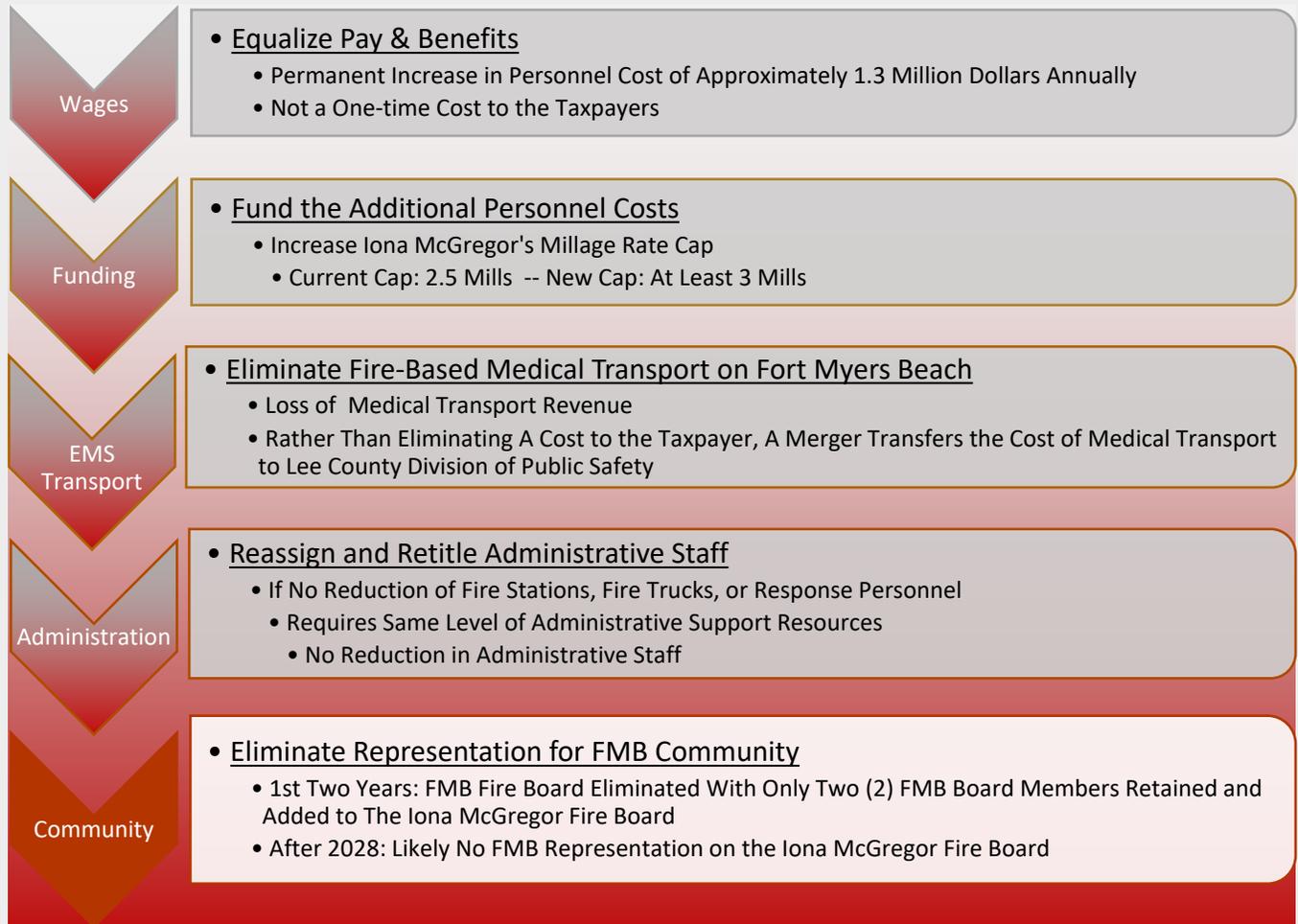




The Iona McGregor & Fort Myers Beach Fire Districts

The Cascading Effects of Merging Districts



The Feasibility of a Merger: Considering the Impacts Likely to Occur

Equalizing Pay and Benefits: To bring parity to the members in each position, FMB employees' wages and benefits would have to increase an average of 11%; a cost of approx. 1.3M. Based on the current property values for the FMB Fire District, the current millage rate of 2.78 mills would have to increase to nearly 3.1 mills. The current Millage Rate cap for the FMB Fire District is 3.00 mills.

If the pay and benefits for FMB members were normalized to match the current Iona McGregor structure, the Iona McGregor community would have to vote to raise their taxes. The current millage cap for Iona McGregor is 2.5 mills and would likely need to increase to at least 3.0 mills to sustain operations.



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Loss of Fire-Based Ambulance Transport Services: Each fire-based ambulance provides 2 cross-trained dual certified firefighter/ paramedics. The replacement ambulances would be from Lee County with single certified, paramedic-only personnel assigned.

