



SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Emergency Services

TO: Jonathan Lewis, County Administrator

THROUGH: Mark Cunningham, Assistant County Administrator 

FROM: Rich Collins, Director 

DATE: April 22, 2019


SUBJECT: Proposed Emergency Medical Services Takeover by Venice Fire Department

Attached, please find a memo from Fire Chief Regnier to my attention regarding a Venice City Council agenda item scheduled for April 23, 2019. This item recommends a takeover of EMS services by the City on October 1, 2020. The Chief's memo provides an overview of the discussions and actions to date with the City as well as issues raised by staff related to the EMS study completed by the City.

SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Emergency Services

TO: Rich Collins, Director, Emergency Services

FROM: Michael J. Regnier, Fire Chief, Emergency Services 

DATE: April 22, 2019

SUBJECT: **Proposed Emergency Medical Services Takeover by Venice Fire Department**

In accordance with information posted on the City of Venice's website (Please see attached Memorandum, City of Venice), the City of Venice (City) has scheduled a discussion item during their City Council meeting on April 23, 2019 regarding the takeover of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) by the City. As such, I am providing you a status update regarding my efforts to communicate with the City's Fire Chief regarding this matter.

After a City workshop regarding EMS services on January 11, 2019 and follow-up report by the City Fire Chief at the City Council Meeting on February 26, 2019, a meeting was held on March 15, 2019 including Sarasota County Administration/staff and City of Venice Administration/staff. Prior to the meeting with the City, the Board of County Commissioners (Board) also asked staff to ensure communications with the City regarding the City's efforts to consider EMS services.

During the March 15, 2019 meeting, we discussed a number of inconsistencies that were presented to the City Council which were contained in a report prepared by Holdsworth Consulting Group regarding the City's taking over EMS within their jurisdiction. Among other things, the Holdsworth report concluded that taking over EMS would be a revenue generator for the City. This determination was based upon a public records request to the County from the City and their consultant for information related to EMS services. The consultant did not contact nor discussed with the County, the EMS system or levels of services provided for the City. Also during the March 15, 2019 meeting, County Administration indicated that should the City move forward with implementing EMS services, a gradual transition of services would not be considered by the County, as it would require residents in the unincorporated county to fund the City's transition, given the millage rate would be partially reduced while the County still provides services. Staff also indicated there would be no lay-offs. Instead, the County would not fill current open positions; rather, we would reassign current City-assigned personnel to other areas of service.

Subsequently, a follow-up meeting between myself and City's Fire Chief was held on April 5, 2019 during which we discussed, at length, the points outlined at the March 15, 2019 meeting. During our discussion, the City Fire Chief agreed to inquire about the ability to re-engage Holdsworth Consulting Group. The City Fire Chief was to contact me on Monday, April 8, 2019 however, after repeated attempts to date, I have not been able to speak to the City Fire Chief.

Given the attached memorandum, I am hereby advising you of what I believe to be inaccuracies being presented to the City Council based upon the content of the memorandum. Specifically, the memorandum from the City Fire Chief to the City Manager states: "*the current average response time as: SCFD - 7 minutes, 22 seconds; and Venice - 4 minutes, 15 seconds.*"

Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) data for the response zones within the City of Venice provided by the Public Safety Communication Center indicates:

- SCFD – 5 minutes, 48 seconds; and,
- Venice – 5 minutes, 29 seconds.

It's important to note that the City of Venice Fire Engines only respond to only 42% of the EMS calls received in the City of Venice. Whereas, Sarasota County Fire Department (SCFD) responds to 100% of the calls. The City has chosen to only respond to high acuity calls for service (ex. Cardiac, Respiratory) and when SCFD resources are already on other EMS calls and the City of Venice fire engines are therefore the closest unit.

The memorandum calls for "*the takeover to commence on 10/1/20.*" This assumes that the City will be able to hire the paramedics needed to staff the ambulances.

While Sarasota County currently employs enough Paramedics to provide a high level of service to all of Sarasota County including the City, the State of Florida convened a stakeholders group to address the current Paramedic shortages identified in most other agencies throughout the State. In fact, the last hiring group (15 employees) by SCFD yielded all EMT's and no Paramedics. The entire West Coast of Florida Region (including the City of North Port, Manatee County and Charlotte County) is also seeing this issue.

