

# CORAL GABLES

THE CITY BEAUTIFUL

There is a proposal for consideration by the Commission of the City of Coral Gables to utilize the property located at 7000 Old Cutler Road as a park and a firehouse resembling a single family home. As your Fire Chief, I hold the safety and protection of our residents in the highest regard, so too do I take into account the quality of life our Coral Gables residents expect. For this reason, I want to assure you that we take into careful consideration any impact our responsibilities have on our community. The following list was comprised of frequently expressed concerns regarding the proposed park and firehouse.

## **Background**

Historically, response to the central area of the City between Fire Station Number 2 (FS2) (located off Riviera Drive and US1), Fire Station 3 (FS3) (located off Old Cutler Road, and Red Road), has been challenging. The challenge is due to travel distances and access limitations brought about by traffic congestion and lack of alternate travel routes. The proposed firehouse will enhance response times to the surrounding communities; such as Coco Plum, Gables Estates, Hammock Lakes, and the west end of the University of Miami.

The constant monitoring, evaluating, and adjustment of our resources to enhance response times are critical to effective mitigation of emergencies. Response times are critical to improving the survivability of victims involved in a fire, medical emergency, or other traumatic incident.

- Brain death commences 4-6 minutes after loss of circulation. A cardiac arrest victim's chances of survival diminish by 10% every minute they remain without a heartbeat.
- A patient who sustains a life threatening traumatic injury has the best chance of survival if they are stabilized and transported from the scene within 10 minutes of the incident and are in a Trauma Center within the first 60 minutes following the event.
- A structure fire doubles in intensity every minute it is allowed to free burn. A phenomenon known as "flashover" may occur less than 10 minutes from the time the fire reaches a free burning state. A victim in a burning structure that reaches "flashover" state will not survive. The likelihood for Firefighter injury or death is certain during a "flashover."
- Over 150 buildings meet the Maximum Risk criteria within this service area. The category of buildings identified as Maximum Risk are; occupancies that are of substantial size and/or present a high potential for loss of life or a large loss of economic value to the community. These occupancies have the highest fire flow requirements. The residents in some of these buildings may be incapable of self-preservation (i.e. elderly living in residential high-rise buildings, hospitals and nursing homes). In Coral Gables, Maximum Risk designation was given to all the high-rise occupancies because of the potential for high loss of life and property in the event of a fire.



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This proposed firehouse would serve the buildings with the highest risk and consequence for an emergency.

The Fire Department has been exploring the possibility of locating a fire station in the service gap between FS2 and FS3 since May of 2016. The majority of the properties available in this area are residential. Both the Economic Development and Fire Departments have evaluated several possible sites including city-owned, commercial, residential, and green spaces. Altogether 16 sites have been analyzed as possible locations, with the goal of identifying a site that provides for a response time enhancement with minimal impact to the surrounding areas; specifically, residential communities. The property located at 7000 Old Cutler Road, is an ideal location from the standpoint that it meets both objectives of enhancing response times while minimally affecting surrounding residential communities. Though this property is residential, it is located on Cartagena Circle that connects three major thoroughfares.

Amongst the benefits provided by the proposed location are:

- The location will enhance travel routes south of US-1 where access to communities such as Coco Plum, Gables Estates, and Hammock Lakes has been challenging. It will also provide services to the High Pines/Davis Ponce area should the proposed annexation be approved.
- The location will narrow the 5-mile gap between FS2 and FS3, reducing the distance between fire stations to 3 miles or less.
- The location will provide alignment of resources within a set boundary without creating duplication of efforts. This arrangement will enhance the effectiveness of response radii and response times.
- The Location provides for minimal impact to the surrounding communities.
- The location is significantly above sea level mitigating any reduction in the high level of services after a storm surge event (e.g. hurricane).

## Resident Inquires

### **1. Has the City already made the decision to purchase the property?**

No. The City has recently negotiated terms of a proposed purchase and sales agreement with the seller, but those terms are subject to City Commission approval (by super majority vote at two meetings) and Community Meeting(s).

### **2. How will a fire house affect the neighborhood?**



As is the case with all City facilities, the City wants to make sure that it is a good neighbor. With this in mind, it ensures that the arrangement of the buildings, exterior appearance, and practices do not detract or affect the surrounding community and causes as little impact as possible. Plans for the site include improvements such as enhanced landscaping and building design. The Neighborhood/Community meeting(s) will provide preliminary illustrations of the project. The objective is to address life-threatening challenges while not detracting from the quality of life.

**3. How will the fire truck(s) exit the site on any of the three sides, with all of the traffic in the area without the use of sirens and lights?**

The proposed location provides direct access by emergency vehicles to three main thoroughfares; Lejeune Road, Sunset Drive and Old Cutler Road. The arrangement of the property allows for a one way in and one way out configuration. Vehicles would enter through the entrance on Old Cutler Road and exit on to Sunset Drive towards Cartagena Circle. The location of the property enables vehicles to enter and exit the house while merging into traffic. This arrangement will dampen the use of sirens and reduce the need for the backup alarms. The use of lights and sirens would not be any more than is the presently the case for the area.

**4. What will the sound/noise impact on the surrounding homes/neighborhood be? Similarly, how will the truck(s) reverse onto the site without the truck(s) beeping?**

The Fire Department makes it a priority to be a good neighbor wherever it resides. It aims to minimize any impact to the neighboring community that it may cause. This has been its objective both at FS1 and at FS3 which are within or in close proximity to residences for many years. The proposed location provides direct access by emergency vehicles to three main thoroughfares: Lejeune Road, Sunset Drive and Old Cutler Road. In contrast, the other properties that were under consideration required fire rescue vehicles to drive through residential streets on a daily basis. The location of the property enables vehicles to enter and exit the house while merging into traffic. Vehicles would enter through the entrance on Old Cutler Road and exit on to Sunset Drive towards Cartagena Circle. This arrangement will dampen the use of sirens and reduce the need for the backup alarms.

