

CITY OF TALLAHASSEE	
<u>CITY COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM</u>	
ACTION REQUESTED ON:	July 2, 2008
SUBJECT/TITLE:	Status Report on Fire and EMS Negotiations and Request for Authorization to Contract for a Fire Services Fee Study
TARGET ISSUE:	

STATEMENT OF ISSUE

In October 2007, City Commissioner Andrew Gillum and County Commissioner Bryan Desloge were directed to take the lead in the negotiations for the extension of the Fire Services Agreement, due to expire on June 30, 2009. Since that time, the focus of negotiations has shifted to include the potential combination of the Tallahassee Fire Department and the Leon County Emergency Medical Services Department. A Memorandum of Understanding, highlighting the major tenets of the combined department and a timeline for implementation has been drafted for Commission review and approval. (Attached)

Additionally, in order to ensure adequate funding for the newly created department, a revised Fire Services Fee Study is being requested. This revised study will indicate the appropriate rate for a countywide Fire Services Fee. It is anticipated that a two-tiered system will be implemented with urban and rural residents fee structure based on the level of service received.

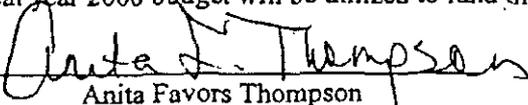
This item serves as an update on the status of the negotiations, to date, an anticipated timeline for future action and a request to pursue a jointly funded Fire Services Fee Study.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Option 1: Authorize the City Manager to contract with Government Services Group (GSG, Inc.) as a sole source for the development of a joint City-County Fire Services Fee Study. The City and County will jointly fund this study.

FISCAL IMPACT

The proposed study is anticipated to cost \$197,400. Funding from Special Appropriations in the fiscal year 2008 budget will be utilized to fund the City's portion of this study of \$98,700.


Anita Favors Thompson
City Manager

For information, please contact: Cindy Dick (891-6603) or Raoul Lavin (891-8488).

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL/ISSUE ANALYSIS

HISTORY/FACTS & ISSUES

The provision of fire and medical services throughout Leon County is currently delivered by two separate entities. The Tallahassee Fire Department (TFD) provides fire services and medical response and Leon County Emergency Medical Services (LCEMS) provides medical response and transport services. The service provided by TFD in unincorporated Leon is governed by the Fire Services Agreement (FSA) and the provision of advanced life support services by TFD is governed by the Advance Life Support Services Agreement. Each of these agreements expire on June 30, 2009 and are currently under negotiations for extension.

In October 2007, both the Mayor and the County Chair appointed lead Commissioners to negotiate a successor agreement to the FSA. Commissioners Gillum and Desloge, accompanied by staff began meeting on the issue October 10, 2007. As part of the negotiations, it became apparent that a comprehensive discussion of the issue should include the current delivery model for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) as well. The negotiation teams agreed that functional and financial efficiencies could be gained by the modification of the service delivery model for both Fire and EMS. This conclusion prompted the negotiation teams to expand the scope of their conversations to include alternative service delivery models for countywide Fire and EMS services. As a result, a conceptual framework document exploring the creation of a consolidated Fire and EMS department was developed and presented to both the City and County Commissions in May 2008.

Since that time, both Commissioners and staff have continued to meet and research options for the creation of a combined delivery system. The key areas of staff research, along with solution options follow.

Governance and Management

- o The creation of an Intergovernmental agency with a separate Fire and EMS board comprised of Commissioners from both City and County Government. Votes would be weighted to provide for equal governance by each Commission. This board would govern the broad policy and direction of the department inclusive of supervision of management, negotiations of labor contracts and budget creation and approval.
- o The conceptual framework includes the retention of both Fire and EMS chiefs initially. These peer managers would report to the City Manager and County Administrator. It is understood that at such point as either position is vacated; the duties would be combined to a single director position.
- o It is also understood that upon relocation to a joint facility, the City Manager and County Administrator would select a single chief.

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Funding

The negotiating committee has discussed the need to ensure that dedicated funding sources are identified to fund a joint Fire-EMS department. As such, funds dedicated to a joint department would be held independently from City and County funding sources and all revenues generated would be allocated for operating and capital expenditures associated with the operation of a joint department.

The City currently collects a fire services fee from City utility customers. This fee is included in the monthly utility bill and all proceeds go towards funding the Tallahassee Fire Department. The City's fire fee has been in existence since 1999 and was revisited in 2005. Both times the City contracted with Government Services Group (GSG) for the development of the fee. In order to ensure that the fee complied with court rulings, the fee was developed to recover the cost of fire services only and not costs related to Emergency Medical Services. The Courts have ruled that fire assessments only benefit property and therefore cannot be utilized for services that benefit individuals.

The County currently pays for fire services through a contractual agreement with the City. The current interlocal agreement for fire services was entered into in 1988 and subsequently amended various times since its inception. The County is currently funding EMS services through a combination of the .5 mills EMS Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU), and revenues collected from transport services.

As part of discussions held by the negotiating team, a funding mechanism for a joint Fire-EMS department has been identified that incorporates a countywide fire services fee and assessment, the existing EMS Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU) and EMS fees collected from transport services. The current EMS MSTU rate is set at .5 mills.

