



What do we know about the Fire / Rescue Budget?

The most important thing to note about Palm Beach County Fire / Rescue is that the average compensation (all employees) is currently \$140,000 per year and they are about to get another 4% added to that. This is with other county salaries frozen and private sector county unemployment at 12.1%.

For some perspective, see the Sun Sentinel article "[Some government workers get generous raises despite dismal economy](#)"

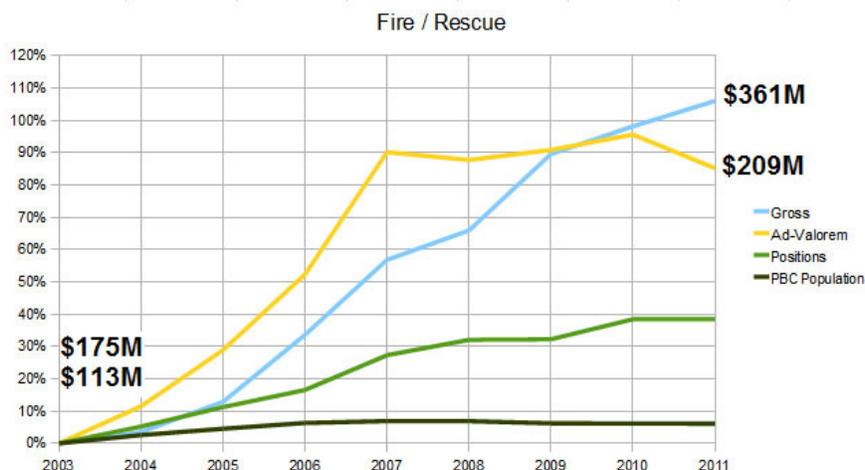
TAB believes that the raises should be deferred (saving \$14M) or other spending reductions be put in place to achieve equivalent savings. Furthermore, the county should perform a comparison with other counties in the state and explain to the citizens why Firefighters in Palm Beach are so expensive.

The current 2011 budget has this line item for Fire / Rescue:

	2010	2011	Change	%
Revenues	126,617,751	152,101,082	25,483,331	20.1%
Appropriations	346,986,345	360,758,193	13,771,848	4.0%
Countywide	8,964,411	9,423,026	458,615	(5.1%)
Net Ad Valorem	211,404,183	199,234,085	(12,170,098)	(5.8%)
Positions	1542	1542	0	(0.0%)

In FY 2011, Fire Rescue's revenue increased by \$26.9 million due to a \$21.5 million increase in the balance brought forward, an increase in interest income, and an increase in the Main MSTU charges for services (primarily transport revenue). **The increase in appropriations is due to increases in personal services costs (Florida retirement rate, collective bargaining agreement across the board increases and long term disability rates).**

So the budget is being increased by about 4.0% and staffing is unchanged. Is that a good thing or not? To find out, we need to put several things in context. If I go back to previous budgets and plot the "Net Ad Valorem" and staffing from 2003 up to the current year, and place the Palm Beach Population growth line on the same graph it looks like this:

