

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## FIRE-RESCUE SERVICES ELEMENT

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<b>I. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1-FR</b>
A. Purpose .....	1-FR
B. Assessments and Conclusions.....	1-FR
<b>II. GOAL, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES .....</b>	<b>4-FR</b>
<b>GOAL 1: EFFECTIVE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES .....</b>	<b>4-FR</b>
Objective 1.1 System Evaluation.....	4-FR
Objective 1.2 Level of Service: Emergency Response .....	4-FR
Objective 1.3 Level of Service: Non-Emergency Response .....	5-FR
Objective 1.4 Intergovernmental/Inter-Agency Cooperation .....	6-FR
Objective 1.5 Alternative Funding .....	7-FR

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# FIRE-RESCUE SERVICES ELEMENT

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Purpose

The Fire-Rescue Services Element is an optional Element created by the Board of County Commissioners in an effort to deal with increasing service demands in a comprehensive and organized approach. This Element develops levels of service for both emergency and non-emergency functions of the Fire-Rescue Department and ensures the consistent provision of these services to current residents and future populations. This Element also identifies the auxiliary and support activities necessary to maintain the provision of Fire-Rescue Service. The Element further develops funding alternatives for the support of these activities and ongoing analysis to ensure the most efficient and cost-effective approach for providing these services.

### B. Assessments and Conclusions

The ability to deliver sufficient personnel and equipment to the site of a fire or emergency medical incident is the key factor in minimizing the loss of life and reducing property damage. The efforts of Fire-Rescue personnel are directed toward stabilizing and possibly reversing such damage.

Two factors directly affect this ability. One is the travel distance required to get to the site, and the other is the availability of personnel and equipment to respond. The current objective is to locate fire stations in a manner that achieves an average five-minute travel time. With the current density of development, this can be achieved by distributing fire stations at five-mile intervals. This provides a 2.5 road-mile coverage area from each station and covers the majority of the service area with minimal zone overlap. The establishment of this service threshold creates, however, a two-tier Level of Service provided to the urban and rural areas of the County. In the sparsely populated zones, the generation of alarms is insufficient to necessitate locating stations within a 2.5 road-miles of all points. As a result travel times to these remote areas will be higher than is standard. As these areas become more densely developed and begin to generate alarm activity that meets the criteria for new station construction (Objective 2, Policy 2-b), then additional facilities will be constructed.

While travel distance is a key ingredient in the placement of fire facilities, it is not the only component in response time - as experienced by the citizens served. There are two other components that must be managed efficiently in order to mitigate emergencies in a timely manner. They are dispatch handling time and turnout time. Together with travel time, these three elements capture the amount of time between the citizen dialing 9-1-1 and emergency units arriving on the scene to initiate intervention techniques.

**Service Population:** Fire Rescue's service population in 2019 was 912,396. With continued population growth expected and the maturing population, the demand for emergency fire and rescue services is expected to continue to increase in the years to come.

**Staffing:** Because fire or medical emergencies occur at all hours, emergency personnel must be available on a 24-hour basis. As a result of this, the fire service utilizes a platooning system. This arrangement provides for personnel to be on duty for a continuous 24-hour period and then be relieved by another. In addition, each battalion has one supervisory personnel who works a 40-hour week schedule and responds to emergency incidents on an "on-call" basis. "Daily Firefighting Strength" in 2019 was 295. This is the actual number of personnel available for emergency response throughout the respective battalions. In-service Emergency Response minimum staffing was revised in 2020 to ensure that Fire Pumper and Rescue Units have the appropriate number of personnel.

**Deployment:** The deployment of personnel is accomplished through the use of several alternative strategies intended to contain costs and improve efficiency. While some fire stations are still staffed with 3-person engine companies and two-person rescue companies, some facilities may have one group of employees performing several functions. For example, "ALS Engines" perform pumper operations as well as advanced life support emergency medical services, and Aerials incorporate ladder capabilities along with pumper operations. In some cases, two separate vehicles are housed at the station and the personnel determine which apparatus is more appropriate to respond to the scene, depending on the nature of the call. These "combination" or "either/or" stations are typically in areas with relatively low alarm activity. This shift in philosophy provides more units with less personnel who perform multiple functions. In all, the department operates 150 first-line emergency response vehicles. The staffing enhancements have been dedicated in memoriam to PBCFR Retiree Driver Operator Ron Jarriel, a fierce proponent and advocate of improving fire rescue services.

**Non-Emergency Services:** Fire prevention, vehicle maintenance, dispatch and training continue to provide viable functions in support of the department's goal to reduce fire loss and injuries. Performance is monitored on a monthly basis to ensure productivity levels are maintained. While very few staff people have been added to these functions, work practices have been revised to allow the department to keep pace with growth. These functions will most likely require additional staff as well as continued implementation of innovative approaches to handle the increased workload expected in the years to come.

