

The merger of Fort Myers Beach Fire Control District (FMBFCD) and Bonita Springs Fire Department (BSFD) would create a savings for the taxpayers of both the Town of Fort Myers Beach and City of Bonita Springs over the long term. Based on the merger between North Naples Fire Department and The Corkscrew Fire Departments, there are duplicate costs that can be combine when merging districts. As well, the purchasing power of a large district can also help reduce costs when updating, building or replacing equipment and facilities.

According to the US Census report from July 1, 2022, Fort Myers Beach has a population of 5,664 and according to the Lee County Property Appraisers Office for 2022, FMBFCD has a n available taxable land value of \$4,441,626,771 to draw revenue from; though for 2023 the taxable property value has dropped to \$3,069,938,448 due to Hurricane Ian's damage. FMBFCD supports 3 fire stations and has a millage rate of 2.9851. The higher millage rate is due to building up the Fund Balance to compensate for hurricane damages. Once this is accounted for, the millage rate should level off to 2.500 based on the *FMBFCD September 30,2021 Basic Financial Statements together with Reports of Independent Auditor*.

According to the US Census report from July 1, 2022, Bonita Springs has a population of 56,370 and according to the Lee County Property Appraisers Office for 2022, BSFD has a taxable land value of \$14,566,334,754 to draw revenue from; and for 2023 the taxable property value of \$14,991,277,753 even after Hurricane Ian's damage. BSFD supports 7 fire stations and has a millage rate of 2.1800 based on the *Bonita Springs Fire Control and Rescue District Basic Financial Statements together with Reports of Independent Auditor for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30,2022*.

At first glance, the millage rate difference would appear to be caused by the property value available to tax versus the facilities and services the different districts provide. Though BSFD has more fire stations, on analysis of the gross numbers the cost per station is 92% versus the cost per station for Fort Myers Beach; this was calculated by dividing the Ad Valorem tax by the number of fire stations and the 8% is \$936,250.88 of the total expenses. This difference could be attributed to the BSFD having more purchasing power as a larger entity than FMBFCD as well as a larger tax base to support each fire station. The merger of these two districts would allow FMBFCD to have a larger presence when needing to purchase and update facilities and equipment.

The larger purchasing power and the merging of duplicate work each district does, would lower the costs associated with the districts, as seen with the Naples and Corkscrew Fire District in Collier County.

There was concern from Firefighters about their seniority and pensions. When the Naples and Corkscrew Districts merged, those firefighters who were on the FRS system where allowed to stay in the FRS System and keep their seniority; those in the 175 plan where allowed to stay in the 175 plan. Currently the BSFD has an account set up with the FRS for the Fire Commissioners. The bill assures Fort Myers Beach will have representation because one member of the board will be required to come from Fort Myers Beach.

References:

1. 2021 Real Property Final Tax Tolls Total, Fort Myers Beach Fire Control Dist., Leepa.org; 10/01/2021
2. 2022 Real Property Final Tax Tolls Total, Fort Myers Beach Fire Control Dist., Leepa.org; 11/03/2022
3. 2023 Real Property Preliminary Tax Tolls Total, Fort Myers Beach Fire Control Dist., Leepa.org; 07/03/2023
4. 2021 Real Property Final Tax Tolls Total, Bonita Springs Fire Dist., Leepa.org; 10/01/2021
5. 2022 Real Property Final Tax Tolls Total, Bonita Springs Fire Dist., Leepa.org; 11/03/2022
6. 2023 Real Property Preliminary Tax Tolls Total, Bonita Springs Fire Dist., Leepa.org; 07/03/2023
7. BONITA SPRINGS FIRE CONTROL AND RESCUE DISTRICT BASIC FINANCIAL STATEMENTS TOGETHER WITH REPORTS OF INDEPENDENT AUDITOR FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED SEPTEMBER 30, 2021, <https://flauditor.gov>, May 9, 2022
8. FORT MYERS BEACH FIRE CONTROL DISTRICT September 30, 2021 BASIC FINANCIAL STATEMENTS TOGETHER WITH REPORTS OF INDEPENDENT AUDITOR, <https://flauditor.gov>, March 4, 2022