



**Marion County**  
**Fire Rescue Emergency Services Advisory**  
**Board Meeting**  
**April 14, 2009**

I. **CALL TO ORDER** – 4:01 by Chairman Pat Gabriel

**Members Present:**

Patricia Gabriel, Chairperson  
Paul Clark, COO Munroe Regional Medical Center  
H. Rex Etheredge, CEO Ocala Regional Medical Center  
Dr. Frank Fraunfelder, Medical Director, MCFR EMS  
Thomas Lorio  
Sam McConnell

**Absent:**

Chief Dan Gentry – City of Ocala Fire Chief  
Dr. Karen Gold

Attendance taken by: Anna Carpenter

II. **MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT / MINUTES**

Minutes were approved as amended after correction to Sam McConnell's name.

III. **PROJECT UPDATE – NEW AND RENOVATED FIRE STATIONS**

Chief Cooper distributed and reviewed a Project Update sheet summarizing status of each Fire Station currently under construction (**Attachment A**). Brief synopsis below:

- Station #31 – CR 484/SR 200: Sheetrock phase finishing up/Electrical in process.
- Station #32 – SW 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue: In closeout phase. Few remaining details to finish.
- Station #21 – Friendship: Power inspection passed. Septic and drain field installed. Plumbing and electrical trim near completion. Waiting for flooring. Ceiling grid to be installed next week.
- Station #4 - Lynn: Still in planning phase. Plans have been revised.
- Station #16 – Shady: Plan has been approved by Fire. Some modifications to foundations needed to accommodate soil conditions.
- Station #27 – Weirsdale: In review. Construction not authorized yet.
- Station #18 - Belleview: Drawings for building have been submitted to Bldg Dept.

The stations being renovated are old stations that have been donated by volunteers. The Shady Station was originally a pole barn which has been built on for years. The plan is to build a 3-bay station and use the original as living quarters.

Fire would like to replace the Ft. McCoy Station – it is old and worn out. The land it is situated on is not large enough to build on, so a new location needs to be acquired. Commissioner Fitos is working on this project with the Fire Dept.

Paul Clark asked if Fire used one or two sets of blueprints depending on the size of the lot. Chief Cooper explained that Starmer Ranaldi did one set of plans which can be adjusted to the size of the lot (Spruce Creek Station is an example). They can be built as a 2 or 3 bay station. Fire pays the architect a re-use fee. Saves a lot of money over having original plans drawn up; one original plan could cost \$90,000.

#### **IV. OLD BUSINESS**

##### **Revenue Enhancement:**

Sam McConnell asked if staff members had been assigned to investigate possibilities for revenue enhancement. Chief Azzariti told him that at the moment, they are all working on changing the organization structure to save costs. However, Captain Mathias is checking out the feasibility of the flu shot idea.

Pat Gabriel said that she has spoken with Chief McElhanev about this. He feels that as a result of the reorganization, there is a possibility of having a volunteer organization for the County. This would fall into their realm of responsibility.

Sam McConnell: "I don't think it's our role to come up with all the ideas for the Fire Station to execute. We should simply approve of the direction you are going in."

Tom Lorio: "How much can you actually raise?" Chief Azzariti told him that 1% of the overall budget is the goal. "For example, the City of Ocala just installed cameras to catch people who run traffic lights and ticket them. That is a non-traditional revenue source."

Sam McConnell moved that the discussion be put on the table until the next meeting with the direction to the Fire Department to come up with ideas they feel can be instituted. Rex Etheredge seconded the motion. Motion carried.

#### **V. NEW BUSINESS**

##### **A) Quarterly Report:**

Chief Azzariti distributed a report for the second quarter of this fiscal year (**Attachment B**). He explained that the procedure regulating bed delays has changed. Previously a bed delay was called in after 10 minutes at the hospital; has now been moved to 15 minutes. The majority of patients should be turned over to the hospital fairly quickly. More seriously ill/injured would take longer, of course.

Paul Clark requested that this report be submitted to the Board **electronically**. Sam McConnell added that he would prefer **any papers to be reviewed at the next meeting be**

submitted prior to the meeting date so the Board members have a chance to review. Chief Azzariti stated he's happy to comply.

### **B) Billing Update:**

Total billed out is \$8.8 million. Amount Fire is allowed to collect is \$7.7 million. They expect to collect \$5,684,000 based on past payment history. As of this date, \$3.8 million has come in. We anticipate a 66% collection rate.