Taking into consideration the Fire Department's proven past practice of reducing or minimizing any actions that impact the quality of life of the residential homes surrounding its facilities; as well as, the arrangement of the proposed property, the expectation is for the noise impact to be minimal.



**5. How many fire truck(s) and Firefighters will be onsite?**

The firehouse will initially house four (4) Firefighter-Paramedics and one (1) Fire Engine. The house will have capacity for up to seven (7) Firefighters.

**6. How do you plan to screen the firehouse so that the neighbors will not have a visual of fire truck(s)? What will happen to the existing trees currently located on the site?**

The intent of this project is not to detract or affect the neighborhood, enhancing access and response times to life threatening emergencies in the area. The site currently has approximately 136 trees that add to the lush landscape of the property. The existing landscape along the border of the property screens the house from street view and will continue to do so after the renovations. The fire truck will be housed in a structure that is commensurate with the existing construction. Any addition to the house will resemble a residential car garage similar to what is found in the neighboring homes. Enhanced landscaping will provide additional buffering to the three adjacent homes located on the West and Southwest of the site.

**7. Will the site have exterior lighting, maintenance space, a communications antenna, etc.?**

No. Lighting of the house will be consistent with that of a residential home. Taking into account the Fire Department's objectives for the proposed site, there will not be any maintenance facility or functions taking place on this property. Due to its proximity to existing infrastructure, there is no need for a large industrial type antenna. Any required infrastructure will be incorporated into the structure consistent with what is normal and customary in a residential home.

**8. Will the house eventually be replaced by another structure with a concrete roof?**

As stated above, the goal is for any structure located on the property to resemble the neighboring area; this includes any future replacement or enhancements to the property. The objective is to retrofit the house while maintaining a single-family presence and any hardening of the structure would not be noticeable. In addition, any proposed structure will be subject to the City approval process, which includes review by the City's Board of Architects.

**9. The house was built in 1936, yet the City plans to retrofit the existing building. Will this require the same process that all property owners are subject to?**



As part of the City's purchase agreement, it will obtain a thorough property inspection at which time the City will assess the extent of the renovations. The age of the home will not prevent the City from retrofitting or hardening the structure. The City will follow the established processes that all residents are subject to which includes a review by the independent Board of Architects, Planning & Zoning, as well as, Public Notices and Hearings.

**10. Have you sought input from the City's Historical Department?**

Yes. On July 3, 2017, the City's Historical Preservation Department evaluated the home and determined it did not meet the criteria for historic significance.

**11. How much of the site will be used as a park versus a firehouse?**

The plans are not finalized, but a good part of the site will be a park. The park will front Cartagena Circle and provide access to the Old Cutler trail to spur residents to engage in outdoor activities. The park will buffer the firehouse, limiting its visibility from the street.

**12. What type of amenities will be available at the park? What will the hours of operations be? What security measures will be put in place?**

The intention of the open space frontage is for the firehouse to create synergy with the Old Cutler bike trail and spur outdoor activities. The City will hold a meeting(s) with the community to obtain feedback for a park design. The park hours of operations will be from dawn to dusk. The City will enhance security with smart technology for proactive oversight of the park and the adjacent firehouse will have an enhanced security system.

**13. Why has there been no notice or public comment yet?**

The City recently negotiated terms of a purchase and sales agreement which requires City Commission (at two meetings) approval and Neighborhood/Community meeting(s). Any notification prior to this point would have been premature, as the City had no commitment from the Seller. There will be several opportunities for public comment throughout the process.

**14. Is the City following its Zoning Code for the use of this site as a firehouse?**

Yes. The property will follow the city processes for change of land use and change of zoning. This process also requires multiple Public Hearings. Ultimately, the City Commission must approve any zoning change.



**15. Have there been any traffic engineering studies conducted to determine this new “use” will affect the traffic at the Cartagena Circle and at the three historic roads?**

Not at this time. Traffic review will be part of the process, as required by the City Code and Zoning Code.

**16. How will the firehouse affect the value of the surrounding properties?**

The conditions that raise property value concerns for surrounding neighbors include the “look” of the building, sirens, and the potential traffic. The City has addressed the “look” by retrofitting the existing home versus building a traditional fire station and ensuring the lush landscape borders buffers the views of the fire vehicles; these steps will make the fire house less noticeable to neighborhood. The location of this site allows access to Old Cutler Road and Sunset Drive - flexible ingress and egress - which would further dampen the use of sirens (as mentioned above). Three high traffic streets currently border the area. Consequently, no impact on value due to traffic is expected. Furthermore, the firehouse’s objective is to address offsite calls and not drive-up traffic to the property. FS 1 and 3 are within close proximity to residential units and there has not been any noticeable impact on the value of the surrounding homes. Since the North Gables homes values are historically lower than the South Gables home values, the City has compared the prices of homes surrounding FS3. The City found that the values of those homes were not impacted by proximity to the fire station. This is true even considering that FS3’s location is larger and provides a more intensive use than the anticipated use of the proposed firehouse.

Related to the use as a park, part of the City’s overall vision is to introduce more green space throughout the City. Studies show that parks have a positive impact on nearby property under the theory “proximate principle.”

**17. How much will the City pay for the property?**

The total purchase price is \$4 million. \$2.3 million of the funding will come from City collected impact fees, \$200,000 from General Capital Improvement Fund, and \$1.5 million from a State of Florida grant. The \$1.5 million was appropriated to the City solely to fund a park/fire station project and is not available for alternate uses. Failure to use the funds may result in the loss of the grant.

