

# Fort Myers Beach Fire Department

## Fire Station 31 Project

### Background:

Since the Fort Myers Beach Fire Department's inception as a Volunteer Fire Department in 1949, the corner of Estero and Donora has been the center of the Fort Myers Beach Fire Department's Operations. From 1949 through 1951, the small volunteer organization was housed out of the Red Coconut Trailer Park, and then on December 28, 1951, Donald and Ora Zimmer donated a small portion of land to construct a Fire Station where the current station resides.



*FMBFD Fire Station 31 1957*

Over the next decade, the Fire Department grew and expanded services, and the simple station was desperately in need of renovations and updates. In 1961, the Fire Department acquired additional land

to construct a new apparatus bay, living quarters, and office space. During this time frame, the Fire Department assumed greater and greater responsibilities in the treatment and transportation of the sick and injured via Emergency Medical Transport Services.



*FMBFD 1960's Fire Chief Swearing-In Ceremony  
Photo Credit: Fort Myers Beach Talk*

In the 1970's, Fire Station 31 would be challenged once again with needs for training and advanced medical education as the Fort Myers Beach Fire Department introduced Paramedic Transport Services to our Community. This additional community service forced the Department to become creative in its design of the facility and designated

space to conduct life-saving training for its emergency responders.

From the 1970s moving forward to the dawn of a new century, Fire Station 31 saw several renovations, rehabilitations, and reiterations of its design and layout.

Then in 2000, almost a full fifty years after the first fire engine rolled out of the bay doors, the Fire Department conducted a significant building renovation. This renovation was designed to extend the life of this facility for several more years.



*Fire Station 31 with Completed 2000 Renovations*

### **Today:**

An independent Building Science and Engineering firm, which guides construction standards through objective scientific research and peer reviewed findings, has identified a five stage assessment when evaluating commercial facilities.

In stage five, a building 50 years and greater has typically been through at least one life cycle of assets such as major renovations to building systems, upgrades, and roofs.

In the case of Fire Station 31, this facility has been through several reiterations and renewal cycles, and

the facility is still lacking critical Fire Department and Community needs. In stage five of the commercial structure life cycle, it is recommended owners prepare for the next cycle of renewals to obtain another 50 years of operations.

The current facility has several challenges limiting its use to the Fire Department and the community it serves. The most profound is the lack of meeting today's accessibility standards. In 2017, the Fire Department assessed these specific issues and discovered another major building renovation would be needed in order to accommodate newer building accessibility requirements.

At this point, in 2017, the Fire Department engaged outside evaluators to do a facility assessment and vulnerability study of Fire Station 31, which revealed several areas that need to be updated and modernized in order for this facility to remain a safe, accessible, and reliable critical community resource. The cost and substantial work that would need to be done to maintain Fire Station 31 as a usable facility would trigger the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Plain 50 percent rule, which states that if the cost of building renovations exceeds 50 percent, the entire building needs to be built to today's current building, fire, hurricane, and flood plain codes.

This essentially would require the Fire Department to completely tear-down and rebuild this facility.

In keeping with industry best practices, even if the Fire Department

wanted to invest funds into the current Fire Station 31 building, it would not be suitable for another 50 years of Fire Department operations.

Once this information was produced and the need to potentially rebuild Fire Station 31 was learned, the Fire Department started to conduct a facility needs analysis. With local code and set back requirements, it was quickly realized that the strap of land that the current fire station sits on would not come close to accommodating the new requirements.

A great deal of data goes into the decision about deploying Fire Department assets such as Fire Station Locations. The Fire Departments Administrative team, along with our partners at the Lee County Department of Public Safety, did a series of response modeling assessments to see if the current location of Fire Station 31 best serves our community's emergency response needs. The results identified in order to serve our community with the highest efficiency, the location of Fire Station 31 should be closer to the Estero and Delmar intersection of our community.

### **The Future:**

While it is easy for the Fire Department and our staff to feel nostalgic about Fire Station 31, the fact remains this facility no longer serves the community, or the Fire Department adequately. The facility needs substantial renovations, which would trigger a teardown and rebuild of the entire facility, which cannot be

achieved on the current lot. While the location of Fire Station 31 may have served this community well for the first 68 years of our history, moving forward into the future, this location no longer best meets the community's needs.



*Current Day Fire Station 31 Photographed from the Original Apparatus Bay side of the structure.*

The role, responsibilities, and expectations of Fire and Emergency services have drastically changed in the last 70 years since the Fort Myers Beach Fire Department's inception. One aspect includes the Department lacking adequate training facilities to maintain the skill levels of its emergency responders. Another issue with the current facility is that it limits the type and size of the apparatus needed to serve our community. When Fire Station 31 was initially designed, the fire apparatus was far smaller and far less complex than today's apparatus. One of the critical limiting factors of today's Fire Station 31 is the inability to house a Ladder Truck.

With community redevelopment and anticipated new larger-scale community projects, the need to have firefighting capabilities housed in the center of the community is a definitive operational need.

Finally, since the days of Benjamin Franklin, a community's fire station has always been a central focus to meet all types of needs. Having a facility that is welcoming and

accessible to all members of our community is an essential element that is lacking and not achievable at our current location.