressed optimism that the joint meeting would result in a better understanding of the EMS issue.

REVIEW AND AGREEMENT OF DRAFT GROUND RULES AND ROLES

Facilitator Bob Jones, Florida State University, reviewed the guidelines, roles, and procedures for the meeting, noting that the Briefing Book to be used today had been prepared by County and City staff working together.

MEMBER INTRODUCTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS FOR THE JOINT MEETING

Each participant expressed a factor that they thought would make today's meeting a success.

REVIEW OF JOINT MEETING OBJECTIVES AND AGENDA

Mr. Jones reviewed the objectives of the meeting, including: (1) to provide an opportunity for both entities to review the issue, (2) to review the perspectives of the City and the County, (3) to clarify the questions and issues with the County study and the issues with the City's service delivery approach, and (4) to identify and discuss next steps and options going forward.

OVERVIEW OF THE BRIEFING BOOK DEVELOPMENT AND CONTENT OUTLINE

Mr. Jones indicated that both the City and the County selected staff members to develop the Briefing Book to be used as a resource document and to clearly define the points of disagreement, noting that Assistant County Administrator Maureen Freaney served as lead member for the County and City Administrator Tish Elston for the City.

TESTING FOR CONSENT ON BRIEFING BOOK DESCRIPTIONS

A survey of the participants as to the acceptability of the information in the Briefing Book resulted in eight votes for the “Acceptable” category and eight for “Minor Reservations.” No votes were recorded for the categories “Major Reservation” or “Unacceptable.”

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF CITY AND COUNTY PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROBLEM STATEMENTS AND THE FRAMING OF A SHARED EMS CHALLENGE STATEMENT

Participants discussed statements in the City and County staff perspectives contained in the Briefing Book that are or might be considered problems, and comments included:

- ✓ County has responsibility to provide most cost-effective services possible (BCC).
- ✓ Salaries, pensions, and benefits for St. Petersburg should average the same as the other cities in eight years. Increases in employee contribution important part of reduction (Council).
- ✓ Pension is an issue (BCC).
- ✓ Response time and level of service should be considered separately; density of city should be taken into consideration (Council).
- ✓ Comparison between large and small cities should be taken into account (Council).
- ✓ Concern with fairness and equity on funding. St. Petersburg is short 11 to 12 firefighters; will funding be provided for those 12 (Council).
- ✓ Number of bridges must be taken into account (Council).
- ✓ Concern with per capita and calls for services – differences in standards (Council).
- ✓ Concerns re privatizing EMS (Council).
- ✓ Concern with number of paramedics funded (Council).
- ✓ Concern with County’s arbitrary cap on millage (Council).
- ✓ Demonstrate how \$11 million can be cut without diminution of service (Council).
- ✓ Agreement needs to be reached on response time (Council, BCC).

- ✓ If millage rates rise, it must apply to all citizens; if only applied to St. Petersburg citizens, City would need to leave the system (Council).
- ✓ The decrease in the reserves and the tax base substantially contributed to the current problem. Millage rate was artificially low. Was this planned (Council).
- ✓ The current budget problem was not planned and there was no plan to suppress the millage rate. Skyrocketing property rates prompted using what, at the time, were adequate reserves (BCC).
- ✓ City consultant's facts, data, and expertise not considered. Would have needed input from consultants for both the City and the County to get a full picture (Council).
- ✓ EMS advisory committee had 20 members, but only one member from St. Petersburg – not equal representation of county population (Council).
- ✓ It would be necessary to go operative to test the assumption that there would be no change in the average response time (Council, BCC).
- ✓ Millage rate should be raised and lowered as needed. County used reserves rather than adjusting rates. Underfunding the system needs to be acknowledged and taken into account (Council).
- ✓ County must know before raising millage rates that system is as efficient as possible (BCC).
- ✓ County cannot raise millage rate in this climate. Just raised 46 percent, more is not realistic. Must do everything possible to reduce costs before raising millage (BCC).
- ✓ Easy to manipulate the data (Council).
- ✓ Increased response time will lead to fatalities (Council).
- ✓ County's goal is to maintain the response time (BCC).
- ✓ Raising the County EMS tax would not resolve underlying problems (BCC).

