

**Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board  
February 18, 2026 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 18, 2026. Pat Gabriel 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:

Patricia Gabriel, Chair

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

Alan Keesee, CEO, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital

Floyd Magwood

Erika Skula, President and CEO, AdventHealth Ocala

Clint Welborn, Fire Chief, Ocala Fire Rescue

Adam Woods

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

Members Absent:

None

Others in Attendance:

James Banta, Fire Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

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

Chief Olmsted, Division Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

Dr. Austin Reed, Assistant Medical Director, Marion County Fire Rescue

Barry Cannon, EMS Transport Manager, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital

Ashley Arbuckle, EMS Outreach Manager, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital

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

Pam Doherty, Administrative Staff Assistant, Marion County Fire Rescue

4. **Approval of Minutes** – The August 20, 2025, Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board minutes were submitted for approval. Dr. Fraunfelder made a motion to approve the minutes, and Mr. Keesee seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 7-0.
5. **Marion County Fire Rescue Updates**

5.1 Chief Banta advised that the department is early in the budget process. Marion County Fire Rescue's main focus from a budget standpoint will be on the union contract with negotiations currently in progress. From a staffing standpoint outside of the first responders, there are pay reclassification changes and the possibility of adding a social worker to the Community Paramedicine Program. A 3-week Kelly day is being discussed with the firefighters, which would change from a 56-hour work week to a 48-hour work week. This has a significant cost, with the main cost driver being the additional 130 positions needed to accomplish this. The budget will be lean this year. Approximately seven fire departments in Florida have transitioned to the 24/72 schedule which is 24 hours on and 72 hours off. The new 24/72 schedule is being discussed to be offered to the EMS side since they are currently on the 3-week Kelly day schedule.

Chief Welborn asked whether the county is using the Kelly Day as a step toward transitioning to a 24/72 schedule. Chief Banta responded that the county has not committed to implementing a 24/72 schedule for firefighters. He noted that the estimated cost of transitioning to a 24/72 schedule is approximately \$20 million, and that figure does not include adding any additional apparatus on the road. The transition would take an estimated three to four years to fully implement. He also emphasized that negotiations remain fluid and are subject to change at each meeting.

Chief Graff stated that departments across the state are actively hiring, many offering higher pay and a 42-hour work schedule. He described the current environment as a competitive race focused on recruitment and retention. He noted that approximately 200 additional personnel would be required to move to a 24/72 schedule. He also mentioned that he does not believe there is sufficient data to justify increasing the budget by an additional estimated 25–30% to provide the same level of service currently being delivered. Chief Graff expressed concern that there is not enough data to determine whether a 42-hour schedule or a 48-hour schedule is more effective. He questioned whether employees working a 42-hour schedule would use the additional time for rest and relaxation as intended, or whether they would pursue secondary means of employment or operate personal businesses during that time. He also noted that the 48-hour schedule is currently available and supported by substantial data, with many departments already operating under that model.

5.2 Chief Graff reported that interfacility transports with the hospital are going well, with no major identified issues. He noted that existing COPCN (Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity) transport restrictions are in place to ensure all agencies maintain the ability to transport and discharge patients as needed. He added that both interfacility transports and bed delay situations are being managed effectively. The UHUs (Unit Hour Utilizations) are performing well and operating as expected.

Mr. Keesee stated that collaboration with MCFR has been excellent.

Wanda Bowlin, EMS Relations and Emergency Management Specialist for AdventHealth Ocala, shared that the hospital expects its new neonatal unit to be operational by the second quarter of this year. She also noted that six additional units are available to provide added support to MCFR as needed.

5.3 Chief Olmsted presented the 21-page PowerPoint overview of the 2025 Marion County Fire Rescue Master Plan and Strategic Plan to the Advisory Board. In addition, each board member received a binder containing the 316-page document, titled, “Community Risk Assessment: Standards of Cover” and the 46page document, titled, “2025 Marion County Fire Rescue Strategic Plan”.