A countywide fire services fee would have to be developed for implementation within the entire County. It has been recommended that differential tiers of fire services fees be developed to recognize the different level of services within the County. Tiers could be developed utilizing a number of approaches including;

- Distance from fire hydrants.
- ISO Ratings.
- Urban/Suburban/Rural.
- Inside Urban Services Area boundary/Outside Urban Services Area Boundary.

Staff is recommending that a third party be engaged to develop a countywide fire services fee and make recommendations on how best to differentiate the tiers. Staff's recommendation is to hire, as a sole source, GSG because of their experience in this area and prior experience with the City's fire operation. Additionally, GSG has prior experience in developing a joint City-County Fire Services Fee as the first study conducted in 1998 was originally intended to look at a joint

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fire services fee. It is estimated that City-County Fire Services Fee Study would be jointly funded by both governments and would take approximately 6-9 months to complete.

Infrastructure

Each entity would retain ownership of current assets. Future assets would be purchased and owned jointly.

Communications

The consolidation of communications functions is critical to system efficiency. Currently, the Leon County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) dispatches LCEMS and the Tallahassee Police Department dispatches TFD. There is also an ongoing project for the provision of joint communications for all emergency service being directed by the Public Safety Communications Board (PSCB). The successful implementation of a Joint Communications System will significantly improve the efficiency of emergency response by all agencies countywide and is critical to system success. In the interim, however, a technical solution utilizing a single computer aided dispatch system to provide for the joint dispatch of Fire and EMS shall be implemented.

Once all the critical factors have been addressed to the satisfaction of the City and County, an interlocal government agreement can be developed for Fire/EMS Service. This agreement will then be brought back for Commission approval. It is expected that integrated operations of the two agencies can begin as early as October 2008.

CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS

Not applicable.

OPTIONS

1. Authorize the City Manager to contract with Government Services Group (GSG, Inc.) as a sole source for the development of a joint City-County Fire Services Fee Study. The City and County will jointly fund this study.
2. Do not authorize the City Manager to contract with Government Services Group (GSG) as a sole source for the development of a joint City-County Fire Services Study.
3. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS/REFERENCES

Fire /EMS Memorandum of Understanding

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Fire and EMS Merger Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

As the appointed representatives of the County and City Commissions, we have worked over the past several months in negotiating the provision of Fire Services to the unincorporated area of Leon County.

In order to provide the most efficient and highly coordinated Fire and EMS service to all citizens of our community, we are recommending to both the City and County Commissions that Fire and EMS be merged into one department.

Specific areas of benefit to the community are:

- To provide improved public safety through more efficient and effective resource management.
- To enhance personnel and public training programs.
- To realize efficiencies through the consolidation of administrative and logistical staff functions, economies of scale and working toward a common goal.
- To provide a coordinated public education and risk reduction program.
- To enhance recruitment, retention and career opportunities.
- To improve service delivery through the removal of perceived barriers between City and County functions, the alignment of priorities and shared focus on customer service.

The major tenets of this merger would include the following:

1. The creation of an intergovernmental agency with a weighted voting structure resulting in a 50/50 governance. The Board could consist of 12 City and County Commissioners or less. However, the Agency will consist of at least four County Commissioners and at least three City Commissioners.
2. A single Fire/EMS Chief will be selected jointly by the County Administrator and City Manager upon receipt of the C.O. of joint dispatch building. An interim technical solution utilizing a single computer aided dispatch system that will allow Fire and EMS joint dispatch to occur will be confirmed.
3. Funding:
 - a. The City and County will jointly fund a study to establish a two tiered fire service fee based on differing levels of service (ie urban and rural).
 - b. The Agency shall be funded by a county wide Fire Services Fee and an EMS Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU) and other sources as appropriate (i.e. patient transports). Fire Services will be equitably funded as recommended by the study.
 - c. The study co-funded by the County and City will also identify the most effective way to bill and collect the fees.
 - d. The County will be responsible for collecting the Fire Services Fee for those County residents who are not City utility customers; if necessary, the

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City will provide assistance in billing non-city utility customers, but will not be responsible for the collection of non-payments.

4. City and County will decide which allocated services each will provide to the agency and this will be confirmed as part of the intergovernmental agency by-laws and operating protocols.
5. In the event an intergovernmental agency is not created by June 2009, the Fire Services payment from the County to the City will be based on the amounts established by the study for Fire Services in the unincorporated area of the County.

Estimated Timeline for Establishment of Intergovernmental Agency:

Late June 2008: Comm. Gillum/Comm. Desloge execute "broad strokes" agreement.

July 2, 2008 City and July 8, 2008 County (First Meeting): Comm. Gillum/Desloge bring executed "broad strokes" agreement to respective commissions; request joint funding for fire services fee study; outline time-line for intergovernmental agency agreement to be coming back.

July 9, 2008 and July 22, 2008 County (Second Meeting): Board of County Commissioners and City Commission consideration of MOU, joint funding of fire services study and direct staff to develop transition plan and SOP's.

July - December 2008: Fire Services Fee Study conducted.

July - September: Staff to complete transition plan, SOP's and address potential budget impacts.

September 30, 2008: Fire services fee study completed.

October 1, 2008: Begin integrated operations under terms of Memorandum Of Understanding (under existing funding structure).

March 2009: Fully consolidated Agency meets: 1) Discuss findings of fire services fee study 2) Discuss implementation issues.

April - September 2009: Finalize consolidated budget for October 1, 2009; Finalize operation implementation issues.

Andrew Gillum Date
City Commissioner

Bryan Desloge Date
County Commissioner