

On June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013 the Lee County Commission will be meeting at 9:00AM. The Fire Chief, Joe Daigle of the Bonita Springs Fire District, has asked that our residents turn-out to show their support for the Fire District to furnish ambulance transport in Bonita Springs and to show their opposition to the current course the County is proceeding on. The County Commission will vote to expand the COPCN of a privately operated ambulance transfer service.

Sounds innocent, but it is not. More than likely, by the end of next year the County will most likely expand the private ambulance company, contracted by Lee Memorial Hospital, to furnish ambulance transport throughout Lee County except for Lehigh Acres and Ft. Myers Beach, both of which have been approved to operate their own fire based ambulance. When Lehigh Acres and Ft. Myers Beach COPCN's come up for renewal in the spring of 2015, it is likely they will not be reapproved. It is also possible that instead of expanding the Lee Memorial Hospital's COPCN the County may choose to simply privatize the existing Lee County EMS service.

The immediate impact on our residents is that the County Commission has increased the ambulance schedule of charges by approximately 19% to 75%, for example prior to the County Commission approved increases in ambulance transport charges Advanced Life Support (ALS) transport was \$600, but is now \$875 a 46% increase! In addition, 7 new items of charge have been added to the AMBULANCE SERVICE TRANSPORT FEE schedule! These new items and the increases are estimated to raise revenues by over \$2 million dollars per year! This will likely result in some residents not calling 911 for a medical emergency because of the increased ambulance charge and fear Medicare or insurance will not cover the increases! By the end of this year, or the beginning of 2015, when Lee Memorial is expanded to provide ambulance transport (or Lee County EMS) is privatized throughout the County, including Bonita Springs, those ambulance crews will more than likely be under pressure to take our residents to Lee Memorial Hospital. You may not be aware that over 85% of the 911 emergency calls are taken to NCH, NCH North, or Physicians Regional Hospital, not Lee Memorial Health Systems.

A large percentage of our residents have established doctor or doctor specialist relationships with Naples and Bonita Springs physicians which is why over 85% of our residents when calling 911 go to a Collier County hospital. Should those residents not be transported to the Collier County facility of their preference, the consequence will likely be that your doctor will not be able to see you at Lee Memorial Hospital. Since most of us using ambulance service choose NCH, NCH North, or Physicians Regional Hospital, this is of serious concern.

More than likely, by the end of this year, to the spring of 2015, Lee County EMS will be nonexistent or privatized or replaced by a privately operated ambulance service operated by Lee Memorial Hospital.

This scenario is absolutely unnecessary! If Lee County Commission had approved the Bonita Springs Fire District's requested COPCN for ambulance transport, Lee County could have moved their 2.5 ambulances to the core area of Lee County to improve service and cut their response times.

As you know, the Bonita Springs Fire District brought a lawsuit against the County for failing to follow their own COPCN Approval Ordinance. At the June 6<sup>th</sup> Public Meeting between Chairman Steve Lohan and Lee County Commissioner Larry Kiker, who were appointed to negotiate the lawsuit settlement, Chairman Lohan stated that Lee County could continue to operate their 2.5 ambulances in Bonita Springs and we would operate 2.5 or 3 ambulances ensuring very good response times. At this meeting, it was agreed by both parties that Lohan and Kiker would commence private negotiations to resolve the lawsuit. At the County Commission Meeting on June 11, 2013, the Commission voted to not permit Larry Kiker to meet privately with Chairman Lohan. Then later the week of June 10<sup>th</sup>, the Commission released agendas for upcoming meetings indicating they intended to reapprove Ambitrans COPCN for privately operated ambulances and interfaculty patient transfer services, as well as increasing the schedule of charges for ambulance transport.

The actions of the County Commission will result in Lee County EMS losing approximately \$2.2 million in ambulance fees to the private ambulance service, Ambitrans. One of the reasons Lee County listed for not approving our requested COPCN for ambulance service was the loss of the approximately \$800,000 (according to Lee County staff) in Bonita Springs rider fees. The County Commission could have let Lee County EMS continue with ambulance transfer service using the ambulances assigned to our Fire District and approved our COPCN for providing 3 ambulances at a significant cost savings.

Please seriously consider going to the June 25<sup>th</sup> County Commission Meeting. I would encourage car pooling. Please forward this invitation to go to this meeting to everyone you know in Bonita Springs. If you have any questions regarding this latest action by County Commission and what is being proposed for County Commission approval on June 25, 2013 Commission Meeting or this invitation, please call Nicole Hornberger, Administrative Coordinator for our Fire District at 949-6200.

Fred Forbes, Bonita East Stakeholder Spokesperson  
Bonita Springs Fire Commissioner