Santa Rosa County
Emergency Services Advisory Committee
February 25, 2003
2:00 p.m.

MINUTES
(Corrected)

Members present:

Gerry Goldstein
Lew Oliver
Don Vanderryt
John E. Reble
Chris Rucker
Tony Simmons

Member absent: Joe Diamond

Staff present:

Sheryl Bracewell
Deb Grinde
Dave Ling

Agenda approved as submitted for this meeting.

Corrected minutes for meeting held December 17, 2003 approved as amended.

Minutes for meeting held January 28, 2004 accepted and approved as submitted.

Persons to Appear

Presentation by Chief Mike Ward Allentown VFD
Chief Ward made a presentation to the committee regarding the Allentown Volunteer Fire Department. The Allentown Fire Department, referred to as Station 11, has been operating on MSBU funds since it's inception.

The department recently built two (2) new stations. One is located in the Chumuckla area and the other is located in the Allentown area. The station in Chumuckla is complete including a meeting room, while the Allentown station consists of the structure only. The Allentown station should be completed within the next two or three months. Both buildings are completely paid for and the only item Allentown is currently paying for is a new engine.

Chief Ward advised that a listing of their equipment is available on the survey that was submitted to the committee. All of the apparatus is up and running. They would like to add a new pumper at the Chumuckla station and a new rescue vehicle at the Allentown station. Current plans include a new station on Highway 178 within the next five years.

One of Chief Ward's greatest concerns is the successful completion of the 160 hours of training mandated by the state. The department is currently attempting to complete the testing and training. The Chief believes problems will occur if, upon completion of the course, volunteers are unable to successfully pass the tests.

The department roster includes fifteen active members. There are fourteen (14) firefighters, thirteen (13) first responders and one (1) EMT. There are three (3) first responders available during the daytime hours.

Chief Ward noted at this point that Mr. Richard Collins has never been asked to explain issues regarding the Allentown Volunteer Fire Department. He added that he would not be asked to speak on behalf of the Allentown VFD. Mr. Collins is not a member of the Allentown VFD and was refused membership in their fire department. If the ESAC committee needs any information regarding the Allentown VFD Chief Ward will assure that someone appears at the meeting for that purpose.

Chief Ward then responded to questions asked by the committee:

The district is the second largest in the county and covers approximately 118 square miles. All members but three (3) of them reside in the Allentown area. The other three (3) members reside in the Chumuckla area and include three (3) first responders of which two (2) are firefighters.

Chief Ward explained that most reasons for delays in response time would be distance and occupations and availability of the members. In addition they are in desperate need of more volunteers from the Chumuckla community. Discussion ensued again regarding the need for more personnel.

Locating the future additional station in the area of Hwy 178 is not necessarily due to a growth factor. It was selected as the best location due to the large expanse that the district covers.

Chief Ward thanked the committee for all of its hard work on behalf of the Allentown VFD.

The committee will be visiting Allentown on March 24 as a field trip after the regularly scheduled meeting.

Review of Reports and Statistics
Reviewed Analysis of Emergency Calls for the month of January. In most instances improvements were noted. Noted that we will continue to use the benchmark dated 2000 – 2001 until such time that enough accurate data has been accumulated to establish a new benchmark.

Correspondence and Additional Information
None

Old Business
Fire Department MSBU and other funding
The committee previewed a Power Point presentation that was prepared by Chief Reble to present to the Board of County Commissioners at their planning meeting on Tuesday, March 9, 2004. The presentation covers the request by the ESAC committee for more equitable MSBU funding beginning with the budget for 2005. The presentation points out the purpose and duties of the ESAC committee as determined by the BOCC. It outlines the recommendations made by the Santa Rosa County Firefighter's Association to the ESAC committee. It shows what activities the ESAC committee has already completed.

