

**Pinellas Assembly Fire/EMS Task Force  
Meeting minutes December 1, 2003, 3 pm  
Largo Training Center**

Present: Ed Hooper/ chair, Sally Foote, Tim Schuler (Sally Israel, Joe Calio, Jerry Knight, Kathleen Litton absent)

Staff: Gay Lancaster, (county representative), Caroll Williams (city representative), Cindy Goodson (scribe) (Jim Callahan absent)

Others: Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey, Janice Metzger, Craig Hare (PC), Bob Siler, Jim Lanier (AMR), Dave Daiker (PC Council of FFs), Charles Dedman (EL Chair), Kevin Bowman (TS), James Angle (PH), William Naylor (S. PA), Kenneth Cramer (PP), Jim Large, Steven Smith (SP)

Mr. Hooper called the meeting to order. The minutes of November 3 were approved unanimously. It was noted that several members of the committee were absent, but it was decided to conduct an overview discussion of topics.

Several handouts were provided at the beginning of the meeting.

Letter from Fire Chief John Leahy, Pinellas Suncoast Independent Fire District.

Letter from Fire Chief James Angle, Palm Harbor Independent Fire District.

REVISED Personnel and Fire Apparatus Inventory Survey by Pinellas County Fire/EMS Administration.

Email from Dwaine Booth relative to the proposed format for Pinellas Assembly.

Memorandum from Chair BCC and Chair Council of Mayors relative to the proposed time line and presentation meeting scheduled January 9, 2004.

The committee discussed the Pinellas Assembly time line and noted that it will be necessary to wrap up discussions and recommendations in the very near future to meet the completion goal of December 12. It was noted that the committee has scheduled today's meeting and a final meeting December 15. This would not meet the target time line. It was decided to schedule two additional meetings next week to complete the scope of work.

Pinellas County Fire/EMS Administration began reformatting the committee's tentative recommendations into the Pinellas Assembly format. This information will be reviewed with the chair at a scheduled meeting on December 2 and will be provided to all committee members for review in anticipation of the next scheduled meeting. Topics discussed to date include:

Cooperative purchasing  
Fire Code  
ISO  
Water Infrastructure

Regionalization  
Specialty Teams  
Fire Fee  
Transport

Tentative recommendations have been formulated on some of the topics, and the others will require additional discussion. Ms. Foote questioned whether the automatic aid issue should be discussed, specifically as it relates to contracting or bidding for fire protection services. It was generally thought that the committee would not be able to solve the issue of adequate staffing of districts. Without automatic aid, every jurisdiction would have to significantly increase staffing and resources. Utilizing automatic aid, there are sufficient resources to provide a high level of response within the county. The city representative indicated Ms. Foote's comments related to the discussion of last meeting, i.e., where fire departments are allowed to contract with another agency for fire protection even though they do not have sufficient resources to meet the contract. It was suggested that this could be included in the observations and findings of the report as a topic for further evaluation. The consolidation/regionalization topic may be an appropriate place to include this discussion.

There was discussion how the county fire service generally operates on a consolidated basis, i.e., training, communications, automatic aid, operating guidelines and that it should be endorsed and encouraged. It was suggested that the language could strongly recommend that executing fire protection contracts outside a jurisdiction's borders should consider the impact of closest unit dispatch. Examples include Kenneth City, Bay Pines, and Redington communities. It was questioned whether the Board of County Commissioners as the Fire Authority could impose or approve these contracts. County Fire/EMS Administration indicated the BCC is the fire authority for the entire county, to include establishing levels of services, fire codes, water supply, creation of fire protection districts, etc., and provides for a funding mechanism for unincorporated areas to pay for fire protection services. Generally, the county does intercede in local fire issues between jurisdictions, provided the specified levels of service are met. He also indicated there are fewer fire departments now than there were in the past, that the county encourages mergers, but plays no direct role in the process.

The chair indicated some cities are looking at NFPA 1710 staffing standards, but it is not universally adopted countywide. This may create a larger issue down the road with automatic aid. County Fire Protection Agreements require a minimum of three personnel on the first-due unit, and the first-due unit must meet a 7-1/2 minute response time standard 90 percent of the time.

