

FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

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FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

Members

The Fire and Emergency Services Committee consisted of the following individuals:

- Jimmy Goff, Chairman
- Don Ammerman
- Cari Coats
- Carolyn Fennell
- Jim Kallinger
- Frances Pignone
- Kathy Putnam

Meeting Schedule and Presenters

The Fire and Emergency Services Committee (the “Committee”) held its first meeting on August 22, 2005 and met on fourteen separate occasions, concluding its deliberations on March 21, 2006. A follow-up meeting was held on April 6, 2006 to further discuss committee’s recommendations. A chart compiling the Committee’s schedule of meetings and the presenters is attached as Appendix A.

Side-By-Side Comparisons

Two detailed Side-By-Side Comparisons of the data presented and considered by the Committee are attached as Appendixes B and C. Appendix B contains a side-by-side comparison of the Orange County Fire Rescue Department and the City of Orlando Fire Department. Appendix C contains a comparison of the two department’s 911 Centers. The data cited in the Side-by-Side Comparisons is information provided by either Orange County or the City of Orlando and is not based on any independent calculations or studies prepared by the Committee.

Findings of Fact

The following findings of fact were determined by the Committee to be of significance and are the basis for their conclusions and recommendations:

Fire/Emergency Fact #1 The Orange County Fire Rescue Department (hereinafter referred to as the “County Fire Department”), the fourth largest Fire Department in Florida (based on personnel), responds to more than 86,000 calls per year. (See Appendix E for additional information on the County Fire Department.) The Orlando

Fire Department answered 47,537 calls in 2005. (See Appendix F for additional information on the Orlando Fire Department.)

Fire/Emergency Fact #2 The County Fire Department has established itself as a modern and efficient provider of public safety services across a complex urban, suburban and rural area, which includes significant residential, industrial, military, tourism, and higher educational facilities. The County Fire Department has contracted with the cities of Oakland, Orlando for the Lake Nona area, Maitland, Ocoee, Winter Garden, Edgewood, Belle Isle, and Eatonville to provide dispatch and/or fire service. Due to its size, financial strength, and governance, the County Fire Department is able to provide many sophisticated services beyond firefighting. In addition to EMS transport, fire inspections, and public education activities, the Department also operates a series of technical rescue teams, an aero-medical transport program, bicycle rescue teams and many other activities. (Source: Barry Luke, Division Chief, Fire Communications, County Fire Department).

Fire/Emergency Fact #3 The County Fire Department operating budget is derived exclusively from a Municipal Service Taxing Unit (MSTU) created in 1981. This budget is unique because the County Fire Department receives no funds from Orange County's general funds. All expenditures including personnel services, apparatus purchase, equipment, and other support expenses are spent from this fund. The County Fire Department also receives funding from Fire/Rescue Impact Fees that are used for new construction and growth related capital expenditures. See Appendix G.

Fire/Emergency Fact #4 Both Orange County and the City of Orlando have 911 Communication Centers that receive emergency calls for both law enforcement and Fire/Emergency services. Orange County has the Orange County 911 Communications Center (County Communications Center), a consolidated center that also serves the cities of Winter Garden, Maitland, and Ocoee. This contractual relationship has proven to be successful for the County Fire Department and the cities by providing seamless dispatch and response of the closest units regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. The City of Orlando has the Orlando Operations Center. Both Centers share their facilities with law enforcement. Approximately 80% of 911 calls coming into the Centers are for law enforcement. (Source: Barry Luke, Division Chief, Fire Communications, County Fire Department).

Fire/Emergency Fact #5 On an average day, Orange County Fire Rescue receives 270 to 280 emergency calls. The performance standard for operators is that the calls must be answered within 10 seconds, 90% of the time. Then, the operators who receive the calls have 60 seconds to dispatch the Fire responders; the average call process time is 46 seconds. (Source: Barry Luke, Division Chief, Fire Communications, County Fire Department).

Fire/Emergency Fact #6 Computers are relied upon at both the County Communications Center and the Orlando Operations Center to determine what vehicles are available for calls, the best vehicle to dispatch, and the best route to the scene.

Each Center currently uses different computer-aided dispatch, mapping and record management systems. Consolidation of these centers would be costly. Estimates for a new integrated computer-aided dispatch and records management system could cost in excess of \$3 million.

Fire/Emergency Fact #7 Both Orange County and Orlando operate extremely busy and very professional 911 Centers, with highly trained professional management and staff. Both 911 Centers work at full capacity in a high-pressure environment. Due to the inherent stress of the job duties, there are always a number of unfilled positions. Table 1 below compares the workload of both centers. (Source: Kathy Miller, Deputy Chief, Orlando Fire Department).

