

# Immokalee Fire Control District

Report 23-05

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# OPPAGA

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

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# Immokalee Fire Control District

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Immokalee Fire Control District is generally in compliance with statutory requirements related to special district administration. However, the district stopped submitting data to the state's Florida Fire Incident Reporting System, which the Division of State Fire Marshal uses to analyze incident and response trends.

District firefighters met most state qualifications during the review period. District incident volume increased during the same period, while the number of personnel remained constant, resulting in an increased workload for each firefighter. District operations and Collier County emergency operations overlap and are complementary. The district relies on county agencies for dispatch and emergency medical services (EMS) within the district, and the district supports the county EMS system by providing non-transport response capabilities and Basic Life Support medical services. Countywide, the district provides less mutual aid (i.e., support to other fire departments) than the countywide average. Local stakeholders have discussed fire service consolidations in the county, but the district does not see a benefit or need to consolidate services with other entities at this time.

The district recently established goals and objectives, but lacks performance standards for some of these, so the district cannot evaluate how well it serves residents. The district considers some national standards for timeliness and the number of personnel responding to incidents to assess performance, but it does not meet these standards, and the district's insurance rating worsened over the review period. Further, the district has not evaluated local stakeholders' perceptions of district performance.

During the review period, district expenditures totaled \$44 million, exceeding \$41.2 million in total revenues. Moreover, during the review period, staffing and facilities did not meet the district's reported needs. The district has developed a five-year plan for future resource needs, but district representatives expect not to be able to fund those operational goals with current revenue streams.

OPPAGA recommends the district board take a number of steps to improve performance monitoring and administrative accountability.

### SCOPE

Section 189.0695, *Florida Statutes*, directs OPPAGA to conduct performance reviews of Independent Special Fire Control Districts located in Rural Areas of Opportunity. The review evaluates the district's programs, activities, and functions, including

- evaluating the district board's governance function;
- assessing service delivery and comparing similar services provided by municipal or county governments located within the district's boundaries;
- describing district purpose, goals, objectives, performance measures, and performance standards and evaluating the extent to which they are achieved;
- analyzing resources, revenues, and costs of programs and activities; and
- providing recommendations for statutory or budgetary changes to improve the special district's program operations, reduce costs, or reduce duplication.

This review period covers local Fiscal Years 2019-20 through 2022-23.

# BACKGROUND

## District Service Area

The Immokalee Fire Control District (district) is located in Collier County, in Southwest Florida. (See Exhibit 1.) The district is one of seven fire control districts in the county. The district covers a service area of 234 square miles, which is 12% of the county's land area.

Eight percent of Collier County's population (30,799 residents) lives in the district. The population within the district has increased 28% since 2020. The Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research projects that the Collier County population will grow by approximately 13% by 2030.

Ad valorem taxes and fees support the district's operations. In 2020, Collier County had 228,390 housing units with a median value of \$366,600. Of these, 157,921 were occupied housing units and 70,469 were unoccupied housing units.

### Exhibit 1

#### Map of Immokalee Fire Control District



Note: District representatives report that Station 31 is currently closed.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Collier County and Immokalee Fire Control District data.

The district serves the unincorporated communities of Immokalee and Ave Maria and the surrounding residential and agricultural areas in northeastern Collier County. The district also provides contract services for fire protection to the Seminole Tribe of Florida's reservation and casino, which is located within the district's boundaries.

The district has been designated a Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO). RAOs are rural communities, or a region composed of rural communities, that have been adversely affected by extraordinary economic events or natural disasters. Under National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, the district is classified as a combination of urban, suburban, and rural demand zones for staffing and response times. Less densely populated zones classified as rural have lower recommended minimum staffing levels and higher recommended minimum response times, as opposed to more dense classifications such as urban.

## District Governance

Created in 1955 by Ch. 1955-30666, *Laws of Florida*, the district's purpose is to provide fire protection and prevention services, establish and maintain emergency medical and rescue response services, and acquire and maintain firefighting, rescue, medical, transport, and other emergency equipment. The district's mission is to protect the life and property of district citizens and visitors by providing public safety services, fire suppression, fire prevention and education, emergency medical services, and hazardous incident mitigation.

Special fire control districts are governed primarily by Chs. 189 and 191, *Florida Statutes*. Special districts are separate units of local government and are overseen by the special district's board of commissioners (board). The law specifies oversight of special fire control districts by five qualified elected commissioners who reside in the district and are elected to four-year terms.<sup>1</sup> All seats on the board are currently filled, with term expiration dates in 2024 (2) and 2026 (3). Immokalee commissioners are each compensated \$250 per month, which is half of the amount allowed by statute.<sup>2</sup>

Each commissioner is responsible for ensuring that the special district complies with all applicable laws and conducts its business as authorized by its charter and adopted budget. The district charter governs areas such as district boundaries, purpose, revenue-raising capabilities, and recordkeeping requirements. The charter also governs the powers and authority of the board, including the ability to adopt rules and regulations, use district funds, and hire and fire necessary fire fighting personnel. Florida statutes do not specify meeting frequency for special independent fire control district boards, but district representatives reported that meetings are normally held the third Thursday of every month.<sup>3</sup>

Several state entities collect data on and have limited involvement with certain aspects of special fire control districts. The Department of Financial Services' Division of State Fire Marshal provides the district guidance, but not oversight. Specifically, the division provides firefighter standards and training, safety compliance checks, oversees certifications, and makes complaint determinations.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the Department of Economic Opportunity's Special District Accountability Program provides technical advisory assistance as it relates to the provisions of the Uniform Special District

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter [1955-30666](#), *Laws of Florida*.

<sup>2</sup> Section [191.005\(4\)](#), *F.S.*

<sup>3</sup> Board meetings are governed by Chs. [189](#), [191](#), and [286](#), *F.S.*

<sup>4</sup> Rule [69A-62.032\(10\)\(a\)](#), *F.A.C.*: The Division of State Fire Marshal shall consider a complaint from any person who alleges a violation of the Act or a division rule. The complainant may elect to remain anonymous. The complainant must identify the location of the workplace that gives rise to the complaint and allege known particular facts that constitute a violation. A complaint may be oral or written.

Accountability Act (Ch. 189, *Florida Statutes*). The department's duties include maintaining the official list of special districts, declaring special districts inactive, providing technical advisory assistance to special districts, helping ensure the accountability of special districts to state and local governments, and collecting an annual state fee for administering the act.

## District Resources

The district receives revenue mainly through ad valorem taxes and impact fees. For local Fiscal Year 2022-23, the district had a tentative budget of \$11.4 million.<sup>5</sup> This budget is managed by the district's chief financial officer, who is a part-time paid staff member, under the direction of the Fire Chief and the board.

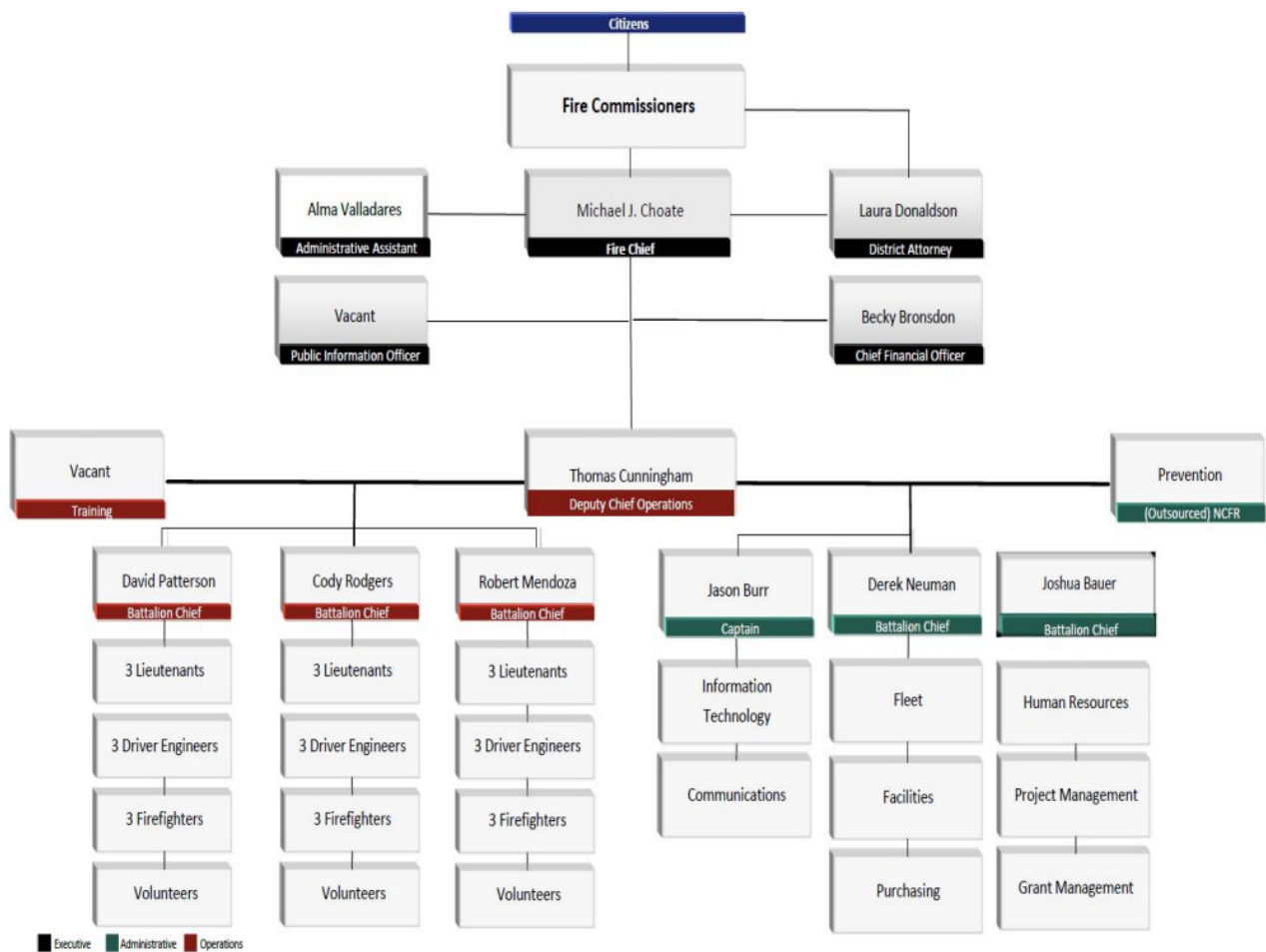
During Fiscal Year 2022-23, district representatives reported that the district's staff was comprised of 53 personnel—34 full-time firefighters, 1 full-time administrative staff member, 2 part-time administrative staff members, and 16 contactor personnel.<sup>6</sup> To meet the district's purpose and goals, the district operates using an organizational structure encompassing division chiefs that lead and supervise staff under several organizational functions. (See Exhibit 2.) These organizational functions include administration, human resources, finance, operations, professional development/training, fire and life safety, support services, information technology, emergency management, and grants management.

