



**Marion County  
Fire Rescue Emergency Services Advisory  
Board Meeting  
May 12, 2009  
REVISED**

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** – 4:05 by Chairman Pat Gabriel. Paul Clark opened with an Invocation; Rex Etheredge led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**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 (excused - Emergency Mgmt Conference)  
Dr. Karen Gold (excused)

Attendance taken by: Anna Carpenter

**Others in Attendance:**

Dr. Lee Niblock	Com. Barbara Fitos	Chief Stuart McElhaney
Dept. Chief Dan Azzariti	Chief Bart Walker	Karl Oltz
Chief Paul Nevels	Chief Dave Cooper	Cindy Marihugh
Heather Danenhowe		

- II. **MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT / MINUTES**

Minutes were approved as amended. Sam McConnell wished Minutes to express that the Board requested all material to be reviewed at the next meeting be submitted electronically prior to that meeting.

- III. **10 YEAR PLAN**

Sam McConnell asked for more perspective on what actually is the 10 Year Plan. Chief McElhaney distributed a booklet titled “Strategic Planning Sessions 2001” – stated he wouldn’t go over it in detail as the Board had not had time to review yet. He gave a brief overview.

- A. **Background of 10 Year Plan**

In 2001 the Commissioners made inquiry as to whether the Fire/Rescue Dept. had a Strategic Plan for the future. They wanted more uniform service countywide. At that time, there were several plans. The Commission suggested combining them into one cohesive plan. Stuart met with Mike Tomich who prepared an economic model incorporating inflationary factors, etc. On June 12, 2001, Fire Dept. presented several possible scenarios

to the Commission. At that time, the Board suggested they develop some 'more aggressive' options.

At a workshop on July 19, 2001, 7 or 8 different levels of service were presented to the Board for their review. A modified version of Scenario #7 was then adopted by the Board. Chief McElhaney: "It is a Board-directed plan. If, at this point in time, the policymakers decide this is too much, then we need to adjust it with their direction."

## **B. 10 Year Plan to Present**

Three sheets were distributed (**Attachment A**) portraying the 10 Year Plan from initial phase to present.

- Sheet 1 explains the planning process from Commissioners instructions to staff through adoption for implementation.
- Sheet 2 profiles what was promised by the BCC and what has been delivered 7 years into the plan:

### Promised:

- Hire 250 FFs (staff 23 stations with 5 FF per shift)
- Build 2 new stations
- Relocate and rebuild 2 existing stations
- Add career staff to 6 existing volunteer stations

### Delivered:

- Added 214 new FF positions
  - Built 2 new stations
  - Relocated 2 stations
  - Renovated 2 stations
  - Converted 3 volunteer stations to career staffing
  - Entered into Agreements with Ocala and The Villages Fire/Rescue
  - Refocused 10 Year Plan to address urban area response
- Sheet 3 shows Career FF levels per 1,000 residents from FY 1998-1999 to FY 2009-2009. Ratio has increased from .8 FFs per 1,000 residents to 1.8 per thousand.

In 2005/2006, the Board decided that they wanted to refocus in the urban areas of the County. Chief McElhaney: "Just at that point, we started going downhill pretty rapidly with Amendment One. Last year we had proposed to the Board that we put the other 5 Stations on hold. Don't expand any more until revenues improve ... we've done well with our apparatus program; may need to increase that the following year. Next year, project no increase in staffing; I still think we are going to be able to continue to improve service. We have 15 unfilled positions. I put them in the budget for next year, but want to hold off filling them; not proposing to do anything next year."

Chief McElhaney has reviewed the property tax revenue prepared by Michael Tomich. "If we hold the millage rate the same, we are estimated to collect about \$1.5 million less. I

feel pretty comfortable that we can live with that. The Fire assessment isn't going down because it's not part of the tax assessments."