Table 1

| 2005 COMMUNICATIONS CENTERS WORKLOAD | | |
|---|------------------------|----------------------|
| ACTION | CITY OF ORLANDO | ORANGE COUNTY |
| Phone calls received | 212,719 | 335,674 |
| Radio transmissions handled | 800,000 | Not tracked |
| Emergency Incident responses | 47,537 | 86,000 |
| Total Unit* Responses | 86,016 | 183,000 |

* Unit = one vehicle

Fire/Emergency Fact #8 Each jurisdiction has reported that in 2005, 45% of all 911 calls originated from cell phones. This is a significant fact because cell phone calls are not always linked to the Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) location of the call that appears on the Call Center's computer. This situation creates difficulties in matching the call to the Enhanced 9-1-1 System, so additional time is needed to determine the location of the caller. Further problems are created when the caller is in transit and is no longer at the incident location. Dispatchers must expend additional time to determine the location of the emergency rather than the location of the caller. It is expected that this problem will worsen as more residents elect to use cell phones instead of having landline phones installed in their homes. (Source: Kathy Miller, Deputy Chief, Orlando Fire Department).

Fire/Emergency Fact #9 Sometimes multiple 911 Centers are notified of the same accident with multiple responses initiated by the relevant Dispatch Centers. (Source: T.J. Lyon, Division Chief, Fire Operations, County Fire Department).

Fire/Emergency Fact #10 An Orange County 911 Coordinator collects updated information from all jurisdictions and provides all ten 911 communications centers within Orange County with weekly updates about new subdivisions and other relevant changes to maps. This coordination is crucial to ensure correct and prompt response by all fire departments.

Fire/Emergency Fact #11 Each communications center houses the Emergency Operations Center for their respective jurisdictions. During state of emergencies, such as hurricanes, this has proven to be an effective way to manage these events and the

increased demand for emergency services. Both Centers serve as an automatic back up to the other. If a catastrophic interruption occurs, calls seamlessly transfer to the other center for processing and dispatch. This has happened twice in the last two years. Evidence was presented to the Committee that redundancy in regard to the County Communications Center and the Orlando Operations Center is a good policy, given the likelihood of hurricanes and other natural or man-made disasters. The question is how to best achieve that redundancy at the lowest cost to taxpayers. The ability of the personnel from the temporarily inoperative Center to safely and quickly relocate to the other Center is also a consideration in this matter.

Fire/Emergency Fact #12 Emergency services share common radio channels. All emergency service providers are utilizing the 800 mega-hertz radio system. The radios used in this frequency band are programmable and contain channels for all emergency service providers in the area. This allows one agency to talk to another agency directly. There are also multiple statewide mutual aid channels available for use when agencies from outside the region provide assistance. This technology makes radio communications nearly seamless from one jurisdiction to another. (Source: Kathy Miller, Deputy Chief, Orlando Fire Department).

Fire/Emergency Fact #13 In 2005, the County Fire Department provided assistance to the Orlando Fire Department on 1,363 occasions. Those incidents resulted in the County Fire Department committing 17,001 minutes to City of Orlando residents. This resulted in an average of 11.01 minutes for each County unit committed to each call. The Orlando Fire Department assisted the County Fire Department on 603 occasions. The Orlando Fire Department was committed to unincorporated Orange County residents for 19,128 minutes. The City units committed approximately 19.26 minutes for each call to County residents.

Fire/Emergency Fact #14 The County Fire Department provides medical transportation for designated areas. It believes that this continuity of care provides a higher level of emergency medical services. Additionally, as a result of providing medical transportation services, the County Fire Department has generated revenue over the past 5 years in excess of \$16 million with an average collection rate of 66% of net billable. All of the collected revenues are utilized to continually improve pre-hospital emergency care service.

Both Orange County and the City of Orlando use private transport companies to ensure transport is available to all residents. The City of Orlando uses Rural Metro to provide transport service for City residents and has accepted the response standards specified in Orange County's contract with Rural Metro. When Rural Metro cannot transport, the Orlando Fire Department provides the service. The Orlando Fire Department has transport capable rescues, but has made a policy decision to use Rural Metro for a number of stated reasons including high call volume and the impact on overall operational strategy. The reasoning for the transport decision by each jurisdiction is in Appendix D - Rescue Transport Costs. (Source: Jim Reynolds, Deputy Chief, Orlando Fire Department).

Fire/Emergency Fact #15 The Orange County Emergency Medical Services Medical Director provides standing orders that direct that patients be taken to the nearest facility. An exception to this directive can occur if the patient is in stable condition and requests an alternate facility. (Source: Roger Duryea, General Manager, Rural Metro Ambulance).