Because of Fort Myers Beach's Fire-based ambulances, treatment and care for our patients is continuous from first-contact to delivery to the doctor at the hospital. Each fire-based ambulance also adds two firefighters to the response plan for a structure fire, which may not occur if Lee County EMS provides the medical transport services.

Community Representation: Currently each community is represented by a 5-member board of Fire Commissioners. A consolidated board, as proposed in Representative Botana's current proposed legislation, would contain only two FMB board Members. This reduces the FMB community's voice by 72% in the first two years (2 FMB Members and 5 Iona McGregor Members). Because of the disparity in the number of citizens in each district, the FMB community's voice on the Iona McGregor Fire Board would likely dissolve entirely over time.

Hurricane Ian demonstrated the vast differences geographically between the Fort Myers Beach and Iona McGregor communities as it relates to natural disasters. Although both communities were impacted by the effects of Hurricane Ian, the impact and recovery for each geographical area was radically different. For this reason, Lee County Emergency Management, in conjunction with the Lee County Fire Districts, restructured the countywide "Geodivisions". Geodivisions exist during emergency events to coordinate the common operations of larger geographical parts of the county, such as grouping together the barrier islands. This process allows for the lines of communications to and from the Lee County Emergency Operations Center to be streamlined.

The Beaches Geodivision was made up of the FMB and Iona McGregor Fire Districts. Through experience, it was identified that our two districts didn't typically experience the same impacts during storm events. For example, the need to evacuate and retain shelter inland existed for the barrier islands, where it did not for Iona McGregor because they are situated further away from the coast.



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During Hurricane Ian, the physical damages were radically different, as were the scope of the search & rescue operations conducted in the days following the hurricane.

So as a result of our commonalities, FMB Fire has been reassigned to work with the island fire districts of Sanibel and Captiva where we are now known as the South Islands Geodivision. Iona McGregor was reassigned to the Central Geodivision with their neighboring South Trail Fire District for the same reasons.

Administrative Duties: Mergers save money when you have overlapping services, such as two (2) fire stations situated very close to each other. Since a merger of the FMB and Iona McGregor fire districts would not reduce the number of stations, trucks, or responders required to serve the two communities, the administrative staff required to support these operations would not be reduced either. The total headcount of personnel between the two agencies today is 161, the hypothetical merged district, contemplated in the merger study, utilizes the same headcount. However, many of the administrative staff members between the two agencies would likely see changes to titles and scope of duties, but not a lower workload per person.

Questions for the Public to Consider

- ❖ As a part of merging the two fire districts, would it make sense to balance the pay and benefits of both agencies?
 - If so, would an increase in costs of 1.3 million dollars to normalize pay and benefits represent a prudent use of taxpayer dollars?
 - If so, is it likely that the residents of the two communities would vote for a tax *increase* to facilitate the increased operational costs of a bigger governmental agency?

- ❖ Would losing fire-based medical transport represent a decrease in services to the FMB community?
 - If so, is there a compelling reason for a merger that supersedes this loss of transport services?



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Consultant's Recommendations for FMB Fire

As part of the merger study, the consultants gave their recommendations to each district for enhancing service to their respective communities. Below are the consultant's recommendations for the FMB Fire District to consider, along with updates on the progress of each recommendation.

Management

A-1 Update Current Strategic Plan:

- Status: In progress, to be completed January 2026

A-2 Conduct Regular Staff Meetings:

- Status: Completed: Since filling the Human Resources, Operations Chief, and Training Chief positions, staff meetings are occurring bi-weekly.

A-3 Monthly Operational Reports:

- Status: Training hours and incident response data being provided monthly. The Board is briefed quarterly via the Fire Chief's report.

A-4 Long-range Master Plan:

- Status: Pending

A-5 Succession Plan:

- Status: Pending

Health & Wellness

B-1 Iona McGregor

B-2 Iona McGregor

B-3 FMB Chaplain Program:

- Status: Not started

B-4 Safety Committee:

- Status: Committee was reestablished approximately nine months ago. Quarterly meetings are being conducted per policy.



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Service Delivery & Performance

C-1 NERIS Migration:

- Status: This is a nationwide move to a new incident reporting repository. The transition is mostly done through our incident reporting software vendor, ESO. However, FMB is meeting its timeline obligations.

C-2 Data Outlier Policy:

- Status: Pending

C-3 Policy for Data Review and Quality Control:

- Status: Policy exists and is in review. Processes are being updated to ensure compliance

C-4 Iona McGregor

Life Safety Programs

D-1 Collaboration on Community Risk Reduction:

- Status: Not started

D-2 Iona McGregor

General Collaboration Ideas

E-1 Consider a Joint Training Center:

- Status: Preliminary Discussions Have Started

E-2 Consider Merging Support Functions:

- Status: Not started

E-3 Study the Feasibility of Sharing Support Functions:

- Status: Not Started

E-4 Review Vendor Agreements for Purchasing Power:

- Status: Not Started