Santa Rosa County
Emergency Services Advisory Committee
April 18, 2007
2:15 p.m.
MINUTES

Members present:
James Chalmers
Stephen Cozart
Joe Diamond
Werner Panchenko
Don Vanderryt

Members absent:
Ryan Jenkins

Staff present:
Brad Baker
Deb Grinde

Agenda approved as submitted for this meeting with two exceptions: Mr. Jerry Lambert will be added as a Person to Appear; election of Vice Chairperson will
be added under New Business.

Minutes for meeting held on March 21, 2007 approved as drafted with two exceptions: one spelling correction and B. Baker clarified his remarks pertaining to the availability of insurance based on ISO ratings, last page.

Persons to Appear
Jerry Lambert, Jay, FL

Mr. Lambert appeared in order to impart his feelings regarding the Fire/Rescue Services Plan. Since attending the last ESAC meeting he did some research and would like to share his findings with this committee. He stated that he did not produce any of the many documents he planned to distribute to the committee members; they came from various sources.

Mr. Lambert touched on the fire districts' funding. He noted that the districts do submit a budget, upon submission of their budgets they receive funding in that amount and if upplemental funds are necessary, they are provided those funds also. In some cases they budget over what they are actually funded.

Upon reviewing the budgets, Mr. Lambert noted that one district budgeted $3,800.00 for a laptop computer, one requested $5,000 for diesel fuel for a backup generator, and one requested $90,000.00 for a new building to be paid off in one year. He stated that the amount of money that they are budgeting for is much higher than what they are functioning with.
Mr. Lambert proceeded to review several documents that went back as far as 2002 and 2003 from the auditors. Mr. Lambert is aware that this committee has reviewed many of these documents and that ESAC has just as many concerns regarding the discrepancies. Mr. Lambert determined that there is more money left over in checking accounts than what the county needs in order to supplement the fire districts. He believes that there are residual moneys not being spent. He has not seen any documents that indicate that the fire districts have any needs that are not being met. Therefore time is not pressing. There are funds available from existing accounts. There are some needs to be met; however, time is not a critical factor.
Mr. Lambert believes that the plan does not address solving any problems other than raising money. There are no clearly defined problems that require solving. He believes a budget should be created, and then funding generated by properties would be identified.
After reading the ESAC minutes since 2003 Mr. Lambert was enthused by this committee's conclusions. He agrees with most of the steps the committee has taken. However, no quantifiable problem was solved. Mr. Lambert believes that this committee was often sidetracked, e.g. fire hydrants, gathering information and facts, etc. The committee continued to put out fires, so to speak. This is Mr. Lambert's interpretation of the minutes.
Then a plan appeared at the County Commission meeting and it was approved. Any immediate reaction by this committee will have no effect; it has been approved. It is Mr. Lambert's opinion that this committee will not have to take any action.
Mr. Lambert would like to provide this committee with more information. He is concerned with a conflict of interest. It would have a negative impact. He stated that, in fact, people who will be creating a budget, will submit that budget to an executive committee upon which these people sit, and then will decide whether they will fund that budget which they just submitted.
Mr. Lambert then provided some documents regarding ethics, including information from the county web site. He proceeded to review several items and requested that this committee take these into consideration, in particular avoiding conflicts of interest.
He reviewed documents regarding other cities, counties and governments who dealt with the same types of issues. These included the city of Fort Meyers, the City of Boca Raton, Lake County, North Lauderdale and Hernando County. He

