

**Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board  
February 19, 2025 Minutes - DRAFT**

- 1. Call to Order** – The Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board met in the Training Room at Marion County Fire Rescue Headquarters, 2631 SE Third Street, Ocala, FL 34471 on February 19, 2025. Dr. Frank Fraunfelter called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.
- 2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Roll Call and Quorum Determination** – Roll call was taken and a quorum was met.

Members Present:

Erin Jones, Healthcare Development Director, Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership

Alan Keesee, CEO, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital

Floyd Magwood (arrived at 4:05 pm)

Erika Skula, President and CEO, AdventHealth Ocala (arrived at 4:04 pm)

Clint Welborn, Fire Chief, Ocala Fire Rescue

Dr. Frank Fraunfelter, Medical Director, Marion County Fire Rescue

Members Absent:

Patricia Gabriel, Chair

Adam Woods

Others in Attendance:

James Banta, Fire Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

Robert Graff, Deputy Chief of Operations, Marion County Fire Rescue

Robert Kruger, Deputy Chief of EMS, Marion County Fire Rescue

Chad Belger, Division Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

Brad Olmsted, Division Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

Wanda Bowlin, AdventHealth Ocala, EMS Relations and Emergency Management Specialist

Pam Doherty, Administrative Staff Assistant, Marion County Fire Rescue

Dr. Frank Fraunfelter led the meeting in the absence of Patricia Gabriel, Chair.

- 4. Approval of Minutes** – The November 20, 2024 Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board minutes were submitted for approval. Alan Keesee made a motion to approve the minutes and Erika Skula seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 4-0.
- 5. Marion County Fire Rescue Updates**

5.1 Budget Update

Chief Banta opened the budget update advising that Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR) is just starting to work on next year's budget. The first meeting with the County Administrator with the beginning proposals will take place the end of March 2025. MCFR will look at adding additional transport units, positions for an additional ladder truck, EMS Battalion Chiefs, and other additional staff positions. Some initial general fund projections look challenging next year, as there may be scrutiny put on the general fund as a whole. The County's focus will be cost of living increases, merit raises and review of additional positions.

On January 29, 2025, the Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) held an Impact Fee Workshop. The department engaged with a consultant to reintroduce fire impact fees and include an EMS component. The initial indication was Commissioners would be supportive. There will need to be a public hearing. If the BCC implements 100% rates on impact fees, this would generate about \$5,000,000 a year. The current cost of a fire station, including equipment, is about \$8.3 million and there are four stations that need to be built that qualify under the fire impact fee. If the BCC approves these impact fees, the Pedro, Westport, and Baldwin Ranch stations would be the three top priorities. If the EMS impact fee portion is approved by the BCC, then the EMS West location on State Road 200 would be built.

Erin Jones said the cost of the impact fees in the past was a deterrent for the Marion County Building Industry Association (MCBIA). The residential projected fire rate would be approximately \$650 and the EMS rate would be around \$200. Alan Keesee said he would encourage dialogue at the Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership (CEP) Board level as much as possible. Erin Jones agreed, and said communication is key at that level. She can help with setting up a meeting. Chief Banta would want to coordinate this through the County Administrator and will let her know.

The Fire Assessment Workshop is February 27, 2025 to update the Municipal Services Benefit Unit (MSBU) fire assessment funding stream that is typically updated every 5 years. It was previously updated in 2019. The idea is to look at the future budget over the next five years, project what it will be, then set an average rate to allow MCFR to operate for the next five years. The average rate at the beginning builds up more money than needed and then towards the end, reserves will start dwindling. It would be approximately an \$84 increase on a residential rate. The commercial rates are based on square footage. The fire assessment rates would go from \$199 to approximately \$283 for each household. Fire assessments can only fund the fire portion of the fire department.

The 20-year sales tax was approved. Impact fees take care of new capacity and sales tax takes care of capital and replacement of fire trucks and fire stations. The priorities have been presented to the County Administrator. Ambulances and fire trucks are non-negotiable.

The Orange Lake fire station (Station 9) and the Marion Oaks fire station (Station 24) both need to be rebuilt. Impact fees cannot pay for these stations. These will need to be paid from either sales tax or another funding source. If all of the fire station projects can be bid under one contractor, under one design at the same time, this will save the department money. MCFR is hoping to make these decisions within the next year to get these projects moving and have six stations built simultaneously.

Alan Keesee asked about the five Community Paramedic program positions in this year's budget. Chief Kruger advised that three of the five positions have been filled internally and the other two positions were opened up externally, with eight applicants currently waiting for review.