The memorandum insinuates that Sarasota County will have to raise the millage rate to support EMS operations to sustain our current level of service.

While this concern was addressed in SCFD's Master Plan, the County has no plans to raise the millage rate beyond what is in effect today. This is due to proactive measures being instituted by SCFD Administration as well as identified efficiencies being utilized. Additionally, the City Fire Chief asked me at our April 5, 2019 meeting if we had any intent on raising the EMS millage rate. I shared this information with him at that time.

The memorandum appears to request terminating the funding for EMS service in the City in FY20; however, proposes that the City start EMS in FY21.

Sarasota County currently assesses the residents of Sarasota County, including the City, with a millage rate of .66 mils. This equates to 2.5 million dollars for the City in FY20. It is unclear

from the City's agenda memo whether the City will cease the interlocal for FY20 collection or for FY21. Based upon the City Council's direction and subsequent official notification to the County, staff will be able to determine the impact for this coming budget year.

The memorandum does not specify or address the numerous operational issues that could arise should the City choose to take over all EMS operations within the City. Major operational issues include:

- Peak demand within the City requiring more than 3 EMS Transport units (i.e.: Seasonal impacts, multiple calls for service, large incidents); and,
- Mutual aid vs. Automatic aid agreements between the City and Sarasota County.

In addition to the above, we have repeatedly tried to meet with City staff to continue to work through any concerns they may have with the service Sarasota County provides. In fact, during the last meeting, I outlined a number of proactive operational measures SCFD has taken to enhance the services in South County and City of Venice; these include:

- Moving a peak time EMS transport unit to 681 and Tamiami Tr. (Station #23);
- Placing an additional 24/7 EMS transport unit at Center Rd. and Jacaranda Bl. (Station #21);
- Requested access to City of Venice Fire Station #53 for future training events to lessen resources moving to North County for training; and,
- Extending the EMS Rapid Response Unit Pilot program (Medic 20) utilized in the City of Sarasota to South County for an additional 90 days to reduce EMS Transport units responding to low acuity 911 calls. (this would allow for EMS transport units to remain available or higher acuity calls).

I am fully aware of home rule and the opportunity for the City to consider assuming the responsibility of EMS services within the City of Venice. However, as the Fire Chief for Sarasota County Fire Department who is also a paramedic with over 30 years of experience, I am concerned that critical service issues, the inaccuracy of information presented in the Holdsworth report, and the potential service impacts that the citizens of Venice may be subject to are not being considered. Additionally, I am concerned that the unincorporated citizens of Sarasota County may be overly burdened with the implementation of this proposal.

While this correspondence does not outline all the inaccuracies or concerns, I believe this information needed to be shared before the City Council meeting on April 23, 2019. I will provide you with a more detailed memorandum as soon as practical to outline all issues related to this matter.

ATTACHMENTS: City of Venice Memorandum



MEMORANDUM

City of Venice

Fire Department

TO: Edward Lavallee, City Manager

FROM: Shawn Carvey, Fire Chief

DATE: April 17, 2019

COUNCIL APPROVAL: Yes

MEETING DATE: April 23, 2019

STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL: Provide Efficient, Responsive Government with High Quality Services

SUBJECT: Approve Initiating Advance Life Support (ALS) Service Transition

Background: Request Council Approval

Venice Fire Department has completed a full feasibility study to take on the EMS services currently provided by Sarasota County within the City of Venice. Over the last year, staff has provided substantial data that shows a locally managed and operated EMS service would be beneficial to the City both fiscally and operationally. Our #1 commitment is to provide the top level of service to our community to preserve their quality of life.

Staff is confident in the accuracy of the numbers provided to Council. The numbers illustrate how the service currently operates and the revenue collection method used by the County. The Venice Fire Department study conducted by The Holdsworth Group was initiated to assess the level of service, anticipated expenses and revenues. It was first to determine, if the City controlled the service, could the City maintain the same level or enhance it. We have reported that we can enhance service from staffing three (3) paramedics to six (6) paramedics on-duty at all times in the City. Secondly, the study was to determine if the potential revenue generated covered the costs of the operation. The conclusion was that it does cover operating costs. Below you will see information that we have provided over the duration of this study to support our recommendation. We ask that Council consider the recommended action below.