**Intergovernmental/Inter-Agency Cooperation:** Palm Beach County now has numerous interlocal agreements with local fire departments, for both mutual aid and automatic aid (closest response). In addition to the collaborative efforts to improve emergency response, fire service providers have joined together to conduct firefighter standards training; share data and reporting technology; share training and video packages, combine dispatching functions; implement a unified Incident Command System; explore regional delivery of special operations, hazardous materials mitigation services; and co-locate employees in another agency's fire station. In the delivery of EMS service, Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue is providing first response for treatment of medical emergencies as well as providing ALS and BLS transport, and the private ambulance providers are handling subscription BLS, non-emergency, and inter-facility transport services.

**Funding:** Since the implementation of the 1989 Comprehensive Plan, Palm Beach County has adopted several additional funding sources for fire-rescue services. Impact fees were implemented in 1990, Advance Life Support Transport services in March, 1995, and Basic Life Support Transport fees throughout the County in January 2011. Other new sources of revenue include: false alarm fees, fire inspection fees, and hydrant rental fees.

## **FUTURE CONDITIONS**

The future demand for fire-rescue services will be driven by alarm activity, population concentrations, and the density of development, all of which necessitate emergency and non-emergency functions. The distribution of future fire-rescue facilities will be in response to new demand and shifting demand. New demand is basically a result of additional population moving into the service area or the expansion of the service area into those areas currently not serviced by the County. Shifting demand is caused by a loss of service areas either through annexation or migration of populations from one part of the service zone to another. New demand may require an increase in facilities and personnel while shifting demand may necessitate the relocation of existing facilities or the reduction in service levels and personnel. In addition, as emergency personnel and facilities are expanded, those support functions must also increase.

The strategic distribution of fire-rescue facilities is an important factor in maintaining response time standards as demand increases. However, staffing and deployment also contribute to the department's overall service levels. While new demand and shifting demand will ultimately lead to the need for additional personnel and resources, the department will continue to utilize alternative deployment and staffing strategies such as utilization of single units to perform multiple functions (e.g. Aerials and ALS Engines) wherever efficiencies can be accomplished. Reallocating resources during peak time periods and reviewing other system status management methods have contributed to the department's ability to maintain response times. As the county becomes even more densely populated, Fire-Rescue will continue to review these, as well as other similar efforts, for possible adaptability in Palm Beach County in order to provide a quality, cost-effective level of service to the citizens of this community.

## II. GOAL, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

### GOAL 1 EFFECTIVE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

It is the **GOAL** of Palm Beach County to provide an effective program of emergency fire and rescue services with a comprehensive fire prevention program that is responsive to the desires, needs and economic capacity of the community.

#### OBJECTIVE 1.1 System Evaluation

Palm Beach County shall continuously evaluate the development and performance of its fire-rescue system network.

**Policy 1.1-a:** The Fire-Rescue Advisory Board shall provide to the Board of County Commissioners an annual evaluation of the Fire Rescue Department and a recommendation on budget proposals.

**Policy 1.1-b:** *Deleted in Round 15-1*

**Policy 1.1-c:** The County shall update future station location studies, staffing needs, and equipment deployment on an annual basis to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Resource and deployment strategies will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Monthly review of travel times;
- Quarterly trend analysis and station response patterns,
- Quarterly review of performance measure data utilized in annual budgetary process, and
- Periodic evaluation of alarm activity to determine appropriate staffing and equipment allocations.

#### OBJECTIVE 1.2 Level of Service: Emergency Response

Palm Beach County shall maintain a Level of Service Standard for emergency response.

**Policy 1.2-a:** The County shall provide an initial emergency fire and rescue response to all of the service area in the Fire-Rescue Municipal Service Taxing Unit (MSTU), in an average total response time of 7 minutes 30 seconds or less.

**Policy 1.2-b:** The determination of when to construct new Fire-Rescue facilities will be based on, but not limited by, the following:

- A major development is in construction phases and a fire station is planned as part of its development;
- The population of the station's response area produces an average of 3 alarms per day;
- Annual trend analysis for stations in adjoining response areas indicate an escalation of alarm activity and travel time;
- Development activity (including high/target hazards) increases in areas where Fire-Rescue does not have a 5 minute travel time;

- The number of calls with an over 8 minute travel time for a geographically specific area can be identified as excessive and increasing in number;
- It has been determined that the imminent annexation of the area is unlikely.

**Policy 1.2-c:** The County shall staff all in-service emergency response units with a minimum of the following:

**In-service Emergency Response Minimum Staffing <sup>c</sup>**

<b>Apparatus</b>	<b>Employees</b>
Fire Pumpers	3 <sup>a</sup>
Aerials	3
Rescue Units	2 <sup>b</sup>
Crash Fire Rescue	1
Special Operations	2
Tenders	1

**Notes:**

- a. By September 30, 2021, all stand-alone suppression units shall be staffed with at least four (4) personnel.
- b. By September 30, 2021, all rescue units shall be staffed with at least three (3) personnel
- c. By September 30, 2021, there shall be no either-or stations except that newly opened stations may run as an either-or station during the first twelve (12) months of operation.