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<sup>5</sup> The local government fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30.

<sup>6</sup> The district's 34 full-time firefighters include command staff, specifically the fire chief, deputy chief, and five battalion chiefs. "District representatives" refers to employees or volunteers with the district, including commissioners.

Exhibit 2  
District Current Staff Organizational Chart



Source: Immokalee Fire Control District.

In addition to its staff, the district maintains 3 stations and 20 primary pieces of apparatus.<sup>7</sup> (See Appendix A for images of several district facilities.) These apparatus include brush trucks, rescue units, ladder trucks, and tankers.

## FINDINGS

### Governance

#### The District Is in Compliance With Most Statutory Requirements Related to Special District Administration

The Immokalee Fire Control District must meet statutory requirements for independent special fire control districts. All independent special fire districts must adopt a five-year plan to identify the facilities, equipment, personnel, and revenue needed by the district during that five-year period.<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> Fire apparatus refers to vehicles designed to be used under emergency conditions to transport personnel and equipment or to support the suppression of fires or mitigation of other hazardous situations.

<sup>8</sup> Section 191.013, F.S.

district must also maintain a public website and must post the district charter, taxes and fees collected by the district, financial audits, budgets, district boundaries, scheduled board meetings, contact information, and other district information on the website.<sup>9</sup> Florida statutes require each district commissioner to submit an oath of office and post a surety bond conditioned on the member's faithful performance of his or her duties of office. Florida statutes also require the district Board of Commissioners to keep a permanent record of district meetings that shall be open to public inspection.<sup>10</sup>

The district is meeting most statutory requirements. For example, the district created a five-year plan and also registered and maintains an official website to ensure transparency. The website contains the statutorily-required information, but the district map provided on the website is outdated as it shows an adjacent fire district that was consolidated in 2015 and is no longer operational. The district website provides access to meeting minutes for each calendar month and the Board of Commissioners have submitted the required oaths of office and surety bonds.

Florida statutes encourage active involvement in the county fire chiefs' association to coordinate the planning and activities of all entities that provide fire protection and suppression services.<sup>11</sup> District representatives reported participating in relevant associations including the Florida Association of Special Districts, the Florida Fire Chief's Association, and the Collier County Fire Chief's Association.

## The District Submitted its Most Recent Statutorily-Required Audit and Had No Prior Year Findings to Address

District representatives reported that the district has not conducted any performance reviews. However, in compliance with s. 189.016(9), *Florida Statutes*, the district submitted financial audits to the Auditor General in Fiscal Years 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22. Audits showed a general increase in total net assets and cash over three years of the review period. (See Exhibit 3.) The district had no prior year findings to address in the Fiscal Year 2021-22 financial audit.

### Exhibit 3

#### District's Total Net Assets and Cash Balance Generally Increased From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2020-21<sup>1</sup>

	Fiscal Year			Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Amount	Percent
Total Net Assets	\$2,972,779	\$8,663,286	\$10,416,813	\$7,444,034	250%
Cash	\$798,608	\$2,830,927	\$4,808,938	\$4,010,330	502%
Restricted Cash <sup>2</sup>	\$2,500,470	\$1,784,942	\$277,622	\$-2,222,848 <sup>3</sup>	-89%

<sup>1</sup> District representatives reported that expenses were greater than revenues in Fiscal Year 2020-21 due to the construction of Station 32 in Ave Maria.

<sup>2</sup> Restricted cash is the amount of cash that is subject to externally enforceable legal restrictions.

<sup>3</sup> Construction expenses for Station 32 were taken out of the district's impact fee fund, which is restricted to funding certain capital expenditures.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data submitted to the Florida Auditor General.

<sup>9</sup> Section 189.069, F.S.

<sup>10</sup> Section 191.005, F.S.

<sup>11</sup> Section 191.013, F.S.



## The District Is Not Addressing Some Administrative Matters That Impact Its Operations

The district's board is not addressing some administrative matters that affect district operations. These issues include maintaining digital staff certification records, reporting incident data, and using outdated operating procedures.

**District representatives reported that the district maintains paper personnel records; consequently, the district cannot readily identify which or how many staff are certified.** When OPPAGA requested information on personnel certifications, the district did not complete part of the information request, stating that the request would take too long to complete because the majority of district staff training files are not stored electronically due to a lack of administrative support. Without electronic records, the district cannot readily identify which staff are certified or meeting training requirements. Moreover, the lack of administrative staff has caused district operational staff to assume office duties when not attending to emergency incidents. District representatives stated that because of resource constraints, they have staffed only essential administrative positions and that administrative positions are difficult to fill with volunteers.

**In the past, the district voluntarily reported incident data, but stopped doing so as of March of 2021 due to a communication breakdown and lack of internal controls.** The Florida Fire Incident Reporting System allows fire protection agencies to participate in a statewide cooperative effort to report and analyze fire incidents. Fire service providers use incident information to prepare an annual report to elected officials, other fire service providers, and the public. Data from this system is also included in a national system used to gather and analyze information on the magnitude of the nation's fire problem as well as its detailed characteristics and trends. Participation in this system assists fire departments in making data-informed decisions ranging from local budget development to the identification of national preparedness initiatives and facilitates decision-making that supports improved operations at the local level.<sup>12</sup>

Florida statutes and the Division of State Fire Marshal encourage reporting fire incident data.<sup>13</sup> According to the division, the district previously reported incident data but stopped doing so as of March 2021. Previously, the district reported to the state system, known as the Florida Fire and Incident Reporting System (FFIRS). The district now submits data directly to the National Fire Incident Reporting System and the Division of State Fire Marshal can collect relevant district and state data from the federal system. In December 2022, district representatives noted that they have resumed reporting incident data. District representatives reported in May 2023 that they have implemented internal controls to ensure that the district reports data in a timely manner moving forward. The Division of State Fire Marshal provided documentation to OPPAGA in March 2023 verifying that the district had resumed reporting data. Maintaining such data is important because one of the district's performance measures for fire and life safety is to evaluate and compare FFIRS reports on a monthly basis to uncover trends in fire and life safety incidents.

**The district is not routinely updating operating guidelines and procedures.** The district has established 47 Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to guide district personnel. The intent of these SOG/SOP is to provide direction for operational and

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<sup>12</sup> Incident data reported to the National Fire Incident Reporting System is used to evaluate response times, mutual aid given, and the total number of responses per incident type.

<sup>13</sup> Section [633.136](#), F.S.

administrative tasks and to establish a system of accountability for district personnel. SOG/SOP topics include radio communications, personal protective clothing use, professional conduct, employee evaluations, vehicle operations, and professional development.

The NFPA suggests that fire departments should review these guidelines annually to ensure that they are current, and the review should be documented in writing. As of March 2023, 45 of the 47 existing SOP/SOG had not been reviewed or revised in the previous two years; 4 SOG/SOP have not been revised since 2015. This annual review is necessary to ensure that SOG/SOP remain current, useful, and appropriate.

## Service Delivery

### District Firefighters Meet Most State Qualifications, and Full-Time Staffing Has Remained the Same as Incident Volume Has Increased; Staff Primarily Respond to Rescue and EMS Incidents

Overall, the Immokalee Fire Control District experienced an increased incident volume over the review period, while the number of district full-time operational personnel remained the same, resulting in increased workloads. The terms “incident” and “call” have different meanings across different fire departments. This report uses the term “incident” to refer to an event to which the district responds, which is consistent with the definition provided by the National Fire Incident Reporting System. The term “calls” will refer to dispatch calls, which may or may not result in an incident response by the fire district.

Through the use of mutual aid agreements, district operations and county emergency operations overlap but are not duplicative. Countywide, the district provides less mutual aid than the countywide average, which district representatives attribute to the district’s geographic distance from other areas of the county. Local stakeholders have discussed fire service consolidations in Collier County, but the district does not see a benefit or need to consolidate services with other entities at this time.

**Division of State Fire Marshal data shows that all district firefighters meet qualifications to be a career firefighter in Florida.** According to s. 633.412, *Florida Statutes*, a person applying for certification as a firefighter must be a high school graduate or equivalent, not have been convicted of a misdemeanor or a felony, submit a set of fingerprints, have a good moral character, be in good physical condition, and be a nonuser of tobacco or tobacco products.<sup>14,15</sup>

According to district self-reported data, all 34 full-time operational staff meets most of these requirements; however, the district did not provide documentation that staff had submitted fingerprints.

According to s. 633.102, *Florida Statutes*, a firefighter is an individual who holds a valid Firefighter Certificate of Compliance (FCC) issued by the Division of State Fire Marshal. To obtain an FCC, an individual must complete the Minimum Standards Course and pass the Minimum Standards Course certification. According to Division of State Fire Marshal data, all active district personnel have

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<sup>14</sup> A person applying for certification as a firefighter must not have been convicted of a misdemeanor relating to the certification or to perjury or false statements, or a felony or crime punishable by imprisonment of one year or more under the law of the United States or of any state thereof or under the law of another country, or dishonorably discharged from any of the Armed Forces of the United States.

