

FIRE COMMITTEE MINUTES

January 26, 2006

The Fire Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on January 26, 2006 at 9:05 a.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Mike Whalen, Chairman
Rex Griswold
Janie Thom

COMMITTEE ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

Christopher Brady

1. Hear an update on hospital availability.

Fire Chief Harry Beck recognized recently promoted Assistant Fire Chief Mary Cameli, who was present in the Council Chambers. He stated that in her new position, Chief Cameli would assume responsibility in the training and special operations areas, as well as maintain control of the Department of Communications. Chief Beck also introduced Deputy Chief Kenny King who was prepared to address the Committee.

Deputy Chief King provided an extensive chronology of the events that occurred on January 1, 2006 when Banner Baywood Medical Center was forced to close the doors to its Emergency Department due to an overload of patients. His comments included, but were not limited to, the following: that on that date, Banner Baywood contacted the City of Mesa Communication Center (Alarm Room) advising that because of "patient saturation" the facility would be going to "Code Black"; that the Mesa Fire Department notified Banner Baywood that it did not meet the criteria of "Code Black," which is normally used to close hospitals because of a facility failure or electrical outage, water main break or other facility emergency; that because there were no available beds, patients were waiting to be admitted to the hospital, and 40 to 50 patients waiting to be evaluated, hospital personnel determined that it was appropriate to close the Emergency Department; that the Mesa Fire Department and two Southwest Ambulances established a triage site on Baywood Street; that Fire Department personnel triaged or diverted approximately 25 to 30 patients at the site, but not within the Emergency Department; and that several patients were transported to other hospitals for treatment.

Deputy Chief King commented that hospital overcrowding, and in particular Emergency Department overcrowding, has been an ongoing issue for several years in the East Valley due to its burgeoning population. He stated that the Mesa Fire Department, in conjunction with other Valley fire departments, hospitals and emergency transportation providers, formed a task force to develop a plan to prevent future incidents of the nature that occurred at Banner Baywood.

Deputy Chief King explained that the initial response plan has been revised to include the following:

- Initial dispatch will include two engines, one ladder and a Command Officer.
- A unified command will be set up involving hospital representatives.
- Mesa Fire Department will organize an incident with a command structure including lobby control, triage, treatment and transportation sectors.
- Consider an action plan to utilize the 100 patient module set up at a specified location to treat patients with non-life threatening symptoms.

Deputy Chief King also reviewed various alternatives for the Committee's consideration including staff proceeding as planned; staying uninvolved in the process; or attempting to manage closures on a case-by-case basis.

Discussion ensued relative to the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA), which imposes certain legal requirements on hospitals to remain open, even in the event of patient overload.

Chief Beck commented that in his opinion, the unprecedented action taken by Banner Baywood was appropriate, especially in light of the fact that patient care was beginning to suffer. He explained that the Fire Department already had a response plan in place, which was routinely implemented at the facility. Chief Beck stated, however, that the prospect of Banner Baywood or other hospitals in the area being forced to close due to overcrowding is leading emergency medical providers to a point where they could potentially be on the verge of a community crisis and it may become necessary to make a declaration in order for the Fire Department to relieve some of the patient overload at those facilities.

Committeemember Griswold suggested that it might be appropriate for the Mesa Fire Department or the local hospitals to distribute a list (printed in English and Spanish) of alternative clinics, urgent care facilities, and hospitals in the surrounding communities that could accommodate patients in the event of long waits at Mesa hospitals' Emergency Departments.

Responding to Committeemember Griswold's comment, Deputy Chief King clarified that the Fire Department would be willing to work with local hospitals to distribute maps of surrounding health care facilities. He noted, however, that urgent care facilities are not regulated by EMTALA and can refuse treatment to individuals who do not have health insurance coverage. Deputy Chief King added that the Fire Department does maintain an inventory of East Valley hospitals and said that during the Banner Baywood incident, personnel provided the names of alternative treatment facilities to those citizens who were turned away from the Emergency Department.

Further discussion ensued relative to the various components of the initial response plan; that a pandemic situation would require a regional response; and that the Mesa Fire Department is working closely with 25 Valley fire departments to address such concerns.

Committeemember Thom commented that because of the ongoing construction of several new hospitals in the East Valley, which will result in more than 1000 hospital beds, she is hopeful that the patient overcrowding incident at Banner Baywood would not occur again.

2. Discuss and consider requiring the submittal of digital/electronic files for new construction drawings for select building projects requiring a construction permit from the Building Safety Division.

Deputy Chief Bob Horn reported that Fire and Police response vehicles are equipped with portable computers that assist with dispatching and providing additional information to public safety personnel during the management of emergency incidents. He explained that when a unit is dispatched to an incident, personnel receive a name and address, the crossroads of the location in question, and can also access extensive drawings of the commercial/retail building. Deputy Chief Horn stated that the drawings are utilized not only in firefighting and hostage situations, but also for locating evacuation routes, fire hydrants and potential HazMat sites.

