

BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

Board Meeting Date: 12/10/25

(Select All that Apply)

Decision Making Agenda Item

Discussion Purposes Only Agenda Item

Walk On Agenda Item

SUBJECT:

Presentation of Report Summary by J. Angle Group, LLC: Fire District Merger Feasibility Study between Fort Myers Beach Fire District and Iona-McGregor Fire Protection and Rescue Service District

PERSON(S) MAKING SUBMITTAL OF AGENDA ITEM:

J. Angle Group, LLC

BACKGROUND/DETAIL OF AGENDA ITEM:

Presentation of Report Summary by J. Angle Group, LLC: Fire District Merger Feasibility Study between Fort Myers Beach Fire District and Iona-McGregor Fire Protection and Rescue Service District

BUDGET IMPACT: Yes / No / Unknown – If Yes, how much? From where?

No budget impact.

REQUESTED BOARD ACTION:

ACTUAL BOARD ACTION:



Fort Myers Beach
FIRE DISTRICT



Iona-McGregor
FIRE DISTRICT

Feasibility Study **FIRE DISTRICT MERGER**

December 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Executive Summary

As described in the Request for Qualifications, the purpose of the study is to determine whether a merger of the two districts would be operationally and financially beneficial to the taxpayers of both the Fort Myers Beach and the Iona-McGregor Fire Control Districts. The districts wanted to assess the feasibility of consolidating the two agencies into one new independent special fire district. It is within this framework that this study was conducted.

From an operational perspective, the J. Angle Group, LLC, (JAG) found no compelling reasons to merge the two districts into a single new independent fire district. Based on JAG team findings, some recommendations were made to increase collaboration between the two districts; however, JAG did not find that a merger would provide any significant operational benefits. When considering the industry-standard travel time for first-arriving units of four (4) minutes, the critical response force needed for various emergencies, and a 1.5-mile travel distance, the current fire station locations and staffing levels are appropriate. Units and staffing would not change in a merged organization.

Two operational concerns mentioned in feedback across both internal and external surveys were the loss of the CFAI fire accreditation that IMFD currently holds and the potential loss of EMS transport by FMBFD.

From a financial perspective, there were again no compelling reasons to recommend a merger. JAG projected—with various assumptions—revenue and expenses for a notional merged organization using existing personnel and service delivery levels. It was found that the merged district would experience additional costs and therefore not be beneficial. Further, although FMBFD taxpayers would experience similar millage rates to those forecast in the status quo model, IMFD taxpayers would likely see increases in millage of up to 0.5 mills over the next five years, compared to the status quo model.

The internal and external feedback results in this document also provide valuable insights into the perspectives shared by the respondents. Again, the feedback does not point to a compelling desire to merge the districts.

Like many fire service organizations, FMBFD and IMFD continually improve and evolve their operations. This report provides a snapshot of FMBFD and IMFD as of the time the information was gathered—late 2024 and early 2025. It was not possible to capture all changes that may have been made during the report's development.

Overview of the Fire Districts

Fort Myers Beach Fire Control District

Established in 1949, FMBFD serves a population of approximately 7,573 within a five-square-mile area. The district is governed by an elected five-member Board of Fire Commissioners and has adopted a 2.80-mill ad valorem levy for FY25 on properties located in the district. FMBFD is an all-hazards fire district providing traditional fire suppression, medical first response (MFR), and ground emergency medical transport (GEMT) (ambulance) service at the advanced life support (ALS) level.

FMBFD operates three fire stations (one of which is being rebuilt following damage sustained during Hurricane Ian in 2022) and six frontline response apparatus, including cross-staffed units, with EMS resources deployed from all district fire stations. FMBFD employs 15 administrative and support staff and about 48 operational staff. FMBFD currently has an Insurance Services Office (ISO®) Public Protection Classification (PPC) of Class 2.

Iona-McGregor Fire Protection & Rescue Services District

Established in 1975, IMFD serves a population of approximately 63,332 within a 39-square-mile area. The district is also governed by an elected five-member Board of Fire Commissioners and has adopted a levy ad valorem tax of 2.50 mills on properties located in the district for FY25. IMFD is also an all-hazards fire district providing traditional fire protection, wildland firefighting, and ALS-level medical first response. Unlike FMBFD, IMFD does not provide GEMT service—patient transport is handled by the Lee County Division of Emergency Medical Services (LCEMS).

