

REASONS

For the creation of a Special Independent Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical District In Key Largo, Florida

Key Largo Volunteer Fire Rescue Department, Inc. provides fire and rescue services to the residents and visitors of Key Largo, District 6, Monroe County, Florida. The department maintains a roster of approximately 50 state certified volunteer firefighters.

Key Largo Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Inc. provides emergency medical services to the residents and visitors of Key Largo, District 6, Monroe County, Florida. The Ambulance Corps maintains a roster of highly qualified and state certified Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's) and Paramedics. All EMT's are volunteers. All Paramedics used to be volunteers until State Law mandated that they receive compensation. A small stipend is paid to the Paramedics from monies collected through billing; however, it is not salary and the organization maintains its 501(c) 3 status.

Both Corporations have 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organizations. They are two separate corporations with two separate board of directors.

Key Largo Volunteer Fire Rescue Dept. is located at 1 East Drive, Mile Marker 99.8, Key Largo, Florida and also has a north station at Mile Marker 106 Overseas Highway, Oceanside in Key Largo.

Key Largo Volunteer Ambulance Corps is located at a separate location at 98600 Overseas Highway, Key Largo, Florida.

Both Corporations are under agreement with Monroe County to provide their respective services in District 6.

A municipal services taxing unit currently exists for fire, rescue and emergency medical services for District 6 (MSTU-6). The new legislation will only be creating a *Special Independent Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) District* that will replace the already existing MSTU-6. Revenue currently collected from the residents of Key Largo by MSTU-6 for fire, rescue and emergency medical services will be collected by the newly created Special Independent Fire, Rescue and EMS District.

A *Special Independent Fire, Rescue and EMS board* will be elected by the public upon passage of the legislation. The board will consist of 5 elected members of the community of Key Largo. A stipend of \$200.00 per month will be paid to member of the newly elected board.

Key Largo Volunteer Fire Rescue Department, Inc. and Key Largo Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Inc. will have a *contractual agreement* with the newly created Special Independent Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services District/Board and will continue to provide the same high quality services to the residents and visitors of Key Largo.

Both organizations intend to continue providing the same quality of service to the public. Both organizations have a history of 50 years of service to the residents and visitors of Key Largo and will continue to operate under the same high standards and level of service that currently exists. It is the intent of both organizations to continue to foster volunteerism in their organizations. We have projected *no increase in millage for 2005 and 2006* and *quite possibly will experience a decrease in millage* after we have received a fair cost allocation from Monroe County Office of Management and Budget. The *current millage rate is .5952 for MSTU-6*. We have provided for a *1.5 percent millage cap in the legislation*. General Law provides for a 3.57 millage cap; however, we feel that a 1.5 percent cap will send a message to the community that we do not intend to create yet another level of government, that we intend to keep the tax burden on our residents and business owners as low as possible. We also feel that the lower millage cap will prevent other interests from replacing the current volunteer system with a paid system without having to go to referendum. (In order to afford a "paid" department the millage cap would definitely have to increase above the 1.5 percent cap.)

Combined budgets for Key Largo Volunteer Fire Rescue Department and Key Largo Volunteer Ambulance Corps is currently at \$1,341,111. Revenues are in line with expenditures according to the Monroe County Office of Management and Budget and the enclosed Fiscal Year 2005 Adopted Budget Revenue and Expenditure Budget Summary Reports ; however, the 'Reserves' and 'Budgeted Transfers' budget categories have not been defined. Monroe County Office of Management and Budget has indicated that the aforementioned budget categories represent necessary reserves and indirect costs charged to MSTU-6 for our portion of a variety of County Services such as fire marshal, public works, administration, etc. We have requested a line item breakdown by department for these budget categories, but have not received that information to-date. These two budget categories represent a total of 247,998.00 (\$91,998-Reserves; \$156,000-Budgeted Transfers) of the total combined department budgets for fiscal year 2005. ***Once we can acquire a fair cost allocation from the County we anticipate actually being able to decrease the current millage rate.***

PROS AND CONS

We have conducted considerable research relative to the pros and cons of creating a special independent fire, rescue and ems district. Everyone we have spoken with that has been through this tell us that this was the best move they ever made. We had a number of individuals from various fire, rescue and ems departments in the state of Florida visit us in order to provide insight in to the preparation of the legislation.

Presently there are 67 special independent fire, rescue and ems districts within the State of Florida. There is no history of any special independent district dissolving.

