**Board of County Commissioners**

**Workshop**

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| Date of Meeting: | May 26, 2011 |
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| Date Submitted: | May 24, 2011 |
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| To: | Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board |
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| From: | Timothy Barden, Interim County Administrator  Scott McDermid, Director, Department of Public Safety  Frances Councill, Director, Division of Emergency Medical Services  Ivanhoe Carroll, Director, Division of Animal Control  Louis Lamarche, Interim Chief, Division of Fire and Rescue  Kurt Hindle, Lieutenant, Division of Fire Rescue |
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| Subject: | Workshop to Provide Volunteer Fire Department Chiefs, Firefighters, EMTs, Paramedics, and Animal Control Officers an Opportunity to Provide Information About Their Services |

**Statement of Issue:**

This workshop is intended to provide Volunteer Fire Department Chiefs, Firefighters, EMTs, Paramedics, and Animal Control Officers an opportunity to provide information about their services, describe what has already been done to contain or reduce costs, offer suggestions for additional ways to contain or reduce costs, and express other relevant suggestions, opinions, and concerns regarding a transition to the Sheriff’s Department for future operations.

**Background:**

On May 2, 2011, the Board authorized the scheduling of a town hall meeting styled workshop to allow Fire and EMS an opportunity to provide information about their respective services.

The Wakulla County Sherriff’s Office (WCSO) is conducting a study of possible cost savings that may be achieved by consolidating all Public Safety Services – Law Enforcement, Fire & Rescue, EMS, and Animal Control, under the WCSO.

At the April 18th Board Meeting, the Board directed County staff to provide information to the WCSO for this study. News of this study surprised local firefighters and EMS personnel who have expressed disappointment about not being consulted in advance or given an opportunity to offer their own cost-saving proposals. Uncertain about the future of the department, some EMS personnel have begun to express concern.

**Analysis:**

Wakulla County’s Fire & Rescue and EMS Services are among the most important and most valued services that we provide our citizens. We owe the volunteers and employees providing these services our gratitude and respect.

**Fire MSBU**

The current MSBU rate is:

**Residential** **$61** flat fee

**Commercial** **$.05** per square foot

**Vacant land** **$.14** per acre.

The current rate is sufficient to maintain operations for the short term with little or no funding for maintenance and repair or trucks and equipment and no funding for lifecycle replacement. However, in order to continue to meet the needs of the community and provide adequate fire protection, the fire service will be in need of replacement.

Adequate Fire Suppression Funding is essential for many various reasons. Four important aspects are included below:

1. Florida Bureau of Fire Standards and Training per State statute has mandated our compliance resulting in added cost to our County (IE; Training and Equipment).
2. WCFR fleet consists of 30 trucks that is 3 short of our current ISO agreements which could result in as much as doubling citizens insurance cost. 15 of the 30 trucks are beyond their service life and need to be replaced ***years ago***.
3. Safety items such as Bunker Gear and Air Packs are also out of service life or completely unserviceable due to age.
4. Some stations are simply in disrepair and others in highly populated areas need to build a station in order to reduce highest the ISO rating possible (Wakulla Gardens) which would save those residents thousands of dollars in insurance cost alone.

To be fully funded the recommended full funding goal is:

**Residential**  **$97.50** flat fee

**Commercial $.08** per square foot

**Vacant Land $.23** per acre

However, considering the current economic climate, the minimum amount needed to function, and the current recommendation for the next FY11/12 is:

**Residential $85 flat fee**

**Commercial $.07 per square foot**

**Vacant Land $.20 per acre**

It is also the recommendation, that over the next three MSBU Assessment Fiscal Years that the rate slowly, but consistently increase, until the fully funded rate is reached so that adequate equipment and apparatus can be maintained and purchased to meet the needs of the community.