Deputy Chief Horn stated that there are currently several time consuming methods by which building drawings are entered into the Department's computer aided dispatch system. He noted that in the first instance, fire crews go to a building site and measure and draw the dimensions of the building, which are then submitted to Fire Technical Services. Deputy Chief Horn commented that the data is then entered into the computer aided drawing (CAD) program and personnel hand draw the walls of the structure and equipment. He said that an alternative method of creating drawings occurs when Technical Services personnel scan blueprints or floor plans that have been obtained from developers or other sources.

Deputy Chief Horn further indicated that in an effort to expedite the above-referenced processes for entering building drawings into the CAD system, staff is proposing to implement a change to the Mesa City Code that would require developers and architects to submit electronic CAD drawings for significant building projects (i.e., large scale hotels and multi-housing projects) in addition to blueprints. He explained that project exemptions would include R3 and R4 occupancies, single family residences, and buildings or structures accessory to and located on the same lot with one and two-family dwellings. Deputy Chief Horn noted that if a developer failed to submit electronic drawings, staff also intends to submit a resolution with the ordinance that would allow the City to assess a service fee of \$200 per page for staff to convert the hard-copy drawings into an electronic format. He added that the Fire Department has worked in conjunction with the Building Safety Division to develop the ordinance and said that the proposal was presented to Mesa's Development Advisory Forum and received no opposition.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that it is anticipated that the City would issue approximately 1000 building permits annually, of which a small percentage would be processed in a non-digital format; and that based on 2005 information, approximately 60 pages of drawings would have been impacted by the ordinance and generated \$12,000 of new revenue.

Building Safety Director Terry Williams addressed the Committee and commented that he does not foresee any operational difficulties by implementing staff's proposal. He indicated that the vast majority of the plans submitted to Building Safety are electronically drawn, including almost 100% of the commercial projects. Mr. Williams explained that the Fire Department's original proposal was that the electronic CAD drawings be submitted along with the blueprints prior to a developer obtaining a building permit, but said that it was the opinion of Building Safety staff that it would be more appropriate to withhold the final Certificate of Occupancy until such time as the electronic drawings were submitted.

In response to a series of questions from Committeemember Griswold, Mr. Williams clarified that the City currently has the capability for plan review of, for example, a Quiktrip size project that has been transmitted electronically. He noted that there is a small number of clients using that process for the submission of plan review, but said that the vast majority of developers/architects use electronic drafting as their primary tool. He added that representatives of the Multihousing Association were present at the Development Advisory Forum and did not voice objections to staff's proposal.

Committeemember Griswold stated that he would like to see Planning and Building Safety have the capability of electronically receiving drawings and plans transmitted by architects and developers and eliminating the need for paper blueprints as quickly as possible.

Mr. Williams further commented that it is the opinion of staff that a building owner would be supportive of the proposal because, in the case of an emergency, the Fire Department would have a clear understanding of the structure's layout, including the possible location, for instance, of hazardous materials. He added that because the Fire Department would only review the site plan and floor plan, the cost to a small businessman who did not submit electronic drawings and was required to pay the cost for staff to convert the hard copy drawings into an electronic format would not be excessive.

It was moved by Committeemember Griswold, seconded by Committeemember Thom, that the proposal for the submission of digital/electronic files for new construction drawings for select building projects requiring a construction permit from the Building Safety Division, be moved forward to the full Council.

Carried unanimously.

3. Discuss and consider offering fee-based cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification classes.

Fire Chief Harry Beck introduced Fire and Life Safety Specialist Michele Adamczyk who was prepared to address the Committee relative to this agenda item.

Ms. Adamczyk reported that the Mesa Fire Department is requesting approval from the City Council to offer fee-based cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) Certification classes to the general public beginning this year. She explained that because the City does not currently offer the classes through the Fire Department or the Parks and Recreation Department, staff refers those individuals who are interested in such classes to the Yellow Pages or the Internet to assist in that regard. Ms. Adamczyk stated that the Fire Department currently offers a free Lifesaver Class to the public, which consists of a two and a half hour overview of the 911 system, first aid, and CPR. She added that approximately 50% of the phone calls that the Department receives regarding the Lifesaver Class are from citizens seeking a CPR Certification class.

Ms. Adamczyk further noted that the Fire Department is recommending charging a fee of \$25 per person to recover the total costs associated with the instructor fees, training manual and issuance of the certification card. She stated that the proposed class enrollment size would consist of at least seven participants, although a single instructor could certify up to ten individuals at one time.

In response to a question from Chairman Whalen, Ms. Adamczyk clarified that there is a significant demand for the CPR Certification classes and commented that in January, 51 individuals participated in the Lifesaver Class and 84 have registered for February's classes.

It was moved by Committeemember Thom, seconded by Committeemember Griswold, to recommend to the full Council that the Mesa Fire Department offer fee-based CPR Certification classes starting in 2006.

Carried unanimously.

In response to a question from Committeemember Griswold, Chief Beck stated that the Fire Department has implemented a Bilingual Assistance Training (BAT) Program in an effort to increase the number of Spanish-speaking staff members on each Fire unit within the Department.

Chairman Whalen thanked staff for the informative presentations.

4. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Fire Committee meeting adjourned at 10:04 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Fire Committee of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 26th day of January 2006. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK