

**Pinellas Assembly Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes December 9, 2003, 1pm
County Administrator's Conference Room**

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

Staff: Jim Callahan (city representative), Chuck Kearns (county representative), Carol Williams (city representative), Clare Golle (srcibe) (Gay Lancaster absent)

Others: Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey, Craig Hare (PC), Bob Siler, Dan Stumpfhauser, Jim Lanier (AMR), Jay Stout (SH), Kevin Bowman (TS), James Angle (PH), William Naylor (S. PA), Dave Daiker, John Little (PC Council of FFs), Kenneth Cramer (PP), Steven Smith (SP), Neal Brickfield

Mr. Hooper called the meeting to order. The minutes of December 1 were approved. It was noted that some members of the committee were running late, but it was decided that the meeting would begin. It was also noted that Kathleen Litton would be absent.

A letter from the Pinellas County Council of Firefighters was provided at the beginning of the meeting.

The Draft Report was projected on the screen for group viewing and editing. The group spent several hours reviewing and making minor corrections section by section and discussing each section of the report as follows:

The committee discussed approvals and recommendations. The committee expressed its wish to formulate the final documents for the Board of County Commissioners and the Council of Mayors. The Report has been scheduled to be presented to the Council of Mayors on January 9th, 8:30 to 10:30 at the Seminole Campus of St. Petersburg College.

The committee discussed the county community cooperative purchasing program. Advantages and disadvantages were brought up. It was decided that uniformity of equipment throughout the system should be a goal. It appeared that not all firefighters' respirators are compatible with each other. It was noted that there are already regular meetings among the county and cities' purchasing personnel. A purchasing program could provide a cost savings to the citizens.

The committee discussed the fire hydrant proposal. It was noted that there are old system units and that water availability and pressure is not always adequate. There was some discussion on whether or not a diversion or shutdown of water lines could boost the pressure should it become necessary during a fire incident. It was decided to recommend the adoption of a countywide minimum hydrant standard.

The committee discussed the fire funding through millage and the proposed assessment fee. Residents of unincorporated areas pay a different rate, which will be slightly higher than the municipality surrounding them. Sally Foote put forth that everything has a benefit and a burden. Discussion centered upon the millage rates, ad valorem and tax equity. It was brought up that all consumers, persons, corporations and property owners, should be paying for the services. The committee feels that millage can be set another way in order to come up with an assessment that is more equitable. The service received by the citizens throughout the county is the same; the millage/tax equity should also be the same.

The committee briefly discussed Special Team Support. HazMat, Tech Rescue and Marine Water Rescue are provided by a few agencies, but their services are available to the entire

county. There is no formal funding mechanism in place for their services. The committee recommends that a team be formed to come up with a standard for water rescue.

The committee discussed the transport issue at length. Subtopics included the ambulance contract, unions, fire department transports, and consolidation.

Chuck Kearns provided a brief history of Sunstar and explained parts of the contract. In the event of any default, the county can takeover the service. Should this occur, the contractor's employees would become temporary county employees until another contractor could provide services. Most likely, only a handful of management staff would not be retained. A bid would go out and a new contract would need to be in place within six months to avoid pension and benefit issues.

If the Ambulance Contractor defaults or ceases to provide services, the County can assume control of all vehicles and equipment to ensure uninterrupted operations. In addition, the contractor must pay \$4,000,000 in liquidated damages. This ensures the ambulance company doesn't arbitrarily stop providing services.

Many miscellaneous questions were answered.

- Is there any staff longevity? Yes, some paramedics have been working in Pinellas County for 25 years. Many others have several years in the service and live locally.
- If the contractor exceeds the number of transports there is marginal additional compensation for each transport.
- The same group has been operating the ambulance service since 1987.
- The current contract is in year 4 of 11.
- Can the newly unionized workforce legally strike? Yes, however, they have indicated they would not strike. It is illegal for firefighters to strike; they are subject to a \$25,000 fine per day if they do.
- Dan Stumpfhauser said that American Medical Response (AMR) is bargaining in good faith with the new union.

The committee discussed fire department transports and providing for patients' needs. Patients should not be treated and then released due to the liability issues. Only limited diagnostic capabilities are available in the field. When the fire department transports the patient, that fire unit is unavailable for over 60 minutes.

Discussion centered on when a fire department transport can be made. It was felt that the Medical Director has put too many hurdles in the way. It was pointed out that the Authority employs the Medical Director indirectly. This is an independent contractor relationship. The County countered that the Medical Director is responsible to follow the protocols adopted by the Medical Control Board and a physician must handle clinical decisions related to transport.

Jerry Knight mentioned that AMR is willing to work together with the fire departments so that a fire unit can transport the patient when an ambulance unit is unavailable. The County pointed out that AMR's contract is with the EMS Authority and as such any discussion related to changing the EMS System must include the EMS Authority and the Medical Director.

Further discussion centered on funding and transport capability. Jerry Knight asserted existing Fire resources are underutilized and could be utilized to improve the system. It was mentioned that at an earlier meeting St. Petersburg Fire Rescue had stated they would only consider

transport if it included additional funding. The County said that they would not pay twice for the same resource (i.e. fund the same ALS Unit as a rescue, and pay additional remuneration if the unit transports.)

Jerry Knight put forth that a discussion should be initiated between the Pinellas County Fire Chiefs Association, AMR and the EMS Authority in an effort to improve service delivery. He was further concerned that there are too many people in the group: FD chiefs, EMS staff, AMR Administration, as many as 25 people. The group should be smaller; each representative could bring to the meeting any input from their respective groups. Chuck Kearns stated that the Medical Director should be present. Sally Foote would prefer that it say "representatives of stakeholders' discussion" and be done with mutual understanding.

There was a general feeling that there would be no driving force behind consolidation and that it might not be the panacea that some may think it is. It might be more successful to work on consolidating equipment standards rather than districts.

The meeting concluded at approximately 5:30 pm.