**Current and Recommended Efficiency Improvements**

Every aspect of the Fire Service has proactively taken steps to further decrease the cost of services provided. A few specific examples of practices recently adopted:

1. We have changed our response to medical calls, in that we respond with a light duty SUV staffed with a Firefighter/EMT in lieu of a very large Fire Engine. This practice has already been implemented in a proactive stance toward reducing fuel costs, wear and tear on expensive apparatus, and fuel exhaust emissions.
2. We have also implemented a no idling policy; if it can be safely accommodated, we turn units off at calls and training events. Please note that emergency apparatus (Fire Engines and Ambulances) must idle, or fast idle, in order for them to function safely – so the no idle policy is only enforced when safety and function are not required from the apparatus.
3. We have a cancellation policy that states if ***trained*** responder requests our agency to cancel our response that we do so and return to quarters.
4. All of our stations have agreed to reduce cost by not running lights or other items when members are not present at the stations.
5. New online training has been implemented reducing overtime cost to paid staff who have been teaching in the traditional brick and mortar classroom.

In addition to the already implemented policy revisions above, a new operational agreement is being developed between the Fire and EMS Divisions to allow County EMS employees to assist with noncommittal fire jobs on fire calls, and that will free up trained fire personnel to affect a faster more effective fire attack. This agreement should allow fire units to arrive on scene sooner reducing fire damage to the property and the possibility of injury to homeowners and our members.

**Neighboring and Comparative County Systems**

The County Comparison chart compares rural Counties in our region; the remaining Counties included are Florida rural counties of similar populations.

Multiple Aspects of Emergency Services and County Government were compared:

1. Resident population; ranging from Liberty County 8,365 to Gadsden County 46,389
2. Types of EMS and Fire Design; of 12 counties compared, 8 were Third Service BOCC based EMS, 3 had combined Fire and EMS into the Fire Department, and 1 was hospital based
3. Number of EMS Units Staffed; ranging from 1 to 6 ambulance, Wakulla County staffs 3 Advanced Life Support Ambulances 24 hours per day
4. County Based Hospitals; all but Jefferson, Liberty and Wakulla have a County Hospital
5. EMS 911 Call Volume; ranging from 700 to 5,640, Wakulla County is currently responding to approximately 3400 Medical 911 calls per year. Unlike Counties’ with local hospitals, Wakulla County EMS units are unavailable for additional duty for nearly 2 hours from the initial 911 call. This is most commonly due to the extraordinary patient transport times experienced in our system.
6. Funding Mechanisms; 7 were general revenue supported, 1 was one cent sales tax based, others varied assessments for support.
7. EMS billing 8 were outsourced, 1 done by hospital, 3 self-billed
8. EMS Collection Rates (after write off’s such as Medicare/Medicaid); ranged from Taylor 62% to Wakulla 65%, from those who were able to provide a short-term reply. EMS agencies with a hospital within their boundaries have access to interfacility transfer revenue – which is prequalified and collects near 100% of billing. Wakulla County is solely based on 911 responses, which cannot be declined; regardless of past payment history, credit, or factors other than emergency medical stabilization.
9. Average pay with benefits, Paramedics range from $42,600 to $57,223, EMTs $30,600 to $49,337

Other factors that affect the comparison of systems are included for consideration.

**Current EMS Specific Cost Containment Projects:**

1. Proactive negotiations with medical supply vendors; seeking improved cooperative pricing with a State-wide search for purchasing agreements.
2. Stabilization of the full-time staff scheduling system, placing everyone on a permanent shift; consequently, this operational shift reduced overtime costs by nearly $100,000.00 per year.
3. Ambulance design-type change from a type 1 modular (Pick-up truck front) to a type 3 modular (van front) over the last 3 purchases. This change has already reduced operational costs significantly; substantial cost savings are realized by eliminating air-ride suspension systems, power step systems, and doubled the fuel economy.
4. In 2009 the Department of Public Safety became an Authorized American Safety and Health Institute Training Center. In this progression, Department Administration achieved certification as “Instructor-Trainers” in BLS and ACLS Certifications. This change provided the ability to train BLS and ACLS Instructors in-house, eliminating the expense of professional contracted educators.
5. Station hot water heaters were outfitted with energy saving timers; County staff – further reducing outside maintenance costs, placed these.

**Attachment(s):**

1. Excel Spreadsheet Containing Comparison across similarly situated Florida Counties.