

North Fort Myers Fire Control and Rescue District FAQs

What is the purpose of this flyer?

To inform the residents of North Fort Myers who we are, what we do, and to explain that there is a real and present public necessity to increase our capped millage rate from 2.50 to 3.50.

Who are we?

Keeping in mind there are 20 separate fire departments in Lee County, North Fort Myers Fire Control and Rescue District (NFMFD) was established in 1955 under State Legislation. By doing this, NFMFD was specifically chartered by the voters of North Fort Myers to protect and serve the community as an independent district. With this, it was determined that NFMFD would be funded using ad valorem methodology. Since then, community growth and increased call volume demanded that NFMFD expand operations. We eventually built 4 fire stations, increased our staff to 68 career personnel, and purchased additional emergency response vehicles. But in 2008, the recession hit and began to adversely affect our budget; eventually to the point where we were forced to significantly downsize. Yet, despite this, we have remained committed to our mission diligently serving our citizens as public safety professionals.

What services do we provide?

Today, our area of protection covers a 36-square mile zone in North Fort Myers that is stretched north to the Charlotte county line; east to the railroad tracks on Bayshore Road; south to the banks of the Caloosahatchee River, and west to the boundaries of City of Cape Coral. Currently, we provide our services through a staff of 50 career members and 10-18 internship firefighters. Via 3 fire stations, we provide emergency response services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our services include: fire suppression, rescue, and BLS services; we also respond to non-emergency incidents such as patient lift assists and offer important community risk reduction programs such as fire and life safety education to our youth and at risk residents of our community. We are also proud of our Prevention Division that protects our community through inspections and code enforcement.

How is NFMFD currently funded?

Today, NFMFD remains almost exclusively funded by ad valorem property taxes at a capped millage rate of 2.50 meaning \$2.50 goes towards every \$1000.00 of the assessed value of your property. For example, a home assessed at \$100,000 at a 2.50 millage would equal \$250.00 in taxes annually.

How long has the District been capped at the current millage rate of 2.5?

NFMFD has had this rate for 13 years. In November 2002, we went to the voters in North Fort Myers to increase the millage from 2.0 to 2.50 and successfully won the vote.

Having lost revenues, how did NFMFD survive the recession?

We downsized and used our reserve accounts. We were highly conservative with the taxpayers' dollar and made major internal concessions to reduce operating costs. These cuts included:

1. Permanently closing the main fire station on Willis Road
2. Eliminating 12 firefighter positions
3. Eliminating administrative positions including:
 - The Public Education Officer position
 - The Fire Investigator position
 - One Fire Inspector Position
 - The Training Health and Safety Officer position
 - Two Secretary positions
4. Selling first response vehicles and apparatus
5. Reducing overtime and comp time for personnel
6. Reduction in benefits and no employee raises since 2008
7. Significantly reducing training and education budgets

We made these cuts over a period of time and it was our hope that ad valorem would rebound to the extent that it would support us. But this has not been the case. Yes, property values over the last few years have been rising, but it hasn't been fast enough, and still not enough ad valorem revenues are coming in to support our operations.

Why is it important to increase the millage rate from 2.5mils to 3.5 mills?

First, we need financial stability without the threat of having to cut back even further. We are concerned about the safety of our personnel when performing hazardous operations such structure fires, wildland fires, and vehicle rescue and extrication. By maintaining the staffing of crews, hazardous operations are safer and much more efficient. Plus, by maintaining staff, we keep emergency response vehicles on the street.

Second, we need financial stability to plan for the future of a growing North Fort Myers. Over the years, our call volume has continued to trend upwards. In 2014, we responded to 10,288 calls, the highest in the history of our department. Having closed a fire station and eliminated first responder positions, community needs have required our trucks and personnel to run more calls with less. Age and wear-and-tear has dictated the need for new fire engines and the same applies to equipment and tools that need to be updated. It would also be very beneficial to the department and community to reinstate some of the positions that were eliminated in the past. By getting the millage increase, it would help us achieve these important goals that will carry us into the future.

How would this new millage proposal affect you?

If the current millage rate of 2.50 were to increase to 3.50, \$3.50 (instead of \$2.50) would go to every \$1000.00 of the assessed value of your property. A home assessed at \$100,000 at a 3.50 mill would equate to \$350.00 in taxes (this would be a \$100.00 annual increase).