Supporting Evidence

The following are questions that have been posed or of concern to Council and our community.

1. *What are current response time for Venice and Sarasota county rescue calls?*
 - Average response time
 - Sarasota County Fire Department – 7 minutes, 22 seconds
 - Venice – 4 minutes, 15 seconds average response time
 - Difference 3 minutes, 7 seconds per call

ALS Initiative Transition

2. *What elements impact response time?*
 - Jurisdictional areas to cover (geographical, square miles)
 - Personnel staffing, scheduled training, other scheduled events not available
 - Predictability of rescue apparatus being in the station when call is received
3. *If city takes over EMS service, would response times change?*
 - Yes, the average response should improve due to having six (6) units staffed with paramedics vs only three (3).
4. *Will response times change if County continues to provide EMS service?*
 - No, not unless the elements in Question #2 change
5. *Define the term "Level of Service".*
 - Quality/capability to render aid at a specific professionally trained level
 - Response time to arrive at scene of call
 - Quality of service provided by uniform training, crew familiarity and knowledge of service area
6. *Define current service quality/personnel capacity.*
 - Sarasota County Fire Department: 1 paramedic and 1 EMT per rescue unit (ambulance)
 - Venice: 2 EMTs per engine company
7. *What is the optimal time standard for rescue response; American Heart Association guideline:*
 - 4 minutes - Heart attack or cardiac arrest
 - 8 minutes - Basic life support
 - 12 minutes - Advanced life support
8. *How much in tax revenues are generated for EMS in the City of Venice?*
 - \$2.4 million for 2018, Ad valorem tax at .66 mil rate
 - \$2.5 million for 2019, Projected Venice ad valorem revenue
9. *How often does Venice Fire Department receive dispatch rescue calls for service?*
 - 2017- 42.7%
 - 2018 (through June) - 43.7%
10. *What are the operational changes for Venice taking over EMS services?*
 - Single leadership, continuity of command
 - Responsiveness to local authority
 - Response time increase at no additional cost
 - Paramedic on scene, first arriving 100 % of time
 - Uniform training/crew familiarity
 - Cross training/flexible scheduling
 - Coordination of training time
 - Integration of all fire service functions with other COV core service (EOC, Police, Utilities, Public Works)
 - Community integration, neighborhood level education and training

ALS Initiative Transition

11. *What are the fiscal benefits of the Venice taking over EMS service?*
 - City defines cost of service locally (millage rate “ad valorem tax” and impact fees)
 - City can control and project future cost
 - City can control level of service

12. *If Venice takes over EMS, which elements would remain the same and which elements would change?*
 - Transport time to Sarasota Memorial
 - Remains: No change, dependent on traffic and availability at hospital
 - Change: Coverage protocol in the City during transport times
 - Engine Companies:
 - Remains: Engine company stationed in each of the three fire stations
 - Change: All engine companies would be staffed with a paramedic

13. *If Venice takes over EMS, what decision making authority does Sarasota County have?*
 - County may agree or disagree to a phased in transition plan
 - County may agree or disagree to a modified ad valorem rate charge during transition
 - County may agree or disagree to sell or lease its rescue units to the City
 - County may retain their employees

The following information was provided by the Sarasota County Master Plan with Standard of Cover and Strategic Plan 2017, page 73.

“Sustainable Status Quo Forecast

Based upon the discussion above, if the County were to continue providing service in the current manner, neither the Fire Fund nor the EMS Fund are financially viable beyond FY 2019 without a significant increase in revenue and/or reduction in expenditures. A reduction in expenditures of the magnitude required to maintain a sustainable fund balance would necessitate a reduction in service level. Therefore, to sustain current operations an increase in revenue for both funds will be needed. In the case of the Fire Fund, this means that the non-ad valorem assessment revenue stream will need to increase beyond the two (2) percent forecast in the 217 GSG Study and used in the projection above. Further, the EMS Fund ad valorem revenue stream will need to increase beyond the forecast 6.3 percent historical growth rate.” This quote also references a memo from the Government Services Group, Inc. May 2017, “Sarasota County, Florida Fire Assessment Memorandum,” Revised Draft.

Also from page 73 of the County’s Master Plan with Standard of Cover and Strategic Plan 2017 is table Figure 50 titled as Assessment/Property Tax Revenue Increases Needed to Sustain Fire/EMS Status Quo Forecast.

