

**Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board
May, 21, 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 May 21, 2025. 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 (arrived at 4:13 p.m.)
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 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
John Gabriel

4. **Approval of Minutes** – The February 19, 2025 Marion County Fire Rescue and EMS Advisory Board minutes were submitted for approval. Dr. Fraunfelter made a motion to approve the minutes and Floyd Magwood seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.
5. **Marion County Fire Rescue Updates**

Chief Banta opened the meeting with budget highlights. Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR) met with Mounir Bouyounes, County Administrator, Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) to start preparing for the budget workshops in July, 2025 and public hearings in September, 2025. Operationally, there are minimal increases, with the highest priority being additional resources, specifically ambulances. MCFR will propose adding two additional transport units, the personnel needed for these units, a Training Lieutenant, a Quality Improvement Technician and a Staff Assistant III position. Chief Graff is looking at where resources are positioned and once we get these two transport units approved in the budget, MCFR will look at moving ambulance locations around. The transport units may be slightly overstaffed in the city limits and the department may move some further out in the county. This will help keep units inside the city. Everything looks positive from the BCC, and almost all these additions impact the general fund. There may be

discussions with the BCC on roll back rates. Chief Banta is pretty confident MCFR will get the funding from the BCC.

MCFR has some significant projects moving forward. This year, the fire assessment, which is typically kept on a 5-year cycle, will be updated. MCFR has gone through the initial workshops with the BCC and conducted different analyses. The BCC had concerns about raising the fire assessment again this year. The BCC is looking at an initial rate resolution on June 3, 2025 to set the rate at \$283 from the current \$199 for residential rates. This is a proposed increase of \$84. This proposed increase would be presented in a public hearing on September 10, 2025.

(Ed. Note: The public hearing is scheduled for September 10, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.)

Impact fees were suspended in 2010 during the recession. Chief Banta said MCFR has shown that impact fees will be beneficial to providing the resources needed for the growth in this community. There is a public hearing on May 23, 2025 where the BCC will hopefully approve an ordinance to reimplement Fire Rescue and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) impact fees. MCFR received consensus from the City of Ocala to support the EMS component. There has been some opposition on the impact fees, but Chief Banta is fairly confident the proposal of impact fees should move forward. The discussion may be whether they should be at 100% of the recommended rates or at a reduced rate. Impact fees can only fund capital improvements moving forward like fire stations, EMS stations and the equipment that goes with them. The funds cannot be used for current deficiencies. Alan Keese, CEO, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital, asked if other counties around us have this in place. Chief Banta advised that yes, other counties have Fire and/or EMS impact fees in place, but the rates vary. If an impact fee is currently in place, the fee can only go up so much each year. If it is a new impact fee, then a new rate can be set moving forward. Looking at MCFR's 20-year plan moving forward, MCFR has to be able to fund this. The projected revenue from the 20-year sales tax will not fund all the projects. The impact fees will help bridge that gap, bringing in revenue between approximately \$2,000,000 and \$4,000,000 dollars per year. Fire stations currently cost \$5,000,000 to \$7,000,000 to build.

Construction is currently taking place at Golden Ocala - Station 20 with a remodel that should be complete in August 2025. Beginning in July 2025, Lowell - Station 11 is set to be rebuilt on the Florida State Fire College property. This has been a long process due to partnering with the State of Florida. Orange Springs - Station 13 is being remodeled to house more personnel and is being converted from a volunteer station to a career station. The remodel should be complete in August 2025.

The Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) for transports for AdventHealth Ocala Hospital, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital, and UF Health Shands Hospital, have been updated and approved at the last BCC meeting. The COPCN allows for expanded opportunities for all the hospitals to transport out of assisted living facilities and nursing homes. This will require coordination from all parties involved.

MCFR sent letters to all the special event vendors, advising them MCFR is phasing out working special detail at events held in Marion County. Leopard Transport, AdventHealth Ocala Hospital, HCA Florida Ocala Hospital, and UF Health Shands Hospital will begin working special detail to cover these events. Chief Banta said this will generate revenue for these organizations and this leaves MCFR with the non-revenue driving type of calls. Chief Kruger will forward the signed copy of the COPCN change to everyone involved. He has emailed all the contacts an update letting them know the COPCN has been adjusted, with a list of vendors that MCFR has worked with on special events and a rate sheet with what MCFR has charged in the past. The letter sent to the vendors clearly stated that MCFR does not recommend any particular transport company. All four agencies are listed with transport COPCNs. Chief Banta said this will be a partnership with MCFR and MCFR

will help with coverage, if help is needed. Chief Kruger does not anticipate a need for another transport service until we hit the 500,000 or more mark in population.