#### **IV. BUDGET OVERVIEW**

Chief McElhaney: "Fire Assessment was projected to be \$200 per parcel. This is the third year in a row that we have held it at \$165." Discussed creation of budget projections for the 10 Year Plan. "This was the best we had at the time to plan with."

Sam McConnell: "It's still amazingly on target. Ambulance service added \$1,000,000. Is that now in your ambulance budget?" Chief McElhaney: "It was a couple years ago that we actually ended that agreement. It's not in either budget; EMS or Fire. It wasn't ours after that agreement was ended."

Chief McElhaney explained how the overall Fire Department is funded:

- 1) Funds come from MSBU account which excludes Ocala and Dunnellon
- 2) MSBU includes areas of Reddick, McIntosh and Bellevue.
- 3) MSTU funds include Bellevue and Rainbow Lakes Estates.
- 4) Excludes Reddick, McIntosh, Ocala and Dunnellon.

"These two sources of revenue are what make up the Fire Department budget. The other main source of revenue is the County General Fund, supported by the millage rate. Ambulance Expenditures (3355) is funded entirely by the millage rate and fees."

Chief McElhaney distributed a chart, Historical Personal Services Analysis, displaying numbers of Line Personnel (those wearing uniforms in the field), Command staff (Captains and above – do not ride ambulances or fire trucks) and Support Staff from 2001 to present (**Attachment B**). The primary reason for budget increases through time are the personnel costs. FY 08/09 was the first year that ambulance service and Fire services were combined. Also, in the '08/09 budget Dispatchers were pulled from Fire budget and added to 9-1-1 Communications (Karl Oltz's department).

#### **A. Dispatch - Budget**

Sam McConnell: "How many people would be added back to Fire if you still showed the Public Safety Communications personnel?" Thirty more. Dispatch currently resides in the Sheriff's Communication Center. Around 1995 the County Fire Dept. put their first Dispatcher in that Com Center. The TriTech program came on board, and County Fire and ambulance were dispatched from that same system. City Fire, County Fire and ambulance service are all on TriTech dispatching.

Sam asked why Dispatch had been removed from the Fire budget. Chief McElhaney: "It's always been a frustration of mine that we have two different dispatchers dispatching their own units to the same call; wanted to set up a 'same system' to handle all calls. There has been tension between the City and County over a number of issues for several years. All services who use the system come and meet once a month."

“I felt it would be better if the City of Ocala and County calls were dispatched by the same personnel. I also felt that if we took Dispatch out of our Fire Dept. and had Karl run it, the City might be more amenable to doing that. We are not there yet. I think the County Administration and City are thinking about having all emergency calls dispatched from one place. There would be a savings to the taxpayer. “

“There was an attempt to put Dispatch in a more central place to give the City of Ocala a better feeling about integrating the whole thing. It’s a customer service issue; if they have a problem with the way things are being done, they could bring it to Karl. If he can’t solve it, we will look at something else.”

“The way our budget is organized, it’s hard to put a finger on it and say ‘here it is’. There are multiple budgets and you have to put them all together. So we pulled all the Dispatch out of Ambulance and Fire budgets and put them in one location. At least you will be able to see in one place what the total Dispatch budget is.”

Tom Lorio asked how many Dispatch personnel worked for the City. Chief McElhaney: “The City currently uses 8 people; Karl says he can do it with 4.” Tom Lorio: “Do you monitor all their frequencies?” Karl Oltz: “No we don’t. The Dispatchers are sitting right beside each other.” Stuart McElhaney: “That’s part of the problem which we solved in the County. There were 3 systems, now there are 2. We are on the same Dispatch system in the same place. It just doesn’t make sense.”