The committee discussed the topic of consolidation. It was generally agreed that consolidation was unlikely to happen from a practical standpoint. That functional consolidation, even if not administrative consolidation, creates inequities and problems in millages and reciprocal issues. Consolidation could be a better scenario across the board for the citizens of Pinellas County. Even though it seems illogical, functional consolidation does seem to work well in Pinellas County. Automatic aid eliminates the need for all cities to staff for the maximum risk. It was noted that if consolidation were to occur, there may not be as many fire chiefs, but there'd probably be a lot more deputy chiefs.

There was general discussion relative to the cooperative purchasing concept and the recommendation to conduct an exploratory study on the feasibility and desirability of creating an insurance consortium for health, workers compensation and other insurance. It was stated that the fire departments routinely participate in cooperative purchasing.

There was general discussion relative to the fire fee and smoothing the unincorporated fire district millages. It was generally agreed that these are two separate issues, but they are complimentary in nature. It was desirable to tap into the \$18 million in non-taxable properties. It was also stated it may be desirable to support the leveling of the unincorporated dependent fire district millages, even though approximately half would pay more and half would pay less than the current taxing formula (current millages range from 1.5 to 3.36). It was thought this would not affect the current method for calculating the county's share of the respective fire district contracts, but would change the method for generating those dollars. It was questioned what type of action would be required to modify the taxing process, i.e., ordinance, referendum, etc.) This recommendation would only affect the dependent fire districts that are under Pinellas County's taxing authority. It would exclude the unincorporated areas within the independent fire districts (Palm Harbor, East Lake, Pinellas Suncoast, Lealman). It was stated that those jurisdictions could opt for the fire fee as the taxing authority. Pinellas Suncoast Fire District already utilizes the fire fee in lieu of advalorem taxation.

On the topic of fire fees, the committee supported the concept of generating offsetting or new revenues by assessing non-taxable properties. This concept would have to be approved separately by each taxing entity. If the fire fee was implemented, it would generate new revenues from previously non-taxable properties, that could in turn reduce the advalorem burden.

There was general discussion relative to specialty team funding. The county representative briefly reviewed some of the reformatted recommendations in the new format. These included information on the county's financial support of the hazardous materials (HM) and technical rescue teams (TRT). The county went on to give an overview of the wide range of water rescue services provided within the county.

It was stated that the county provides financial support to the six departments (St. Petersburg, Largo, Seminole, Pinellas Park HM and TRT, Clearwater - TRT, Palm Harbor - HM) that participate in HM and TRT teams. This financial support provides for operating, capital outlay and training. In addition, the county indirectly provides financial support for the personnel services through their prorated share of the fire protection contracts. It was generally agreed that the costs to support the specialty teams should be distributed countywide, that currently many cities and independent fire districts receive these services without contributing to the costs. The group also supported the concept of generating revenues through a surcharge or assessment to agencies that create the demand for the special response teams, i.e., hazardous materials carriers, etc.

On the topic of water rescue services, the county's position was that the scope of services are too varied and too undefined to support countywide funding at this time. It was recommended that additional study be conducted to define parameters for water rescue services prior to establishing any designated funding source.

On the topic of fire codes, the draft recommendation was to recommend the legislative delegation to support the appeal of the condominium fire sprinkler retrofit legislation, and to discourage amendments of the Florida Fire Prevention Code outside of the established process.

On the topic of water supply infrastructure, the draft recommendation was to support the county's efforts to standardize and implement minimum water supply and fire hydrant requirements. Previously, the task force was provided draft information on the county's water proposal. At the time, the information was in the Utilities department for review and input. Next, the proposal will go through the remaining review process and will go to the Board of County Commissioners as an ordinance. It is anticipated this process will take approximately two months to complete.

On the topic of the EMS component, there was general discussion on transport services. It was generally agreed that this topic may need further discussion prior to deciding whether a recommendation would be made or not. It appeared there was no consensus between the cities and the county on the issue of fire-based transport. The current transport system operates at a high level of patient care and that there are protocols in place to allow first responders (fire departments) to transport when necessary. The Chair inquired what was the county's contingency plan in the event the current transport contract was terminated. The county representative indicated there is a plan, and that the county would present the information at the next meeting.

The chair discussed the potential agenda for the next meeting. The focus would be to first finish the EMS discussion then discuss and amend the draft task force recommendations produced by the county.

Next meetings:           December 9, 1:00 p.m., 315 Court Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor Conf. Room  
                                  December 11, 3:00 p.m., 315 Court Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conf. Room