<sup>15</sup> A person applying for certification as a firefighter must be a nonuser of tobacco or tobacco products for at least one year immediately preceding application, as evidenced by the sworn affidavit of the applicant.

achieved this certification. In addition, OPPAGA reviewed a sample of district firefighter certifications.<sup>16</sup> During this review, the district provided documentation showing that eight personnel (100% of the sample) had a valid FCC.

**District incidents have increased during the review period, but the number of full-time personnel has remained the same.** District representatives reported population increases, residential development, new construction, and increased incident volumes over the review period. Total annual district incidents increased by 17%, from 4,001 in Fiscal Year 2019-20 to 4,673 in Fiscal Year 2021-22. (See Exhibit 4.) District representatives reported responding to 13,241 district incidents from Fiscal Year 2019-20 through Fiscal Year 2021-22. The number of district operational personnel has remained constant during this time, resulting in a higher net workload for each firefighter. The district expects growth and development to continue, which will result in a further increased workload over time and the need for additional personnel.

#### Exhibit 4

#### Number of District Incidents Increased but Full-Time Operational Personnel Remained the Same During the Review Period<sup>1</sup>

	Fiscal Year		
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Total Number of Reported District Incidents	4,001	4,567	4,673
Number of Mutual Aid (Provided) Incidents	61	49	78
Average Number of Total Incidents per Day	11.1	12.6	13.0
Number of District Full-Time Operational Personnel	34	34	34

<sup>1</sup> Fiscal Year 2022-23 totals were not yet available.

Sources: OPPAGA analysis of Division of State Fire Marshal and Immokalee Fire Control District data.

**The district primarily responds to rescue and emergency medical service incidents, which is consistent with state and national patterns.** Fire departments fight fires, provide emergency medical services (EMS), help people in a wide variety of dangerous situations (service calls), and mitigate incidents involving hazardous materials. Fire departments also prepare to perform rescue work and provide care for those injured in connection with incidents such as car accidents and natural disasters. Nationally, EMS is the most common type of incident to which fire departments respond.

Similarly, the largest percentage of district incidents during the review period were for rescue and EMS incidents, comprising 72.6% of all incidents. This is similar to the 2020 statewide average for rescue and EMS incidents and slightly higher than the countywide average and the national average during the same period.<sup>17</sup> (See Exhibit 5.)

<sup>16</sup> OPPAGA randomly sampled eight personnel, which was 24% of full-time operational staff. OPPAGA has no way of verifying whether all district full-time operational staff are compliant with career firefighting requirements, as we were not provided with and did not review personnel files for all staff.

<sup>17</sup> The Rescue and EMS Incident category includes all EMS incidents, including motor vehicle accidents and EMS standby incidents for hazardous conditions. This category also includes incidents where medical assistance is provided to another group/agency that has primary EMS responsibility. The Rescue component of this category includes searches for lost people; opening locked vehicles and gaining entry to locked areas; extrication of victims from structures, vehicles, elevators, machinery, etc.; rescue from water and ice areas; and rescue from electrocution or trapped by power lines.

## Exhibit 5

From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2021-22, the District Primarily Responded to Rescue and EMS Incidents

Description	Incidents	Percent	Countywide Average	2020 Statewide Average	2020 National Average <sup>1</sup>
Rescue and EMS Incidents	9,618	72.6%	64.0%	71.6%	64.2%
Good Intent Call	2,215	16.7%	14.7%	11.0%	11.7%
False Alarm and False Call	490	3.7%	8.2%	6.3%	8.0%
Service Call	487	3.7%	9.7%	7.4%	7.6%
Fire Incidents	261	2%	1.4%	1.7%	3.9%
Other <sup>2</sup>	170	1.3%	2.1%	2.0%	4.5%
<b>Total District Incidents</b>	<b>13,241</b>	<b>98.6%</b>			
<b>Mutual Aid (Provided) Incidents</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>1.4%</b>			
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>13,429</b>				

<sup>1</sup> This column does not total 100% due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Severe weather and natural disaster; special incident type; hazardous condition (no fire); and overpressure, rupture, explosion, overhear (no fire)

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Division of State Fire Marshal and U.S. Fire Administration data.

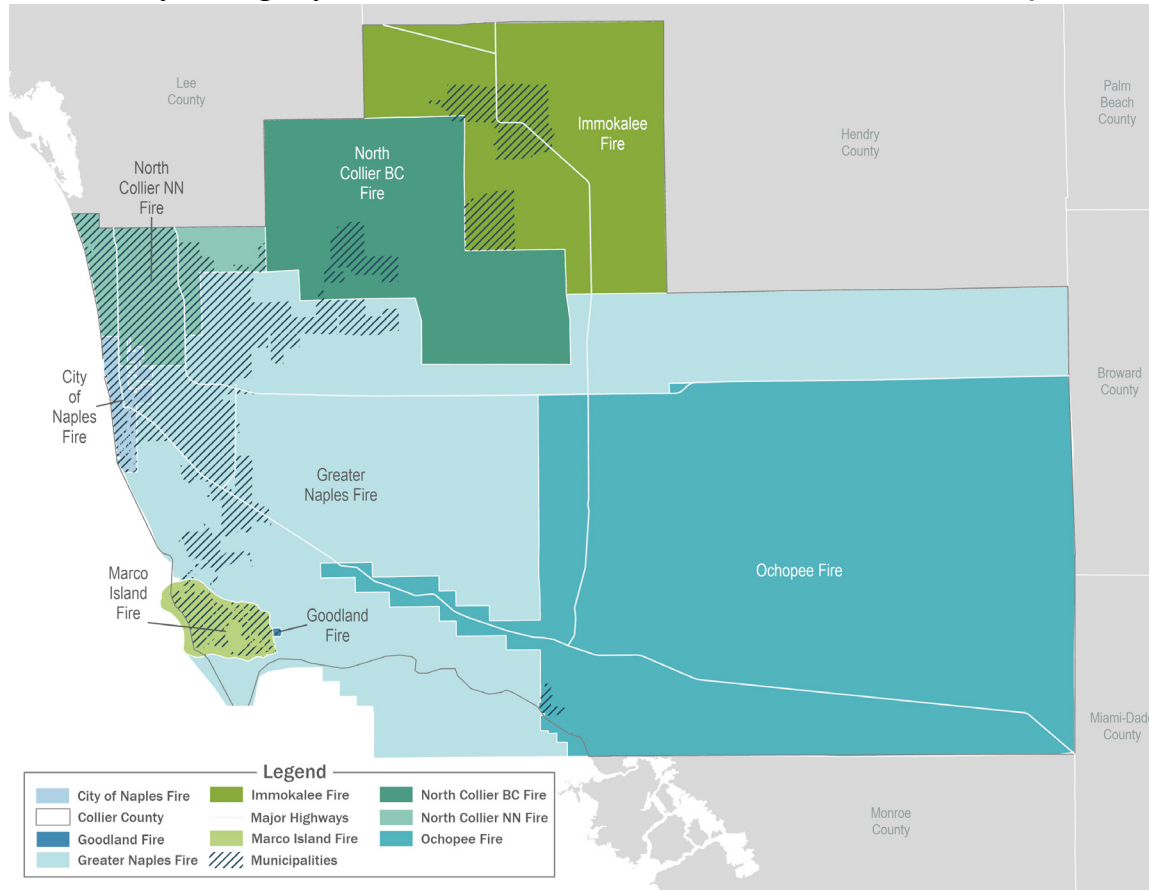
The district responded to 261 fire extinguishment incidents during the previous three fiscal years, which was 2% of total incident responses. This is slightly above the 2020 statewide average of 1.7% and slightly below the 2020 national average of 3.9% for fire extinguishment incidents. In addition to the 13,241 district incidents, the district responded to 188 local mutual aid requests from other jurisdictions during the same period.

## District and Countywide Emergency Operations Overlap, but Provide Complementary Support

**The district relies on county agencies for dispatch and EMS.** The Collier County Emergency Communications Center, under the Collier County Sheriff's Office dispatches Immokalee Fire Control District units and Collier County Emergency Medical Services units within the district boundaries. Separately, the Collier County Department of Emergency Medical Services provides EMS for a large part of the county, including within the district. Many of their paramedics and emergency medical technicians are cross-trained as firefighters.

## Exhibit 6

### Collier County's Emergency Services Area Includes the District and Several Other Fire Departments



Source: OPPAGA analysis of Collier County data.

**The district supports the county EMS system by providing non-transport response capabilities and basic life support medical services.** EMS response is the primary service that the district provides. Rescue and EMS incidents comprised 72.6% of all district incidents during the review period. District operational staff are certified to manage emergency medical services. Of the district's 34 full-time firefighter staff, all are certified to provide basic life support medical response, 29 are trained as emergency medical technicians, and 5 are trained as paramedics.<sup>18,19</sup> However, the district is the only fire district in the county with staff who does not provide advanced life support services. District representatives reported that they are negotiating with the county to have Collier County EMS paramedics who are certified to provide advanced life support assigned to district response teams, which could reduce the time for advanced life support to arrive at an incident. District representatives reported that this proposal is still in the planning stages, but written documentation of this strategy was not yet available at the time of OPPAGA's review.

**The district provided less mutual aid than the countywide and national averages during the review period, but created agreements to receive aid from other entities.** The district has entered into countywide mutual aid and automatic aid agreements with the North Collier Fire District, Greater

<sup>18</sup> Basic life support includes care to anyone who is experiencing cardiac arrest, respiratory distress, or an obstructed airway, and requires knowledge and skills in performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation, using automated external defibrillators, and relieving airway obstructions in patients of every age.

<sup>19</sup> Although some district staff have advanced medical certifications, district representatives report that the district has not provided advanced life support (ALS) in the past due to the financial burden. However, district representatives report that the district's financial situation is improving and that the district may be able to provide ALS to citizens in the coming years.

Naples Fire District, the City of Marco Island, the City of Naples, and the Florida Forest Service.<sup>20</sup> The district has also entered into a statewide mutual aid agreement with the Florida Division of Emergency Management and has established specific local mutual aid agreements for facility maintenance and repair service, IT support, new construction inspection services, fire inspections, and apparatus maintenance and repair. County stakeholders reported that mutual aid in Collier County works extremely well and had positive feedback regarding the district’s first response capabilities and cooperation with county services.