Karl Oltz: “That is why there are so many people responding to the same incident.” Chief McElhaney: “There are questions that the Dispatcher asks of the caller to try to determine what type call it is. Low level call doesn’t need to send Fire trucks; the City still does that. We don’t have the resources to do it. It preserves all those resources for a more critical call. We send them all to the motor vehicle accidents because we don’t know how critical it is. We have to address the hazard and the patient care; it takes a lot of different resources to do that. We try to determine from the caller what level of resources is needed.” Paul Clark: “It has been the City’s policy to send everyone on every call.” Tom Lorio: “Seems that is pretty standard policy. If you don’t need them, you can send them back.”

Sam McConnell returned to the subject of separating Dispatch out of the budget. He asked why all the budgets couldn’t be combined – less confusing to try to explain to taxpayers. Chief McElhaney explained that the County uses line item budgets. He would prefer to use a cost center system, but must follow County structure. “There was concern on the part of some folks that they wouldn’t be able to look at the ambulance budget and compare it to what EMSA’s budget was ... What does Dispatch cost? Now at least we know because it’s all in one place. I would like to be able to see what is the total Fire Dept. budget, but our budget structure is not built to do that right now.”

Sam McConnell: “Who is building the budget this way?” Chief McElhaney: “It’s a County process. I will be working with the County Administrator on this issue. I don’t know why you couldn’t build a budget that was in one place and still show multiple funding.”

Barbara Fitos: “Now is the time to talk about it. It’s a transparency issue and accountability to the taxpayers. During the EMSA transition, Stuart and I spent hours and hours going over the budget trying to understand it. I would love to see it all put into one place. I am sure there was a reason it was built that way. We have on our staff Bill Kauffman who answers to the County Administrator. It may be that we can do something under him that parallels what Mike Tomich does on a County level ... here’s what it looks like in one format ... we could report back to you all once a month. That might be something we need to discuss this year.”

Chief McElhaney: “It would certainly not hurt my feelings if the Advisory Board expressed some frustration to the Commissioners with the budget format. I think it would be helpful if we could somehow make them aware.”

## **B. Union Contracts**

Tom Lorio: “Do you have union contracts for the next two years?” Chief McElhaney: “Both contracts expire the end of this fiscal year. We have begun negotiations with the unions; we pretty much told them not to expect any raises next year. I think we are probably only going to get one year contracts. Because we have a career technical ladder, some people will advance, but we have that built into the budget. I don’t think the union has an expectation of raises; I believe it will be pretty amicable contract.”

Sam McConnell: “Of the 3310 department, total personnel reserves are 68% of your budget. 42% of that is your legacy costs (retirement contributions, workers comp, health insurance, etc.). “If you foresee those costs continuing to rise, it’s going to be scary for the County. If 68% is just the personnel costs, with 42% of that legacy costs, it’s getting up there. A lot of corporations are getting paid **less** than previous years. You have cut your budget. 92% of your cut was from capital expenditures and the City agreement you were able to cancel.”

Chief McElhaney: “The bulk of our reduction is capital. I am very confident with that now. Probably we could live with that for another year. We roughly factored in 2 or 3 pumpers a year. But most of our equipment is fairly young. I think we are in good shape for a few years, but we are going to have to look at either raising revenue or cutting people in the long run.”

## **C. Turnover Rate**

Chief McElhaney: “Our turnover rate shows that a lot of Firefighters with 3 years or less are leaving because our starting rates are low. Last couple years, union contracts have been paying \$0.25 an hour for everyone, which raises our starting salaries. I think our guys are treated pretty well ... good career ladder. We have a lot of young guys in the system. What does that look like 5, 10 years from now? We can start to look at that and make long term decisions about where we are going. I think you are absolutely right, Sam. We need to look at that. We have made cuts in people, but I think the point you are making is it’s the long-term impact of the retirement. I believe we are paying about 21% for Special Risk retirement. That is pretty strong.”

Sam McConnell: “You are a great Chief, Stuart. This is all past experience I’m trying to share with you. If you don’t spread it over a couple years and you just hit one category, then the other category has to pay the price.”