IMFD operates five fire stations (two of which are currently under repair due to storm damage suffered during Hurricane Ian in 2022, with an expected completion date in mid-2025) and nine (9) frontline response apparatus, including cross-staffed units, with EMS resources deployed from all district fire stations.

IMFD employs 17 administrative and support staff and 81 operational staff. IMFD currently has an Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating Public Protection Classification (PPC) of Class 2 and is accredited by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI).

Key Findings

- **Demographics and Community Impact:** In total, FMBFD and IMFD serve a population of over 70,000. Both districts serve predominantly older populations, with a significant share aged 65 and older in Lee County, Florida. Hurricane Ian in 2022 had a significant impact on the population and infrastructure of both FMBFD and IMFD.
- **Organizational Structure:** Both districts have well-defined governance structures and operational frameworks. FMBFD and IMFD have similar organizational hierarchies, with Fire Chiefs overseeing various divisions and departments. Together, the districts employ 32 administrative and support staff and 129 operational staff.
- **Service Delivery and Performance:** Both districts provide comprehensive fire suppression, emergency medical services (EMS), and specialized rescue operations through participation with Urban Search & Rescue (USAR) Task Force 6. Together, the districts deploy 15 frontline apparatus, staffed by 36 personnel from eight fire stations, meeting the minimum operational staffing requirement. FMBFD and IMFD have robust aid agreements with neighboring districts and departments to enhance service delivery.
- **Financial Overview:** The primary revenue source for both districts is ad valorem taxes. FMBFD and IMFD have experienced steady revenue growth over the past five years, with significant capital investments in infrastructure and equipment. FMBFD's overall revenue has increased by 35% from FY19 through FY23, with an average annual increase of 7.9%. During this same period, IMFD's revenue has increased approximately 6.3% annually. As of FY24, both districts continued to experience the negative financial impacts of Hurricane Ian.
- **Critical Issues and Challenges:** Key challenges include maintaining revenue consistency, enhancing professional development, addressing staffing shortages, and managing the impact of natural disasters. Specifically, FMBFD is challenged with constructing facilities, including rebuilding a fire station destroyed by Hurricane Ian, and maintaining its GEMT program. IMFD has a strong desire to maintain its positive culture and labor-management relationship while remaining an accredited agency.

General Partnering Options

Based on the comprehensive analysis of FMBFD and IMFD, JAG was able to evaluate the potential opportunities for shared service delivery between the two fire districts in the region. This can range from a simple, fundamental sharing of resources and programs to a legal merger of two agencies into a single organization, which may take multiple forms.

The following options have been identified as potentially feasible, each with its advantages and disadvantages, which are explained in detail in the “General Partnering Strategies & Merger Options” section of this report.

- **Maintain Status Quo (Autonomy):** Both districts continue to operate independently, focusing on internal improvements and collaboration through interlocal agreements.
- **Interlocal Agreements to Collaborate:** Enhance collaboration between FMBFD and IMFD by formalizing interlocal agreements, sharing resources, and jointly developing training programs.
- **Legal Merger:** Assess the feasibility of a legal merger between FMBFD and IMFD to establish a unified fire district with a single millage rate. This option would require careful planning, stakeholder engagement, and legislative approval.

General Recommendations

JAG has provided the following recommendations based on several specific findings. Each finding is explained in detail in the “General Recommendations” section of this report.

Management Components

- **Recommendation A-1:** FMBFD and IMFD should prepare for and update their current Strategic Plans.
- **Recommendation A-2:** FMBFD should conduct regularly scheduled staff meetings with the administrative staff.
- **Recommendation A-3:** FMBFD should provide monthly operational reports.
- **Recommendation A-4:** FMBFD and IMFD should consider developing and adopting Long-Range Master Plans.
- **Recommendation A-5:** FMBFD should develop and adopt a Succession Plan.

Health, Wellness, & Safety

- **Recommendation B-1:** IMFD should develop a Risk Management Plan.
- **Recommendation B-2:** IMFD should install apparatus-mounted filtration systems on diesel apparatus.
- **Recommendation B-3:** FMBFD should consider implementing a Chaplain Program.
- **Recommendation B-4:** FMBFD should ensure that safety committee meetings are regularly scheduled.

