



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM

REQUESTED COUNCIL MEETING DATE 1/19/10

SUBJECT: Discussion – Fire Services

DEPARTMENT: Administration

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

This item is for discussion purposes only

SUMMARY:

Back in December, City Council Member Kennedy asked that a discussion about Fire Service be placed on the next available agenda. I have included a background memorandum for your review.

ATTACHMENTS: Ordinance Resolution Budget Resolution

Other Support Documents/Contracts Available for Review in Manager's Office

DEPARTMENT HEAD	Signed	Date
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FINANCE DEPARTMENT	Approved as to Budget Requirements	Date
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CITY ATTORNEY	Approved as to Form and Legality	Date
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CITY MANAGER	Approved Agenda Item For:	1/19/10
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COUNCIL ACTION: Approved as Recommended Disapproved Tabled Indefinitely
 Continued to Date Certain Approved with Modification:



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Allen Green
Vice Mayor Mary Martin
Councilman Dennis Kennedy
Councilman Robert Pohlmann
Councilman George Steindorfer

From: Kenneth W. Parker, City Manager

Subject: Discussion of Fire Services

Date: January 11, 2010

In December, City Council Member Kennedy asked that we schedule an agenda item so that the entire City Council could discuss the delivery of Fire Services. I have scheduled the item for the January 19 Agenda. This is an opportunity for the City Council to discuss approaches to delivery of Fire Services.

Almost ten years ago, the cities of Port Orange, New Smyrna Beach, and Edgewater undertook combining emergency dispatch services into one operating entity. As an out growth of that effort, the cities of Port Orange, New Smyrna Beach, and Edgewater began a process of closest unit response for Fire and Rescue Services. That meant that the closest unit, regardless of jurisdiction, would respond to a call, whether it be medical or Fire Service calls. The initial network was a 10 station network linked together through a common communications network, common operating protocols, and common training standards. Today, the network has grown to include two additional cities and a total of 13 stations in the first response closest unit network. Additionally, 4 County stations participate but are not a part of RCC for communications. They are dispatched by RCC if needed for a call.

What this network allowed the participating cities to do is to provide better coverage, share resources, and to examine where stations were needed based on response times, not jurisdictional boundaries. For example, when a Port Orange unit responds into South Daytona, the residents of South Daytona are assured that they will receive the same level of service as if the unit was from South Daytona. The same can be said about South Daytona or any other city responding into Port Orange. Additionally, because of the automatic move up system that is in place, units can quickly be repositioned to cover the zone vacated by the responding unit. A City does not have to rely completely on its own resources.

Over the years, Volusia local governments have examined a variety of approaches to providing Fire Services. Each of the studies have indicated that services could be provided in a more efficient and effective manner. Until Port Orange, New Smyrna Beach, and Edgewater began running first response closest unit protocol, all other entities responded within their own jurisdiction with their own resources. If they needed additional resources, then they would call for mutual aid. Although cities and the County worked well together under the mutual aid program, it was not the same as a first response closest unit program. A few years ago, Volusia County amended its EMS Ordinance to require first response closest unit for emergency medical services throughout the County. Some cities and even the County had to make operational changes in order to implement. The cities of Port Orange, New Smyrna Beach, and Edgewater did not. It was about this time that South Daytona and Ponce Inlet became part of the Regional Communications Center and became part of the first response closest unit program.

In 1984, the Halifax Area Consolidation Study was authorized by the Legislature. The study looked at whether it was more cost effective to have one city in the Halifax area. The study indicated that Fire Services could be more effectively and efficiently provided under the unified city. The voters voted the consolidation down. However, throughout the campaign, cities indicated that they agreed with some of the items in the study. They agreed that certain functions could be provided in a more effective and efficient manner without the individual cities losing their distinct character. Fire Service was identified as one of those areas.

Port Orange Fire Chief, Michael Ertz, was recognized by the Daytona Beach Halifax Area Chamber of Commerce for his work in identifying functional ways to make the Fire Service more effective and efficient. Chief Ertz, working with others, stated that functional consolidation of Fire Service could produce operational savings.

In the late 1990's, Ormond Beach Mayor David Hood advocated a new Study Commission. He took his position to the Volusia Council of Governments. VCOG authorized study teams and provided funding for the consultants. One of the areas identified was Fire Service. Once again, the study showed that Fire Services could be provided in a more effective and efficient fashion through combining Departments. The study went further and discussed various governance structures and funding mechanisms.

