

The Melbourne Beach Volunteer Fire Department

A briefing for a better understanding



- Thank everyone for coming out to learn a little bit about your hometown Fire Department.
- Tonight I have Deputy Chief Miller, who is a volunteer and a Melbourne Beach resident with me, as well as a few of our members out in the audience.
- So why are we here? Fire Department leadership and myself have prepared a brief presentation to outline
 - who we are as your Fire Department
 - some challenges that we are currently facing
 - a possible solution
 - And some benefits that this solution could provide you as our residents.
- This is going to be part 1 of 2, and a second meeting will follow to discuss additional options, hard costs, and potential funding sources.
- I think this presentation will answer a lot of questions that you may have, but we have left plenty of time at the end to try to address any questions or concerns that you may have.

Who are we?

- Volunteer Fire Department, established in 1953 by 6 Town residents.
 - 71 years of service provided primarily by volunteers.
- ISO Class 3 rated Department
 - Top 18% of all fire depts in the USA
- Current Department Staffing:
 - 1 Fire Chief (*Paid Full-Time*)
 - 1 Maintenance Technician (*Paid Part-Time*)
 - 35 Volunteers

A group of highly trained & dedicated volunteers who serve and protect our community.



2. Insurance Services Office

- Independent 3rd party auditors that rate a communities risk for certain things including fire protection and loss potential.
- Rating scale 1-10.
- Our class 3 rating means that we are in the top 18% of all Fire Departments in the Country.

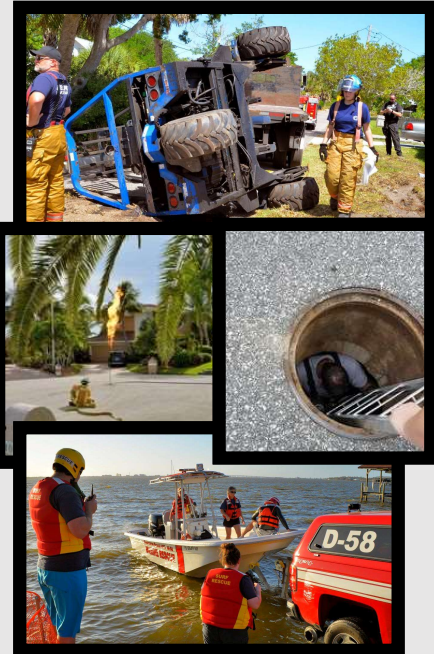
3. State Certified Firefighters: 21 (62% of Department)

- State Certified EMT/Paramedics: 7
- State Certified Fire Instructors: 10
- State Certified Fire Inspectors: 2
- CPR/STB Instructors: 7
- 1 Master Safety Officer Certification
- 2 State Qualified Strike Team Leaders

What do we do?

- Respond to wide variety of emergency incidents within the Town of Melbourne Beach and provide aid to surrounding communities 24/7/365.
- Assist the community with emergency preparedness.
- Write our own grants
- Train/Certify our own Members

More than just put out fires!



1. All types of Fires
 - Vehicle Accidents
 - Hazardous Material Incidents
 - Water Rescues (Ocean & River)
 - Electrical Hazards
 - Alarm investigations
 - Natural Disasters
 - Public Assists (Lock outs, water problems, good intent calls)
 - Assist Police and other governmental agencies
 - Public Assists (Lock outs, water problems, good intent calls)
2. Fire code enforcement, commercial & vacation rental fire inspections, teaching community courses (CPR, Stop the Bleed, Fire Safety, etc.), support Fire Drills at Gemini Elementary.
3. Awarded over \$450,000 in Grant Funding since 1999.
 - Critical items such as SCBAs and structural firefighter turnout gear.
4. 10 State Certified Fire Instructors

How are we different?

- Staffed primarily by volunteers.
 - Most Departments in the area rely fully on career (paid) staff members.
 - 50% of our members are tax paying residents of the Town of Melbourne Beach.
 - Uniquely talented - highly skilled
- Non-staffed Fire Station
- Train other municipalities volunteer firefighters and law enforcement officers.
- Community Oriented – Community Involved
 - Volunteer Firefighters Association
 - Community Events
 - Assists the residents w/ non-emergency requests
 - Assists other Town departments