Chief Graff explained that an internal team was formed in January 2025 to develop the master plan from the ground up. The process included comprehensive data analysis, development of capital replacement plans, resource distribution projections, and historical system performance analysis. The plan also incorporates a Community Risk Assessment, Standards of Cover, financial expenditure breakdown, and a historical overview of the department’s evolution and future direction. These documents are required components for fire department accreditation.

Chief Banta noted that the planning process began with a two-day session involving cross-sections of staff who provided input on departmental priorities. He explained that the prediction model for number of transports is based on how busy the trucks were and how many calls they were running. These numbers are mapped on a geographic information system (GIS) to identify

call density and service demand. As a result, high-performance (HP) units were relocated from inside the City of Ocala to areas outside the city to improve overall system coverage. This adjustment has significantly improved the availability of units within the municipality.

Chief Banta mentioned that changes were made to the types of calls to which the fire engines responded. These adjustments do not impact EMS operations but are intended to increase engine availability for higher-priority calls and potentially reduce the need for additional system resources over the next five years. Additionally, Engine 13 was placed into service at Orange Springs - Station 13 this past week to provide much-needed support to that area.

There was a brief discussion on recent high-profile events involving the fire department. Mr. Keesee advised that their focus is on supporting the fire department with ongoing cultural issues. Chief Banta advised that leadership is evaluating the department as a whole, making adjustments where necessary. The small issues are important and do matter.

Regarding the Dunnellon Fire, Chief Banta explained that MCFR fell into the assistance role with Dunnellon after the first 24 hours. Current efforts include additional air monitoring, flying overhead drones to monitor changes and clean up. The biggest challenge with the Dunnellon fire has been communication with the public. The cleanup plan involved removing up to 2 feet of soil under the burned railroad ties, hauling everything away, and conducting soil samples to make sure everything is clean. MCFR's focus was to prevent further spread of the fire. Chief Banta noted strong collaboration with Emergency Management and the City of Dunnellon.

## **6. Board Items**

### 6.1 FY 24/25 Quarter 4 Report

Chief Graff reported that MCFR has added the Fire Rescue and EMS impact fee collection to the quarterly report with a summary of this information. This report will now satisfy the agreement between MCFR and the City of Ocala showing how funds collected are allocated.

### 6.2 FY 25/26 Quarter 1 Report

Chief Graff advised that updated Medicare rates will be reflected in the 2026 report. This quarter still reflected 2025 rates, as part of the reporting period remains in 2025. Mr. Keesee said impact fees are lower than anticipated. Chief Banta explained that significant revenue is not expected until the end of year, as it is collected at close-out, possibly as late as October.

Pat Gabriel and Erica Skula complimented the department on the Community Risk Assessment: Standards of Cover Plan and the 2025 Strategic Plan, recognizing the efforts related to the plans being developed internally.

Dr. Fraunfelter introduced Dr. Austin Reed, the new Assistant Medical Director, as they are working side by side on revising and updating protocols. Cardiac arrest survival data shows approximately 10-12% higher than state and national averages. The survival rate increase is partially contributed by the opening of two resuscitation centers in the community.

Mr. Keesee announced that HCA Florida Ocala Hospital has entered a major partnership with the flight crew of Air Methods, a national helicopter organization. This helicopter will fly patients into Marion County from nearby geographical areas. Barry Cannon, EMS Transport Manager, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital, stated that in January there were 1,265 active patient transports. Last year, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital completed 12,365 patient transports.

Erika Skula, President and CEO of AdventHealth Ocala, advised that her hospital recently received a comprehensive stroke accreditation. ECPR (Extracorporeal Cardiopulmonary

Resuscitation) and ECMO (Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation) services are progressing well, with ongoing training in coordination with local fire stations.

- 7. **Next Quarterly Meeting Date** – The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 20, 2026, 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 4:52 p.m.

Approved:

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Pat Gabriel, Chairperson

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Date