However, the district provided mutual aid for only 1.4% of total incidents during the review period, which was lower than the countywide average of 6.2% and the national average of 5.1% during the same period. (See Exhibit 7.) District representatives reported that the main service delivery challenge was staffing. The district’s two fire stations are 9.3 miles apart and separated by a rural area. District representatives reported that the district does not have the personnel resources to staff both fire stations appropriately to meet recommended service standards and lacks the financial resources to offer competitive salaries as compared to adjacent fire districts.<sup>21</sup> Because of these resource limitations, the district has also entered into an inter-local agreement with the North Collier Fire and Rescue District to handle fire inspections for the district as well as to provide fleet maintenance services for vehicles and apparatus.

**Exhibit 7**  
**Mutual Aid Provided by the District Is a Small Percentage of Total Reported Incidents**

	Fiscal Year			Total
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	
Mutual Aid (Provided) Incidents	61	49	78	<b>188</b>
Total Number of Reported Incidents	4,062	4,616	4,751	<b>13,429</b>
Percent Mutual Aid (Provided)	1.5%	1.1%	1.7%	<b>1.4%</b>

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Division of State Fire Marshal data.

## Collier County and the District Have Considered Consolidating to Address Inefficiencies, but the District Does Not See a Benefit at This Time

District representatives reported several obstacles and no need to consolidate county fire and EMS services by dissolving the district. Since 2010, two of the three special fire control districts in Florida that were formed through a merger of existing districts involved fire districts in Collier County. County stakeholders reported several challenges and lessons learned resulting from these previous mergers, including a lack of oversight and accountability, staff resistance, and unclear jurisdictional authority. In addition, a prior OPPAGA report on district mergers in Manatee County noted challenges with integrating district policies, salaries, insurance, and retirement benefits.<sup>22</sup> District and county stakeholders reported discussing additional fire service consolidations in Collier County; barriers include differing tax bases, budgets, geographic locations, and services provided by each fire district.

<sup>20</sup> A mutual aid or automatic aid agreement is a prearranged agreement between two or more entities to share resources in response to an incident. NFPA recommends that these agreements be in writing, reviewed by legal counsel, signed by a responsible official, define liability, and detail funding and cost arrangements. It is a common practice for fire departments nationwide to utilize mutual aid agreements to facilitate access to potentially needed resources. As owning and maintaining all of the resources needed to respond to extreme or high-demand incidents is cost-prohibitive for most communities, entering into mutual aid agreements provides economic and logistical efficiencies to support any gaps in resources and capability.

<sup>21</sup> According to the U.S. Fire Service, nationally, staffing remains a constant need for all fire departments as staffing levels across job roles and functions have remained flat while fire department roles and responsibilities have increased. Many fire departments are unable to fully staff engines or fully train their members.

<sup>22</sup> OPPAGA Special Report [01-67](#).

While the district's Five-Year Comprehensive Plan states that the district is aware of the subject of consolidation and will take part in any consolidation study, district representatives stated that they do not see a benefit or need to consolidate services with other entities at this time. Specifically, district representatives believe that the geographic isolation of the Immokalee area and different budgets and revenues between fire districts are the main barriers to consider regarding consolidation.

## **Performance**

OPPAGA assessed Immokalee Fire Control District's progress toward achieving goals and performance against national standards. The district recently established goals and objectives, but lacks some performance standards for those goals in the areas of facilities, growth management, fire operations, human resources, and administration. The district is aware of national standards for response times and the number of personnel that are responding to incidents, but does not meet these standards. During the review period, one national indicator of the district's overall effectiveness rating worsened, but remains in the middle of the rating scale. The district does not systematically assess its performance and district representatives noted that financial limitations were barriers to improved operations.

### **The District Recently Established Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures, but Lacks Measures for Some Key Functions and Cannot Yet Evaluate How Well It Serves Residents**

During the review period, the district did not conduct internal or external performance reviews or take other steps to evaluate its needs. Further, for most of the review period, the district did not have formal goals. However, in May 2022, the district adopted formal goals, objectives, and measures for its major functions.

While the district has performance measures for eight organizational functions, it has not yet created measures for three key activities: growth management, fire operations, and administration. (See Exhibit 8.) The district also has not created performance standards (targets) for any of the objectives. Without these standards, particularly for objectives related to reducing incident response times and enhancing EMS capabilities, the district cannot measure progress related to its stated purposes: to provide fire protection and prevention services and to establish and maintain emergency medical and rescue response services. OPPAGA asked why these performance measures and standards were lacking, but district representatives did not explain; however, these representatives stated that they have begun the process of establishing them.



## Exhibit 8

### District Established Several Goals, Objectives, and Associated Performance Measures, but Lacks Measures for Growth Management, Fire Operations, and Administration

Organizational Functions	Goals	Objectives	Performance Measures
Professional Development/Training	4	4	10
Fire and Life Safety	2	4	9
Logistics	4	4	5
Fleet	4	4	4
Grants Management	4	4	4
Emergency Management	3	3	3
Human Resources	1	2	2
Facilities	2	2	1
Growth Management	2	4	0
Fire Operations	3	3	0
Administration	2	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>

Source: Immokalee Fire Control District.

In addition, the district's 2019-2024 Five-Year Comprehensive Plan establishes objectives, including entering into and supporting automatic and mutual aid agreements and improving the district's Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating.<sup>23</sup> Given the district's limited administrative staff, it is not clear how the district will monitor progress toward achieving performance goals. Without this monitoring, the measures will not be useful, and the district will be unable to evaluate how well it is serving residents.

### The District Does Not Meet National Standards for Timeliness or for the Number of Personnel Responding to Incidents; Reported Insurance Ratings Declined Over the Review Period

District representatives reported that they focus on response times as a performance measure. They reported that district officers monitor run times weekly and report district performance to the board every six months. However, they reported that the district is not meeting national standards for response times or the number of personnel that are responding to structure fires due to financial challenges, limited staffing, and the geographic isolation of the two communities the district serves.

In addition, reported insurance ratings worsened during the review period. The district utilizes a recurring onsite evaluation from the ISO as a means to measure improvements to district performance. Effective February 1, 2022, the district received a Public Protection Classification of 5/5x, which is the most common rating nationwide and the second most common rating in Florida.<sup>24</sup> (See Exhibit 9.) This is a decline in the district's performance compared to the district's previous rating of 3/3x, which was issued in Fiscal Year 2019-20. In comparison, North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District received a PPC score of 2/10, and the City of Naples received a score of 1/1x. Greater Naples Fire Rescue District received a score of 4/10 in 2018.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The ISO is an independent company that supplies data and analytics for the insurance industry.

<sup>24</sup> Class 1 represents an exemplary fire suppression program, and Class 10 indicates that the area's fire suppression program does not meet ISO's minimum criteria. The ISO rating serves as a reference for insurance companies in setting property insurance rates. Typically, a better classification resulting from enhanced fire protection leads to lower insurance premiums. Per ISO, statistical data on insurance losses bears out the relationship between excellent fire protection and low fire losses, as measured by the PPC program.

<sup>25</sup> Generally, for split classifications (e.g., 5/5x), the first number applies to properties within five road miles of the responding station, and 1,000 feet of a hydrant or other approved source of water, and the second number applies to properties beyond 1,000 feet of a creditable water supply.



## Exhibit 9

### The District's 2022 ISO Rating of 5 Is the Second Most Common in Florida<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> A rating of 1 represents an exemplary fire suppression program, and 10 indicates that the program does not meet minimum criteria.

Source: Insurance Services Office.

OPPAGA was unable to verify the cause of this decline in performance because OPPAGA requested, but the district did not provide, the previous ISO report. District representatives stated that the decline was a result of their decision to close the district's third fire station (Station 31) for operations in November 2018 as well as no longer having a ladder truck. When the district's SAFER grant expired, district representatives reported not having a plan to maintain the level of staff without grant funds. District representatives decided to sell working apparatus to save nine staff positions because they believe trained personnel are the district's most valuable resource and should be prioritized.

The ISO rating consists of four main components: community risk reduction, emergency communications, fire department, and water supply. Of these four components, half of the overall score is based on one category, fire department, or the fire department's structure fire suppression system. The district received a credit of 41.5% out of a potential 100% for this category. (See Exhibit 10.) Areas within this category for which the district received the least credit include reserve ladder and service trucks, deployment analysis, and ladder service.<sup>26</sup> (See Appendix B for more information regarding the district's fire department evaluation from ISO.)

## Exhibit 10

### District's Fire Department Category Received the Lowest Credit From the Most Recent ISO Evaluation

Fire Suppression Rating Schedule Item	Earned Credit	Credit Available	Percent
Emergency Communications	9.85	10	98.5%
Community Risk Reduction	3.75	5.50	68.2%
Water Supply	24.88	40	62.2%
Fire Department	20.75	50	41.5%
<b>Final Community Classification</b>	<b>05/5X</b>		

Source: Insurance Services Office.

When comparing ISO ratings with other providers in the county, district resources should be considered, as this may affect elements of the fire department rating. It is important to note that the community of Immokalee has been designated as a Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO) while other communities in Collier County have not received this designation.

<sup>26</sup> Oversight of 911 dispatch services is not a district responsibility; the district collaborates with the Immokalee Water and Sewer District and Ave Maria Utilities to provide hydrant testing and records.

## The District Has Not Evaluated Local Stakeholders' Perception of District Performance

The district website provides mechanisms to collect feedback on district operations, such as a “Fire Dept. Customer Survey” and a “General Questions” submittal options and district representatives reported having established a citizen advisory board to include community members, and educate and involve them on how the district is funded. However, district representatives reported that no information related to district performance had been submitted via these mechanisms. One district representative stated that few residents attend the district’s public board meetings and that residents could, but do not, give feedback through an unaffiliated social media website for the local community. County stakeholders have not evaluated the district’s performance, such as conducting reviews of call dispatch, but stated that they have not received any recent citizen complaints or inquiries regarding the district and that they have no tactical concerns about the district’s service delivery.

