

**Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board
May 15, 2024 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 May 15, 2024. Mrs. Patricia 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 (arrived 4:13)

Clint Welborn, Fire Chief, Ocala Fire Rescue

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

Members Absent:

Adam Woods

Others in Attendance:

James Banta, Fire Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

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

Cassandra Li, Administrative and Financial Services Manager, Marion County Fire Rescue

Brad Olmsted, Battalion Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

Lisa Cahill, Public Safety Communication Manager, Public Safety Communications

Pam Doherty, Administrative Staff Assistant, Marion County Fire Rescue

4. **Approval of Minutes** – The February 21, 2024 Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board minutes were submitted for approval. Chief Welborn made a motion to approve the minutes and Alan Keesee seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

5. **Marion County Fire Rescue Updates**

Chief Banta expressed how proud and thankful he was to the partner agencies and other resources in helping manage the mass casualty incident (MCI) that occurred yesterday, May 14, 2024. An incident of this magnitude being handled so smoothly was because of the preparation, planning, training, coordination and relationship with all the agencies involved. HCA had 5 ambulances that transported from scene and AdventHealth helped run 9-1-1 calls and maintain the system.

Mr. Keesee said their staff was thrilled to be part of the mutual aid process. They will work on getting better radios and true jump bags for assisting in this type of situation. The whole process was humbling and the whole community worked together. Ms. Skula also expressed her thanks. She found the communication to be impeccable. Chief Banta is very appreciative to both of the local hospitals for how smooth everything ran.

5.1 Budget Update

Chief Banta opened the budget update discussion. The budget has been submitted to the County Administrator and the recommendations will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners at the budget workshop in July. The Fire Rescue budget has a total increase of just under 6% which includes personnel. The added positions include 1 Multimedia Technician, 1 Captain, 2 Lieutenants, 3 Driver Engineers and 15 Firefighter/EMTs. Another station will be added into the system and these personnel will staff the station, accounting for sick and vacation time relief factors. Operating increases are due to overall cost increases, inflation and adding second sets of bunker gear for firefighters.

The EMS budget increased close to 9% due to adding 6 Paramedics, 5 Community Paramedics and 4 EMTs. The 10 Paramedics and EMTs are strictly for a relief factor to add more staff to reduce overtime to help with planned vacancies. The 5 Community Paramedics will help expand the Community Paramedicine program throughout Marion County. An EMS Advanced Practitioner will be starting with Marion County Fire Rescue next week to assist in this program with the goal of keeping more patients at their homes by providing direct care without the need of transporting them to a hospital.

Dr. Fraunfelter mentioned that ultrasound machines have been added into the EMS program with practice training taking place. We will start slow with the Community Paramedics and Critical Care Paramedics and then use them as teachers for the rest of the field. The department will look at adding them into the general trucks in the next few years, which is part of the coming wave of EMS.

5.2 Hospital Inter-Facility Update

Chief Kruger advised between January 1 and April 1, 2024, Marion County Fire Rescue had a slight decrease in inter-facility transports totaling 183, with AdventHealth having 64 transports and HCA having 119 transports. With the slight decrease in transports, the system is doing exactly what it is meant to do by keeping 9-1-1 trucks running 9-1-1 calls. In March, the Board approved the two amended hospital transport agreements changing the handling of 90% of the transports to 100% of the transports.

The University of Florida (UF) will be bringing on their trucks in late July 2024. They have contracted with American Ambulance to handle their inter-facility transports. They are under the same agreement as both HCA and AdventHealth to do 100% of their transports. The Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) is complete. The soft opening should occur in early-mid July 2024.

Each year, the EMS Awards Grant is awarded based on population. There was a challenge this year with the state delaying the award. The department should have these funds by July which will purchase ultrasound machines for the critical care trucks and devices for the technical rescue teams.

5.3 Blue Sky Project Update

Chief Banta discussed the Blue Sky Project 37-page handout. In November 2023, the Hospital District funded a study of firefighter resiliency. Marion County Fire Rescue is very thankful to the Hospital District for investing in this project. Some of the highlights include a change in the firefighter schedule of a standard 24/48 to a 24/72. There is a lot of research looking at sleep deprivation and the harmful effects as a result. To change to a 24/72 schedule, there would be

an annual budget increase of about \$30 million a year, plus hiring an additional 200 employees to manage this schedule. The City of Gainesville is currently transitioning to this schedule. Pasco County is also transitioning to this schedule in the next three years. Marion County will be monitoring the implementation of this progress in other counties to determine their success. In the meantime, our department will be evaluating the schedule and continuing to build our relief factor by overstaffing and moving to an eventual Kelly-type schedule that would transition to a 24/72 schedule. We could possibly use the HP single-cert staff as a study group since they already work a 3-week Kelly Day schedule and transition them to the 24/72 schedule. Approximately 10 full-time equivalents (FTEs) would be needed to accommodate this transition. Studies on sleep deprivation and its impact to health would be reviewed and a cost analysis would be conducted. We need to expand on how we look at firefighters on a physical standpoint, including looking at vitamins, minerals and bloodwork, and start treating them as athletes instead of the general public. We should implement tools to build resiliency and look at hiring practices to see if they are a good fit for this career. Marion County identifies physical ability, but not mental ability. There are seven recommendations to work through with this project. Chief Banta is appreciative of the Hospital District for their support in funding this project and going through the process.

6. Board Items

6.1 FY 23/24 Quarter 2 Report

Chief Banta said there have been no significant changes in the quarterly report, and everything is staying consistent month to month. Calls continue to grow slightly and workload grows, but we are in a good spot. The things we are doing to reduce workloads have been successful, which include the hospital partnerships and the Community Paramedicine Program. Retention is improving and some trucks have double paramedics on board. The morale in the department has improved significantly.

The fire training center is a large project with \$4 million dollars attached to it. The sales tax is a contributing factor for this project, so Marion County hopes to vote it in. The Request for Qualifications (RFQ) is being sent out for design and the redesign for the fire station model. The Citra station will be the last design with the current station model. The property has been purchased for the training center and the project will start being phased in. There is no state or federal funding for this as of yet.

Ms. Gabriel asked if there has been any feedback regarding the sales tax proposal. Mr. Keesee said the feedback from the Chamber & Economic Partnership (CEP) was all positive. Ms. Jones advised that Kevin Sheilley, President/CEO of the Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership, speaks to numerous groups regarding the sales tax proposal. Some local reactions have expressed they like the sales tax but they were unsure of the 20-year plan. After explaining the 20-year commitment, they seem to understand the importance and the benefits of the plan. Any changes to the fire assessment would not be addressed this year.

The new EMS Central station is being constructed quickly. The Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board is encouraged to stop by and visit the station.

The Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board members are invited to the budget workshop to show support to Chief Banta. Pam Doherty will email the date and time to the members when it becomes available.

(Ed. Note: The budget workshop is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, July 9, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.)

7. **Next Quarterly Meeting Date** – The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 21, 2024 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 4:47 p.m.

Approved:

Pat Gabriel, Chairperson

Date