We have been challenged by the union on more than one occasion to provide proof that we are providing the State mandated level of service in respect to response time, and qualifications of volunteers. We are mandated by the same laws that any paid fire or emergency medical services organization is. **We have proven that we not only meet all State mandates, but that we exceed them.**

All of our volunteer firefighters are State Certified. We maintain a roster of approximately 50 volunteer firefighters who are either State Certified Firefighter I or State Certified Firefighter II. Many of these individuals are Emergency Medical Technicians, and Paramedics as well and many hold a plethora of other certifications such as advanced extrication, dive rescue, dive instructor, fire instructor, ems instructor, rope rescue technician, hazardous operations technician, just to name a few. We do have additional volunteer personnel on our roster that provide support and administrative/technical services. Additionally we have probationary members, some of which are fully State Certified firefighters and some that are "in-training". We applied for grant money through the federal Fire Grant Act and received approximately \$90,000 dollars to create a state-of-the-art training facility in order to recruit and train volunteer State Certified firefighters. Our curriculum is the same curriculum the State uses to train firefighter in their facilities. This facility is available for use by Monroe County departments, other fire departments, state, federal and local agencies, etc.

All of the Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics on the roster at Key Largo Volunteer Ambulance Corps meet all the State certification requirements. All EMT's in Key Largo Volunteer Ambulance Corps works together with the local Community College in providing first responder and emergency medical technician courses. The cost of implementing and administering these classes is totally funded through donation dollars by the Ambulance Corps and is not reimbursed to them by Monroe County.

Response times for both organizations exceeds the national standard. Both organizations work well together and complement one another. We provide a much higher level of service now than the County could if they staffed our stations without having to strip other stations of personnel to do so.

We intend to foster volunteerism. We provide a far greater level of service to the public at a much lower cost due to our volunteer departments. Typically 80% of a paid organization's budget goes to paying salaries. We do not pay salaries.

Millage rate in MSTU-6 this year was .5952 and in District 1 it was 1.67... **We do it for less and provide more.**

We will eliminate a high level of bureaucracy by becoming our own district. We already have the separate taxing district. We will just directly manage the revenue and expenditures. **We are not adding another level of government we are replacing the**

existing level with a more efficient local approach toward government as it relates to the provision of fire, rescue and ems services.

Currently the County sets the millage rate and budget constraints. The County directly manages our budget including transferring money in and out of line items without our control or quite frequently our knowledge. **We will control our own tax dollars locally and set the millage rate locally.**

Key Largo Volunteer Fire Rescue Department and Key Largo Volunteer Ambulance Corps, two distinctly separate corporations, are under contract with Monroe County to provide fire, rescue, and emergency medical services to the residents and visitors of Key Largo, Florida. MSTU-6 is the taxing district for Key Largo for fire, rescue and ambulance services. Monroe County collects and manages the revenue generated by MSTU-6. Fiscal budget submittals are developed by both corporations and submitted to the County for approval. Monroe County sets budget limits and imposes restrictions. Various direct and indirect costs for county services are applied up-front. Purchasing must be facilitated via requests to purchase for the acquisition of equipment and supplies. Other regular recurring operating expenses such as travel, training, gasoline, station cleaning, salaries, payroll tax payments, insurance, postal expenses, telephone, etc. as well as special emergency expenses are paid for with donation dollars collected from the local residents and businesses and then reported to the County for reimbursement. Volunteer member reimbursement is processed on a monthly basis and submitted to the County for approval and payment. **We will be able to better manage, balance and account for our funds/expenditures and make the best use of our tax dollars.**

The type of service we require in Key Largo is different than that of the rest of the County. Quite frequently we are required to fit in to a "cookie cutter" approach toward operations and finances in order to be "fair" to all the departments. Our needs are different and quite frequently our needs far exceed those of some of the much smaller departments in the County. **With control of our own tax dollars we can more adequately plan and budget the appropriate operation and service for our community.**

We are not creating another level of government. We are eliminating the current level and replacing it with a far more efficient and local approach toward providing fire, rescue and emergency medical services to the residents and visitors of Key Largo.

We have a history of 50 years of service to the community we serve.

We maintain volunteer organizations thus keeping the millage rate low in our District. We will maintain and foster the volunteer system.

We have provided a higher level of service to the community with a lower cost than the rest of the County and will continue to do so. We anticipate that with control of our own tax dollars, that we will not increase millage and that we may actually be able to decrease the millage rate.

It is also important to compare the level of service we can provide with an all volunteer staff and the cost of that service to the level of service the County could provide by staffing our stations with "paid" staff and the cost to the taxpayer of that service. We can do it for less and provide more.

We can customize our organization to best fit the needs of the area we serve.

One concern that was voiced by Mayor Dixie Spehar and attendees at our public hearing was our ability to expand our boundaries to include Tavernier Fire Rescue and EMS Department. We have provided for that in the Legislation. We have provided for the ability to expand our boundaries and provided for being able to enter in to a contractual agreement with *"... any other district, city, or town, the United States of America, or any agency or authority thereunder, for the purpose of expanding services, providing effective aid, and accomplishing and carrying out the purposes for which the district was created and for the further purpose of specifically obtaining financial aid, assistance, or subsidy."*

Thank you for all of your time, attention and support of our efforts.