## Resource Management

Over the last four fiscal years, Immokalee Fire Control District expenditures totaled \$44 million, exceeding total revenues of \$41.2 million. During this period, the district received additional revenue from taxes and impact fees. As revenues increased, the district also spent more on capital expenses and operational personnel. District representatives reported that the current budget is insufficient to meet future needs.

### During the Review Period, District Expenditures Totaled \$44 Million, Exceeding \$41.2 Million in Total Revenues

**District revenues grew during the review period, as did district expenditures; expenditures generally exceeded revenues.** The district’s primary revenue sources are taxes and impact fees. The district imposes an annual ad valorem assessment on property within the district. The highest allowable millage rate under state law for most special fire control districts is 3.75 mills, and the district levied the highest allowable rate from Fiscal Years 2019-20 through 2022-23.

Through an inter-local agreement, the district also levies an impact fee on new construction within the district. The intent of the fee is for growth within the district to pay for capital improvements needed due to growth. The fees are restricted and can only be used for certain capital expenditures and/or debt associated with growth within the district.

During the review period, the district’s largest revenue source was ad valorem taxes, which increased by 42% over the period. (See Exhibit 11.) The district’s overall revenues increased by 17% (\$1.2 million) during the review period.<sup>27</sup> This growth is largely due to increases in taxes and impact fees, which increased from Fiscal Year 2019-20 to Fiscal Year 2022-23.

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<sup>27</sup> While overall revenues increased from Fiscal Year 2019-20 to Fiscal Year 2022-23, district revenues decreased from Fiscal Year 2021-22 to Fiscal Year 2022-23. This is mainly due to changes in grant funding and other proceeds from debt.

**Exhibit 11****District's Total Revenues Increased 17% From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2022-23**

Receipt Type	Fiscal Year					Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Total	Amount	Percent
Taxes	\$4,193,763	\$4,653,970	\$4,987,520	\$5,963,864	\$19,799,117	\$1,770,101	42%
Impact Fees	1,191,884	2,511,391	2,535,472	2,000,000	8,238,747	808,116	68%
Other Payments in Lieu of Taxes <sup>1</sup>	6,150	6,150	70,357	186,000	268,657	179,850	2924%
Other Disposition of Surplus Assets	37,195	5,643	25,092	25,000	92,930	-12,195	-33%
Other Rent	6,180	5,607	13,330	15,000	40,117	8,820	143%
Interest Income	82,066	9,292	20,162	5,500	117,020	-76,566	-93%
Other Miscellaneous	14,588	25,644	3,000	5,000	48,232	-9,588	-66%
Other Rebates and Refunds	4,855	3,855	2,751	3,000	14,461	-1,855	-38%
Grants	1,270,840	427,381	1,824,571	-	3,522,792	-1,270,840	-100%
Other Proceeds From Debt <sup>2</sup>	231,713	3,438,646	5,363,259	-	9,033,618	-231,713	-100%
Fundraising	-	-	12,540	-	12,540	0	N/A
Reimbursement-Federal Emergency Management Agency	-	57,658	-	-	57,658	0	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$7,039,234</b>	<b>\$11,145,237</b>	<b>\$14,858,054</b>	<b>\$8,203,364</b>	<b>\$41,245,889</b>	<b>\$1,164,130</b>	<b>17%</b>

<sup>1</sup> District representatives report that other payments in lieu of taxes include an agreement with the Collier County Housing Authority, which pays \$6,000 annually to help cover the costs of services provided to the Farm Worker's Village, and 25% of the amount Collier County receives from the Seminole Casino.

<sup>2</sup> District representatives report that Other Proceeds From Debt reflects either actual receipt of funds from a lending institution or the recording of the full amount of a vehicle or apparatus purchased through a lease-to-own program.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

The increase in district revenues is partly attributable to increases in housing units within the district, because impact fees are assessed on a per-square-footage-under-roof basis. According to information provided by district representatives, property units in the district increased by 16% (1,621 units) during the review period. (See Exhibit 12.) Specifically, the amount of real property subject to millage levied by the district increased 18% (1,585 units), and the amount of non-taxable parcels and parcels with a taxable value of \$100 or less increased by 3%. District representatives anticipate that hundreds of properties will eventually be built in Ave Maria, but they do not anticipate a large change in the district tax base until Ave Maria is fully developed.

**Exhibit 12****Property Within the District Increased by 16% From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2022-23**

Property Type	Fiscal Year				Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Amount	Percent
Real Property Subject to Millage Levied by the District	8,744	9,327	9,679	10,329	1,585	18%
Non-Taxable Parcels and Parcels With a Taxable Value of \$100 or Less	1,126	1,766	1,741	1,162	36	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,870</b>	<b>11,093</b>	<b>11,420</b>	<b>11,491</b>	<b>1,621</b>	<b>16%</b>

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

Revenue growth is also attributable to increases in property values, the basis of ad valorem taxes. According to information provided by district representatives, the total assessed value of real property subject to millage levied by the district increased by 45% (\$523.5 million) during the review period. (See Exhibit 13.) District representatives reported that they were able to utilize funds derived from these revenue increases to make a large payment on district debt, increase salaries, and initiate an advanced life support program with Collier County EMS.

**Exhibit 13****Assessed Value Within the District Boundaries Increased 45% From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2022-23**

	Fiscal Year				Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Amount	Percent
Assessed Value of Real Property Subject to Millage Levied by the District	\$1,150,573,353	\$1,276,948,213	\$1,369,961,086	\$1,674,067,128	\$523,493,775	45%

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

District expenditures also generally increased during the review period. (See Exhibit 14.) From Fiscal Year 2019-20 to Fiscal Year 2022-23, district expenses increased by 36% (\$3.0 million) due to Station 30 construction costs. On average, the district's biggest expenses throughout the four fiscal years included personnel, construction, and capital. During the review period, the dollar amount of capital expenses increased more than other district expense categories; from Fiscal Year 2019-20 to Fiscal Year 2022-23, the district's capital costs increased by 451%. District representatives reported that these increases were due to the construction of the new Station 32 in Ave Maria and Station 30 in Immokalee, as well as the replacement of computer equipment, bunker gear, and fire equipment.

**Exhibit 14****District's Total Expenditures Increased 36% From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2022-23**

Expenditures	Fiscal Year				Review Period Total	Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23		Amount	Percent
<b>General Fund</b>	<b>\$4,881,445</b>	<b>\$5,419,317</b>	<b>\$7,271,717</b>	<b>\$9,224,291</b>	<b>\$26,796,770</b>	<b>\$4,342,846</b>	<b>89%</b>
Administrative Costs	360,565	408,138	421,941	410,979	1,601,623	50,414	14%
Operational Costs	4,520,880	5,011,179	6,849,776	8,813,312	25,195,147	4,292,432	95%
<b>Impact Fee Fund</b>	<b>3,489,554</b>	<b>8,022,599</b>	<b>3,489,477</b>	<b>2,158,587</b>	<b>17,160,217</b>	<b>-1,330,967</b>	<b>-38%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$8,370,999</b>	<b>\$13,441,916</b>	<b>\$10,761,194</b>	<b>\$11,382,878</b>	<b>\$43,956,987</b>	<b>\$3,011,879</b>	<b>36%</b>

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

Overall, the district's expenditures exceeded revenues during the review period. The district's average ratio of expenses to revenues was 113%, which means that on average, 113% of revenues were used for expenses each year. District representatives reported a number of reasons for expenditures exceeding revenues, notably revenue stream limitations and new station construction. District representatives explained revenue stream limitations, noting that because the district is primarily agricultural in nature, property values are generally lower than other properties in Collier County. In addition, district representatives reported that many properties within the district, including homes, are owned by not-for-profit entities that do not pay taxes. District representatives also reported that expenditures have exceeded revenues in the past two years due to startup construction costs for Station 32 and taking on debt for replacement apparatus. Finally, while the district was able to utilize revenues from impact fees to construct Station 32, it is required to utilize general funds for recurring costs such as maintenance, and these costs increased during the review period.

**District administrative costs, direct costs, and contracted services also increased during the review period.** District administrative costs totaled \$1.6 million during the review period. These costs include, but are not limited to, costs associated with personnel, forms, supplies, data processing, computer equipment, postage, and programming.<sup>28</sup> The majority of these costs, \$862,654, were for professional expenses.<sup>29</sup> Administrative costs increased 14% overall during the review period.

The district's direct program costs totaled \$25.2 million and increased by 95% during the review period. The district categorizes these costs into personnel, operating expenses, capital, and debt service. Of these, capital expenses had the largest increase (451%) during the review period.

The district's contracted services totaled \$561,466 and increased by 12% during the review period. The district's contracted expenses include building and vehicle maintenance and legal, medical, and audit services. The largest of these costs, \$161,946, were for contracted legal services. (See Appendix C for details on the district's administrative, direct, and contracting costs.)

**The district had a procurement policy in place during the review period; bidding requirements were waived on few purchases.** Independent special districts are not required to follow all state procurement laws, but may develop policies to guide purchasing and contracting.<sup>30</sup> When purchasing vehicles and major equipment, the district's bidding policy requires district leaders to competitively bid purchases exceeding \$50,000. However, the board can waive bidding requirements when the provider is a sole source or semi-source provider, if the service is a professional fee, or if it is otherwise more beneficial to purchase the good from a supplier that maintains standardization of equipment. During the review period, the board waived bidding requirements on two purchases—a security system and a brush truck. (See Exhibit 15.) The costs of these purchases were \$116,896 and \$190,000. According to district representatives, bidding requirements were waived primarily due to concerns with timing, specifically needing to install a security system during a specific phase of building construction and also needing to purchase a part to complete a piece of apparatus immediately.

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<sup>28</sup> Section [197.3632, F.S.](#)

<sup>29</sup> District representatives report that professional expenses include payments to the tax collector and property appraiser as well as legal and audit expenses.

<sup>30</sup> Per s. [189.053, F.S.](#), independent special districts may have their own procurement policies. The Florida Special District Handbook specifies sections of procurement law that apply to special districts, including sections regarding bidding for construction; professional architectural, engineering, landscape architectural, and survey and mapping services; and personal property purchases.