1. Retired Air Force Brigadier General, Lt. Colonel, Command Chief Master Sargent
 - Oil Tanker Captain with a Master Unlimited License
 - Ret. Safety Official of record for 2 of the major aerospace companies who oversaw 6 space launch complexes
 - Multiple CEOs of multi-million dollar companies
 - Electricians
 - College Professors
 - Emergency Room Trauma Nurses and Nurse Practitioners
3. Our own Police Department as well as 2 other municipalities firefighters and 1 other municipalities police officers.
4. Donated over \$100,000 to the Town in 2024.
 - Not for profit 501-c-3 that provides donations and benefits to the Fire Department include things such as:
 - Water Rescue Equipment such as New water rescue boat, jet ski, ATV
 - Squad 58 mini-pumper & Utility vehicle
 - Fitness equipment for Public Safety exercise facility
 - Firefighter mental health benefit

- Volunteer scholarships for further education
- Community Safety Initiatives such as the go-bucket program where we were the 3rd community in the State of Florida to be prepared and have hostile event supplies, including severe bleeding control equipment in place in every classroom and place of community congregation.
- Community Events
 - Halloween Haunted House
 - Children's Christmas Parade
 - Santa Run on Christmas Eve
 - Fourth of July in the Park
 - Fire Prevention Week at Public and Private Schools
 - Community CPR & Stop the Bleed classes
 - Boy Scout Merit Badge classes
- Assist elderly with changing smoke detector batteries and other misc. requests (moving heavy items, fence repair after hurricanes, boarding up houses before hurricanes)
- Ex. Fire Dept. staff designed and helped implement Town projects such as the new 33ft Christmas tree and sun shades in the park.
 - After hurricanes, Fire Department volunteers stay and assist public works with clearing roadways
 - As well as Building Department with damage assessments after the hurricanes.

Why should you care?

- The Volunteer Fire Department is a large part of what makes Melbourne Beach feel like Melbourne Beach.
- Volunteers from the community are invested in the community and provide personalized service to our residents and visitors.
- We save the Town money.

Professional service with a small-town feel.



1. Small Town Events like

- Longest Running Christmas Parade in Brevard County.
- Christmas Eve Santa Run – Have heard from multiple residents that this is one of the main reasons they moved to Melbourne Beach.
- Provide impromptu tours when children come over from the park,
- Facilitate special requests such as birthday party visits (age 1 – 100)
- Every year, the Fire Department visits every single classroom at both public and private schools in Melbourne Beach so that every students can meet the firefighters and learn not only about fire safety, but also about voluntarism and civic pride.

2. The Volunteer Fire Department allows our residents to continue the time honored tradition of neighbors helping neighbors in their time of need.

- Many times firefighters in paid departments don't live in the community they serve, in contrast many of our volunteers are tax paying residents that have a vested interest in keeping this Town the amazing place that it is, and keeping their taxes down.

What does the community expect when they dial 9-1-1?

- The 3 Big Expectations:
 - Show up with the Proper Equipment
 - Show up with the Proper Staffing
 - Knowledgeable & trained supervisors to lead the incident.
 - Manpower trained to accomplish the tasks.
 - Guaranteed (100% of the time) quick response that provides both items above.



- Famous quote from Chief Eversole of the Chicago FD that talks about community expectations, and it basically says “The Chicago Fire Department department responds to 1000 calls every day. Do you know how many of the calls the public expects perfection on? 1000. Nobody calls the fire department and says, 'Send me two unskilled firemen in a pickup truck.' In three minutes they want five brain-surgeon decathlon champions to come and solve all their problems.”
- While we are not the same size as Chicago, and our call volume is not the same, I believe our residents expect, and deserve the same thing when they are having an emergency and call 9-1-1. They don't care if we are volunteer or paid, they want someone to highly trained and skilled to teleport there and fix their problem.
- How quick is quick enough? And why is a guaranteed quick response important?
 - For medical emergencies, seconds count - for example, in Stroke or Cardiac arrest, time translates to brain either saved or damaged.
 - What about for Fires?
 - We have the same amount of fires as we always have (actually less now than 71 years ago when we started)
 - Reality is, fires are different now – burn up to 8x faster, reach hotter temperatures, and are grow 50% larger before getting controlled than

ever before

- Why? In large part due to new synthetic materials, new technology such as lithium-ion batteries, and new construction techniques used to save money.
- This is part of why even though we have the same amount of volunteers that we always have, its slowly becoming insufficient, as we now have less time to rescue victims, and stop fires before they get out of control.

Why is there an issue now?

- Nationwide & local Issues brought up in 2019 that have continued to trend in a negative direction:
 - Changes in demographics within our Town.
 - Long-time volunteers slowly retiring, many new volunteers not interested in serving a full “20-year career” as they used to.
- Changes in local partnership with the Town of Indialantic.



