



September 5, 2012

The Honorable Thomas J. Borris
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive, West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Honorable Thomas J. Borris:

The City of Laguna Beach City Council, the City Manager's Office and the Fire Department have reviewed the 2011-2012 Orange County Grand Jury report, *Emergency Medical Response in Orange County*. The City Council has reviewed and authorized the following response in accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05.

Findings/Conclusions

F1. Fire Departments that once primarily responded to calls for fire emergencies now have become emergency medical response departments primarily responding to medical emergencies. This evolution has occurred since the onset of "9-1-1" call where all emergency calls are received at one place.

The City of Laguna Beach partially disagrees with this finding.

Most of the Laguna Beach Fire Department's responses are medical in nature representing approximately 67% of the total call volume. However, Orange County's current fire based Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system is the product of a 1974 master plan created and lead by the Orange County Fire Chief's Association. The master plan set forth responsible entities for critical support of the paramedic system including: the County Health Department, County Communications Department, base hospitals, receiving hospitals and teaching institutions. Public and private stakeholders as well as local, county and state government were involved in the planning and authorization of our current fire based EMS system.

Due to advances in technology, population expansion, tourism and public expectations, the Laguna Beach Fire Department's mission has purposely evolved over the last 45 years to the current all-risk delivery model. As early as the 1960's the Laguna Beach Fire Department was responding to "resuscitator" medical aid calls for service. In 1977 the City of Laguna Beach began contracting with the County of Orange Fire Department to provide paramedic service to the entire city. The City's trained firefighters were dispatched to medical emergencies

simultaneously with the paramedic unit in order to arrive the closest unit with medical training and equipment to the emergency first. The first arriving firefighters began Basic Life Support (BLS) treatment until the paramedics arrived. Once the paramedics arrived on scene, the firefighters and paramedics worked as a treatment team and assisted with the care and treatment of the patient. The patient was transported via a private ambulance with paramedics escorting to the hospital. Since 1977 this public/private EMS service delivery model became the basis for the minimum level EMS care in Laguna Beach.

The Warren-911-Emergency Assistance Act was passed in 1972 and required *every local public agency, within its respective jurisdiction*, to have a basic 9-1-1 system operational by December 31, 1985. The non-alignment of municipal and phone switching boundaries proved to be a major obstacle to implementation in urban areas. This, coupled with other engineering challenges, meant the Bill needed to provide time for engineering solutions prior to its enactment. In April, 1982, the City of Laguna Beach contracted with General Telephone for the design and installation of an enhanced 9-1-1 system.

At the direction of governing boards and city councils, the Orange County Fire Service took the leadership role and financial responsibility for the development and implementation of Orange County's current comprehensive EMS system. The Warren-911-Emergency Assistance Act was not the catalyst for the evolution of the modern day EMS system in Orange County. Furthermore, the City of Laguna Beach's fire based EMS delivery system was well established before the Warren Act was passed and fully matured prior to the implementation of 9-1-1 in the City of Laguna Beach.

F2. As the fire departments evolved into emergency medical departments, the model for operating the fire departments has not radically changed. The fire departments have simply absorbed the emergency medical responses into their departments under their old "fire response" model.

The City of Laguna Beach wholly disagrees with this finding.

The City of Laguna Beach Fire Department has methodically evolved into an efficient all-risk organization providing fire suppression, fire prevention, hazardous materials response, rescue, public education and emergency medical services to name a few. This multi-function capability capitalizes on assets originally placed in their geographical locations in order to arrive firefighting forces to fires and rescues quickly. In response to a growing population, the geographic layout of the City and community expectations, the City Council authorized the funding and expansion from one fire station to three fire stations in 1968. In 1988 the county unincorporated area of South Laguna was annexed in accordance with LAFCO requirements and a fourth fire station was absorbed by the City. This station previously housed the county paramedic unit that provided contract paramedic service to the City of Laguna Beach. The

Orange County Fire Department relocated the paramedic unit to another area in South County and it was no longer available to the City.