**Policy 1.2-d:** The County shall maintain a staffing level of personnel in the communications center consistent with the standards set forth in NFPA Pamphlet 1221 (2002) 6.3.1 and 6.4.

**Policy 1.2-e:** The County shall maintain an apparatus replacement schedule that insures the safe and dependable utilization of emergency response vehicles. The replacement of apparatus shall take into consideration the following criteria: age of the apparatus, years of operation, mileage, engine hours, maintenance costs, current standards, and performance of the apparatus.

**Policy 1.2- f:** The County shall maintain sufficient training personnel to provide at least 100 contact hours annually for each operations employee.

**OBJECTIVE 1.3      Level of Service: Non-Emergency Response**

Palm Beach County shall maintain a Level of Service Standard for non-emergency functions.

**Policy 1.3-a:** The County shall maintain sufficient staffing and efficiency levels to insure the completion of fire inspections, as stipulated in Appendix G of the Palm Beach County Fire Code.

**Policy 1.3-b:** The County shall maintain sufficient staffing and efficiency levels to insure that 90 percent of all submittals for fire plan review are completed within four working days.

**Policy 1.3-c:** The County shall maintain sufficient staffing for program development and delivery to insure annual instructional programs for school age students and adults in the area of fire and life safety education and injury prevention.

**Policy 1.3-d:** The County shall maintain sufficient mechanical personnel and efficiency levels to meet the projected hourly service requirements for fire service vehicles.

**Policy 1.3-e:** The County shall maintain sufficient staffing and efficiency levels to investigate the cause, origin, and circumstances of fire.

**Policy 1.3-f:** The County shall maintain sufficient staffing and efficiency levels to insure all scheduled inspections required by the Palm Beach County Building Division's permitting process are completed on a daily basis.

**Policy 1.3-g:** The County shall continue to work cooperatively with the Florida Division of Forestry to support the FireWise Community Program and to provide educational outreach programs to encourage the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans.

#### **OBJECTIVE 1.4 Intergovernmental/Inter-Agency Cooperation**

Palm Beach County shall develop service agreements to insure the orderly interaction with neighboring agencies and jurisdictions when assistance is required.

**Policy 1.4-a:** The County shall maintain mutual aid agreements for reciprocating service with those fire rescue agencies who maintain comparable Levels of Service for staffing and equipment.

**Policy 1.4-b:** Review and, if necessary, revise fee structures for all services that may be provided to jurisdictions or agencies that do not maintain mutual aid agreements with the County.

**Policy 1.4-c:** The County shall bi-annually review and update, if necessary, procedural coordination and policy development with the County Division of Emergency Management to respond more effectively to large scale manmade and natural disasters.

**Policy 1.4-d:** Coordinate Emergency Service Functions (ESF's) 4-firefighting, 9-urban search and rescue and 10-hazardous materials for the County Division of Emergency Management in the event of a hurricane or other disaster.

**Policy 1.4-e:** Participate and coordinate communications functions within the Palm Beach County Fire Chiefs Association's mutual aid plan.

**Policy 1.4-f:** The County shall continue to support fire management efforts on ERM-managed Natural Areas in Fire Rescue's jurisdiction through cooperation with the Florida Division of Forestry and ERM to mitigate the potential of wildfires.

## **OBJECTIVE 1.5      Alternative Funding**

Palm Beach County shall develop alternative funding methods to more equitably distribute the costs for fire-rescue services.

**Policy 1.5-a:** Evaluate funding options on an annual basis to determine long-term capital needs including but not limited to: special assessments, general obligation bonds, and revenue bonds.

**Policy 1.5-b:** The County shall annually evaluate the fire inspection fee structure for all existing non-residential properties and transient residential properties.

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## Fire-Rescue Services Element Amendment History

Round	Description	Adoption	OrdNum	Effective	Note*
89-1	Adopted	8/31/1989	1989-17	9/11/1989	
91-2	Fire Rescue Advisory Board; Fire Safety Task Force; Future station location studies/facilities; dispatch times; miscellaneous	12/16/1991	1991-48	12/27/1991	Settled by 1992-28
95-2	Service Delivery and response times	12/6/1995	1995-58	2/6/1996	
97-1	EAR Re-write	9/22/1997	1997-32	12/3/1997	
04-2	Fire Rescue Revisions; to update and revise data	12/13/2004	2004-57	2/2/2005	
07-1	To add Policies 1.3-g & 1.4-f regarding Wildfire Prevention	8/27/2007	2007-10	10/29/2007	
12-1	To revise and update to reflect the latest data and conditions; to update Fire Rescue Map 1.1 to reflect current conditions.	7/23/2012	2012-21	8/31/2012	
15-1	To delete Fire and Life Safety Task Force policy	4/29/2015	2015-14	6/12/2015	
20-A	To revise minimum number of employees, update data, references, and station map.	2/5/2020	2020-02	3/21/2020	
21-A2	To revise and update to add background language for in-service emergency response staffing	5/5/2021	2021-13	6/20/2021	

\* NIE means not in effect - not within element