Chief McElhaney: “There are a lot of things that are in our budget that we have no control over. They are just put in our budget; health insurance, for example. I agree wholeheartedly with cost allocation, but this is the way the County does it.” He reviewed again what had been cut from Fire’s budget in the way of positions totaling about three-quarters of a million dollars.

Tom Lorio asked about the level of retirement in the next few years. Chief McElhaney explained that there are now several hundred employees who have 5 years or less in. This is desirable because it enables employees to “move through the system at a more uniform rate.”

Sam McConnell asked if there have been any discussions about the contracts and decreasing salaries. “I feel I have to at least put it on the table for you. There are lot of other businesses and corporations who have had to cut.” Chief reported that no date has yet been set for further contract negotiations.

#### **D. Shorter Shifts**

Discussion was held on 10 or 12 hour shifts vs. 24 hour shifts. Chief McElhaney explained that it actually requires more staff to man ambulances for 10 or 12 hour shifts. Some board members felt that 24 hour shifts put too much pressure on personnel. Stuart stated that in high performance areas, the answer is to have more units available ... less stress on each ambulance unit.

Sam McConnell: “Less revenue; less productivity; reduce cost no matter what business it is.” Chief Azzariti: “We could run a far more efficient system by running 24/48; reduce costs and increase efficiency for both agencies.” Chief McElhaney: “We are certainly cognizant of the safety of our personnel and the citizens. It’s kind of like Sam was saying, we have to look at all the different options that are out there. There are Fire Departments laying off people; very few hiring like we are. Some are making concessions – instead of a 10% raise we will take 5%. That is not a concession. Revenue, productivity and expenditures; if we whack capital this year, we also cut our expenditures. Last fiscal year, EMSA expenditure budget was about \$20 million. Next fiscal year, our expenditure budget ... we are actually looking at about \$17.9 million. We will have more ambulances on the street next year than we have this year.”

“Item 3355, line item for Insurance Fee is budgeted at about \$500,000. We found that that number should be about \$200,000. That is money that is going back into the General Fund.”

Sam McConnell asked if the Fire Dept. has any control over the cost of retirement/workers comp. Chief McElhaney: “No. The one way we can control that is to have fewer employees. The State tells us how much we have to put aside per employee.

No control over it whatever. On workers comp, there are some things we can do. I am trying to put considerably more emphasis on safety. Pulled three Battalion Chiefs and put one on each shift. Their sole purpose is to prevent accidents. Couple years ago we hired a personal fitness trainer for a year and our workers comp went down amazingly. That is something we have control over. Your premiums and claims costs are a direct result of employee actions.”

Paul Clark asked [what responsibility regarding the budget lies with the Advisory Board](#). “Are you going to ask us for recommendations on this budget? If so, what is the timeline?” Chief McElhaney: “The Department Proposed budget is typically due the end of February. Then there is the County Administrator Proposed. We have already gone through those steps with Dr. Niblock. That is normally over by mid to late March. Then there is a period of time until mid to late June where you are getting a better picture of what revenue is, etc. Then you start your budget workshop with the County Commissioners.”

“My thoughts were that you guys were an Advisory Board to the County Commission. I felt like my job as staff was to prepare the budget with my staff to go to the County Administrator. What I would like to see is for us to all go to the County Commission to present the budget. You may feel like you are not comfortable with staff’s proposal because this is a new Board. I would feel equally comfortable if you would like to get involved in the budget at the beginning. It’s really kind of up to you all what you’re comfortable with.”

Barbara Fitos: “I think you need to experience where you are at as an Advisory Board understanding that there are ... some costs that are beyond the Chief’s control. The basic premise is that you all are charged with maintaining response times that are going to meet the needs of our citizens. What’s it going to take to deliver that service? That is where you all come into play as far as I am concerned. I am hoping this year, with the help of Bill Kauffman we can build something that you all can wrap your hands around rather than come into it mid-stream like you are now. As you move through this budget final phase this year and the upcoming next, you start building it from square one. You will all advise relative to what it’s going to cost us in terms of service.”

