



City of Largo, Florida

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MEMO DATE: June 6, 2007

AGENDA DATE: June 12, 2007, Work Session

TO: Mayor and City Commission

FROM: Norton Craig, Acting City Manager

TITLE: **EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN REVIEW**

BACKGROUND:

The 2007 hurricane season is predicted to be an active weather cycle with seventeen (17) named storms, nine (9) of which are predicted to become hurricanes. Florida's east coast has a 74 percent chance of receiving a direct hit from a landfall hurricane. If this occurs, Pinellas County or another west coast community will feel the impact of an exiting hurricane. In 2006 the United States enjoyed the effect of the weather phenomena, La Nina, which is characterized by unusually cold Pacific Ocean temperatures. La Nina conditions, which help prevent the formation of hurricanes, appears to be dissipating. The current weather pattern is shifting back to the El Nino cycle, which led to the busy 2004 season. A shift to an El Nino cycle appears evident by the early formation of two tropical storms. In the event of a hurricane, or any major disaster the coordination and cooperation between Pinellas County's twenty-four (24) cities, the county, and state and federal agencies are critical for the success of emergency management, to include preparedness, evacuation, response and recovery phase.

Pinellas County communities have limited experience dealing with weather conditions stronger than tropical storms. The last direct hit occurred in the early 1900's. By providing mutual-aid assistance to disaster stricken communities such as, Hardee County and Charlotte County after Hurricane Charley, City of Naples after Wilma and Southern Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina, Largo employees have learned invaluable lessons. What is evident is the need for preparedness by each citizen, as well as cooperation and coordination between city governments.

Hurricane Katrina was a stunning example of a complete breakdown of preparedness, response and recovery. Beginning on August 29, 2005, the world watched in horror as the levee system in place to protect the city failed, and ineffective communications crippled rescue operations. Buses that should have evacuated thousands were never deployed. Around 1,400 Louisianans died in Katrina and hundreds of thousands more were displaced and probability will never return.

When updating the Tampa Bay Regional Evacuation Study, the Tampa Bay Planning Council is required to

conduct an evacuation behavior analysis. This year's study was conducted by a Mason-Dixon Poll stating that "53 percent of coastal population surveyed don't feel vulnerable to a hurricane, 88 percent have not taken steps to fortify their homes, 16 percent said they would defy orders to evacuate, 61 percent had no hurricane survival kits and 25 percent did not know that standard homeowners insurance policies do not cover flooding." To improve public awareness, the Pinellas County Communications Department and cities within the County have been working in cooperation to develop a unified county-wide Public Information Team. Each city has assigned a trained Public Information Officer under the National Incident Command System (NIMS) to participate in a unified county-wide information campaign. The City of Largo has assigned Heather Graves, Manager of the Marketing and Communication Division, to represent the City on the team. This year Heather completed the Public Information Officer course at the National Fire Academy, which helped prepare her for this position. A cooperative effort is critical to provide timely and accurate information in the event of a disaster. Joint public information campaigns are underway to provide vital information to the citizens to assist them with developing their household emergency plans.

Pinellas County Emergency Management in partnership with all local communities, including the Largo emergency management team, has formed multiple subcommittees to discuss specific issues that must be addressed during an emergency. These groups are generated from the county-wide Disaster Advisory Committee (DAC) or from assigned emergency management coordinators. Once a working group is assigned and tasked with a project, the group will expand by bringing in the operational components. For example, the county-wide first-push road clearing committee, which includes multiple Public Works staff along with the Largo emergency management coordinator, is involved with creating a county-wide plan to provide a clear path through roadway debris for emergency response. Efforts include coordinating city, county and state Department of Transportation resources. Progress made by this working group has expanded into the debris management plan with a emphasis on coordination of services and the prevention of duplication of efforts. Multiple other working groups continue to examine the disaster recovery issues such as long term housing, special needs services, law enforcement, damage assessment, and search and rescue. The intergovernmental cooperation has resulted in revisions to city and county plans. Doug Meyer, the Emergency Management Coordinator for Pinellas County will provide a brief overview of some current changes underway within Pinellas County Emergency Management.

The City's Emergency Plan outlines the overall duties of each City department. Additionally, each department has been tasked with creating a plan that details personnel needed during an emergency and the responsibilities associated with each position. As each department completes their emergency plan, it is necessary to review how each department's plan relates to the City's plan as a whole and verify if county, state and federal guidelines will be met. As outlined in the City's plan, the duties and responsibilities of the Mayor and Commissioners are primarily to issue resolutions, proclamations and other executive orders related to the emergency. After consultation with the City Manager, the Mayor has the authority by ordinance Number 94-24 to declare a state of local emergency by proclamation. If the Mayor is unavailable, the Vice Mayor, or a member of the City Commission, in order of their seniority on the City Commission, may issue such declaration. The declaration of a State of Local Emergency and all emergency regulations activated under the provisions of the Emergency Management Ordinance shall be confirmed by the City Commission by resolution within two working days or at the next regularly scheduled meeting, whichever occurs first, unless conditions render a meeting of the City Commission impractical. The Mayor and City Commission will be informed via fax of all briefings held by the County Emergency Operations Center.

After the events of the past few years, national, state, and local emergency officials realize the immensity of the impact that may occur from all forms of disasters; impacts that may be felt years in the future. The urgency of reviewing emergency plans has been realized at all levels of government. The City of Largo's plan is continually under review to verify the inclusion of the latest information from federal, state, and county agencies. Although the most recent update should be completed by the end of June, major revisions are already necessary because of directed mandates through FEMA revisions, by-products of the working committees, and information generated by the Florida State Catastrophic Planning project. The Emergency Management Coordinator within Largo Fire Rescue, Acting Fire Chief Karry Bell, and the City's administration, and staff from each department have devoted considerable time developing and

continuously revising the city's comprehensive emergency plan and reviewing the feasibility of each department's operational plan. The Emergency Management Coordinator is responsible for research of the most recent federal or state requirements, which is an essential function of effective emergency management. The City Administration realizes the need for a full-time professional emergency management coordinator who's time is totally devoted to the development of a comprehensive plan that coordinates the emergency operations plans created by each department. Additionally, constant research of the most recent federal or state requirements is essential to assure the accuracy of the City's emergency management plan and the reimbursement of allowable FEMA disaster related costs. While the City Administration has found the need for such a position, due to current fiscal constraints all options are being considered to get assistance in this area.

OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT & BUDGET BACKGROUND:

Not Applicable

BUDGETARY IMPACT:

Not Applicable

CONSEQUENT ACTION:

City staff will continue interaction with County and State agencies to ensure the relevance of the City's emergency plan.

REVIEWED BY AND RECOMMENDATION:

Not applicable

COMMISSION DIRECTION REQUESTED:

No Commission direction is requested at this time.

Reviewed & Approved by:

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