

FIRE COMMITTEE MINUTES

June 23, 2003

The Fire Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on June 23, 2003, at 8:00 a.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Claudia Walters, Chairman
Dennis Kavanaugh
Mike Whalen

COUNCIL PRESENT

None

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mike Hutchinson

1. Discuss and consider proceeding with a request for proposal to provide emergency medical service transportation in Mesa.

Fire Chief Harry Beck, Fire Management Assistant Dorinda Larsen, Assistant Fire Chief Gary Bradbury and Deputy Fire Chief Kenny King addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item.

Chief Bradbury provided background information pertaining to the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) transportation program, outlining the City's progression from a rotation system to a sole provider (Southwest/Rural Metro) in 1990. He explained that the public/private partnership has been a success and that Southwest/Rural Metro has provided exemplary service, administered the contract in good faith, and improved Mesa's customer service level. Chief Bradbury stated that in 1998 at the time of its contract renewal, the provider was informed that the City would evaluate emergency transportation models for future implementation. He added that although still a public/private contract model, it is the recommendation of staff to modify the management direction of the EMS transportation program which would ensure not only prompt and appropriate service to Mesa's citizens, but also provide a cost recovery component for the City.

Chief Bradbury reported that an Emergency Transportation Team was formed to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of both the private provider and the City of Mesa. He noted that of the three potential models for emergency transportation (private provider, public/private cost recovery, and Fire Department-based), it was the consensus of the group that a public/private cost recovery model, in which both entities would share in the system development, operations and cost recovery, would be the most appropriate choice. Chief Bradbury also stated that the private partner would provide the basic system structure and staffing, administrative management, billing reimbursement, consumable medical supplies and patient records management, and the Fire Department would furnish the daily operations management and response dispatch, with operational peak-time staffing as an option.

Chief Bradbury advised that in evaluating a future model for emergency transportation, the following components were reviewed: 1.) Enhanced customer service through integrated deployment; 2.) Improved response times, whereby all primary and peak time ambulances would include an Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) system, Mobile Dispatch Computer and radio communication equipment that integrates with Mesa's Police/Fire Communication Center; 3.) Greater public/private cooperation; 4.) A team environment for the transportation provider and Fire crews; 5.) Staffing level stability through cooperative peak-time staffing with Fire Department personnel, and 6.) Cost recovery to the City of Mesa.

Chief Bradbury further stated that the service model proposal, which is revenue neutral, would provide for ongoing cost recovery as follows: Advanced Life Support (ALS) Fee; Dispatch/Communications Fee; Medical Control Fee, and Medical Supply Replacement.

Chief Bradbury concluded his remarks by noting that staff is requesting direction from the members of the Fire Committee relative to proceeding with a Request for Proposal process to provide EMS transportation in Mesa, including the evaluation and ultimate selection of a vendor. He added that Southwest/Rural Metro's current service contract expires February 29, 2004 and that staff would like to have a new contract in place prior to that time.

In response to a question from Committeemember Kavanaugh, Chief Bradbury clarified that the ultimate goals of the proposal would include faster response times, a more effective utilization of staff, and increased revenue returns for the City.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that the City would receive the ALS reimbursement fee only when a Mesa paramedic would accompany a patient in an ambulance and provide care en route to a receiving facility; that the patient would not incur additional costs, barring a rate increase request by the regional transportation providers to the Department of Health Services; that consumable medical supplies would be provided by the private partner, and that Mesa would assess a standard fee per call for dispatch services to the City of Apache Junction and the Town of Gilbert.

In response to a series of questions from Committeemember Whalen, Chief Bradbury clarified that Banner Baywood Medical Center and Banner Desert Medical Center are currently under contract with the City to provide medical care to patients transported by ambulance. He explained that because the City's medical control has degraded to the point that patients are not receiving the services that are needed, in part due to hospital overcrowding, staff is considering three potential models to address this concern. Chief Bradbury stated that the models include a City of Mesa 911 Center; a free-standing facility that could be manned by physicians and medical staff, and/or seeking bids from hospitals that would be interested in supporting the City with medical control.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that the Mesa Fire Department has engaged in discussions with other agencies within the Maricopa County area regarding the concept of a regional medical support program; that the City could potentially receive \$1.2 million as a result of the public/private cost recovery model; that indigent service would continue to be provided, and that it is anticipated that four vendors may participate in the RFP process.

Chief King provided a brief comparison of the current and proposed system for the dispatching of EMS transportation.

In response to a question from Committeemember Kavanaugh, Chief King stated that the City is anticipating that the successful vendor will provide a minimum of ten full-time ambulances, as well as peak-time staffing to allow the City to operate in an efficient and effective manner.

Additional discussion ensued relative to the role of the community evaluation team in reviewing the proposals; that the RFP is written in such a manner to permit vendors not only to meet the basics of the contract, but also to offer service enhancements; that any fee increases would be imposed by the Arizona Department of Health Services and not the City of Mesa and assessed only to those residents who use the emergency transportation services, and potential medical liability issues regarding a City-owned 911 Operation facility.

Chairman Walters stated that in light of the Council's recent actions with regard to an RFP for bus service which did not sufficiently address protests and was subsequently withdrawn, she urged the City Attorney's Office to review the RFP for Emergency Medical Service Transportation one more time before it comes to the full Council to ensure that there are appropriate remedies included in the document that address this issue and that the RFP process is "smooth" and efficient.