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINANCIAL FORECASTS – QUESTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, ISSUES

At the request of Mr. Jones, participants provided input regarding the three categories on the Financial Worksheet:

- EMS Cost Issues and Implications
- EMS Governance Issues and Implications
- EMS Operations Issues and Implications

FOLLOWING DISCUSSION, MR. JONES POINTED OUT THAT EVERYONE HAD RECOGNIZED THERE ARE REVENUE CHALLENGES THAT MIGHT BECOME EVEN MORE DIFFICULT GOING FORWARD

Commissioner Seel related that other cities note the discrepancy in the funding of St. Petersburg, and queried whether the City would be interested in having an independent fire district that it funds itself. City Council Chairman Kennedy indicated that the City's first priority and choice would be to leave in play the existing funding mechanism established by statute and court order; that an independent taxing district would be a secondary funding system; and that if the City should have to take that route, the smaller cities in the neighboring areas would suffer drastically. Commissioner Welch indicated that a separate millage would be a bad choice.

Commissioner Seel suggested that Countywide fire and funding could be considered, or fees instead of millage; and Commissioners Brickfield and Roche agreed; whereupon, Councilman Newton pointed out that the lawsuit and resulting court order do not allow the County to interfere with St. Petersburg's fire services. Councilman Danner suggested discussing consolidation in steps, possibly going to 10 fire districts now and consolidating even more in the future; and Councilman Kornell indicated that while he is not willing to consider fire consolidation, other items for consolidation could be discussed.

FOLLOWING DISCUSSION, MR. JONES POINTED OUT THAT COST COMPARISON IS AN ISSUE THE CITY IS CONCERNED ABOUT

St. Petersburg participants emphasized that comparing the City's EMS system on the same level with others in the 18 fire districts is difficult; that the responsibilities and workload of the St. Petersburg Fire Chief and firefighters are much greater; that the County's position in terms of equity does not take into consideration the size, complexity, volume, and activities of St. Petersburg; that the larger the district, the more expense there is because it is a bigger, more complex operation, requiring more expensive equipment; that the Weedon Island incident demonstrates why the St. Petersburg system costs more; and that if there should be equity across the system, people would choose to work in lower-volume areas, putting the larger systems at a disadvantage. Mayor Foster indicated that taking EMTs and engines out of service is not a model St. Petersburg can agree with; and that the focus should be on EMS and leave Fire for future discussion.

REVIEW OF THE COUNTY STUDY (IPS) AND RESULTING PROPOSAL FOR CHANGES TO THE EMS SYSTEM

Mr. Jones asked the participants whether clarification was needed on any of the summary points of the County's IPS Study listed on Page No. 10 of the agenda packet, which has been filed and made a part of the record, and the following points were discussed:

1. The current method of funding is unfair and unequal among the fire districts (discussion and debate).
2. Firefighter transport of patients to hospital would be more expensive and less efficient than the current system using Sunstar ambulances (discussion and debate).

PRIORITY DISPATCH

Items discussed and comments made:

- ✓ Priority Dispatch is used successfully all over the country.
- ✓ Priority Dispatch would affect St. Petersburg's ability to serve its citizens.
- ✓ Concern with unilateral manner County thrust plan on City.
- ✓ Will add to response time and cannot see cost savings.
- ✓ EMS Advisory Committee was not equally represented; was skewed one way.
- ✓ Priority Dispatch does not address labor costs.
- ✓ Problem with callbacks.
- ✓ Questions re urgency to implement system if there are no cost savings.

EMS Division Manager Craig Hare, County staff, indicated that the first two phases of Priority Dispatch were implemented without difficulty and few, if any, complaints were received.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF THE OPERATIONAL EMS SCENARIOS-QUESTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, ISSUES, AND POTENTIAL OPTIONS

The participants reviewed six scenarios put together by the County and City staff. In response to queries by the Council, BCC Chairman Latvala, with input by Mr. Jones and the other Commissioners, indicated that the scenarios were generated for the City of St. Petersburg; that the intent is not to pick and choose, but to have a consolidated system; and that if the response to one of the scenarios is positive, it could be taken to other cities for discussion.

Participants reiterated that some of the matters are being brought up for discussion purposes only, and not intended as a statement of support or opposition.

Scenario 1: Status Quo – No discussion.

Scenario 2: ALS First Responder Services Provided Only by ALS Engines

- ✓ City Council Chairman Kennedy – Shifts the County’s cost to the City.
- ✓ Mayor Foster – Taking engines out of service to deliver a medic and an EMT is a concern; and having the next closest engine respond would lengthen response time. Said must be honest with the citizens.
- ✓ Councilman Kornell – Pointed out size of St. Petersburg operation and number of calls compared to others in area. Said issue has been consistently ignored in IPS study. A 23-percent turnover rate for Sunstar is disturbing. Could lead to more privatization of EMS.
- ✓ Commissioner Bostock – Dual role of firefighter/paramedic stands out as cost efficiency.
- ✓ Commissioner Roche – Must look at on Countywide level. Cannot change any scenarios without changing the Special Act, only Fire transport. Mayor Foster suggested could do so by agreement.
- ✓ Councilman Nurse – Reducing staffing would be complicated, which would make savings difficult.
- ✓ Councilman Newton – Trying to use St. Petersburg as a model for the smaller municipalities is illogical. Carve St. Petersburg out. Benchmark St. Petersburg against similar-sized city.
- ✓ Commissioner Welch – Will not support any scenario that carves St. Petersburg out.

Scenario 3: ALS First Responder Service Provided Only by County

- ✓ Mayor Foster – Would never agree to Number 3. Have very good Special Act and court order which defines “reasonable” and “customary” and “level of service”.

Scenario 4: Ambulance Services Provided by City (Billing, Medical Direction, etc., to be Maintained by Authority)

- ✓ Commissioner Roche – Would create 18 separate Sunstar operations. Not logical, long-range move.
- ✓ Commissioner Seel – Willing to look at a pilot. Mayor Foster agreed.
- ✓ Chief Knight. What is being presented is not what City suggested.
- ✓ Councilman Nurse – Would be logical to use City’s staff to transport. Don’t make matters worse for citizens by making mistake on what would be needed (discussion ensued.)

Scenario 5: Separate EMS Ad Valorem Millage for a St. Petersburg EMS District

- ✓ Councilman Newton - If St. Petersburg is not different, why consider a separate ad valorem – (Commissioner Bostock - Because not using a cost-efficient model).
- ✓ Mayor Foster – Not going to happen. St. Petersburg’s model is reasonable and customary, as determined by a Special Act, a referendum, and a court order.
- ✓ Commissioner Brickfield – Does the BCC have the authority to create a Special Act? Mayor Foster – If St. Petersburg consents. BCC Chairman Latvala – BCC does not need St. Petersburg’s consent.
- ✓ Commissioner Bostock - Respects that BCC cannot force model for providing services. County has responsibility to fund it. Would not want to go there. Prefer looking at cost efficiencies.
- ✓ City Council Chairman Kennedy – System would potentially be based on economic status; concerned with affect on low-income households. Commissioner Bostock – Do not want to increase tax burden, which is why BCC wants to focus on efficiencies.
- ✓ City Council Chairman Kennedy – City could have taken hard-line stance because of prior litigation, but is trying to compromise and solve the problem amicably. City is bringing \$3 million to table but County is unilaterally saying system must be changed.
- ✓ BCC Chairman Latvala – Can no longer afford program by raising millage; BCC has said does not want to raise millage. Has responsibility to deliver most cost effective system possible, which is why going to Priority Dispatch. Trying to find another solution and asking St. Petersburg to work with County.
- ✓ Commissioner Welch – Will not support another millage increase. BCC has not supported this scenario and did not create problem. All County budgets have been cut, but First Responder budget has not.
- ✓ Commissioner Brickfield - Keeping mind open to all scenarios. This scenario could work.
- ✓ Mayor Foster – All have responsibility to taxpayers and responsibility to adhere to a regulation and a court order that defines the Special Act. Would like to explore pilot and look at sustainability models. If St. Petersburg is bankrupting system, cut us out; certainly not my first choice.
- ✓ Councilman Newton – In 1989, someone anticipated today’s problem and the resolution was addressed in the Judgment. Who will pay legal fees?
- ✓ Councilman Kornell – IPS categorized St. Petersburg as different. Keep politics out - base on number of calls and per capita. Making \$8.8 million in cuts, with \$7 million taken from St. Petersburg is tough. Barrier communities must have services. Must look at broad picture.
- ✓ BCC Chairman Latvala – St. Petersburg’s provider model is more expensive – model that other fire departments use is efficient. Millage rate is not place to find cost savings.