referred to benefits from plans, definition of "fair and reasonable", service categories or occupancy types, special assessments, exemptions and rate schedules.
Mr. Lambert would like to know what "benefit" he is getting for his money (300% increase). Mr. Lambert was under the impression that he would receive something for his money. When, in fact, he said that the ordinances state that there will be an agreement between the county and each of the fire departments. They are essentially the same for each department and they are the only agreements between the departments and the county. They agree to spend all of the money and according to their budget. This does not occur. It does not indicate any special benefit for anyone's property.
Mr. Lambert is also concerned with apportionment. He also reviewed other plans for apportionment and all are widely different. Most residential rates did not use square footage. Most were a flat rate and in the fifty dollar range. However, commercial rates were categorized by square footage.
Mr. Lambert continued to look for the property benefit. A Santa Rosa County Resolution No. 2006-43 currently in effect does not have a dollar figure attached to it. It does state that all properties in the boundaries of Santa Rosa County shall be subject to the non ad-valorem assessments. He questioned if that included churches, schools, nursing homes, etc. It states all properties. The tax assessor, among others in the county, could not advise who was not paying the MSBU.
The Fire/Rescue Plan does not include all, it excludes some. Mr. Lambert provided some examples of exclusions and exemptions from other agencies. He was unable to find any exemptions in our documents. He stated that does not mean that there are exclusions; he was just unable to locate them. He also provided examples of typical rate schedules from other areas.
He advised this committee that it needs to solve the problem and keep the ball in their court. He asks that this committee reconsider their approval of the plan and make a motion to that effect.
S. Cozart thanked Mr. Lambert for taking the time to make this presentation.
Reports and Statistics
Tabled until next meeting.
Correspondence
Letter from Mr. Lambert requesting to appear at this meeting.
Old Business
Fire Services Plan
S. Cozart reiterated the fact that this committee did discuss and make a motion that was carried unanimously during the last ESAC meeting to recommend to the BOCC this committee's support for the Fire/Rescue Services Plan. We approve of this plan on a broad, general basis. There is further work to be done with the plan including public hearings. The record may not reflect this at this time; however, the plan will be tailored prior to implementation. Chairman Cozart disagrees with the idea that the plan does not indicate any problems. We are aware that there are very specific problems with the MSBU ordinances and in particular the budgets, including audits and the lack of accountability.
The funding is tied to the specific revenue in each district. The ordinance must be changed in order to keep up with the growth that our county is experiencing. He agreed that the audits seem to be only a formality. There never seems to be an opportunity to reconcile back to the original budget. This is a problem that needs to be addressed. We need to assure that the money is being used properly.
On the subject of conflict of interest, S. Cozart stated that he believes that there should be an Executive Group not entirely composed of fire chiefs. It should include members not affiliated with the fire districts. S. Cozart believes that the Executive Group should include a person (voting member) from this committee. The fire districts are not run by the county or owned by the county. As an example, the equipment actually belongs to the individual departments. Because the county has historically wanted to stay out of the 'fire business' the old traditional volunteer method has always been utilized. The growth indicates that the county must be involved in the fire business at this time using the volunteers' experience and knowledge.
S. Cozart emphasized that many things need to be worked out in this plan and that it is not written in stone. He continued by adding that it is a working plan and it goes toward providing the citizens with a service that is adequately staffed, adequately equipped and adequately trained. He added that it is possible that the increase itself may need to be scrutinized. There will be hearings that will hopefully address these concerns.
J. Diamond, Avalon VFD, commended Mr. Lambert on the work that he did to make his presentation to this committee.
J. Diamond questioned B. Baker regarding changes to the MSBU that may be taking effect. B. Baker stated that, in fact, the MSBU ordinance must be changed.
J. Diamond stated that he agrees that there should be civilians serving the Executive Group. As a Fire Commissioner on the Board for the Avalon VFD, he believes that outside input would be beneficial for the departments. He questioned B. Baker as to whether he would also be a voting member of the Executive Group. B. Baker stated that the plan was presented to the Board of County Commissioners in order to learn whether or not they were making strides in the direction that the BOCC may have anticipated. J. Diamond also

questioned what accounts any donations to the fire districts would be assigned.
J. Diamond reiterated that the plan is a work in progress and that it is not cut in stone. He stated that B. Baker has many things to cover in the plan and wondered why we wouldn't go to a set tax and suggested that may be fairer.
S. Cozart stated that it was his understanding that the donations would be held in completely separate account from the MSBU funds. B. Baker agreed and also stated that they are considering citizen type involvement in the Executive Group.
J. Diamond stated that some districts encumber money in order to purchase large dollar items, e.g. new buildings, new engines, etc.
W. Panchenko questioned if the only voting member is the Chief of the district.
B. Baker explained that their goal was to have one person that was able to present a consensus from each district and not necessarily the Chief. One of their concerns was that they did not want to have a person with less understanding of fire department issues making decisions about these types of issues.
D. Vanderryt stated that the service the MSBU will provide includes both fire protection and rescue services. It cannot be broken out any further than that for each tax payer who would like to know exactly what they will receive as a part of that service.
J. Chalmers stated that he believes that the budget and accountability issues will be more intense and much improved over past practices. He also stated that just because he may receive a 300% increase he would not expect that services to himpersonally would increase by 300%. He stated that intense training and good equipment is expensive. He also stated that it is a value that may not be realized immediately. Santa Rosa County needs to be up to speed regarding life safety apparatus equipment for its citizens. The additional funding will be necessary to add paid firefighters throughout the county as it grows. It seems to be a good plan to start out with.
J. Diamond commended B. Baker by stating that it is the best plan that Santa Rosa County has ever had. He also noted that the amount of training our firefighters will be required to maintain increases every year. It is very difficult for volunteers to include these types of hours in their weekly personal schedules in order to maintain their certifications. We are heading in the right direction.
R. Collins, Pace, FL
Mr. Collins believes that there has never been a plan presented in the past. Mr. Lambert's research indicates that there is better communication occurring and more attention to our needs.
Mr. Collins stated that Florida Statute Chapter 125 states that the commissioners can make determinations regarding the MSBU funding at their will so to speak.
Mr. Collins does not believe that it is a good idea to have only firefighters in the Executive Group; he believes that it is necessary to have outsiders on the committee. He stated that the Chiefs are responsible for operative duties and not administrative duties. He suggested that the Chiefs be replaced by members of their Boards of Directors. He stated that the Boards of Directors are ultimately responsible for the budgets. He also stated that it seems we will do a better job of auditing the budgets with this plan.
Mr. Collins has attended meetings where comments have been made of eliminating the ad valorem tax and replacing those taxes with a sales tax so that all citizens are contributing.
Mr. Collins stated that maintaining only one checking account in a fire department is, in fact, illegal.
Mr. Collins indicated that the audits must occur in order to aid the public, the BOCC, the ESAC, and the fire departments. Defined guidelines need to be developed for the auditors. He believes that these issues should be included in the plan. Volunteers do not have time as they are busy training.
Mr. Collins emphasized the idea that the county website needs to be improved; it should include a photo of each and every piece of apparatus for each and every department. This would assist in obtaining funding for and asking educated questions about equipment needs.
Mr. Collins further stated that most gear and air packs are not cheap and need to be changed out occasionally; equipment and gear should be checked for validity on a regular basis and disposed of whenever necessary. "A picture is worth a thousand words."
S. Cozart stated that he continues to support the plan as written; he does believe that some necessary changes need to take place. He would like this committee to entertain a vote in support of the plan.
J. Diamond stated that because it is labeled a "working plan" and it is the best plan that has ever been developed for fire services, he does support it as it can still be built upon and we should move forward.
B. Baker stated that they are trying to implement the plan in phases right now. Without the Chiefs' cooperation they would not have been able to take the first step. With the Chiefs' teamwork they have made great strides.
S. Cozart pointed out that B. Baker stated the Commissioners are discussing types of public input for the Executive Group. S. Cozart personally believes that he may not be able to support the final version if public input is not included.
J. Diamond suggested that the letter issued to the BOCC by this committee should include the fact that public/civilian input should be included as a voting