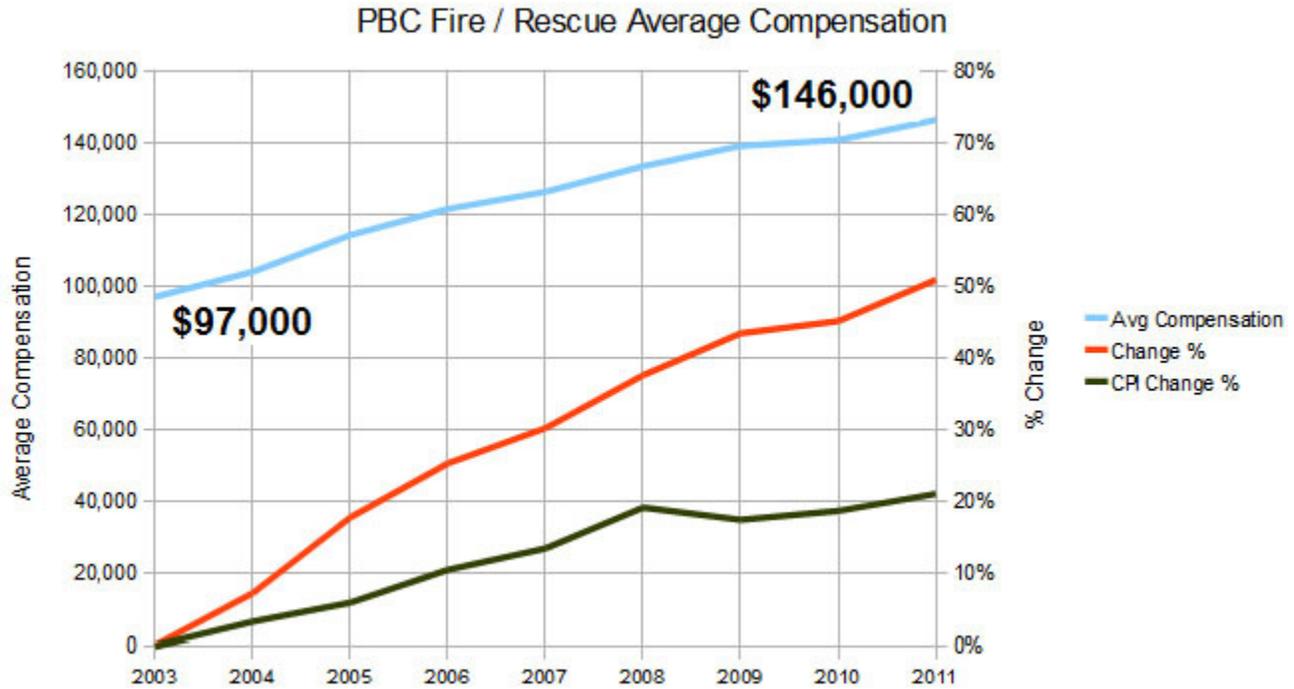


Note that while population stayed relatively flat (we now have only 6% more people in the county than we did in 2003, and it's been declining since 2007), Fire Rescue staffing went up about 38% and spending went up 106%.

To put that another way, in 2003 there was one Fire Rescue employee for every 1087 residents and Fire Rescue charged an average of \$145 per person, while in 2011 it will be one for every 833 residents and cost \$281 per person (a 94% increase). Does this make us safer? We'll look at that question a little later.

2011 Proposed Fire Rescue Budget Cuts

There are none. In fact, the collective bargaining agreement is giving employees an across the board raise of 1% in 4Q10, and 2% next year - with benefits, that is a 4% increase in personal service costs at a time that the rest of the county government is tightening their belts, and civilian unemployment is at 12.2%. Is that prudent?



Project Goals

Palm Beach County Fire & Rescue department is by far one of the most advanced and sophisticated in the Country. The department in its current form is not financially sustainable. Small and large changes should be considered to bring this budget back to a realistic working formula. The opportunity to investigate what can be changed is before us right now, for a short window of time. The collective bargaining contract with the Union will be up for renewal in the Spring of 2011. In order for any significant budget and organizational changes to be made, this negotiation must be handled by strong leaders that have the public interest in mind. We intend to . . .

- Search with great scrutiny the collective bargaining contract, review other contracts in Counties that are more fiscally responsible, identify wasteful and excessive items to eliminate. ([Click HERE](#) to view the current contract.)
- Study comparable Fire & Rescue departments in other areas of the Country that are more fiscally responsible to highlight what they are doing differently. Palm Beach County is above the National average. **Benefits and pay for the average PBC Fire & Rescue worker is over \$140,000 per year.**
- Change the new hire policies to reflect the growing need for a more reasonable retirement and benefits package. This should include age of retirement, as well as a change in benefits (any that can be done on a local level).
- Work on policies that take advantage of the influx of military personnel that will be returning from duty in the near future. These men and women are already well trained in many useful skills and they have VA benefits that could reduce the need for many of their healthcare costs.
- Make proposals in common sense cost cutting areas, such as combining the fleet service with county fleet service, utilizing county communications and dispatch services in a more unified way, eliminating unnecessary vehicles, and replacing 3 full time videographers and photographers with interns from a local film school.
- Explore privatization of services. Provide case studies, and possibly propose a trial area for a test of these services.
- Propose the elimination of Kelly days and review the policy concerning scheduling to reflect the needs of the public, not the needs of Fire & Rescue workers to maintain other jobs.
- Review and eliminate the proposed capital projects that would replace or improve 10 fire stations that are currently not necessary.

- Look into costly and questionable policies concerning lobbying while on duty, including overtime pay in the final retirement formula, accumulating and getting paid for extra sick days, and taking advantage of "double dipping".

We have a lot of work and research to do in this committee, and we will need to accomplish it before the bargaining agreement begins. Our team is committed to presenting all of our research to the Commissioners and staff and we expect a full review and consideration of all of these suggestions. We will provide the research necessary for this review.