



Marion County Board of County Commissioners

McPherson Governmental Complex

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District 1 – David Moore, Commissioner
District 2 – Kathy Bryant, Vice Chairman
District 3 – Stan McClain, Chairman
District 4 – Carl Zalak III, Commissioner
District 5 – Earl Arnett, Commissioner

April 1, 2015

Dear citizens:

Over the past several weeks, our Marion County Fire Rescue department has received extensive media coverage regarding the department's budget and funding levels. I want to take this opportunity to reach out and share with you what steps we are taking to address our Fire Rescue funding needs into the future.

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners recognizes the importance and impact of our fire rescue crews in the daily lives of our county residents. Our crews protect life and property at all times, and they do so to the highest standards of their profession. This board believes in providing the best public safety services our tax base can support; in fact, we allocate nearly a third of the entire county budget to public safety services alone. This fiscal year, that total is 30 percent (approximately \$157 million) - slightly up from last year - and includes fire rescue, emergency medical services, sheriff's office operations, jail and public safety communications, among others.

This budgetary commitment is just one of the ways we strive to support our Fire Rescue department. Here are other steps we are taking to support it into the future:

- **Marion County Fire Rescue's 5-year strategic plan.** The plan, a work in progress, is prepared with input from the citizen-led Fire Advisory Board and addresses department service levels, the capital replacement program and salaries over the next several years.
- **Fire Assessment Study.** The board has hired a consultant to revise the current non-ad valorem fire assessment methodology. Based on those results, the board will then be able to determine how best to fund Fire Rescue as we work through the budget process for fiscal year 2015-16.
- We have also directed county administration to **hold the line on the millage rate** and are exploring options to **re-prioritize existing spending** and direct it to the ambulance service for the upcoming fiscal year.

All of this will be thoroughly vetted through multiple workshops in the summer and finalized in public hearings in September prior to final adoption for year one of the 5-year master plan.

Projections for increasing property values are encouraging, and this increased revenue will improve our options for prioritizing public safety. These changes, however, will be realized over time.

I thank you for your interest and for being part of the community-wide conversation about this key aspect of our comprehensive county budget. Likewise, I invite you to remain engaged throughout our budget process. Details will be published on our county website, at www.marioncountyfl.org/FireFAQs, as updates become available.

Sincerely,

Stan McClain, Chairman

"Meeting Needs by Exceeding Expectations"