What Makes Your Special Fire District Special

How your fire department is funded – and why it matters

After understanding how your fire district operates as part of a larger countywide system, the next logical question is simple. How is it funded?

Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue District uses a blended funding model. A flat fee paid by every parcel plus a small ad valorem tax based on property value. We feel this approach combines the strengths of both systems while avoiding the downsides of relying entirely on either one.

For most of the District's history, funding came solely from a flat fee. That model is predictable and ensures everyone contributes. But it has a limitation. Flat fees do not keep pace with inflation.

Over time, that reality became unavoidable. Fire stations aged. Capital improvements were delayed. Salaries fell behind comparable departments. This was not due to poor management. It was the result of a funding structure that could not grow with rising costs.

Residents were asked to vote on adding a small ad valorem tax. They did. That decision allowed the District to responsibly correct course.

Today, everyone still pays a flat fee, reinforcing shared responsibility for emergency services. The ad valorem component allows revenue to adjust modestly with economic conditions without excessive growth. The result is balance. It supports maintaining stations, investing in equipment, and retaining a strong workforce while remaining fiscally disciplined.

Just as important is how those dollars are managed. The District is governed by a locally elected board that lives in the community and is directly accountable to the residents it serves. Decisions are made close to home, with a clear focus on value.

That focus drives innovation. When the District was recently told a new fire station would cost approximately 10 million dollars, we took a different approach. Instead of accepting that price, we acquired an existing home and adjacent property and converted it into a functional station at a fraction of the cost. The result is not only more affordable, but also provides a healthier, more livable environment for firefighters.

Here is what the funding model looks like in practical terms.

A one-million-dollar home in the District pays a $360 flat fee plus approximately $670 in ad valorem tax, for a total of about $1,030 per year. In comparison, a similar home in the nearby Seminole dependent fire district would pay about $1,950 annually under a higher millage rate. As property values increase, that gap widens.

In addition to local funding, the District partners with Pinellas County Emergency Medical Services to deliver advanced medical care. The County funds paramedics assigned to fire engines for rapid response, while a contracted ambulance provider handles transport.

Different districts make different choices. Ours reflects a deliberate balance of fairness, sustainability, and accountability while continuing to deliver dependable, high-quality service to the community.

Amendment 3, if approved by voters, is projected to cut about $700,000 a year, representing roughly 7% of our budget.

It automatically eliminates the new Paramedic position for the new station in Indian Rocks Beach. The County wrote that into our contract this year. That is not in our control.

85% of our budget is people.

Although response times may be affected, we will continue to respond with a modified staffing model. We are not going anywhere.

We are impacted less than areas that have lower property values, more homesteaded properties, and rely solely on ad valorem taxes. As always, PSFRD remains committed to providing professional, reliable emergency services and being transparent with residents about the challenges and decisions that affect our community.