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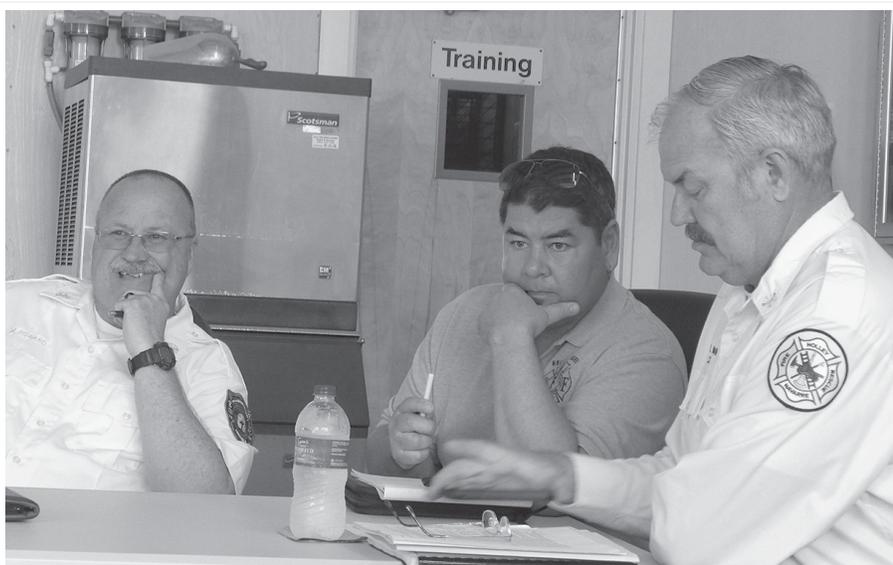


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Fire depts. take first steps in consolidation

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BY PAM BRANNON
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Representatives from South Santa Rosa Fire Departments met March 31 to consider consolidation.

The first steps to possible consolidation of three of the south Santa Rosa County Fire Departments – Midway, Holley Navarre, and Navarre Beach – took place last Friday morning in Navarre. About 50 people showed up to hear what the fire chiefs and their fire commissioners would say about why this would be a good idea and what the next steps would be. Holley- Navarre Fire Commission Chair David Stone said it would not be a quick or easy process, explaining, “This is

going to take a long time. It will be two, three, or maybe five years before we get everything done if we decide we should go this way.”

The meeting Friday was held at the Holley-Navarre Fire station behind the Winn-Dixie shopping center at 9 am. Midway Fire Chief Jonathan Kanzigg and Midway Fire Commission Chair Dave Szymanski joined Stone and Holley-Navarre Fire Chief Ron Norton and Navarre Beach Fire Chief Mike Howard at the table to discuss where to go from here. Most of the discussion revolved around hiring a consultant to do a feasibility study. Chief Norton said he asked the consulting firm who helped with the department’s recent successful tax referendum if they did such studies. “They told me they do not, but they recommended ESCI in south Florida,” Norton said.

Kanzigg said he had also reached out to that company to see if it would be possible for them to do a study.

“The owner of the company is the former fire chief of Marion and has a partner also familiar with fire departments operations. They would spend a week on site looking at everything and would give recommendations for a five-year plan.”

Kanzigg said it would cost about \$35,000 for the study, from what he had heard so far. Midway Fire Commission Chair Szymanski said, “We need to do out due diligence and bid this out and do interviews.”

He also suggested first step would be to get a committee together who could decide what should be in the Request for Proposals (RFP) needed to advertise for bids. Holley-Navarre Fire Commission Chair Stone said, “I would suggest the three fire chiefs and three union presidents and three members of the fire commissions be on the committee – maybe the chairs of the fire commissions.”

Szymanski agreed, saying, “I know I would want to serve on the committee and I think that would be a good make-up of a committee to do an RFP.”

It was suggested by the Navarre Beach Fire commissioners that perhaps there could be a pro-rated cost to that \$35,000 fee, since the Navarre Beach Fire budget is much smaller than either Midway or Holley-Navarre. However, Midway Chief Kanzigg later stated that he believed from the first discussions that have been between the three department chiefs everyone was in agreement that the cost should be split evenly, saying, “No one fire department wants to feel like it is carrying the other two. I know my residents of Midway would not want that, for sure.”

The chiefs were asked by more than one member of the audience why they thought this was a good idea.

Chief Kanzigg said, “Response times. Right now our response times in our outlying areas, like Edgewood, are not what they should be. We cannot service that area as a first responder as we should.

And the area is only going to keep growing. If we were all one department, then areas like Edgewood would get better, faster first response.”

Kanzigg and Norton explained that when a call comes 911 now it comes to Midway for that outlying area, and they then have to call for mutual aid to Holley-Navarre, and that is wasted time. “If there was one department, then we would be staffed and ready for that call and it would go to the one central place.”

Kanzigg also said that with the growth his department and Holley-Navarre have been talking about building two new stations. “So why should we build two stations when we could combine resources and build one,” Kanzigg said.

The next meeting will be held Thursday, May 4 at 9 a.m at Midway Fire station on College Blvd, Gulf Breeze.