1. Nationwide issues that have gradually effected us over time such what we just discussed as well as a some other issues such as
 - General decline in volunteerism across the US
 - The demands of work and home life limit available time.
 - A diminishing number of people interested in serving in areas public safety.
 - Firefighting is a dangerous, dirty, and physical job.
 - Demographics within our own Town changing
 - Increased property values making local homeownership harder
 - Increased # of short term rentals = more transient visitors and less permanent residents.
 - Town residents aren't as willing to volunteer as they were in the past. – Used to be required to live or work within 2 miles of Town to volunteer.
 - Volunteerism isn't forever, people come and go. Those who were once very active eventually slowing down.
 - 25% of our volunteers have over 20 years in the Fire Service.
 - Volunteers more reluctant to be officers
 - Don't want the added responsibility, time commitment, paperwork, compliance requirements, and training.
2. Cancellation of Automatic Aid Agreement in August of last year.

- We provided them with heavy volunteer manpower along with some unique equipment and other fringe benefits, and they provided us with a quick guaranteed response.
- New leadership believed that the partnership was not equitable as they were sending us paid firefighters, which costs their tax payers more
- Our view was that while the partnership was not equal, we believed it was fair, as we provided each other with different things that the other did not.

Why cant we just continue on the way we are?

- The current model is not sustainable.
- Serving as a Volunteer Firefighter is already a big ask.



- A guaranteed, quick (5 minutes or less) response is critical to providing an adequate level of protection and service to our residents.
 - We cant guarantee this with volunteers alone.
 - The only way would be to have volunteers staff the station 24/7, which is an unreasonable ask, especially considering all that they already do and all the time they already give.
 - Minimum of 100hrs per year of ongoing training, in addition to responding to emergency incidents.
- What if we got more in town volunteers, would that fix the issue?
 - It would certainly help, but even if we had 20 more in-town resident volunteers today, it would not fix the current issue of prolonged response times and the shortage of volunteers that poses both the skills and knowledge required to fill a leadership/supervisory role within our organization.
 - In addition, it takes more than a full year of training to become certified.

Here is the Solution

- Transition to a combination style Department and supplement the volunteers with a few paid staff.



This is the cheapest and best solution that we know to fix the problems and leave Melbourne Beach in control of their future.



How would this change benefit the Town?

- Guarantees a fast response from your own, in town, dedicated Melbourne Beach Fire/EMS staff.
- Increased level of service for town residents
 - Addition of EMS - (150 calls a year to approx. 800 calls a year)
 - Allows for possibility of implementing a Community Paramedicine program
- Ensures an on-site supervisor is available 24/7 to manage incidents, direct volunteers, and manage in-station shifts.
- Frees up Towns police officers to focus on law enforcement.
- Provides a path to return to Automatic Aid with Indialantic Fire Department and a allows for a possible partnership with BCFR.

Fire & EMS at the speed of a paid department, with the manpower and community involvement of a volunteer department.



2. Community Para-medicine provides in-home care, safety assessments, and education with the goal of reducing the need for emergency services, reducing visits to the emergency, and decreasing falls, and improving continuity of care.
3. Would expand our pool of potential volunteers and allow those that live further away to come and serve our community.
4. Fire Department will be able to respond to every EMS call and free up Law Enforcement to handle police matters and not be placed in a position to decide whether to respond to the medical incident or the law enforcement incident that happens at the same time.

Why not just outsource it?

- More money for less service
- Community Control
- Once it's gone, it's gone forever



1. The estimate for the County to take over fire protection of Melbourne Beach in 2016 was nearly 1 Million dollars.
 - The cost of everything has gone up, and it will most likely be significantly higher today,
 - The Town Manager has already reached out for an updated quote.
- If our residents are going to pay additional money, it should increase every aspect of the service they get from their Fire Department, not just increase some areas, while decreasing others.
2. My belief, and from what I have seen over my 19 years serving this community, is that Melbourne Beach residents are passionate about this Town, they cherish its longstanding history, and ultimately they want to be able to control the future and destiny of their community.
 - Anytime you outsource a service, you loose oversight and control.
 - This doesn't just tie your hands when it comes to the cost you are assessed for the service, but it also eliminates your ability as a Town to have any control over the policies and how that service operates and conducts business.
 - This is especially true if there is only one contractor to choose from; if you have no other option, you are essentially at their mercy. If they decide to increase their fees and triple the cost the 2nd year, you have no choice but to pay it.

What's Next?

- The Fire Department & Town Management will continue to investigate all potential options, costs, and funding sources. At the conclusion, another Town meeting will be held to present findings. (Estimated Time: April 2025)
- A Town Commission Meeting to vote on how to proceed.



- Possibility of SAFER grant.

Questions?



Volunteers are not paid - Not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.

