



MEMORANDUM

Delray Beach Fire-Rescue Department



TO:	Donald Cooper, City Manager	DATE: 2/19/2016
FROM:		
	Danielle Connor, Fire Chief	
SUBJECT:	Highland Beach ILA – Operational Analysis	

From an Operational perspective, the City fire department has had a relationship with Highland Beach since 1993. Since the inception of this ILA, the City of Delray Beach has grown, and the role of our access to the Highland Beach personnel and apparatus has been a mutually beneficial relationship. The quality and quantity of service delivery has been efficient, response, and responsive. Contractually, this agreement has escalator clauses that have been 5% or the CPI, whichever is greater. In recent years, this relationship became strained when the issue of apparatus replacement was begun in 2010, the subsequent failure of their referendum that fall for a ladder truck replacement, and during the City’s consideration of consolidation with Palm Beach County Fire Rescue (PBCFR). While the City explored consolidation in 2013/14 and again in 2015, negotiations had already begun with Highland Beach to draft a new ILA that transferred the responsibility for apparatus replacement to Delray Beach and the adoption of a full-cost methodology for expenses, as opposed to the aforementioned CPI/5% escalator. Twice these negotiations were halted, per the request of Highland Beach, with the explanation given that they did not want to enter into an ILA with Delray Beach, only to have the services transferred to PBCFR. Further, the Town Manager(s) stated that the Town would look elsewhere for fire services if consolidation was successful. In the past six months, the Town has solicited information from both PBCFR and Boynton Beach for fire services.

Presently, the Highland Beach station functions as one of the six stations that DBFR operates and provides emergency services from. Contractually, DBFR units respond into Highland Beach to provide personnel and apparatus for structure fires, vehicle accidents, hazardous materials emergencies, or for any emergency that may occur while the designated Highland Beach apparatus and personnel are already on a call. Conversely, the Highland Beach apparatus and personnel are deployed into Delray Beach as needed. Operationally, the benefits of the Highland Beach station, apparatus, and personnel are the following:

- As our City has become more developed, more populated, began hosting greater numbers of special events, and has generally become more congested, we have utilized the Highland Beach apparatus when necessary in Delray Beach. Use of this apparatus has enabled us to gap fill our responses or station staffing when Delray Beach units are either in training or responding to emergency calls. On average, the Highland Beach apparatus travels into Delray Beach 35-37 times per month for emergency calls. These units travel into Delray Beach other times for training and zone coverage, as well.

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- Of the City's five fire stations, only one lies east of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW): Fire Station #2 lies just off Atlantic Avenue near A1A. The Highland Beach apparatus and station placement has enabled us to provide backup personnel and apparatus to emergencies in Delray Beach east of the ICW in a timely manner.
- The Highland Beach station is the immediate backup (second due) to the City's second busiest station (Station #3). This zone is one of the most highly developed in the City in recent years.

The South Federal Highway and Linton Boulevard corridors have been developed to the point that travelling these roads (from a Fire and EMS perspective) can be difficult. Delray Beach, as referenced above, utilizes the Highland Beach apparatus an average of 36 times per month for emergency service calls in Delray Beach proper. Looked at another way, this would be over 400 times per year, and over 2,000 times in the next five years. Knowing that we have access to the Highland Beach personnel and apparatus is a definite benefit to our citizens and visitors. Having access to these additional resources not only reduces responses times, but also enhances firefighter safety by the faster arrival of secondary units. The question of Highland Beach's tolerance of the City's usage and reliance on "their" apparatus is a concern. Also of concern, is the City's reliance on Highland Beach's apparatus and personnel to handle the increase in calls in the City.

If this ILA is not approved, we will have to further analyze our current response zones, staffing, and apparatus deployment strategies in both the immediate aftermath of the nonrenewal, as well as the future. This year, our Fire Department has utilized peak level staffing on Rescues 111 and 113 in an attempt to decrease response times, quicken hospital turnaround times, and enhance the availability of a primary unit in each zone for secondary calls. During the past several months since the inception of this staffing model, we have already gathered data to support these initiatives. In order to ensure the continuity of our service, and more importantly, to backup Fire Station #2 as the then-only fire station east of the ICW, Fire Station #3's Rescue 113 would need to immediately be up staffed to three personnel. Also, we have initiated long-term data collection, including call volume, response time data, census changes, and development figures to ascertain the future need of an additional fire station on Federal Highway, South of Linton Boulevard. I am of the opinion that within the next ten years, the call volume, development, increased census on Zone 3, and the overriding demand for firefighter safety will necessitate a satellite station with an additional Rescue truck on South Federal Highway. Geographically, the City's fire stations are located a little less than 3 miles apart, with the most recently-added being Fire Station #5 in the mid 1990's. In order to maintain our service level in the southeast section of Delray Beach, the additional staffing will be an immediate need absent the Highland Beach ILA.

The current ILA with Highland Beach provides funding for 22.5 personnel. In consideration of the demographics of our department, projected retirements and employee turnover, absorption of these personnel could be achieved as follows:

- We currently have 23 employees in the DROP
- We currently have an additional 19 DROP-eligible personnel (have not entered the DROP yet)
- By 9/30/17, we would have 14 of these personnel retire

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- After 9/30/17, the next scheduled retirements are 3/1/18 (1 employee), then 9/1/18 (2 employees)
- We have employees that resign, retire “early” (before the maturation of their DROP), or don’t make probation
- We could potentially have eight (8) “extra employees” which could be used to up-staff other units

Bottom line, is that we would have a minimum of 14 of these 22 positions vacant through retirement by the conclusion of the current ILA, 9/30/17. Using an FTE of 4.2, the eight (8) “extra employees” could then be used to permanently staff R111 and R113 with three personnel.

The issue of whether the City should pursue the renewal of this ILA versus focusing on our own municipal fire department is the primary question. The department is at a critical juncture. In recent years, employee attrition has become problematic. This attrition has been compounded by large volumes of retirements (together, 40 employees have separated from the City in the last 4 years). Succession planning remains a significant issue, as well, with the projected retirements of three (3) Chief Officers, nine (9) Captains, and five (5) Driver Engineers in the next three years. Notably, in addition to the three scheduled Chief Officer retirements, three additional Chief Officers are DROP-eligible and will all retire within the next 6 years. Employee recruitment, retention, training, and development are all areas that will require extensive investment of time and resources in the next five years. In addition, the department will be relocating Fire Station #3 and building a training center within the next 24 months, and developing specifications and purchasing replacement apparatus. Level of service recommendations are being finalized that will increase rescue staffing, and data compilation has begun for the strategic placement of an additional fire station in the next 7-10 years.

As Fire Chief, my recommendation is that the City’s time, focus, and resources be directed to the City’s fire department and its ability to sustain its service delivery now and in the future. As the City has become more popular, populated, and developed, a commensurate call volume has been reflected within the Fire Department. As outlined above, the department is facing some significant strategic goals in the short term, with an eye on future growth and sustainability. Although we have utilized the Highland Beach apparatus and personnel (as permitted by the current ILA) to maintain service levels in the City, our focus should be on our City, our department, and our sustained ability to deliver the emergency service that our residents, visitors, and business owners have come to expect. We have been unsuccessful in securing apparatus replacement from Highland Beach for six years, negotiations have been stalled for long periods of time, and they have sought out replacement fire service from neighboring service providers. Despite a long and otherwise cordial relationship, it is my recommendation that the City redirect its efforts from renewing the ILA with Highland Beach to internal upgrades that will support long term growth and self-reliability.

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