## Exhibit 15

### District Waived Bidding Requirements on Two Purchases During the Review Period

Date	Item	Cost	Justification
February 18, 2021	Access Control and Security System for Station 32	\$116,896	2 bids received; time of essence because system had to be installed during the appropriate construction phase of the station; same vendor that supplied audio visual equipment and beneficial to have same vendor
June 23, 2022	Wildland Attack (Brush Truck)	\$190,000	Chassis for truck was immediately available, as opposed to other vendors, which had a 12-month (or more) wait period; two other vendors declined to bid

Source: Immokalee Fire Control District data.

Finally, the district's bidding policy requires that all construction services are bid in accordance with s. 255.20, *Florida Statutes*. Statute currently mandates that when costs exceed \$300,000, all construction contracts must be competitively awarded. The district utilizes s. 287.055(10), *Florida Statutes*, to select firms when design-build services are sought for district construction projects. District representatives reported that bidding requirements for construction services had not been waived during the review period.

**The district employed some mechanisms to manage costs.** In 2018, the district closed Station 31, which district representatives reported saved \$100,000 and provided funding for employee retention and raises. The district also brought payroll and other financial services in house in 2018, saving \$13,000 per year, and in 2022, the district reduced the number of administrative staff by one, which has saved the district \$45,000 per year. The district also implemented a health reimbursement account and medical clinic to reduce health insurance costs, resulting in a net annual savings of approximately \$12,000, and negotiated changes to the district's collective bargaining agreement to reduce payout of sick and vacation time to non-tenured employees, which saved \$19,852 in Fiscal Year 2021-22, the first year of the negotiated change.<sup>31</sup>

The district has taken other steps to reduce expenditures. District representatives reported that the district limits capital purchases to those eligible for impact fee use or that are required replacements. Further, district representatives also reported utilizing credit card points to pay off district purchase card bills, saving an estimated \$5,000. District representatives also reported that contracting with North Collier on fleet maintenance has saved the district approximately 15% per year on maintenance and repairs. In addition, district representatives reported that the district utilizes Division of State Fire Marshal services for fire investigations when possible because the services are free.

### During the Review Period, Staffing and Facilities Did Not Meet District Reported Needs

**The number of district paid staff remained consistent during the review period, while the number of volunteers decreased.** The district had 34 full-time firefighters throughout the review period. (See Exhibit 16.) For Fiscal Years 2019-20 through 2022-23, the district had some changes in part-time personnel and contracted employees. District representatives reported that the district had a part-time deputy chief of administration who retired in 2022 and that the district has not filled the position. District representatives also reported that an additional contracted employee was hired to

<sup>31</sup> District representatives report that cost savings resulting from negotiated changes to the collective bargaining agreement have been realized by changing the terms of pay-out sick and vacation time at separation. Payment of both is determined based on years of service. For example, a staff member who separates from the district while on probation receives no pay-out of sick and vacation time, while a staff member who separates from the district after 16 years or more receives a 100% pay-out of their sick and vacation time.

complete external maintenance at Station 32. The district lost both of its volunteer firefighters during the review period. District representatives reported that there are few volunteers because the district is located in a rural area and most certified firefighters are not willing to volunteer. Additionally, district representatives reported that volunteers usually only remain volunteers for a short time before gaining employment elsewhere.

## Exhibit 16

### During the Review Period, Most District Staff Were Full-Time Firefighters

Staff	Fiscal Year				Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Amount	Percent
<b>Full-Time</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
<i>Operational</i>	34	34	34	34	0	0%
<i>Admin/Support</i>	1	1	1	1	0	0%
<b>Part-Time</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-13%</b>
<i>Admin/Support (General)</i>	3	3	3	2	-1	-33%
<i>Admin/Support (Elected)</i>	5	5	5	5	0	0%
<b>Contractor</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Volunteer</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>-100%</b>
<i>Operational</i>	2	1	0	0	-2	-100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>-3%</b>
EMT	29	29	29	29	0	0%
Paramedic	5	5	5	5	0	0%

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

### District representatives reported that current personnel levels do not meet the district's needs.

To meet NFPA standards, district representatives noted that they would need a total of 36 firefighters ready to respond to incidents at all times, which representatives reported is currently unattainable for the district due to millage rate limitations constraining the amount the district can spend on staffing.

The number of district career firefighters was slightly low compared to national trends. According to the NFPA, communities with a population size similar to the district have a median of 40 career fire fighters.<sup>32</sup> In Fiscal Year 2022-23, district representatives reported having 34 full-time operational staff.

District representatives reported that lack of competitive pay is the leading cause of staff turnover. The district has been able to incrementally increase salaries over the past four years because its tax base has increased. However, district representatives reported that district housing values and local tax exemptions limit their ability to provide competitive pay.

The district utilized the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant to increase staffing. When the grant expired in 2018, the district was able to maintain staffing levels by selling a district tower truck and closing a fire station. District representatives reported that it is challenging to increase staffing without relying on grants with expiration dates.

<sup>32</sup> These trends are based on the NFPA's *US Fire Department Profile 2020*, which was published in September 2022.



**District representatives reported that the current number of apparatus meets current, but not future, district needs.** The district owns or leases 20 pieces of apparatus/vehicles. (See Exhibit 17.) District representatives reported that the current level and condition of these vehicles/major equipment currently meets the district's needs. However, district representatives noted that if staffing increased, the district would need additional vehicles.

#### Exhibit 17

##### District Owned or Leased 20 Pieces of Apparatus/Vehicles in Fiscal Year 2022-23

Apparatus/Vehicles	Ownership		Status		Total
	Owned	Leased	Active	Reserved	
Brush Truck	4	-	2	2	4
Battalion's Chief's Vehicle	1	1	1	1	2
Engine <sup>1</sup>	1	1	1	1	2
Rescue Unit	1	1	1	1	2
500 Gallon Diesel Trailer	1	-	1	-	1
Administration Battalion Chief	-	1	1	-	1
Chief's Vehicle	-	1	1	-	1
Deputy Chief's Vehicle	1	-	1	-	1
General Purpose	1	-	-	1	1
Ladder Truck	-	1	1	-	1
Special Event Golf Cart	1	-	1	-	1
Support Service's Battalion Chief	1	-	1	-	1
Tanker <sup>2</sup>	-	1	1	-	1
Wildland/Rescue Polaris Side by Side	1	-	1	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>20</b>

<sup>1</sup> An additional engine will be delivered in the first quarter of 2023, which will also be leased.

<sup>2</sup> An additional water tender will be delivered in 2023, which will also be leased.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

**In addition, according to district representatives, most district fire stations and facilities require major repairs.** The number of facilities owned by the district remained the same during the review period. The district operates out of three stations. District representatives reported that the current level and condition of the district's facilities is mixed. District representatives reported that the district's headquarters, Station 32, fully meets the district's needs. Station 32 is a new facility that was put into service in November 2021.

However, district representatives reported that Stations 30 and 31 are not up to hurricane standards. Station 30 is in the process of replacement during the current fiscal year, and district representatives reported that the contractor is required to achieve Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO) by May 15, 2023. As of June 6, 2023, Station 30 is still under construction because the contractor did not meet their May 15 deadline due to equipment delays. District representatives report they will revise the TCO with a new July 1, 2023, deadline. Station 31 underwent a roof repair and interior renovations within the review period. However, Station 31 is currently closed to the district's fire service; Collier County EMS is using the station while district representatives request state funds to reopen the station to fire services. The goal is to re-open the station by the end Fiscal Year 2022-23; however, re-opening Station 31 is dependent on negotiations with the county to have Collier County EMS paramedics assigned to district fire trucks or receiving a SAFER grant.



## The District Developed Five-Year Plans for Future Resource Needs, but District Representatives Expect to Be Unable to Fund Operational Goals

**The district maintains a five-year plan and hopes to increase staffing levels, improve facilities, and enhance services over the next five fiscal years.** In accordance with s. 191.013, *Florida Statutes*, the district adopted a five-year plan to identify facilities, equipment, personnel, and revenue needs.<sup>33</sup> District representatives reported that the five-year plan provides objectives and guidelines that create a baseline by which to monitor and evaluate district success. (See Exhibit 18.)

### Exhibit 18

#### District's Five-Year Plan Includes Adding Facilities, Apparatus, Personnel, and Revenue

Category	Five-Year Plan Objectives
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain a minimum of three months operating reserves with a goal of five months' worth, or 35% to 55%, of the total operating budget.</li><li>• Spend money wisely and use the state bid process to save funds wherever possible.</li><li>• Review the impact fee structure and consult with the board to establish fair and equitable impact fees.</li><li>• Develop investment, inventory control, and accounting policies and capitalization procedures.</li><li>• Pursue grants to fund special projects, equipment, and staffing.</li><li>• Educate the public on the financial status and future goals of the fire district.</li></ul>
District Growth and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure that new growth and development within the district is coordinated through the district, that provisions for additional resources and facilities are available to meet the needs of this growth, and that the integrity and autonomy of the district is preserved and protected.</li><li>• Plan for future expansion of existing district facilities, establish standards for staffing equipment and resources for new stations, provide new facilities based on growth patterns within the district, as the need arises, and coordinate site location criteria with adjacent jurisdictions.</li><li>• Locate new district substations within the district in areas that have been identified where service delivery requirement needs are enhanced due to current and projected call volumes.</li></ul>
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Began construction to replace Station 30 in December 2021, with completion targeted for spring 2023.</li><li>• Move forward with facility project projection goals.</li><li>• Plan to secure properties for future stations located in areas of the district that will see future growth.</li></ul>
Apparatus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purchased a 2021 Ladder Truck and a 2021 Ford F-550 Attack Truck.</li><li>• Purchased a new Water Tender with anticipated delivery in 2023.</li></ul>

Source: Immokalee Fire Control District.

According to the district's five-year plan, the district aims to employ the personnel required to achieve its mission. District representatives reported utilizing NFPA standards to plan for the district's staffing needs. District representatives stated that they use these standards because they are recognized nationally across the fire service industry. With additional funding, district representatives anticipate increasing the number of employees, including more administrative employees. District representatives reported that they would like to add a part-time position for community education and outreach because public education would help the community understand the value of district services.

**The district expects to be unable to fund future expenditures with current revenue streams.** District representatives reported that they do not have sufficient revenue to address their plans for the district's growing population because 55% of properties in the district are exempt from taxation as not-for-profit agencies. District representatives also noted that the taxable property value for the purpose of fire district ad valorem assessments is reduced by the homestead exemption in Collier County, whereas in Lee County, fire district ad valorem assessments are calculated without accounting

<sup>33</sup> Section [191.013](#), *F.S.*

for the homestead exemption. Moreover, while the district covers the Seminole Casino Hotel, it only collects 25% of the income the casino provides to Collier County. Finally, district representatives reported that staff cover areas near Highway 82, Felda, and LaBelle, which are partially covered by a volunteer fire department that does not charge a property tax assessment.

District representatives noted that the restrictions on the use of impact fee revenue is also a major barrier to funding the staff and apparatus necessary to meet current needs. Because impact fee revenues cannot be utilized to pay for recurring costs, district representatives reported that it is challenging to pay for expenses such as utilities and salaries. District representatives noted that if impact fee revenues could be used for staffing, the district would be in a better position to meet the NFPA staffing requirements.

While housing growth is expected in Collier County, district representatives reported that the estimated 250 additional residences built in the district in the next few years will be owned by a not-for-profit.<sup>34</sup> District representatives believe these residences will not be required to pay any fees for fire services. In addition to housing growth, district representatives reported that changing property values are likely to affect future performance and costs.

District representatives reported that the district is considering ways to diversify and increase revenue streams to fund planned operational changes. District representatives reported that the district attempted one referendum to allow non-ad valorem fire fee assessments in 2018, which was not successful, and intends to attempt voter approval again in the future. District representatives also reported that district leadership is exploring grant opportunities and funding from state and federal agencies as well as considering trading tax credits for property with Collier County to purchase the land for new fire stations. Finally, district representatives reported that they are also examining ways to raise the millage rate cap.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Immokalee Fire Control District is located in a rural area of opportunity and may experience revenue generation challenges not experienced by other fire districts. Also, OPPAGA determined that the district had a number of issues related to performance, management, and operations.

### **The District Board Should Take a Number of Steps to Improve Accountability, Performance, and Service Delivery**

To address these issues, OPPAGA offers several recommendations. This performance review will repeat in five years, at which point OPPAGA will consider district progress implementing the recommendations. In the interim, the district should periodically reassess performance; to ensure usefulness, such assessments must be conducted consistently over a period of time and supported by the board.

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<sup>34</sup> District representatives report that two of the new non-profit neighborhoods are currently under construction, and two more are slated to begin construction in the next two years.

**Improve accountability.**

1. The board should annually review/revise standard operating guidelines and procedures and document changes in writing.
2. The board should direct staff to systematically compile, maintain, and update records, particularly staff training certifications, preferably electronically to ensure staff certifications meet state standards.
3. The board should monitor new procedures to ensure that fire incident data is being reported per the Division of State Fire Marshal's guidance.
4. The board should continue to monitor community growth and related service cost increases, and develop strategies to manage revenue streams to ensure expenditures do not exceed expected revenues.

**Improve the extent to which goals are achieved.**

5. The board should consider reducing and revising existing goals and objectives to ensure that they are
  - a. applicable to the district's specific, unique needs and resources;
  - b. achievable utilizing existing operational resources;
  - c. trackable using existing administrative resources; and
  - d. practical for setting an expected level of performance, such as response times.
6. The board should document plans to improve performance and track the district's improvements over time. This could include
  - a. tracking district performance and conducting routine performance reviews and self-assessments to monitor internal performance and support planning; and
  - b. compiling and tracking local stakeholder feedback to identify areas for improvement.

**Improve service delivery.-**

7. When the district is financially prepared, the board should seek Collier County approval to provide advanced life support services.

## **DISTRICT AND COUNTY RESPONSES**

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(2), *Florida Statutes*, OPPAGA submitted a draft of this report to the Immokalee Fire Control District and Collier County for review and response. The fire district's written response is reproduced in Appendix D.

# APPENDIX A

## Immokalee Fire Control District Facilities

Station 32  
5368 Useppa Drive  
(Headquarters)



Station 30  
502 New Market Road  
East



Station 31  
1107 Carson Road



## APPENDIX B

### ISO Evaluation for Immokalee Fire Control District's Structure Fire Suppression System

The ISO rating consists of four main components: community risk reduction, emergency communications, fire department, and water supply. Of these four components, half of the overall score is based on the fire department category, or the fire department's structure fire suppression system. The district's worst category was for fire department, which includes criteria related to district vehicles and staffing. (See Exhibit B-1.)

#### Exhibit B-1

#### District Received a Credit of 41.5% Out of a Possible 100% for Their Structure Fire Suppression System in 2022

	Earned Credit	Credit Available	Percentage
The fire department's standard operating procedures and incident management systems for emergency operations involving structure fires.	2	2	100%
The number and adequacy of the pumpers and their equipment.	0.50	0.50	100%
The total pump capacity available sufficient for the Basic Fire Flow of 3,500 gpm.	3	3	100%
The number of engine companies, their pump capacity, hose testing, pump testing, and the equipment carried on the in-service pumpers.	4.10	6	68.3%
The average number of existing firefighters and company officers available to respond to reported first alarm structure fires in the city.	5	15	33.3%
The training hours that firefighters receive per year in accordance with NFPA standards.	2.45	9	27.2%
The number and adequacy of existing engine and ladder-service companies to cover built-upon areas of the city.	2.64	10	26.4%
The number of ladder or service companies, the height of the aerial ladder, aerial ladder testing, and the equipment carried on the in-service ladder trucks and service trucks.	1.06	4	26.5%
The adequacy of ladder and service apparatus when one (or more in larger communities) of these apparatus are out of service.	0	0.50	0%
<b>Credit for Fire Department</b>	<b>20.75</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>41.5%</b>

Source: ISO, effective February 2022.



## APPENDIX C

### Immokalee Fire Control District Administrative Costs, Direct Costs, and Contracted Services

**Professional services accounted for the majority of Immokalee Fire Control District's administrative costs.** During the review period, professional costs included tax collector, property appraiser, legal, and audit expenses. (See Exhibit C-1.)

The district's other administrative costs include personnel expenses and additional supplies/services. During the review period, personnel costs were the district's largest non-professional expense. District representatives noted that administrative costs have increased because the district's statutorily-required payments to the tax collector and property appraiser have increased. District representatives also reported that the increase to supplies and services costs is related to the addition of Station 32 and the overall increase to costs nationwide.

#### Exhibit C-1

##### District's Administrative Costs Increased 14% From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2022-23

Administrative Costs	Fiscal Year				Review Period Total	Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23		Amount	Percent
Professional <sup>1</sup>	\$199,867	\$210,910	\$224,100	\$227,777	\$862,654	\$27,910	14%
Personnel	147,669	182,117	174,778	156,702	661,266	9,033	6%
Supplies/Services <sup>2</sup>	13,029	15,111	23,063	26,500	77,703	13,471	103%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$360,565</b>	<b>\$408,138</b>	<b>\$421,941</b>	<b>\$410,979</b>	<b>\$1,601,623</b>	<b>\$50,414</b>	<b>14%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Professional costs include tax collector, property appraiser, legal, and audit expenses.

<sup>2</sup> Supplies/services costs include office supplies, dues/subscriptions, postage, shipping, legal advertising, and other miscellaneous expenses.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

**Personnel costs accounted for the majority of district direct program costs.** The district categorizes direct costs into personnel, operating expenses, capital, and debt service expenses. On average, for the entire review period, personnel costs were the largest direct program expense category for the district followed by capital and operating costs. (See Exhibit C-2.) District representatives reported that in negotiations with their staff's collective bargaining unit, the district had to increase wages to retain employees. In addition, district representatives reported that the \$3.08 million capital expenses in Fiscal Year 2022-23 will be used for the construction of Station 30, replacement computer equipment, bunker gear, and fire equipment, and grant matching funds.

**Exhibit C-2****District's Direct Program Costs Increased by 95% From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2022-23**

Direct Program Costs	Fiscal Year				Review Period Total	Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23		Amount	Percent
Personnel	\$3,417,502	\$3,580,600	\$3,973,376	\$4,279,812	\$15,251,290	\$862,310	25%
Capital	557,947	780,845	1,960,880	3,077,000	6,376,672	2,519,053	451%
Operating	397,368	482,707	721,290	807,500	2,408,865	410,132	103%
Debt Service	148,063	167,027	194,230	649,000	1,158,320	500,937	338%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,520,880</b>	<b>\$5,011,179</b>	<b>\$6,849,776</b>	<b>\$8,813,312</b>	<b>\$25,195,147</b>	<b>\$4,292,432</b>	<b>95%</b>

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

**Legal expenses accounted for the largest percentage of the district's contracted services costs.**

The district's contracted expenses include building and vehicle maintenance and legal, medical, and audit services. On average, for the entire review period, legal was the largest contracted services category for the district followed by medical and building and vehicle maintenance costs. (See Exhibit C-3.)

District representatives reported that there are several reasons for increased contracted services costs. The district's legal expenses are affected by the district's legislative activities and collective bargaining agreement negotiations; in Fiscal Year 2019-20, the district required legal counsel for both activities. Additionally, in Fiscal Years 2021-22 and 2022-23, the district had active legislative sessions and required legal counsel on aspects of station construction and loan activity. Medical costs increased due to COVID-19 testing and treatment and employee physicals. In addition, building and vehicle maintenance costs increased because the district's vehicles and two of the district's facilities are old. Station 32 also has higher maintenance costs because it is a larger facility. Finally, audit costs increase if a single audit is required for grant funding. District representatives reported that Collier County does not contract for any services that affect the fire district.