“I would suggest that next year you start early ... you’ll be ground floor with the budget. I would also suggest that if you are given the opportunity to meet with Stuart and his staff, you open as much or as little time as needed to acquire a comfort level to make a recommendation.

Dr. Niblock: “Arguably, I would love to hear from this Board before I do my review. We certainly have some excellent resources within Administration. Budget is a 365 day a year process; will probably begin in January. I would suggest that each of you schedule some time with Stuart. I would like to hear your recommendations. You answer to the Board of County Commissioners, but it would be helpful to me also.”

Stuart: “I think it would be helpful to get together on those thoughts conceptually and work it from there.”



Sam McConnell: "This budget hasn't been put to bed and the commission hasn't signed off on it yet. Just because we are starting behind, doesn't mean that we can't catch up. I was hearing, we will work on the coming year. This one's not done and over with yet."

Chief McElhaney: "I think what I said was that we have been through the County Administrator's approval at this point. This is the point where we always find things we need to change. I think we do have the opportunity to continue to work this budget. I think what Lee was suggesting was that anybody who wants to come and sit down, let's work it together. If you guys have some different thoughts, let's share. I am going to work with the County Administrator, but he said he would also like your thoughts."

Dr. Niblock: "I don't think it's too late for the individual Board members to go over the budget. In going forward, I definitely want to hear your thoughts. You have between now and July 8<sup>th</sup>."

Pat Gabriel: "In PRAC we made individual appointments with Dr. Niblock. We looked over the budget and had our questions answered. We culminated in discussing it in the group. I think what's happening this year is the merger of the rescue within Fire has made everything different and skewed. I was talking to Dan Azzariti yesterday about Billing; ended with what we see getting in revenues. I think we are doing better than anticipated in Billing revenues coming in."

Rex Etheredge: "This is a year of transition. We are looking to find ways to reduce some costs. It takes time for those pieces to come together. I am reluctant to look through some of these numbers and really drill down ... I am not confident to 'learn' the organization. As far as I am concerned, I have confidence in your ability to go forward. We have some time, but if I make a recommendation, it's going to be a high level recommendation. It wouldn't be prudent for me to do that. Next year it will make more sense for me to be involved and make suggestions. I am not comfortable in doing that today."

Chief McElhaney: "The issue of trying to meet our goals within our revenue by cutting capital -- that is a short term solution. I think that is a very important, even if we go together to the Board at the workshop. But if you all say one of the things we observed is that we are meeting revenue by cutting capital and we don't feel comfortable with that, I want you to know that I understand that that is not a long term solution."

Sam McConnell: "I don't have the time, energy, or resources to do a line item review of your budget. It's our opportunity to give you a direction, not micromanage. I don't want to do that."

Chief McElhaney: "Part of it, Sam, is because it's new to you. I have lived and breathed this plan for ten years. I appreciate you asking detailed questions because you can't possibly get to know everything there is about the Fire Dept otherwise, and you must make some important recommendations."



Sam McConnell: “The 10 Year Plan is no longer valid because of incorporating EMSA. We need a new plan now; the plan you have is antiquated.” Stuart agreed with him; said that he would suggest a new 10 year plan, not a 3 year plan as Sam recommended. Sam McConnell: “Our economic times are such that in 10 years it would be obsolete. Three to five years would be the maximum I would go out.”

Pat Gabriel: “I think that is a good topic for us to put on next meetings agenda. But meantime, we need to get to these items Stuart wanted our opinions or thoughts on.”

#### **IV. AGENDA ITEMS – UPCOMING ISSUES**

##### **A. Construction:**

Chief McElhaney: “I want to make you aware of what’s coming up before the next Advisory Board meeting. There is a joint-workshop with the City of Belleview next Monday; Inter-local agreement between City and County. We bought 2.26 acres to build a Fire Station there; it’s 95% funded in this year’s budget. There are some issues – do we extend the water and sewer line – those kind of things; it’s mostly common sense stuff and well within our budget.” Tom Lorio: “That is the last construction to start?” Yes.