Service Delivery & Performance (Data Analysis)

- **Recommendation C-1:** FMBFD and IMFD should continue preparing for the implementation of the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS).
- **Recommendation C-2:** FMBFD and IMFD should consider developing a Data Outlier Management Policy to help ensure the accuracy of incident records.
- **Recommendation C-3:** As part of implementing NERIS, FMBFD and IMFD should adopt a system and written policy for incident data review and quality improvement.
- **Recommendation C-4:** IMFD should review the use of NFIRS Incident Type Code 611, dispatched and canceled en route code (and/or the NERIS equivalent).

Life Safety Programs

- **Recommendation D-1:** FMBFD and IMFD should consider closer collaboration between the two districts regarding community risk reduction.
- **Recommendation D-2:** IMFD should consider reinstating plan reviews from Lee County within the district.

Collaboration Considerations

As mentioned, a variety of cooperation options can be pursued between the two fire districts, each with its own financial implications. Quantifying those is difficult, if not impossible, given the unknowns surrounding their structures. Based on this, JAG has made several recommendations regarding interlocal agreements for collaboration. Each is explained in detail in the “Collaboration Considerations” section of this report.

- **Recommendation E-1:** FMBFD and IMFD should study the possibility of a joint training center.
- **Recommendation E-2:** FMBFD and IMFD should explore merging administrative support functions.
- **Recommendation E-3:** FMBFD and IMFD should study the possibility of shared support functions.
- **Recommendation E-4:** FMBFD and IMFD should review agreements with third-party vendors to identify opportunities for consolidation.

Financial Impact of the Recommendations

Finally, JAG utilized all historical data and analysis to evaluate the financial implications of maintaining the status quo versus pursuing a complete merger between FMBFD and IMFD. The analysis focuses on two end-member models: the status quo (two separate districts) and a complete merger (one district) with a common millage rate. Each option is explained in detail in the “Financial Impact of the Recommendations” section of this report.

Status Quo Model: Fort Myers Beach Fire District

- **Revenue Assumptions:** The primary funding source is ad valorem revenue. The forecast model accounts for Hurricane Ian’s impact and projects future trends based on historical data. The total taxable value is expected to increase significantly due to the replacement of older properties with higher-value multi-family occupancies.
- **Expense Assumptions:** Personnel services are a significant recurring expenditure, with an assumed annual increase of 3.5%. Operating expenses are projected to increase at an annual rate of 6.2%. Debt service continues through FY27.
- **Fund Balance Assumptions:** The model allocates the total fund balance based on the timing of capital expenditures and district policy. The forecast indicates a decline in the fund balance below the target in FY27, with recovery by FY30.

Status Quo Model: Iona-McGregor Fire District

- **Revenue Assumptions:** Like FMBFD, the primary funding source is ad valorem revenue. The forecast model projects an increase in total taxable value, with adjustments based on state estimates and historical trends.
- **Expense Assumptions:** Personnel services are projected to increase by 3.5% annually. Operating expenses are expected to rise at an annual rate of 7.5%. The forecast includes Capital Improvement Plan expenditures.
- **Fund Balance Assumptions:** The model shows a decline in the fund balance below the district's reserve goal in FY27–28, with recovery expected by FY29.

Consolidated Single District Model

- **Revenue Assumptions:** Combines the taxable values and other revenues of both districts. The forecast model excludes ambulance revenue, assuming Lee County would not grant a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity for ambulance service to the successor district.
- **Expense Assumptions:** Personnel costs are based on the higher average pay and benefits for each position, reflecting the prevailing market rates. Operating expenses are initially higher due to merger-related costs but are expected to decrease in subsequent years.
- **Fund Balance Assumptions:** The combined model assumes the total fund balances of both districts are carried forward. The forecast indicates that the total fund balance will approach the target by FY30.

Tax Impact & Projections of a Legal Merger

- **FMBFD:** It is projected that FMBFD would see a slight reduction in the tax rate in the first, fourth, and fifth years of a complete merger.
- **IMFD:** The tax rate is projected to increase annually throughout the forecast period compared to the current status quo.