Billing was 3 months past due. At the previous meeting, it was still 6 weeks behind. Fire has made major changes in Billing, and currently it is only 8 days behind; still not one person taking a bill from start to finish, as hoped. But it's working wonderfully and morale is great.

Sam McConnell: "What segment is paying? If 26% of billing is Medicare, are 26% of the revenues from there also?" Chief Azzariti said no. He will have those stats added to the quarterly report in the future. Chief Hall left meeting to obtain those figures.

Tom Lorio: "Are consistency of calls remaining the same?" Chief Azzariti stated that Fire is averaging approximately 110 transports daily. Discussion was held on the impact of fluctuating population in Florida during different seasons. Dr. Fraunfelder: "Growth in past has been about 4-5%. I expect that will continue." Chief Azzariti: "It used to have a much more significant impact ... not so much now."

Sam McConnell asked why 3 vehicles respond to every traffic accident, even if it's not a serious accident.

Karl Oltz: "Before Marion County took over the ambulance service, they sent a fire truck. Now we have Rescue Units, Medic Units (transport units), and fire trucks. We want to get somebody on the scene as soon as possible. If an accident occurs in the City of Ocala, the City will send a unit, and we will send a unit with fire truck, if necessary. We need to send the Medic Unit not knowing the extent of injuries. There may only be steam coming from a radiator, but we don't know that; a fire truck must go out in case of vehicle fire. If they get there and are not needed, they go right back in service." Goal is to get help on the scene as quickly as possible. Karl offered to give any interested Board members a tour of the Com Center anytime.

Sam McConnell: "If they say there are no injuries, do you still send a unit out?"

Karl: "No sir, not if they report no injuries."

### **C) Fractile Response Time:**

Chief Azzariti reported that these numbers are improving, but still want to improve response times further. Fire calls are a low percentage of calls responded to.

#### **D) Prevention:**

Chief Paul Nevels distributed a handout, "Town of McIntosh / Timeline" (**Attachment C**). He briefed the Board on the situation to date. Summary:

- The Town of McIntosh is serviced by Station 9/Orange Lake. In March of last year, the Town Council decided to pull out of the MSTU for emergency medical. Felt they have not benefited enough to continue payment.
- McIntosh's ISO rating will drop to a 10 (lowest possible) if they elect to not have fire services provided by Marion County. They are receiving advice from some source that this will not occur. (ISO – Insurance Service Office: large company headquartered in Marlton, New Jersey which rates fire departments. Most insurance companies use information gathered from them.)
- In July, 2008, McIntosh Town Council decided to continue in the MSTU temporarily. Made back payment to County.
- McIntosh has its own municipal water system with hydrants. Their current ISO rating is 7/9. 7 is rating for properties within 1,000 feet of a hydrant; 9 is rating for properties within 5 miles of a fire station but not within 1,000 feet of a hydrant.
- ISO representative schedule to be here next Monday and Tuesday performing evaluations of Marion County stations. Will get definitive answer from rep. on whether McIntosh's ISO will be affected if they withdraw from MSTU.

Tom Lorio asked if Marion County responded to McIntosh while they were withdrawn from the MSTU. Chief Nevels: "Last summer the Commissioners said no." Mr. Lorio also questioned who does dispatch for McIntosh. Chief Nevels: "Marion County, so they would have no dispatch also. Currently they are still receiving Marion County Rescue response."

Sam McConnell: "People usually only walk away from a service if they are not getting good service or they can't afford it. Why are they?" Chief Azzariti: "They feel they should receive a discount based on the number of calls responded to in their area. If we give them one, we would have to give everyone a rate based on calls."

Sam McConnell: "So they obviously don't see the value. If they didn't receive service for a while and they had a few fires, then they would see the value." Chief Nevels: "One of the articles in the papers said there hasn't been a true structure fire in that town for ten years. We still respond whether it's a major structure fire, a small kitchen fire, or a medical call."

Discussion was held on what the monetary saving would actually be to McIntosh to pull out of the MSTU. Since the individual citizens pay the MSTU in their taxes, there are no savings to the city itself.

Sam McConnell questioned why we are spending so much time/resources on this issue if the residents don't want it. Pat Gabriel explained that if McIntosh pulled out, other municipalities could follow. Sam also asked why McIntosh could not have its own fire department similar to the City of Ocala. Chief Azzariti: "If they choose to opt out, they could do that as a municipality. But if there is a life lost in a fire, we have done everything in our power to prevent it."