In response to Chairman Walters' request, City Manager Mike Hutchinson assured the Committeemembers that staff would review the RFP prior to its release.

Committeemember Whalen advised that after discussing with the City Manager a potential conflict of interest he may have regarding this issue, he will proceed forward and vote on this agenda item.

It was moved by Committeemember Kavanaugh, seconded by Committeemember Whalen, to recommend to the Council that staff be directed to proceed with a Request for Proposals to provide emergency medical service transportation in Mesa.

Carried unanimously.

Chairman Walters thanked staff for the informative presentation.

2. Discuss and consider recommending the adoption of an Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Phoenix for the operation of the 800 MHz system.

800 MHz Project Manager and Communications Administrator Joe Noce addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item. He provided a brief historical overview of the ongoing partnership between Mesa and Phoenix to establish a regional wireless communications network for the benefit of the two communities and participating agencies. Mr. Noce stated that it is the recommendation of staff that an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) be established between Mesa and Phoenix, thereby formally constituting a governance board to oversee the radio system. He noted that the board would establish the rules by which other agencies would join the system and become part of the board, as well as agree on the investment to be made by new parties to the system. Mr. Noce added that on June 4, 2003, the Phoenix City Council approved the IGA as submitted and that Phoenix officials will sign the document upon final approval by the Mesa City Council.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that new customers will be added to the system and require guidance regarding how the process takes place; that "roaming" coverage will allow

units to travel between jurisdictions and maintain seamless communications with their own dispatch service; that encryption key management will allow the user to engage in discreet conversations that are protected by encryption; that all 800 MHz frequencies have been exhausted and that the future of the system will be in 700 MHz frequencies which will accommodate voice, video and data capabilities; that because it is a joint system, any future upgrades will be made to both sides (Phoenix and Mesa) of the system simultaneously; that an agreement has been reached with the Gila River Indian Community for the extension of the radio system southward along the I-10 corridor, which will eventually link with the City of Tucson, and that discussions have begun with the City of Flagstaff to extend the radio system northward up the I-17 freeway as well.

Chairman Walters acknowledged Committeemember Kavanaugh for his longtime efforts and hard work relative to this important project.

Committeemember Kavanaugh stated that during his tenure on the National League of Cities' National Task Force of Interoperability, with regards to the issue of public safety, an important area of discussion included the governance model. He noted that Phoenix and Mesa were cited as examples of regional cooperation for the benefit of many communities within a region. Committeemember Kavanaugh added that the model through an IGA is a more flexible approach for communities to do governance and minimize conflicts in the future.

It was moved by Committeemember Kavanaugh, seconded by Committeemember Whalen, to recommend to the Council that the adoption of an Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Phoenix for the operation of the 800 MHz system, be approved.

Committeemember Whalen thanked Mr. Noce for his ongoing efforts relative to this arduous process. He also commented on the difficulty of employees from Mesa and Phoenix working together on a project of such great complexity. Committeemember Whalen added that he looks forward to an expanded Statewide radio system.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that the 700 MHz frequencies will have sufficient capacity for a minimum of 25 to 30 years; that Mesa has reached an agreement with Maricopa County, whereby the City will install transmitters at South Mountain for the interoperability channels that will be in all 800 MHz systems and will be controlled by the Sheriff's Department; and that the Department of Public Safety (DPS) operates on a different frequency range and that Phoenix is exploring various means by which to establish interoperability with the agency, and the extension of an excise tax for the funding of enhanced 911 service on cell phones.

Chairman Walters requested that the Committee be provided with an update on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations relative to its impact on the communication of medical calls via the new radio system.

Mr. Noce commented that Chief Beck played a key role in this project since its inception during his tenure with the Phoenix Fire Department.

Carried unanimously.

3. Hear an update on the Opticom Priority Control System.

Assistant Fire Chief Gil Damiani addressed the members of the Committee relative to this agenda item. He provided a brief update on the Opticom Priority Control System, which is designed to act as a standard traffic preemption system. Chief Damiani also credited former Assistant Fire Chief Paul Wilson for his efforts and hard work to bring the system to Mesa.

Chief Damiani reported that of Mesa's 327 traffic signals, 218 are Opticom controlled, and stated that it is the ultimate goal of the Fire Department that the device be installed at every intersection in the City. He explained that the location of the system is based on the input and recommendations received from emergency response units, traffic volume maps provided by the Traffic Engineering Department, and calls for service in specific areas of the City. Chief Damiani advised that the City is retrofitting approximately nine signals per year and installing the Opticom system in newly installed intersections at the rate of seven per year. He added that \$150,000 was earmarked last year for the purchase/installation of Opticom equipment and that the costs vary between \$6,000 and \$10,000, depending on whether the device is located at an existing or new intersection. Chief Damiani said that the installation cost of an emergency signal ranges between \$50,000 and \$70,000 per intersection.

In response to a question from Chairman Walters, Chief Damiani clarified that the Opticom system can be controlled at the discretion of the Fire Department, but as a general rule, traffic is controlled in the direction in which the emergency response vehicle is traveling.

Chairman Walters thanked staff for the presentation.

4. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Fire Committee Meeting adjourned at 9:05 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Fire Committee Meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 23rd day of June 2003. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK