

Board of County Commissioners

Agenda Request

Date of Meeting: March 1, 2010

Date Submitted: February 22, 2010

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Benjamin H. Pingree, County Administrator
Lindsay Stevens, Assistant County Administrator
G. Scott McDermid, Director, Department of Public Safety
Louis Lamarche, Chief, Fire Rescue Division

Subject: Request Ratification of Discussion and Direction From the February 4, 2010 Board Workshop Regarding a Review of the State Fire Marshall's Bureau of Fire Standards and Training Standards/Requirements for Firefighters in the State of Florida

Statement of Issues:

This agenda item seeks Board Ratification of Discussion and Direction From the February 4, 2010 Board Workshop Regarding a Review of the State Fire Marshall's Bureau of Fire Standards and Training Standards/Requirements for Firefighters in the State of Florida (Attachment #1).

Background:

The Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners, along with staff, has had numerous conversations regarding the Community's concern for the increasing training requirements for Volunteer Firefighters and the omission of "grandfathering" abilities for currently practicing Firefighters. In our community, there are Volunteer Fire Department Members that have served Wakulla County for more than 30 years; who now will be required to attend hundreds of hours of additional Firefighter training before being allowed to continue duties they have performed for years because of changes in the State of Florida Requirements in the State of Florida.

On January 11, 2010, the Board directed staff to invite the State of Florida, Department of Financial Services, Division of the State Fire Marshal, Bureau of Fire Standards and Training to present these requirements in a publicly advertised workshop.

The workshop was scheduled and held on February 4, 2010, with Charlie Brush, Manager of the Fire Marshal's Safety Program, presenting. Also in attendance was Leslie Binghamton, General Counsel, for the Division of State Fire Marshal.

Analysis:

At the workshop, held on February 4, 2010, the State Fire Marshal's Bureau of Fire Standards and Training reviewed and discussed the current standards and requirements for Volunteer Firefighters in the State of Florida.

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The discussion included the following:

Charlie Brush provided a cursory overview of the more than 240 hours of training required by the State to permit access to the State's Firefighter 1 Certification Exam. Currently, the State of Florida requires Firefighter 1 Certification be held by all persons working within the "exclusionary zone." The exclusionary zone is described to be approximately 1 and ½ times the height of the structure being suppressed.

Mr. Brush explained that there is no "grandfathering" of currently practicing Firefighters, including Volunteer Firefighters. Currently practicing Firefighters must continue their training and education from the level at which they were initially trained. If a currently practicing Firefighter received 40 hours of training, they would need to complete the remaining 200 hours before qualifying to take the State's Firefighter 1 Certification Exam. Mr. Brush explained that new structural codes, furniture manufacturing materials, and newly created electronics provide new fire fighting challenges that were not previously taught.

The Board expressed concern over the ever-increasing standards being required by the State to Certify Volunteer Firefighters. The Board also expressed concern over the lack of training program developments outlined in a memorandum created by the State Fire Marshall's Office in 2003. Specifically, in 2003 the State Fire Marshall's Office Board referred to developing an on-line training program (Attachment #2). As of the date of the Workshop, the on-line training program has not been developed by the State Fire Marshall's Office.

This particular item is of particular interest to the Board, as an online program would allow prospective Volunteer Firefighters the ability to study a portion of the training on their own schedule, at their own pace, online. A note of concern was made regarding the fact that none of the training developments that were documented in the 2003 Fire Marshal Memorandum have become available to date.

The Board clearly articulated support of staff developing training that will meet the minimum State requirements, while providing as much latitude to a Volunteer's schedule as possible. Both staff and Volunteers in attendance at the workshop expressed a willingness to work together in developing a plan to train all Volunteers, that are willing and able to commit their personal time and efforts; up to the minimum standards mandated by the State's Fire Marshal's Bureau of Standards and Training.

Staff proposes that all VFDs be invited to participate in the development of a Corrective Action Plan that clearly outlines the steps needed to become fully compliant with all applicable State requirements. Staff and VFD Leadership will further develop recruiting efforts, targeting current members and prospective members of all VFDs to attend a State Approved Firefighter 1 Course,

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scheduled to tentatively begin on March 1, 2010. This course will be provided by County staff at no charge to any willing participant.

It is required by the State Fire Marshal's Bureau of Standards and Training that in order for an authorized Firefighter 1 course to be held, there must first be a roster of students applicants presented to the Fire Marshal's Office, with the appropriate supporting documentation, for approval. Staff has begun recruiting students to attend the March 1st Firefighter 1 certification course; however, to date there have been no registrants.

In addition to a Firefighter 1 training course, staff proposes to provide instructor training to currently Certified Firefighters, allowing them to instruct at their respective VFD stations, an effort to "Train the Trainers" for each VFD station. These courses will be held in coordination with staff instructors, who then will work with the respective VFD Instructor to provide the practical portion of the training. The practical portion must be supervised by State Certified Live Burn Instructors who have completed specialty training.

Staff proposes to return to the Board no later than May 1, 2010, with a proposed Corrective Action Plan to be approved for submittal to the State Fire Marshal's Office.

Options:

1. Ratify the Board discussion of the Workshop held on February 4, 2010 and direct staff to:
 - a. Work with the VFDs to Develop a Corrective Action Plan;
 - b. Begin the next Firefighter 1 Class, March 1, 2010;
 - c. Establish a new training program, with an initial focus on training identified individuals within each VFD station to serve as Firefighter 1 Instructors;
 - d. Report back to the Board by May 1, 2010 with the proposed Corrective Action Plan and Training Program Design.
2. Do not ratify the Board discussion of the Workshop held on February 4, 2010 and do not direct staff.
3. Board Direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1

Attachment(s):

1. February 4, 2010 Workshop Item
2. Training Requirements for Volunteer Firefighters