##### **B. Three Agenda Items: (Attachment C)**

1) Budget Amendment: “We are moving \$40,000 out of Training into Refunds for the ambulance service. We have a lot of start up costs in training, but have fewer people coming over, so don’t need it there. Refunds: We bill someone then their insurance company pays, so we refund the billed amount to the customer.”

2) Working on contracts with the hospitals to which we provide inter-facility transports. Agreement spells out the responsibilities of each party. Munroe will pay the Medicare rate plus mileage.

3) Fire PIO, Heather Danenhowe, and her Department are being recognized at the next Commissioners Board meeting for recent awards. They received the Award of Excellence in Community Public Education Programs from the Florida Fire Chiefs Association. MCFR also received awards from the Florida Public Relations Association for North Central Florida.

##### **C. Organization Chart (Attachment D)**

Chief McElhaney referred to an organization chart which had been distributed in the packet of information. He apologized for not being present at the last meeting. “There are certain items which are directly affected by the County Administrator’s reorganization. This is not an organizational change. What I am looking to do is lessen the span of control of the people who are running the districts. We currently have 4 geographic districts. I am proposing that we go to 5 rather than 6 at this time.”

Four districts will be supervised by Captains, while the fifth will be supervised by a Battalion Chief who would additionally be responsible for all medic units as well as the District

Stations. We would also then have three Battalion Chiefs who would serve as shift Safety Officers. Any of the Battalion Chiefs could move up and cover for the Assistant Chief.

“This will help us with our overtime budget. The field is desperately waiting to get that done. They are expecting this. We did cut the Finance Manager position; one of the Administrative Managers is handling those functions.”

“It’s not really a lot of change to what we are currently doing. We built an org structure based on what we thought it was going to take. I think the Board realizes and appreciates that as we see how to run this, we are going to need to continue to tweak the structure.”

Sam McConnell: “You have got Battalion Chiefs on the same level as Captains and so they seem like they are floating.”

Chief McElhaney: “Originally, Sam, we had 4 districts each run by a Captain and 4 Battalion Chiefs -- 6 people per shift. The Captains and Battalion Chiefs told us they had too much area to cover. We put in Assistant Chiefs; one person running each shift – a non-union position on shifts. We started talking to the Supervisory Unit -- they told us if you call me District Chief, you have to pay me more. It’s just a title change. I didn’t want to go there. Because of some of that issue, I was trying to figure a way out. We did lose that Safety position, so we wanted a person who could ride up to do that; it would be one of the Battalion Chiefs.” Additional responsibility would be schedules. The Battalion Chief would outrank a Captain, so there still is some differentiation between the two.

**Closing Comments:**

1) Pat Gabriel: “Stuart and I were talking yesterday about the facilities, etc. We were wondering if anyone would be interested in a [half day field trip](#) to go out and actually look at some of the facilities.” Chief McElhaney said he would like to take them to some of the stations planned for renovation or replacement. Most of the Board members did not feel the need to visit the stations; were already very familiar. Rex Etheredge responded that he would like the tour. Pat will make arrangements with him.

2) Discussion was held on Board members who wished to review any issue in detail (budget or any other issue), procedure would be to meet with Chief McElhaney in his office individually. This will enable the Advisory Board time to cover all items on the Agenda during a meeting. However, no vote was taken; no definitive rule established.

**Motion to adjourn was made by Rex Etheredge; seconded by Tom Lorio.  
Meeting adjourned at 6:35 PM. Next Advisory Board meeting will take place Tuesday, June 9<sup>th</sup>, at 4 PM.**

Minutes submitted by Anna Carpenter.  
Approved:

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Pat Gabriel, Chairman

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Date