Scenario 6: Exit of City Entirely from Pinellas County EMS System

- ✓ Commissioner Seel – Expressed concern with mutual aid, and how it would be paid for (discussion ensued).
- ✓ Commissioner Welch – Scenario 6 is not acceptable; the court order is a reality and must be worked around. Queried if City had run the numbers, and suggested phasing in over three to five years.
- ✓ City Council Chairman Kennedy – Not first preference.
- ✓ Mayor Foster – Agreed could be phased in; said economically feasible; noted would not be an immediate \$7 million reduction; said \$7 million reduction is a deal killer.
- ✓ Commissioner Roche – Open to all options. Queried as to who would make call to go with Scenario 6 and what would happen to 1989 court order (Mayor Foster – would have to be by contract).
- ✓ Commissioner Morroni - Would set a terrible precedent. Citizens want County and cities to work together and not sue each other. Cannot manage EMS by millage increases.
- ✓ Councilman Kornell – County IPS study says County would lose \$4.5 million if St. Petersburg pulls out. Employee contributions differ throughout districts. Double-taxing the citizens of St. Petersburg does not work. Will work with County, but \$7.1 million figure is difficult to work with.
- ✓ City Council Chairman Kennedy – Would be willing to phase in. County issued ultimatum that St. Petersburg will be cut \$7.1 million; not acceptable solution. City cannot allow to happen; too one-sided. He said that if BCC does not raise EMS millage, BCC would be obligated to pay for reasonable and customary expenses for services from the City, and Councilman Newton concurred.
- ✓ Councilman Curran – Agreed with City Council Chairman Kennedy. Said would feel very comfortable with service if City left system; said EMS system is ineffective or would not be here, yet City is being labeled ineffective and being cut \$7 million.
- ✓ County Attorney Bennett advised that should the City of St. Petersburg exit the system, County could not institute Scenario 3 unilaterally.
- ✓ Commissioner Seel – In Scenario 6, City would have to raise millage; is of concern.

SUMMARY OF ISSUE DISCUSSION

At the request of Mr. Jones, the participants shared their thoughts about today's meeting.

Councilman Dudley expressed frustration that, whether intended or not, the County had presented the issue as an ultimatum to the City. He indicated that he gained a lot of information

today; and that it was helpful to have the elected officials themselves entering into discussion; whereupon, he recommended that the status quo be continued for another year to give the participants time to work on the commonalities.

Councilman Kornell acknowledged that the issue goes back many years; and stated that he is willing to discuss this topic or any other topic for the good of the citizens; whereupon, he suggested that the public relations battle cease; and that the Council and the Commission discuss the issue honestly with each other rather than promote their sides in the news media.

Commissioner Roche concurred with Councilman Kornell regarding the news media, and stated that the IPS study was not brought forward by the Board itself; that he has not made a decision; that the present system is not sustainable; and that all possible solutions should be on the table, including consolidation and transport.

Councilman Danner indicated his frustration that the meeting is taking place at the 11th hour; and stated that he would like more data factored in, such as the number of people covered, traffic courts, and employment centers; whereupon, he stated that until all the data can be factored in to truly depict the system, Priority Dispatch should be deferred as a gesture of goodwill.