MCFR is always trying to balance transport and fire workload. From a non-transport point of view, MCFR is looking at scaling back the dispatch matrix on types of calls where fire trucks are sent— the changes to implement will reduce adding another fire truck to stations and reduce the number of calls the trucks are running. It will put more of a workload on the ambulance, but that ambulance will have already been dispatched to the call.

MCFR would like to begin conversations with both hospitals to look at other areas of transports to see if, or what, other paid workloads either hospital would have interest doing (i.e. special events, assisted living facilities, the possibility of EMS cardiac calls, etc.). Alan Keesee said it would be helpful understanding what these are as they would be open to look at this. Chief Banta said (at this point) the problem is not a revenue issue with MCFR, it is a work load issue. Reducing work load and responding to 911 calls has to be the department's focus.

Leopard Transport has changed ownership. The new ownership is interested in helping with special events and/or interfacility transports.

Alan Keesee questioned if his hospital keeps expanding his paramedic transport pool, does this impact MCFR's staffing of hiring paramedics. Chief Graff advised that we are not having trouble hiring high performance single certified EMTs and Paramedics. We are almost at full staff. We currently have open Paramedic positions saved for the EMTs in paramedic school.

With the improvement of workload, working conditions, wages and benefits, people are not leaving the department. The new stand-alone facilities and main hospitals have cut drive times in half, helping units get back in the stations faster. From a system-wide perspective, adding the interfacility transports allowed stations 18, 30, 10, 21 and 31 that were close to TimberRidge and Summerfield hospitals to stay in house, which helped the turnaround time and unit hour utilizations (UHUs). There is now more time between calls. This is keeping the trucks in their zones, adding capacity into the system.

Chief Banta advised that MCFR purchased 100 LifePak 35s. The department is going to the next level for cardiac monitoring as these units are state of the art. MCFR is one of the only departments in the state of Florida going from a LifePak 15 to a LifePak 35. Chief Kruger explained how this device gives MCFR the ability to do 15-lead in the field and reads the viable rhythms in the background for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). AI technology is built-in.

Chief Graff discussed the Strategic Plan and Master Plan. Both plans have expired so the department is in the process of working on a Master Plan with a Community Risk Assessment and a Standard of Cover. These documents are needed for fire department accreditation. During the process, the Strategic Plan Workshop was completed on February 5 and 6, 2025 with people represented from various ranks of the department. A good-better-different process was used. This is in draft format right now. Chief Olmsted is developing a community survey for priorities for this Board through Survey Monkey. Please take the time to fill this out. This will be part of the Master Plan. MCFR hopes to have a draft by June 1, 2025 and have it go into effect by October 1, 2025 for the new fiscal year. Chief Banta said this was all done in-house by Chief Graff. Chief Graff explained MCFR is also developing a dashboard that will be able to project and display all the calls, types, times, analysis, etc. on this dashboard. This will all be linked to report writing software.

## **6. Board Items**

### **6.1 FY 24/25 Quarter 1 Report**

The FY 24/25 Quarter 1 Report was provided to the Advisory Board. Chief Kruger gave a brief overview of the report. The Billing division is doing phenomenal work. The state average for the collection rate is approximately 50-55% on returns; the collection rate for MCFR's Billing division is 77% and keeps this department moving forward.

Captain Chris Hickman with Ocala Fire Rescue, along with others in his department, have led the fall prevention program, which has been a very successful program for MCFR and our community.

Chief Banta mentioned that in the next year, MCFR will look at updating the billing rates. In addition, this past year, balanced billing was stopped for Veterans. When a Veteran in our community receives a bill, the bottom of the bill asks the Veteran to call the Billing office. The staff in Billing will assist the Veteran with the possibility of getting benefits, if they do not have them. The patient's benefits will be billed, but the Veteran will not be balanced billed.

Dr. Fraunfelter shared there is good momentum moving forward in Marion County that includes the following: several comprehensive stroke centers opened; an interventional neurologist is located here; both local hospitals engaged in becoming comprehensive resuscitation centers; a mobile integrated health system is engaged locally; opioid overdoses have decreased; and new stroke trucks will arrive soon.

Alan Keesee asked if there is a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) requirement in Marion County. Chief Kruger advised a COPCN is needed to do transports in Marion County. He advised that currently UF Health Shands Hospital runs their transport in a rendezvous manner—they meet up at specific locations and transfer patient care with Marion County. Alan Keesee stated for the record he has an objection to this, and disagrees as well, and can discuss this at the appropriate forum. Chief Kruger said this is no different than air transport for Marion County Fire Rescue.

7. **Next Quarterly Meeting Date** – The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 21, 2025 at 4:00 p.m. in the Training Room at Marion County Fire Rescue, 2631 SE Third Street, Ocala, FL 34471.
8. **Adjournment** – There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Approved:

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Pat Gabriel, Chairperson

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Date