



Inter-Office Communication

City Manager's Office

334-5010

Box 6

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Commission

From: Russ Blackburn,  City Manager

Date: April 13, 2010

SUBJECT: Consolidation of Fire Services

The Consolidation of Fire Services would require in depth analysis to fully capture the associated costs and benefits of a single entity. As a precursor to that discussion, I have outlined some of the inequities of the two separate departments that would require discussion and decisions.

1. Base Pay

The current pay plans for City Fire personnel and County Fire personnel differ across all ranks (see table below).

| | City Minimum | City Maximum | County Minimum | County Maximum |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Firefighter | \$39,773 | \$55,683 | \$32,340 | \$50,148 |
| Driver Operator | \$44,546 | \$62,364 | \$41,868 | \$66,996 |
| Lieutenant | \$51,227 | \$71,719 | \$51,480 | \$84,960 |
| District Chief | \$64,591 | \$96,886 | \$60,132 | \$99,216 |

In addition, the County has a separate classification for paramedics within each rank. The City offers paramedic pay as supplemental pay to each employee amongst all ranks who holds a paramedic certification. The "premium" paid for a paramedic differs across the two entities. These items are negotiated through collective bargaining.

2. Pension Benefits

All benefits are somewhat different for both agencies; however, pension benefits are the most notable. County Fire personnel are covered by the Florida Retirement System (FRS). City Fire personnel are covered by the City's Consolidated Police

Officers' and Firefighter's Defined Benefit Pension Plan. The table below outlines some of the major differences in these plans.

| | City Pension Plan | FRS |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Retirement Eligibility | 20 years of service or Rule of 70 - any age | 25 years of service, any age |
| Multiplier | 2.5% and 2.625% after 10/1/2005 | 3% |
| Vesting | 10 years | 6 years |
| Final Average Earnings | Highest 3 consecutive years | Highest 5 consecutive years |
| FY2010 Employer Contribution Rate | 6.10% of covered payroll | 19.81% of covered payroll (net of health insurance subsidy) |
| FY2010 Employee Contribution Rate | 7.50% of covered pay | Non-contributory (0%) |
| DROP Plan | 5 years completed by 30 years of total service | 5 years completed by 35 years of total service |
| DROP Plan contributions | Employer and employee contributions cease upon DROP entry | Employer contributions continue (currently 10.91%) |
| COLA | 2% - Age specific based on YOS | 3% - Annually immediately following retirement |
| Retiree Health | \$10/month for each YOS, no cap, adjusted \$5/year for age under or over 65 Has a cost of living adjustment. | \$5/month for each YOS, capped at \$150/month or \$1,800/ year. No cost of living adjustment. |

3. Holiday Pay and Vacation Benefits

City and County Fire personnel both earn twelve holidays each year. How those holidays are paid differ significantly. GFR employees have the option to receive ten hours of pay at their base rate or take ten hours of leave. ACFR employees receive holiday pay ranging from twelve hours of pay at their base rate and as high as 2 ½ times their base rate.

Vacation leave is also earned at a different rate for City and County personnel as reflected in the table below (shown in hours annually for shift personnel).

| Length of Service | City | County |
|-------------------|------|--------|
| 1 to 5 years | 120 | 140 |
| 5 to 10 years | 144 | 168 |
| 10 to 15 years | 168 | 196 |
| 15 to 20 years | 192 | 252 |
| 20 to 25 years | 240 | 308 |
| 25 years or more | 240 | 336 |

4. Work Schedule

Both City and County shift personnel work a 24 on/48 off schedule. However, City shift personnel work an average 52 hours/week. County shift personnel work an average 56 hours/week. This is due to what is referred to as “kelly days”. City personnel receive a day off with pay every six weeks, also known as a kelly day. County personnel do not receive kelly days. The work schedule and kelly days are part of the collective bargaining agreement.

5. Staffing

Gainesville Fire Rescue currently staffs operations with 3.9 FTE’s per shift position. Alachua County Fire Rescue staffs operations at 3.66 FTE’s per shift position. To illustrate the fiscal impact of this difference, assume a minimum staffing level of 20 positions to staff each apparatus in operation for each shift. Both entities operate 3 shifts. Staffing at 3.66 positions per shift requires 73 positions. Staffing at 3.9 positions per shift requires 78 positions. Under this example, a decision to staff at the higher level would require five additional firefighter positions. At the minimum of the pay range plus benefits, five positions would cost about \$225,000 plus uniforms, equipment, and training.

The above illustrates just a few of the inequities that exist within the two entities. These, along with the many other issues, would require lengthy discussions and analysis, as well as collective bargaining to determine the resulting policies and procedures for a consolidated entity and any associated fiscal impacts.

As you are also aware, consolidation of services has been reviewed numerous times over the past several years. Attached is a general timeline for Gainesville Fire Rescue and Alachua County Fire Rescue that helps provide a sense of the studies, discussions and proposals on consolidation of fire services that have occurred over the years. In reviewing this timeline, one can see that as the issue of consolidation came up over the years, Gainesville Fire Rescue and Alachua County Fire Rescue have found ways to coordinate their efforts to avoid duplication of services.

