

**Marion County Fire and EMS Advisory Board
February 11, 2021 Minutes - DRAFT**

1. Call to Order – Patricia Gabriel called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

3. Members Present:

Patricia Gabriel, Chairperson

Chad Christianson, CEO, Ocala Health (left at 9:06 a.m.)

Joe Johnson, President and CEO, AdventHealth Ocala

Joe Reichel, Ocala/Marion County Chamber of Economic Partnership

Shane Alexander, Fire Chief, Ocala Fire Rescue (arrived 8:42 a.m.)

Members Absent:

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

Mauro Porcelli

Adam Woods

Others in Attendance:

Jamie Banta, Fire Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

Bart Walker, Deputy Fire Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

Rodney Mascho, Division Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

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

Robert Graff, Division Chief, Marion County Fire Rescue

Kyle Drummer, Director, Public Safety Communications

A quorum was met.

4. Approval of Minutes – The November 19, 2020 minutes were submitted for approval. Joe Reichel made a motion to adopt the minutes and Chad Christensen seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-0.

5. Marion County Fire Rescue Updates

- Budget Update – The budget opened February 1, 2021 and will close on March 5, 2021. It is averaging 12-14% over from last year. Changes will be made to the surtax schedule. Tentative workshops are scheduled from July 12, 2021 through July 23, 2021 and budgets will be presented at this time. There will be some position changes but no drastic changes or increases. Personnel is holding steady and metrics are looking good. Adding additional personnel and units worked to reduce the workload and increase the workforce.
- CARES Funding – Marion County Fire Rescue received \$447,000 in funding and all funds have been expended. All work was completed by December 31, 2020. The Cares funding helped offset the EMS distribution system.
- Battalion Chiefs – 21 Battalion Chief positions were created to address span of control across the department. These positions were filled and operating in the field. This has allowed the department to provide better leadership. The next level of focus will be on the leadership of Captains and Lieutenants. The department received 215 applications, and

hired 21 people from that group. There were eight people hired from the outside and 13 hired internally. Hiring externally allowed the department to bring in external culture and talent with outside ideas and thoughts. Adding these positions helped us close the gap from when the department lost staff that had years of talent and experience during the recession. These new positions will take work off the Division Chief and Fire Chief levels. Each Battalion Chief oversees about 30 people consisting of 1-2 Captains and 3-5 Lieutenants.

With the direct leadership, the county will be able to measure and track benchmarks and goals, ranging from the reduced number of accidents and injuries to better out-of-chute times. The Strategic Plan contains six key initiatives. Each Battalion Chief will take a piece of the Strategic Plan and move forward to make sure we are hitting each of the key initiatives.

- Community Paramedicine – This program has been part of the City of Ocala for the last few years and Marion County Fire Rescue wants to bring it here. Marion County will focus on the high utilizers in the system. Chief Graff provided a packet with updates on this program. One of the main questions for this program is “where are these people located?” The County wants to augment the City of Ocala’s program to help with the work they are doing and allow their resources to stay more in their jurisdiction. In 2020, Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR) had roughly 7,887 calls for service by people that called five or more times. This are roughly 1,000 people calling five or more times, with more than 20 people calling more than 20 times. These people are in need of a resource. This program will address that need and connect them with that resource. Of these callers, 27.3% live in the city and 72.7% live in the county. The handout shows a breakdown of the reasons for these calls.

Chief Graff is working on metrics that other programs are using. Chief Alexander reported the program was successful and lives were being impacted by Ocala Fire Rescue’s program. Regarding the overdose portion, Florida is set to receive \$66 million in funds for the lawsuit for the opioid crisis. The City of Ocala is in that lawsuit individually. Sheriff Lemma from Seminole County said the groups that have the program running successfully would be the primary recipient for receiving the funds. Chief Graff is moving in the right direction in working on this funding and meeting with several people. The overdose portion is separate and Ocala Fire Rescue (OFR) is mirroring with community paramedicine and working on getting referrals.

Running and managing this program will be split between many groups, which will help the people get in touch with the right resources. Chief Alexander mentioned that many of these people are in groups outside of the case management and social system (i.e. under insured, no insurance, etc.). This is not case management or social work – this is the group falling between the cracks.

Chief Graff explained that Marion County Fire Rescue would run a dedicated Community Paramedicine program and send those in the program to a community paramedicine school. They will be critical care paramedics with a larger knowledge base and more experience. They need the right individuals who are dedicated and truly care about the program. They will have metrics and goals to establish ahead of time. Often times the patients just need to be educated and need help organizing medications. Chief Graff expects a significant decrease of calls in the first year.

As population grows, the need for the Community Paramedicine program grows. Chief Mascho said he cannot pull information prior to October 2019, but he can pull information moving forward. Mr. Johnson said it is a huge benefit keeping them out of the hospital. He said it is an intersection of doing good and well although they will lose on some admissions.

Chief Walker asked if there is a percentage of how many 911 calls were not transported due to helping the person solve a problem. Chief Alexander said they are not tracking that and the majority of people end up being transported to a hospital. Chief Alexander said it costs Ocala Fire Rescue \$749 to run a call, Marion County Fire Rescue \$1,000-\$3,000 to transport and \$500 for Ocala Police Department to transport. Last year, 167 people died from opioids.

Mr. Christensen said they are invested in Heart of Florida residency programs. They have 45 internal medicine residents and 18 family medicine residents at Heart of Florida. We are hearing from the Heart of Florida and tracking how to do a better job with referrals and tracking whether this patient actually went to the Heart of Florida. If they did not get there, how could they reconnect with that patient to get them the service they needed.

Chief Graff is working hard on this program to see that it would meet the goals that are in line with each group.

- Ambulance Billing Update – This budget year we are trying to be more accurate based on historical data projections. Over the last few years, ambulance revenue had \$1-2 million extra that was brought in that was not planned. We are still seeing ongoing impact from transport volumes from COVID-19. While the actual call volume is increasing, the transport volume is still low compared to last year. For this quarter, there were 698 less transports than the prior fiscal year in same quarter. The red number of \$1 million looks bad, but these are the 2 key components that drive this number.

Chief Mascho discussed the collection rate, with how much was billed versus how much was brought in? He is tracking the monthly trend with the additional 3 months. The reports were entered in the system, reviewed and imported into the billing software. Staff worked these accounts, put them in batches and worked on sending out bills. We may not start seeing revenue for 2-3 months out. The thought process is to do a rolling 12-month period, six months old. Then, we look specifically at the transports during this 12-month period, which shows how much money was collected. The collection rate was a little higher because money was still coming in from past bills that are being paid. If you take the amount billed by amount collected, the average over the 3-month variation is 71.37%. Most ambulance service collection rates are in the 60% range and billing companies are in the 65%–70% range. This year, we added an additional position with the thoughts of this person reaching out and contacting the people before sending to collections.

Chief Walker said we get compliments on how well our staff works with customers. Marion County Fire Rescue uses in-house people to collect. If it does go to collections, it starts to lose money. Revenue was impacted last quarter with the holidays and staffing issues due to employees out with COVID-19. We are back on track getting bills out. Our goal is to get the bills out within 72 hours from when paramedic writes report. With auto insurances, the quicker we issue bills, the quicker we get paid before they reach their max. It takes 1-2 years to get the money from the Veterans Administration. There have not been issues with Medicare paying.

- Public Emergency Medical Transport (PEMT) Program – The cost of a transport is approximately \$600 and we are paid \$136 by Medicaid. We lose approximately \$500 every transport. Because we are government based ambulance service, we have the ability to apply through this program to get more money on Medicaid transports. There is a limited amount of money available and many agencies have submitted for this money. Marion County submitted approximately \$121,000. We will soon know how much money we will receive back. With year 2, there is a different process that gets money back on managed Medicaid patients.

Upcoming projects in Marion County include adding a million square foot, 110' tall storage addition to the Dollar General facility. The World Equestrian Center is growing and we have worked out a deal with a 0% interest loan on a \$1.3 million ladder truck. Assisted living facilities, nursing homes and residences continue to be a challenge in keeping up with demand. Over the next four years, the sales tax plan will provide a complete rebuild of three fire stations and one remodel, adding to new construction for two EMS stations, as well as our fire training facility. The training center will be on the Martel site with a combined partnership with the Marion County Sheriff's Office. The Fire College will have a station built on that property, with a 50-year lease for the 5 acres at the entrance.

It was the general consensus that the process and outlook with Marion County Fire Rescue is fantastic.

Chief Walker complimented Advent Health, the Marion County Health Department, the City of Ocala and the Paddock Mall on the process of COVID-19 immunizations. The immunization process will be improving, setting up with private vendors, Publix, Winn-Dixie and Walmart, with all coming out of the federal supply. Chief Banta said the game changer is the Johnson and Johnson vaccination. Mr. Johnson said it is truly an honor to be part of the process that is working so well.

6. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 13, 2021, at 8:30 a.m. at Marion County Fire Rescue Headquarters Training Room.
7. Adjournment: There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 9:28 a.m.

Approved:

Pat Gabriel, Chairperson