**Exhibit C-3****District's Contracts for Services Increased by 12% From Fiscal Year 2019-20 Through Fiscal Year 2022-23**

Contracted Expenses	Fiscal Year				Review Period Total	Change	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23		Amount	Percent
Building and Vehicle Maintenance	\$27,560	\$28,400	\$39,000	\$44,000	\$138,960	\$16,440	60%
Legal	54,216	27,701	40,029	40,000	161,946	-14,216	-26%
Medical	33,000	33,000	33,000	40,000	139,000	7,000	21%
Audit	22,960	37,600	30,500	30,500	121,560	7,540	33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$137,736</b>	<b>\$126,701</b>	<b>\$142,529</b>	<b>\$154,500</b>	<b>\$561,466</b>	<b>\$16,764</b>	<b>12%</b>

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Immokalee Fire Control District data.

# APPENDIX D

## District Response



### Immokalee Fire Control District

5368 Useppa Drive, Ave Maria, FL. 34142

Michael J. Choate, Fire Chief

June 26, 2023

The Florida Legislature  
Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government  
Accountability  
111 West Madison Street  
Room 312, Claude Pepper Building  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475

ATTN: PK Jameson, Coordinator

Sent electronically to [leventhal.emily@oppaga.fl.gov](mailto:leventhal.emily@oppaga.fl.gov)

RE: District's Response to Findings and Recommendations of OPPAGA's Report – Immokalee Fire District

Dear Ms. Jameson,

We are in receipt of the Immokalee Fire Control District ("the District") Findings and Recommendations Report prepared by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability ("OPPAGA"), and offer the following response:

The District is pleased to note the report finds general compliance with statutory requirements related to special district administration. Staff worked diligently and cooperatively with OPPAGA staff to provide comprehensive and accurate information in a timely manner.

The findings and recommendations of the Report are categorized in three areas:

**1. Improve Accountability**

- a. Board should annually review/revised standard operating guidelines and procedures and document changes in writing.

The Fire Chief and Command Staff are responsible for guidelines and procedures; the Board is responsible for adopting policy. In December of 2020, the Board engaged Lexipol, a leading source of state-specific policy and training solutions that reduces risk, lowers potential litigation costs and improves safety in public safety organizations. Lexipol provides services designed specifically to provide up-to-date, legally defensible policies, procedures and training to the

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Headquarters (239) 657-2111 Fire Prevention (239) 597-9227  
Fax (239) 657-9489



District's personnel. Lexipol provides policy solutions to more than 3,500 public safety agencies across the United States, serving more than 2 million first responders. Since the engagement of Lexipol, the Board has adopted or revised more than thirty-five policies, and Command Staff has updated and initiated multiple procedures and guidelines. These policy and procedure updates and revisions are almost complete, and once personnel are fully trained, the comprehensive policies and procedures will be in effect, and will be updated on an on-going basis.

- b. Board should direct staff to compile, maintain and update records (preferably electronically) to ensure staff certifications meet standards.

In compliance with public records and training requirements, all employee records are retained, updated and monitored. Training certifications are monitored through the District's training software. Personnel records are not electronically maintained with a centralized data base because the District does not have the administrative staff to accomplish this task. The intent is to increase administrative support staff when the budget can accommodate the additional staff.

- c. Board should monitor new procedures to ensure fire incident data is being reported per the Division of State Fire Marshal's guidance.

The District is now in compliance with those requirements, and with the exception of the period of time when the reporting system transitioned from the State to the National Reporting System, historically was in compliance. At the time the reporting requirements were transitioning to NIFRS the District was implementing a new report management system which created an internal miscommunication. The District has now implemented additional internal controls to ensure compliance moving forward.

- d. Board should monitor community growth and related service cost increases, and develop strategies to manage revenue streams to ensure expenditures do not exceed expected revenues.

The Board continuously reviews the revenue and expenses and any use of reserves to fund the operation of the District. During the report review period, there were times when expenses did exceed revenue, mainly due to construction of new facilities, and the timing of the receipt of associated debt to fund such construction (sometimes received in a prior fiscal year). As the District's property value has increased, the Board has diligently worked to increase financial solvency while balancing the need to address the level of service by increasing staffing (both operational and administrative).

## **2. Improve the Extent to Which Goals are Achieved**

- a. Board should consider reducing and revising existing goals and objectives so they are trackable using existing administrative resources, achievable utilizing existing

resources, applicable to the District's needs, and practical for setting expected level of performance.

Staff is in the process of revising the Goals and Objectives to address shortfalls in establishment of measures to evaluate performance, and is utilizing the Florida Fire Chiefs' Association, the Collier County Fire Chiefs' Association and the Florida Association of Special Districts to obtain information on the measures and evaluation practices used by other emergency service agencies.

### **3. Improve Service Delivery**

- a. When financially prepared, the Board should seek approval of Collier County to provide advanced life support services.

As noted in the Report, multiple discussions with County management have occurred regarding the placement of Collier County paramedics with District response personnel to facilitate the provision of advance life support services within the District's response zones.

Almost all of the District's challenges are a result of the lack of funding. As an independent fire control district in the State of Florida, the District is almost solely dependent upon property taxes to fund the provision of fire and emergency services. The District's maximum millage rate as identified in the Florida Constitution is 3.75 mills, or \$3.75 per \$1,000 of property value. This funding mechanism results in two major challenges for the District:

#### **1. Low Property Value and a Constitutional Limit on Millage Rate**

The District is largely agricultural and economically depressed, with many of the residential parcels at a lower appraised value than most in Collier County. The total property value in the District is significantly lower than that of the other two independent fire districts in Collier County, the City of Marco Island and the City of Naples (both of which have fire departments) and Collier County as a whole. Therefore, the very base of funding for the District, combined with the inability to raise the millage rate to generate more revenue, is not sufficient to effectively provide the full level of service required by the members of the community.

#### **2. High Percentage of Tax Exempt Properties**

More than 55% of the property in the District consists of tax exempt parcels, including low income housing, churches, schools, and other 503(c) designated entity owned properties. While these tax exempt parcels provide much needed services to the members of the community, they demand a high level of service from the District while providing no funding for the provision of the services required. The District receives no Federal, State or County funding to assist in the provision of these services.

The provision of fire and emergency services is personnel driven. The District's greatest asset is its personnel who provide the highly demanded services to the residents and visitors of the community. Because of the economic challenges faced, the District is forced to operate with limited staffing and cannot be competitive in the provision of pay and benefits to those providing this much needed service. As a result, more than 50% of the staff has five years or less of service with the District. The cost of employee turnover is significant – each new firefighter has to be provided with specifically fitted protective gear at a cost of more than \$3,000. It is not unusual to hire a new employee, outfit them with gear, and have them separate employment within the first year.

The National Fire Protection Association ("NFPA") establishes standards and criteria for the provision of fire service nationally. Because of financial limitations, we are unable to increase staffing even though incident volume has increased. This results in an increased workload for each firefighter and limitations on meeting the National Fire Protection Association ("NFPA") standards for response times and staffing.

The financial challenges to maintain operations in an effective and safe manner is annual and ongoing. If property values are higher in a given year, the funding challenges are less dramatic. If property values decline, funding challenges become more significant. Almost all of the District's shortfalls in the provision of service are directly a result of financial challenges. As noted in the report, the District has been designated a Rural Area of Opportunity, a rural community which has been adversely affected by extraordinary economic events. While the District has been fortunate to see a cumulative increase in taxable property value of 42% during the review period, the largely agricultural nature of property in the District and the high percentage of tax exempt properties create an ongoing economic challenge.

The District has taken many actions to address the financial challenges faced:

**1. Grant Applications**

The District has applied for and received multiple grants over the last several years:

- a. Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response ("SAFER"), a Federal Grant, provides funding directly to fire departments to assist in increasing the number of firefighters to help meet industry minimum standards. In 2013 and 2014, the District received SAFER funds to increase staffing, but even with this short term financial assistance, staffing levels are not adequate to meet industry standards. The District has applied for a new SAFER grant to provide the funding to hire 9 firefighters to re-open Station 31. We do not yet know if we will receive the funding.
- b. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program provides annual grants on a formula basis to states, cities, and counties to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living

environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income persons. The funds are federal and are administered through Collier County. The District received CDBG funds to purchase land to replace the existing Station 30 on New Market Road East, and to fund architecture and engineering fees. The District applied for but has not yet receive funds to construct the station.

- c. Florida State appropriation in the amount of \$900,000 towards the construction of Station 30.
- d. Florida State appropriation (just received) in the amount of \$6,500,000.00 towards of construction of replacement Station 31.
- e. CARES federal funding in the amount of \$1,000,000 to assist in costs incurred related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- f. Multiple smaller equipment specific related grants and fund matching grants from state and local sources.

## **2. Attempt to Diversify Funding Mechanism**

In 2018, the District attempted to pass by referendum the ability to levy non-ad valorem fire fee assessments to diversify and enhance the revenue stream. The referendum was taken to the voters in August of 2019 and was not successful.

## **3. Reduced Costs**

The District has taken every action possible to reduce operating costs, including closing Station 31 (one of three).

Sincerely,



Patricia Anne Goodnight  
Chair, Board of Fire Commissioners

cc: Michael Choate, Fire Chief  
Thomas Cunningham, Deputy Chief  
Becky Bronsdon, Chief Financial Officer  
Emily Leventhal, Staff Director,

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# OPPAGA

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

OPPAGA provides performance and accountability information about Florida government in several ways.

- Reports deliver program evaluation and policy analysis to assist the Legislature in overseeing government operations, developing policy choices, and making Florida government more efficient and effective.
- Government Program Summaries (GPS), an online encyclopedia, provides descriptive, evaluative, and performance information on more than 200 Florida state government programs.
- PolicyNotes, an electronic newsletter, delivers brief announcements of research reports, conferences, and other resources of interest for Florida's policy research and program evaluation community.
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OPPAGA supports the Florida Legislature by providing data, evaluative research, and objective analyses that assist legislative budget and policy deliberations. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475).

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Project conducted by Tim MacGregor, Laurelin Haas and Chris Hilliard  
PK Jameson, Coordinator