Paul Clark: "How can you keep mortgage insurance without fire coverage?" Chief Azzariti: "It may become impossible for them to obtain insurance or sell a home. What they want is a reduction in price; we can't do that."

#### **E. Organization Structure:**

Chief Azzariti distributed a handout of the Fire Department organizational structure (**Attachment D**) to become effective 4/25/09. "Since we last met, our organizational structure has been revised."

- Administration Division headed up by Chief Shari Hall
- EMS Management – Captain Joel Mathias under Shari Hall
- Operations Division – Chief Richard Maxwell
- Prevention Division – Chief Paul Nevels
- Support Services Division – Chief Dave Cooper
- Training and Safety Division – Chief Bart Walker
- Communications Division – Karl Oltz

Chief Azzariti explained ranking and responsibilities. Captains are responsible for a district. Battalion chiefs have global responsibility. They can ride up to cover the position of an Assistant Chief when necessary.

#### **Staffing Reductions / Savings:**

Marion County Fire Department currently employs 473 firefighters; 48 single-certs. With the addition of administrative staff, total employees are 611. Sam McConnell asked how many total Chiefs MCFR has. Shari Hall: "6 division Chiefs, 3 Assistant Chiefs; 6 Battalion Chiefs, 1 Deputy Chief and the Fire chief; 17 total."

Some positions have been eliminated due to budget cuts. Discussion was held on how many positions have been cut and what the savings is projected to be. Many of the cut positions were unfilled. As this development is in the initial stages and has not actually become official yet, exact figures are hard to provide, but savings will be in excess of \$200,000.

Chief Azzariti reported that Chief McElhaney will be getting a new title, Public Safety Assistant County Administrator. He will also still be Fire Chief. Sam McConnell asked why two titles. Chief Azzariti: "Stuart McElhaney didn't want to stop being Fire Chief. He's wearing a dual hat. We step up to cover each other's functions." Chief McElhaney will be

distributing a chief-gram when all these changes have been effectuated. Anna Carpenter will copy this correspondence to the Board members.

### **Medicare Billing – Amount of Uncollectable**

Discussion moved back to Billing; review of report Chief Hall had obtained. Projected collections are 95% on Medicare. Projected collections for 80/20 split are 80%; expecting insurance company to pay, but patients not to pay their 20%.

Sam McConnell: "Any way you can collect that \$1.5 million that is not collectable?" Shari Hall explained the process; patients receive 3 letters, then someone calls to try to obtain payment or establish a payment plan. Some patients are on payment plans as low as \$5 per month.

Sam McConnell: "This is 2% of your entire budget." Chief Azzariti: "I would do whatever we can to get it, but I don't think the County government is going to pursue that." Tom Lorio: "Municipalities are not going to pursue that debt. If a person can't afford insurance, they can't afford to pay the bill." Shari Hall added that MCFR responds to a lot of calls from jails and prisons. The Fire Dept is obligated to provide service. These calls add to the ratio of unpaid bills. She feels that the next 3 months will reveal a change in the percentage of unpaid bills. The MC ambulance service has only been operating for a few months; patients are just falling into the '90 days late' category.

Rex Etheredge asked if the quarterly report could reflect the type of calls made. Shari said that this could be added to the Activity Summary Report. Chief Azzariti inquired if anyone had any ideas about additional categories they would like represented; he will be glad to add them. Pat Gabriel suggested updating the report reflecting percentage of payment each quarter.

Chief Azzariti: "What surprised me is that 90% of the self-pays do not pay their bills. And if they don't have the money, how do we make them pay?" Rex Etheredge: "We may drill down and find that there is a way to collect more. But what I am hearing is that we haven't drilled down yet. At the beginning of the meeting we were talking about revenue-generating ideas – here's one right here."

Paul Clark: "Why is the Medicaid line blank?" Shari Hall explained that Marion County does not have their Medicaid number yet. It is in the process; when we get it, collections can begin. As far as standby billing, it is contractual (football games, etc.) and there haven't been any instances of no-pay yet. Paul Clark: "We use a specialized collection company for vehicular accidents. You may want to consider something like that."

Rex Etheredge made the motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Paul Clark.  
**Meeting adjourned at 5:32 PM. Next Advisory Board meeting will take place Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup> at 4 PM.**

Minutes submitted by Anna Carpenter.

*Pat Gabriel - Chair*