Fire/Emergency Fact #16 People transported by EMS transportation make up 15% of the emergency room visits in Orange County. (Source: Dr. George Ralls, Orange County Emergency Medical Services Medical Director).

Fire/Emergency Fact #17 Orange County government has established a clinic system, the Primary Care Access Network (PCAN), to provide health care services to uninsured residents. Twenty-One percent (21%) of Orange County residents have no health insurance. This system appears to have helped to provide primary care in lieu of hospital emergency rooms. (Source: Pete Clarke, Deputy Director, and Randy Lewis, Senior Program Manager, Health and Family Services Department, Orange County).

Fire/Emergency Fact #18 “Wall Time” is a term used to describe the time a vehicle and crew have to wait at a hospital emergency room (ER) until the patient is accepted by the hospital and is a problem faced nationwide by all emergency transporters.

- Dr. George Ralls, Orange County EMS Medical Director, said that “wall time” is a national problem. He opined that volume isn’t the problem. According to Dr. Ralls, there is a tremendous need in this community for unscheduled care and walk-in ER patients shouldn’t be blamed for the “wall time” problem, as these low acuity patients are seen quickly. The fixed costs related to these patients are there anyway. The problem of “wall time” is not primarily related to the number of patients coming to the emergency rooms for health care; but instead may be attributable to the amount of time it takes for a patient before he or she can be admitted to an ER bed, and, if necessary, eventually moved to an appropriate hospital ward. During certain times of the year hospitals are busier, but this may not justify adding beds only to accommodate this periodic influx of patients.
- Dr. Todd Husty, EMS Director for Seminole County, Maitland, and Winter Park, has addressed the “wall time” problem by defining it as a hospital “internal disaster” (disaster defined as need outstripping supply) so that the hospital can take actions that usually it wouldn’t, and by setting a 15 minute goal for EMS personnel transferring a transported patient to emergency room (ER) care, and a 45 minute maximum rule. The approach has reduced instances of wall time to 2-4% of Seminole County transports.
- Of the 450,000 patients seen at Orange County emergency rooms in 2005, 76,000 were EMS transported, while the rest were walk-ins. Of the transported patients, 50% were admitted to a hospital. 20% to 30% of the walk-ins were admitted. The 911-call volume for Orange County is substantially greater than

that of Seminole County because Orange County has more residents and also 35,000,000 visitors per year. In addition, there is an increase in the number of patients treated because of the specialized types of hospital services provided in Orange County. (Source: Dr. George Ralls, Orange County Medical Director).

- o Orange County Fire Rescue Communications monitors emergency room availability and patients are transported in accordance with established protocols. (Source: Dr. George Ralls, Orange County Medical Director).

Fire/Emergency Fact #19 The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) provides what data must be collected, stored and searchable and kept in fire communications system records. System records can be the most costly part of migrating to a new software application because the records in the present system must be moved to the new software. Migration of records from one software application to the other requires the building of intricate programming “scripts”. These scripts create a cross walk from one application to the other so that data contained in each report field are properly migrated from the old application to the new application. Such a crosswalk is also required for all occupancy data so even if you wanted to leave your incident data in the old application archive, you would still have to migrate huge stores of data from the occupancy files to the new software. All users of the software would have to be trained and become proficient so that incident or inspection data is accurately captured. The cost of purchasing a new software application is not large (less than \$500,000) but the cost of migration can be very expensive when the labor and scripting costs are added. A clear and compelling business benefit must be present in order to justify the decision to migrate from one application to another. (Source: Kathy Miller, Deputy Chief, Orlando Fire Department).

Fire/Emergency Fact #20 Both the City of Orlando and Orange County are rated by the Insurance Services Organization (ISO), which is an independent protection rating organization that is used to set insurance rates nationally. The ISO does not conduct self-assessments/peer reviews. It only collects data on and analyzes the fire suppression service capability of a community. Their analysis is based on criteria such as: fire alarms (how well the agency receives alarms and dispatches its resources); the number of engine companies (distribution); and, water supply (whether the community has a sufficient water supply, etc.). The ISO rating is derived from a comprehensive study of a wide array of factors including deployment strategy, response times, staffing, training and infrastructure. The ratings are on a 1-10 scale with a rating of 1 being the best.

- o The City of Orlando has an ISO rating of 2.
- o Orange County’s ISO rating is split 4/9. This score reflects the diverse urban, suburban, and rural service areas that the County Fire Department protects. Essentially, ISO only classifies a community’s ability to fight fire; this service accounts for only about 2% of the County Fire Department’s annual emergency responses. A comprehensive public fire protection program includes many aspects of which the ISO rating, a fire insurance rating tool, is but just one of

those factors. The County Fire Department is satisfied with the 4/9 rating and realizes it is an appropriate balance between available funds and fire service delivery.