The consolidation studies have not identified redundant fire stations and firefighting personnel that could be eliminated through a consolidation. More recently, consolidation of specific functions have been discussed and one has been implemented with the agreement between the City and County to share the services of a Public Information Officer.

I hope this provides you with general information and background to facilitate your upcoming discussion of consolidated services. Please feel free to contact me should you need additional information.

City of Gainesville/Alachua County Fire Services Timeline

- 1882 – City of Gainesville Fire Department established.
- 1974 – Alachua County begins providing Emergency Medical Services as the Alachua Ambulance Service that was part of the Department of Public Safety.
- 1974 - City of Gainesville and Alachua County sign one year fire services contract to provide one engine to any fire in the suburban area surrounding the City. The agreement was re-negotiated annually.
- 1984 – City of Gainesville begins providing automatic aid to suburban areas outside Gainesville city limits through the Fire Services Contract with Alachua County.
- 1985 – Alachua County creates a MSTU for fire services and begins providing limited direct fire services (prior to this, the County had a long history of providing fire protection services through agreements with municipalities and smaller private volunteer departments).
- 1985 to present – the cities of Alachua, Hawthorne, Archer, and Waldo enter into agreements with the County for fire protection services.
- 1980s (late) – City of Gainesville seeks increased funding for fire service to the unincorporated areas. Alachua County decides to add direct service facilities around developing areas near Gainesville.
- 1989 – Fire Master Plan – laid the foundation for the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Agreement, a seven year agreement to direct and coordinate the growth of City and County fire service infrastructure. The agreement provided for:
 1. County to build five stations;
 2. County to compensate City for fire service calls to the unincorporated area;
 3. automatic mutual aid with first response by closest unit; and
 4. standards established for response protocols, response times, station facilities, and fire apparatus.
- 1990 – County begins building fire stations to provide direct fire protection services in developing suburban areas around Gainesville.
- 1996 – Analytica Study provided analysis of several different approaches to the provision of fire services with emphasis on cooperative planning and eliminating redundancy resulting in the Designated Assistance Agreement between Alachua County and the City of Gainesville providing for “closest unit dispatch”. The City

and County hold “stakeholder” meetings to research and discuss single provider models of providing fire /EMS services. No action taken.

- 2000 – Combined Communications Center instituted to provide a single City/County 911 call center, including fire service calls.
- 2000 – City of Gainesville proposes to provide fire/EMS services to a designated area around the City of Gainesville with the County being responsible for rural fire and EMS services. No action taken.
- 2000 – Alachua County proposes to provide fire/EMS services in the City of Gainesville and the County. No action taken.
- 2002 – Non-binding Referendum – County voters indicate support for consolidation of Gainesville Fire Rescue and Alachua County Fire Rescue without a special taxing district.
- 2003 – Combined Emergency Services Proposal – The City of Gainesville approves a merger proposal with the City responsible for directing fire/EMS service in the City and County. City, County, and unions worked together to:
 1. reduce duplication in emergency services in Gainesville and unincorporated Alachua County;
 2. address citizen preference from 2002 non-binding referendum; and
 3. join efforts of Gainesville and Alachua County for future service.

The County rejected the City proposal and approved development of a fire/EMS Services Master Plan.

- 2004 – Alachua County Fire/EMS Services Master Plan – looked at three organizational strategies including:
 1. continuation of autonomous organizations;
 2. operational consolidation of GFR and ACFR; and
 3. full merger of GFR and ACFR in new dependant fire district.

The Master Plan recommended that City and County pursue a full merger of GFR and ACFR in new fire district.

- 2006 – Fire Services Assistance Agreement - improved on the Designated Assistance Agreement by providing quickest unit response and using the Alachua County Fire/EMS Services Master Plan for the placement of future fire/EMS stations.
- 2010 – Alachua County Commission request for discussion of fire consolidation at the April 29 Joint City/County Commission meeting.

Perspective on Alachua County Fire/EMS Services Master Plan and the City of Gainesville/Alachua County Fire Services Assistance Agreement

Since 1996, the City of Gainesville and Alachua County have successfully provided automatic aid to the urban area of the City and County through the response of the closest available units to fire, rescue, emergency medical, hazardous materials, and extrication calls, as well as to natural and accidental disasters under the direction of the Designated Assistance Agreement. In October 2006, both jurisdictions renewed their automatic aid agreement with the Fire Services Assistance Agreement (FSAA) and agreed to follow the Alachua County Fire/EMS Services Master Plan dated October 2004, which identifies future station locations. The FSAA sets staffing levels, identifies the level of services to be provided, and helps prevent duplication of services.

The Master Plan states that “An interlocal agreement such as this (FSAA) can reduce redundancy in resources and allow service to be improved through the use of adjacent resources.” Additionally, the plan reports that “The unit and station coverage of Alachua County does not include significant overlapping service areas. There are small coverage overlaps of Gainesville; however, there is also significant workload within those areas suggesting the need for multiple resources.” This is why the Master Plan does not call for a reduction in personnel or fire stations.