6. Board Items

6.1 FY 24/25 Quarter 2 Report

Chief Kruger reviewed the FY 24/25 Quarter 2 Report that was provided to the Advisory Board. This quarter shows MCFR is down about 300 calls since last quarter. The Community Paramedicine program and reduction in traffic accidents and fire alarms impacted the decline in calls. Cardiac arrests show an impressive increase in Return of Spontaneous Circulation (ROSC) from 26% in FY24/25 Quarter 1 to 32% in FY24/25 Quarter 2. This increase can be contributed to the teams and citizens being engaged in CPR, the 911 Tele-CPR through dispatch, and the PulsePoint application alerting people there is a cardiac arrest in their vicinity. HCA Florida Ocala Hospital is now a Florida Resuscitation Center and AdventHealth Ocala is in the process of getting this same certification. MCFR is meeting response times and daily trends have not changed much. The workload concurrency charts are higher than last quarter, but should be trending down in upcoming months. Ambulance Billing has collected more than anticipated and budgeted. Of the revenue that is billed out, almost 75% is collected. The state ambulance fees will be discussed at a conference next month and, due to a legislative change and surveys to surrounding departments, a recommendation to change the ambulance rates will go before the BCC.

Chief Banta explained the Communications Center is stable in staffing and Chief Kruger advised they are meeting or exceeding their metrics.

Chief Graff attended the Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC) recently. A big topic for discussion was the “all-hazards approach” model and is it still the model to follow. Most major fire departments in the country are looking at this model and trying to determine what units should be sent to a 911 call. Chief Graff said this is being reviewed as the dispatch matrix is redone and other ways MCFR can provide the best and most cost-effective service.

Dr. Fraunfelter said having hospitals engaging in advanced care in our community is critical. Having an Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO) process at AdventHealth Ocala and HCA Florida Ocala Hospital for cardiac survivors is a big win for our community.

Chief Kruger advised that MCFR took delivery of 100 LIFEPAK 35 monitor/defibrillator units. The teams will start training on them the first week of June 2025 and the department will start rolling them out on the trucks the end of June 2025.

Pat Gabriel asked how MCFR’s fire component is working out. Chief Graff said the service is amazing and staffing is good. We have 36 positions open, but 12 of those positions are being held for Station 13, that has not opened yet. There are three ways to capture our community citizens and have them become an employee in our system. These programs include the new hire classes that will begin soon, the mentorship program that is currently hiring, and the Career Academy program that will start in the next school year for high school seniors. Metrics and equipment are great, and a lot of time is spent on apparatus replacement planning. Mandatory overtime is down. A deferral process was implemented that has alleviated the uneasiness of the staffing issues.

Dr. Fraunfelter said paramedicine is an experienced-based business. Having the experienced personnel in the field is critical. The hospitals benefit when a person does several years in paramedicine and then becomes a nurse.

Erin Jones, Healthcare Development Director, Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership (CEP), asked who trains for the Career Academy. Chief Graff said MCFR does the

training, that is in addition to their normal school schedule. The mentorship program is a combined program between the City of Ocala and Marion County which is separate from the Career Academy.

Floyd Magwood thanked MCFR for doing a great job. He said it is impressive the way MCFR is being efficient with their money by moving things around.

Mr. Keesee said EMS Week was just celebrated (May 18-24, 2025). Dr. Fraunfelter thanked everyone that contributed to EMS week. In addition, Erica Skula, President and CEO, AdventHealth Ocala, and Ms. Jones thanked MCFR for their service and everything they do for the community.

Chief Graff advised the draft Strategic Plan was recently completed and this plan will be presented at the next quarterly meeting. Each member of this Advisory Board will receive a copy.

Ms. Gabriel said it is amazing to see how far Marion County has progressed since the 1990's with an emergency service that was questionable back then.

Chief Kruger said he appreciates these Advisory Boards and contributes the success with the collaboration between the community, the hospitals and the departments. The guidance and feedback are appreciated and this keeps the ball moving forward.

Chief Banta said he appreciates everything the hospitals have done for EMS Week and their recognition of the people that are actually running the calls.

Ms. Gabriel advised the committee that she is thinking about retiring the end of 2025.

- 7. **Next Quarterly Meeting Date** – The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 20, 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 4:50 p.m.

Approved:

Pat Gabriel, Chairperson

Date