Commissioner Seel noted that she had earlier requested the actuarial information; that costs and salaries should be brought more in line; that the County Commission has begun talk about creating a council of governments; and that an EMS council could be created.

Councilman Nurse indicated that the focus should be on cost control; that both the City and the County should go back and try to drive down overhead costs; and that there should be a way to deal with people who abuse the system; whereupon, he recommended a hybrid system.

Commissioner Morroni indicated that time is of the essence; that it seems apparent that the \$8 million will not be available for 2013; that citizens view the millage rate as a 46 percent increase; that the City and County must work together; that he would support looking at a hybrid system; and that, if necessary, the Council and Commission should meet again to look at progress made on a hybrid system.

Commissioner Bostock suggested that some things discussed today may turn into issues of their own; that the anticipated result of this meeting is to bring costs down and preserve the levels of services; and that some of the ideas discussed today could prove helpful.

Commissioner Brickfield suggested that he is willing to consider anything except the current system, including a.m./p.m. shifts, a pilot program on some of the ALS engines in St. Petersburg, pensions, fire-based transport, and a Sunstar pilot.

Councilman Newton thanked everyone for attending. He indicated that fair and reasonable costs must be funded; and that he would like to look at best practices of Miami, Tampa, and St. Petersburg. He recommended that cuts be spread across the County; and indicated that he supports Option 6 at this time, but hopes a solution can be found.

Councilman Polson thanked County Administrator Bob LaSala and applauded staff that worked on the Briefing Book; indicated that he does not support either of the scenarios, that he would support a hybrid system; and that he supports a countywide referendum.

Commissioner Welch indicated that the meeting has been positive and that elected officials talking together is how to make things happen; that the County Commission has not made a decision as yet; that the numbers need to be looked at closely to see what the savings would be in real dollars; and that cost containment is the answer.

Mayor Foster agreed that the meeting was positive, and indicated that none of the scenarios are acceptable; that the Commission should not consider the millage first; that the Special Act and court order call for “reasonable and customary,” not “fair and equitable,” and that the answer should not all be on the shoulders of the City of St. Petersburg. He expressed appreciation that the Council invited the County to the table and thanked the County for agreeing to meet with the City.

Councilman Curran agreed with the Mayor for the record. She stated that residents do not understand the redundancy in the system; indicated support for a hybrid system; suggested there is not sufficient time to get results from a pilot program; agreed with the Mayor about looking at the cost of Paramedics Plus; and indicated that exiting the system should not be taken out of the equation.

DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS AND POTENTIAL OPTIONS

Councilman Nurse suggested that the Commission and the Council meet again within a month, and others supported additional meetings of the two entities.

CLOSING COMMENTS – CHAIRS OF THE COUNTY COMMISSION AND CITY COUNCIL

BCC Chairman Latvala thanked staff for its efforts; indicated that she does not support a referendum; noted that time is of the essence concerning the Sunstar contract; and pointed out that Paramedics Plus is funded by user fees, not by millage, and she does not anticipate the millage rate being increased; whereupon, she thanked the Council for meeting with the Commission and indicated that the Commission would look forward to a proposal from the Council.

City Council Chairman Kennedy thanked staff and the participants for their efforts. He stated that the need to change the system in order to save money must not affect the ability to respond to severe emergencies; that he would support taking more time and doing some pilot programs; that Priority Dispatch would be a good-faith offer; and that cooperation is needed, not ultimatums. Chairman Kennedy indicated that in regard to the referendum, the citizens voted on the issue when they authorized a 1.5 millage rate. He indicated that if the problem cannot be resolved, litigation would be the only option for the City; that an injunction would take six months; and that he hoped that discussions would continue even if, due to the time factor, the City begins to put the litigation process in motion; whereupon, he indicated that the City would look forward to a proposal from the County without the \$7 million.

ADJOURNMENT

The joint meeting was adjourned at 5:44 P.M.