Tri-Data was authorized to study the subject matter in the early portion of the decade. The Tri-Data study came to the same conclusion as the other studies: There are efficiencies to be gained in the delivery of Fire Services.

Last year, VCOG asked the Managers and Fire Chiefs to again look at Fire Services. Some in the group were willing to go further than others in combining services. However, consensus could not be reached between all of the entities on the best route to take. Chief Weber and Chief Baker were the leads on the Fire side. They experienced the same level of frustrations as I experienced on the administrative side. We know how to make the system more efficient. In my opinion, it is not the administrative ability to accomplish the task that stands in the way. The decisions are not administrative but rather are policy.

For some time, Port Orange has stated that it is willing to look at better and more efficient ways to deliver services, including Fire Services. In the past, we have discussed with the City Council such concepts as a shared Regional Fire Service Administration with the individuals working at the station level still being assigned and paid for by their respective cities. Under this concept, the participating cities would share administrative expenses. Under this concept, it would include all ranks Commander and above. It would include training, emergency medical service, fire marshal services, public education, logistics, and support services.

We have discussed with you in the past a fully integrated Regional Fire Service model. Under the Regional model, all of the services, employees, equipment, and facilities would come under regional supervision. The equipment would continue to have the name of the jurisdiction that acquired the equipment on it. The stations would continue to be owned by the participants. The Regional Fire Service would be responsible for the salaries, operating expenses, etc. The governance of the regional entity would be similar to that of the RCC. I have recommended this approach be used.

Southeast Volusia cities are the ones who are running an integrated service now. In my opinion, it would be the easiest of the regions where a Regional Fire Service model could be implemented. It could serve as the model for the remainder of the County. But it has to have buy in from all of the entities to work. It cannot be viewed as one entity taking over the show from the other entities. It truly must have buy in from all of the governing bodies in the region to make it work. The reason that RCC has worked is that it has enjoyed support from the participating governing bodies.

Some have discussed a County-wide approach or an east side-west side approach to handling Fire Service. Some have included ambulance transport service in the various models.

You have heard discussions on the plus and minus of dependent and independent districts. You have heard discussions on contracting for service with another entity. You have heard discussions about the plus and minus of contracting with another entity for Fire Service. I have consistently stated that collaborative models work best. I have indicated that I thought the Port Orange City Council was supportive of exploring and examining collaborative models of service delivery that make economic sense. In a collaborative model, the stakeholders would be involved in developing the service delivery system. In a collaborative model, the governance and funding structure would be reflective of the service delivery model. For example, if the service delivery model included ambulance transport, then the financing model would include different variables than if the service delivery model only included Fire and Rescue Services. In the collaboration model, issues such as pension, equipment, facilities, and other operational issues would be addressed.

When we developed the Communications Interlocal Agency to handle regional communication and dispatch, we used the collaborative model. It allowed us to develop the service delivery model and then shape the governance and finance model around the service delivery model.

You may be aware that there has been interest expressed by several groups in looking at a Fire Service delivery model. They are interested in exploring different approaches to providing Fire and Rescue Services. I would hope they will include ambulance transport in their study model. It is my understanding that if this study moves forward, it will be funded with non-public monies. In other words, the cities and the County will not be asked to fund the study consultant. The cities and the County will be asked to provide data and to meet with the study consultant.

In the past, Volusia Tax Reform has indicated that they thought the local governments should seriously examine the current Fire Service delivery model to determine if it provided the best service value. I have not received any indication that they will be studying this issue and making any recommendations to local governments on making the Fire delivery system more cost efficient and cost effective. Last year, this group asked the cities and the County to provide data. I expect that they will do the same this year.

In conclusion, we know how to make the system more efficient. We know how to develop a governance structure that works. We know how to develop an administrative structure that works. In some ways, the big picture items are the easiest to accomplish if there is a policy willing to achieve them. That does not mean that there would not be issues to resolve. Any time you are merging organizations, there will be issues that need to be discussed and resolved. We have done that successfully in the past, and I do not see any reason that we could not accomplish them if a decision is made to move forward to merge services.

I would not recommend merging services if the residents would receive a service of lower quality. However, I believe that we can adequately address the service issues and, at the same time, provide a more effective and efficient delivery model.

kwp/rlg

cc: Thomas Weber, Fire Chief
Shannon Lewis, Assistant City Manager