- The ISO has recently partnered with the Commission of Fire Service Accreditation International (CFAI) to enhance its ability to rate fire departments. The CFAI provides a comprehensive system of fire and emergency service evaluation that helps local governments determine their risks and fire safety needs, evaluate the performance of the organizations involved, and provide a method for continuous improvement. The self-assessment process covers 10 categories that address all aspects of fire service. Within these categories are performance indicators and core competencies to which the agency must show effectiveness. The County Fire Department is currently seeking accreditation and will file a formal application this year.

The Orlando Fire Department is also seeking Accreditation through this process. By obtaining accreditation, the Orlando Fire Department will have validated its business processes as well as its deployment strategy, via the ISO's public protection rating, and its performance, by meeting nationally accepted fire service performance standards found in Section 1710 of the National Fire Protection Association Code ("NFPA 1710"). The Orlando Fire Department is committed to providing high quality cost effective service through constant review of its business processes. *(Source: Kathy Miler, Deputy chief, Orlando Fire Department).*

Fire/Emergency Fact #21 The current City-County jurisdictional boundary is jagged. Islands and enclaves exist creating a fragmented service area, inefficient service delivery and increased response times. Cost inefficiencies are created because of overlapping response areas. *(Source: City of Orlando GIS, Orange County Property Appraiser).*

Fire/Emergency Fact #22 Economies of scale are already being realized through like purchasing contracts at the local and state level.

Fire/Emergency Fact #23 Both the County Fire Department and the Orlando Fire Department have programs in place that have resulted in similar success in the hiring and promotion of minorities and women. There is not a statistically significant difference in the relevant percentages of minorities and women in their respective workforces. The Orlando Fire Department pointed out that their numbers went down somewhat as a result of the recent retirement of a number of minority and female personnel, to include a number in supervisory positions.

Conclusions

Based upon testimony received by the Committee members during its various meetings, the Committee by a majority vote adopted the five conclusions that follow at their meeting held on March 21, 2006:

Fire/Emergency Conclusion #1 Both the Orange County Fire Rescue Department and the City of Orlando Fire Department are well run, professional organizations that handle very large volumes of emergency responses.

Fire/Emergency Conclusion #2 The County Fire Department and the City Fire Department have joint response, automatic aid and mutual aid agreements, and Memorandums of Understanding with each other.

Fire/Emergency Conclusion #3 "Wall time" is an issue for patient transporters within Orange County.

Fire/Emergency Conclusion #4 911 Communication Centers redundancy is good policy.

Fire/Emergency Conclusion #5 The present fire and emergency services boundaries between Orange County and the City of Orlando cause inefficiencies such as the duplication of the delivery of emergency services, as well as both agencies responding to the same calls.

Recommendations

Consolidation of the Orange County Fire Rescue Department and City of Orlando Fire Department was studied for efficiencies in service delivery, economies of scale, opportunities for enhanced intergovernmental cooperation and other related issues. The Committee recommends that the Study Commission adopt the following recommendations for further consideration by both the County and the City:

FIRE/EMERGENCY RECOMMENDATION #1

That Orange County and the City of Orlando should develop a fire service boundary agreement that rounds off jurisdictional boundaries to clearly establish service delivery areas for both agencies.

FIRE/EMERGENCY RECOMMENDATION #2

That the 911 Communications Centers of Orange County and the City of Orlando not be consolidated, but that Orange County and the City of Orlando acquire technology improvements to allow interoperability, thus speeding up emergency call response times and the availability of units and maintaining current redundancy.

FIRE/EMERGENCY RECOMMENDATION #3

That Orange County and the City of Orlando planning for land use, new developments, etc., should include fire and emergency services representatives and should include joint planning for emergency service provision, for example, planning future locations for fire stations, especially in areas that are underserved.

FIRE/EMERGENCY RECOMMENDATION #4

That the Fire Rescue Administrations from both Orange County and the City of Orlando address the potential of joint purchasing of fire and emergency vehicles and equipment, establishing common radio terminology, improving accountability practices, and coordinating emergency response resources and command procedures, based on the National Incident Management System and Section 1561 of the National Fire Protection Association Code (NFPA 1561) - Emergency Services Incident Management System.

FIRE/EMERGENCY RECOMMENDATION #5

That, because the Committee found that neither efficiencies in service delivery nor economies of scale would result from consolidation of services, and because bigger is not necessarily better, neither the Orange County and the City of Orlando Fire Departments nor their services be consolidated.