There are nine (9) fire districts that would be affected by this action. They include Allentown, Bagdad, Berrydale, East Milton, Harold, Munson, Pace, Skyline and Jay (Station 27). Avalon-Mulat, Holley-Navarre, and Midway Departments are independent legislative districts. Navarre Beach Fire Department is funded through a separate MSBU. The US Navy funds the Whiting Field Department and we have three (3) departments covered by municipalities (Town of Jay, City of Milton and Gulf Breeze).

Chief Reble showed statistics regarding current rates, proposed changes and inequities within the system.

Discussion ensued regarding this proposal. L. Oliver questioned whether citizens not living in the slow growth areas are subsidizing the other districts. C. Rucker stated that the supplemental funding provided by the citizens of the county was to provide a minimum level of service. He also stated that other areas of the county, e.g. Midway, made a choice to have a greater amount of coverage by voting for an additional tax within their own district.

Chief Reble advised that if the volunteer districts folded for any reason, then Santa Rosa County would be responsible to provide fire services to those areas. J. Goldstein questioned what the drop in the portion that the county supplements would be if the proposal was successful. Chief Reble stated that indeed some districts would still require supplemental funding from the county in order to maintain minimal fire service coverage.

D. Vanderryt questioned whether the MSBU rates could be different for each district. Chief Reble stated that the ordinance would have to be broken down into nine (9) different ordinances, that is one for each district.

Chief Reble intends to explain that what is being proposed is a more equitable tax structure, that the current rate structure has not kept pace with rising costs of non-discretionary expenses (currently greater than 27%) and that, simply put, the departments must have funds in order to operate.

C. Rucker asked whether costs for mandated training would be addressed within the budget; Chief Reble advised that as an "intangible" cost he elected not to include it with the proposal. He also suggested that more technologically advanced equipment, such as thermal imaging equipment, be included in the presentation.

Chief Reble stated that this proposal is only intended to correct the inequities. However, a long-term solution is also in order, e.g. rate structures, etc.

This committee will attempt to be included on the agenda for the March 8th meeting. This committee will also request that representatives from each of the nine (9) districts be in attendance at the BOCC planning meeting along with all members of the ESAC committee.

Insurance
Have determined that being insured along with the county is not an option at this time. Have also determined that it may be advantageous for some districts to group together in order to save money on premiums; however, this should be coordinated by the Santa Rosa County Firefighter's Association.

D. Cook has sent a memo to H. Walker regarding insurance agents who would be willing to make presentations to the Santa Rosa County Firefighter's Association.

Discussion ensued regarding the fact that some costs would increase while others may decrease and what effect these actions might have on different districts.

C. Rucker suggested that an underwriter be given the opportunity to give estimates for review and determination.

Site Tour Form
Preliminary trial of form took place during tour of Pace VFD. The form was adopted for future use as a tool to document individual notes and not to be used as an official form.

Navarre Beach funds request
C. Rucker questioned whether a request was made to the Board of County Commissioners for additional funding for lifeguard coverage at Navarre Beach for the summer months as requested by J. Wirth in December.

Chief Reble stated that he does not think that the TDC (Tourist Development Council) will be able to assist in this matter statutorily. The ESAC committee will recommend to Navarre Beach VFD that they approach the Board of County Commissioners directly regarding this request for funds. T. Simmons would like the Navarre VFD to submit their budgetary items list in order to learn where the balance of his budget is being spent. C. Rucker believes that this request should be covered by MSBU funds. However, he would like to make a motion that ESAC send a letter to Chief Wirth explaining the committee's decision that they should seek other funding through the MSBU funds. G. Goldstein seconded this motion.

After more discussion committee agreed that recommendation be made to the BOCC suggesting that this expense for additional rescue services for the summer months should, in fact, be borne by MSBU funding, and, if this is not possible, that interim funding be pursued in order for this to be taken care of by May 15. The motion carried and C. Rucker will draft a letter for Chief Reble's signature.

Public Forum
None

Next meeting is March 24, 2004 at 2:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Submitted by: D. A. Grinde