member within the Executive Group. It should include a person who does have some fire experience.
S. Cozart questioned whether this committee thinks that we need to include a member of the ESAC committee. It may give us the opportunity to contribute to the workings of the Executive Group.
J. Diamond said that if we did include a person from ESAC that person would only contribute and/or collect information from the meetings and not be a voting member. However, he believes that a voting civilian should also be included.
W. Panchenko stated that as long as the ESAC is kept abreast of the Executive Group's activities that should be sufficient.
S. Cozart stated that this committee would recommend that the BOCC include a civilian as a voting member of the Executive Group.
R. Collins, Pace, FL
Mr. Collins stated that he would like the meetings to be held in this meeting room in order for the meeting to be recorded live as is this meeting and others. He would like this issue included in the plan.
B. Baker explained that the Executive Group has discussed a public forum type meeting. However, they have also discussed holding their meetings at each of the fire districts in order to tour the sites and thus improve decisions made regarding each of the fire departments. That is the direction they have been pursuing.
R. Collins, Pace, FL
Mr. Collins said that it may be better attended by the public if the meeting is held in the BOCC meeting room. He stated that the venue needs to take into consideration the importance to the general public. He gave examples of previous committee meetings that were not well attended.
S. Cozart stated that he will bring a draft letter to the BOCC listing suggestions made by this committee to the next meeting.
New Business
Election of Vice Chairperson
S. Cozart requested that all committee members give some thought to whom they might want to elect as the Vice Chairperson for the committee. An election will take place at the next meeting.
EMS RFP
B. Baker briefed this committee regarding the county EMS RFP. He stated that they have received four (4) proposals to date. They are from Midway Fire Protection, LifeGuard Ambulance Service, American Medical Response (AMR), and Care Ambulance Service.
S. Cozart question whether the proposal from Midway FD included service to the entire county. B. Baker said that yes, they had partnered with AMR in order to do so.
B. Baker stated that county staff had reviewed the proposals for compliance to the requirements and have scheduled oral presentations to be made by each of the providers.
He noted that there was an optional service included in the request that excluded the Midway fire district.
B. Baker explained what each of the providers have proposed including the number of units and their availability 7/24, subsidies or no subsidies, user fees when necessary, rapid response vehicles, availability and locales for each, deployment plans, etc.
S. Cozart questioned whether Midway FD was authorized to run a countywide ambulance service outside their jurisdiction. B. Baker stated he did not know the legality of their plans.
J. Diamond questioned Midway's ability at peak load. B. Baker stated that they also have rapid response vehicles.
S. Cozart asked to be made aware of the schedule of presentations. B. Baker will advise accordingly.
J. Chalmers questioned whether a deployment plan was submitted by AMR and B. Baker stated that there were some questions that needed to be clarified and when that occurred their deployment plan was included.
No further discussion and meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM
Next meeting is Wednesday, May 16, 2007 at 2:00 PM