ALS Initiative Transition

Figure 50: Assessment/Property Tax Revenue increases Needed to Sustain Fire/EMS Status Quo Forecast

Financial Resources By Type	2019 Forecast	2020 Forecast	2021 Forecast	2022 Forecast	2023 Forecast
Special Assessments					
Growth	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Rate Increase	19.1%	6.6%	4.1%	2.1%	2.1%
Total Annual Increase	20.0%	7.5%	5.0%	3.0%	3.0%
Property Tax Revenue					
Growth	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%
Rate Increase	10.0%	10.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Annual Increase	16.30%	16.30%	11.3%	6.3%	6.3%

The following table is from the VFD – ALS Development Plan Comparison Full Start 10-01-19 vs 3-Year Plan that was presented to Council on February 26, 2019. These figures are the anticipated revenue based on the current revenue model used by County. As one can see, Venice Fire shows a net revenue in years 2020 through 2024 without any anticipated millage increase.

	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	5 Year Total
Full Start							
Potential Gross Revenue	0	4,356,960	4,545,147	4,738,087	4,935,959	5,138,949	
Anticipated Expenses	833,789	3,055,056	3,332,660	3,544,912	3,705,166	3,964,106	
Potential Net Revenue	(833,789)	1,301,904	1,212,487	1,193,175	1,230,792	1,174,843	5,279,412

Requested Action: Council to execute a letter to Sarasota County terminating the Interlocal agreement for EMS Services. Per the termination of the Interlocal agreement, the effective date for Venice Fire to take over full EMS transport responsibilities for the City of Venice will October 1, 2020. It is also recommended that the City and County staff negotiate a phase-in memo of understanding agreement prior to complete take over that may ease the transition with staffing for both Departments.

City Attorney Review/Approved: N/A

Risk Management Review: N/A

Finance Department Review/Approved: Yes

Funds Availability (account number): [Click on link here to enter text.](#)

ORIGINAL(S) ATTACHED: [Click on link here to enter text.](#)

Cc: [Click on link here to enter text.](#)

Fire and Rescue Facts and Figures

In the City of Venice (COV), Fire Services are provided by COV, and Rescue Services (Ambulance Emergency Transport) are provided by the County of Sarasota.

When you call 911 (County dispatch) for a medical emergency, the Ambulance that arrives has "Sarasota County" on the side of the vehicle; a COV Fire Truck will also show up in the event the Ambulance crew needs additional medical support.

We pay for these services in several ways . . . the City Fire Truck is funded through the Ad Valorem Tax (3.7 mil for the coming tax year . . . increased from 3.1 in the past few years) and the County Ambulance is funded through the County's Ad Valorem Tax (0.66 mil for the coming year . . . steady for the past few years).

If you use the County Ambulance Transport Service, you will get a bill and last time I did, it was around \$700.00 which was covered by Medicare.

In the COV, the Fire Services are about 29% of the General Fund expenditures.

The COV Council states that the Fire Dept. is underfunded by \$1 Million to \$2 Million, which would make the coming year expenditures at \$10 Million, or about 1/3 of the General Fund Expenditures.

Let's look at the Fire Dept. calls for 2017. A total of 3,400 calls; 5 were for building fires and 2,200 were in support of County Ambulance Runs . . . **the COV Fire Dept. is really an expensive back up Ambulance Service.** Each time we hear the sirens it costs ~\$3,000.

A recent study provided to the City Council showed comparable costs down in Naples at \$1,300.

For 2017, the County budget for the ambulance service was \$39,389,018; the transport runs reported that year were 38,604. This means the cost per transport was \$1,020.34. **The County is Losing Money on the Ambulance Service!**

Venice Tax Watch has prepared an independent report that is available to the public and factually demonstrates that the proposed takeover of the ambulance service is in no way to the benefit of our residents. Ask for it if you want more.

COV is not able to provide fire protection services at a competitive cost and now wants to take over a county service that is losing money . . .

The NUMBERS JUST DON'T WORK!

As the Mayor said when the last time a similar proposal was advanced back in 2013 . . . "THROWING MORE PEOPLE INTO A SYSTEM THAT IS BROKEN DOES NOT FIX THE SYSTEM." (Herald-Tribune, Posted Sep 19, 2013)