In response to the 1988 annexation, the City Council authorized and funded a city sponsored paramedic program utilizing firefighters that were already staffing fire units. The additional reoccurring annual cost to operate an engine based paramedic unit is nominal when utilizing this model. The City continues to utilize its long-standing public-private partnership with private ambulance companies for providing transportation of the sick and injured.

In the 35 years since the inception of the City's paramedic program, 5 models for service delivery have been deployed. Past models include: contract paramedics from Orange County Fire Department's Fire Station 6 (van), single paramedic engine at Fire Station 2, a single paramedic van at Fire Station 2, a paramedic engine at Fire Station 2 and a paramedic assessment unit at Fire Station 1 and the current deployment of 2 paramedic engines based out of Fire Stations 1 and 4. All of the noted changes in the City of Laguna Beach's EMS service delivery models were significant. The desire to provide the highest level of fiscally responsible service to the community has always been the City Council's goal when considering EMS service delivery models.

Since 1977 the City of Laguna Beach has deployed many EMS delivery models in an effort to provide the most efficient and effective service to the community and its visitors. Fire based EMS was not just absorbed by fire departments in Orange County, it is the product of a planned and collaborative effort recognized for its efficiency. The City Laguna Beach Fire Department's current all-risk service delivery model is an effective and efficient utilization of resources.

F3. Economic recessions have forced local fire department boards of directors and city councils to re-evaluate their models for providing fire and emergency medical responses. While this brings to the fore issues of staffing, response times, public safety, training, consolidations, union rules and privatization of their various services, it also spotlights the model used for all emergency responses.

The City of Laguna Beach agrees with this finding.

Federal, State and local governments are grappling with the economic effects of the worst recession since the Great Depression. Policy makers across the country are evaluating the sustainability of current service levels in light of decreasing revenues. There is no "one size fits all" solution to this issue. Service level reductions, reductions in salaries and benefits, consolidation of services and contracting services are just some of the options available to governmental entities to help balance their budgets.

The City of Laguna Beach has employed a combination of reduction measures to help balance the budget. Over the last five years, the equivalent of 10.4 vacant positions has been eliminated, including three positions making \$95,000 a year or more. In October 2011, the City began

implementation of a 2nd tier retirement plan for new sworn public safety personnel. In October of 2011, fire personnel began paying 4.5% of their pension contribution and police personnel will begin paying 2% of their pension contribution on January 1, 2013. During this same time period, the City has increased reserves and avoided any layoffs or furloughs while minimizing reductions in services to the community.

Recommendations

R1. *The city fire departments and the Orange County Fire Authority should engage independent private consultants to re-evaluate their models for providing response for both fire and medical emergencies. These re-evaluations should include the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of current models and alternative models. This re-evaluation should be accomplished by July 31, 2013. (See F1, F2 & F3)*

This recommendation will not be implemented by the City of Laguna Beach because it is not warranted at this time.

The City of Laguna Beach continually evaluates the service levels, capabilities and efficiencies of all its departments, including the Fire Department. Evaluations are periodically conducted by City Staff which may or may not utilize the assistance of consultants. The City is not opposed to evaluating new models in the future but it is not willing to commit to a review before July 31, 2013.

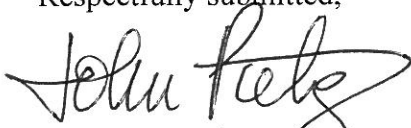
R2. *Suggested alternative models should include forming a unified Emergency Response Department that includes fire and medical, separating the fire response from the medical response, privatizing the emergency medical response, etc. (See F3)*

This recommendation will not be implemented by the City of Laguna Beach because it is not warranted at this time.

The City has previously explored the feasibility of contracting fire/EMS services and found that there are no substantial savings for providing like services.

The City does not feel there is significant value in exploring non-fire based EMS delivery systems at this time. The economic efficiencies of an engine based all-risk service delivery model relies on the current fire based EMS delivery system. Unlike agencies with four person paramedic units, the City of Laguna Beach operates an efficient three person paramedic engine model which requires less personnel and maximizes the City's EMS delivery system dollars.

Respectfully submitted,



John Pietig, City Manager
City of Laguna Beach