

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES LOCAL BILL STAFF ANALYSIS**

**BILL #:** HB 1225 w/CS Midway Fire District/Santa Rosa County  
**SPONSOR(S):** Benson  
**TIED BILLS:** None. **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** None.

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<b>REFERENCE</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>ANALYST</b>	<b>STAFF DIRECTOR</b>
1) <u>Local Government &amp; Veterans' Affairs</u>	<u>14 Y, 0 N w/CS</u>	<u>Smith-Boggis</u>	<u>Highsmith-Smith</u>
2) <u>Judiciary</u>	<u></u>	<u>Havlicak</u>	<u>Havlicak</u>
3) <u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>
4) <u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>
5) <u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>

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**SUMMARY ANALYSIS**

This bill codifies all prior special acts relating to the Midway Fire Protection District in Santa Rosa County into a single act and repeals all prior special acts relating to the District's charter.

The bill renames the District to the Midway Fire District. The bill conforms the District's authority with the Independent Special Fire Control District general law, and the general law relating to the Uniform Special District Accountability Act. The bill maintains the district's current authority to impose and collect impact fees, non-ad valorem assessments and ad valorem taxes.

No fiscal impacts are anticipated for either fiscal year 2003-04 or 2004-05 according to the Economic Impact Statement.

This document does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill sponsor or House of Representatives.

**STORAGE NAME:** h1225c.ju.doc  
**DATE:** April 8, 2003

## FULL ANALYSIS

### I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

#### A. DOES THE BILL:

- |                                      |                              |                             |   |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Reduce government?                | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Lower taxes?                      | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Expand individual freedom?        | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Increase personal responsibility? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Empower families?                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

For any principle that received a "no" above, please explain:

#### B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

##### Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill renames the Midway Fire Protection District to the Midway Fire District (District). The bill conforms the District's authority with the Independent Special Fire Control District, chapter 191, Florida Statutes and the Uniform Special District Accountability Act, chapter 189, Florida Statutes. The bill provides for boundaries, and boundary adjustments to be made pursuant to s. 171.095, F.S. The current millage of Midway Fire District is .95 mills and remains unchanged under the provisions of this bill. The district is currently authorized to impose and collect impact fees, non-ad valorem assessments and ad valorem taxes.

##### Chapter 191, Florida Statutes, Provisions

Chapter 191, Florida Statutes, is the "Independent Special Fire Control District Act" (Act). The Act's purpose is to establish standards and procedures concerning the operations and governance of the 53 independent special fire control districts, and to provide greater uniformity in the financing authority, operations, and procedures for electing members of the governing boards of such districts to ensure greater accountability to the public. The Act requires each district, whether created by special act, general law of local application, or county ordinance, to comply. The section provides that it is the intent of the Legislature that this Act supersedes all special acts or general laws of local application provisions that contain the charter of an independent special fire control district. However, those provisions that address district boundaries and geographical subdistricts for the election of members of the governing board are excepted. Chapter 191, Florida Statutes, also does not repeal any authorization providing for the levying of ad valorem taxes, special assessments, non-ad valorem assessments, impact fees, or other charges.

##### District Board of Commissioners

Section 191.005, Florida Statutes, provides for the election of the district board of commissioners, including its membership, officers, and meetings. This section requires the business affairs of each district to be conducted and administered by a five-member board that is elected in nonpartisan staggered elections by the electors of the district. Districts that currently have three-member boards were required to increase to five members unless a special act was enacted after 1997 that provides that they are three-member boards. Although a special act is needed to have fewer than five members, a district can have more than five commissioners on its governing board. Pursuant to paragraph (c) of subsection 191.005(1), the board of any district may request the local legislative delegation that represents the area within the district to create by special law geographical subdistricts for board seats. Any board of five members or larger elected on a subdistrict basis as of the effective date of this act

shall continue to elect board members from such previously designated subdistricts, and this act shall not require the elimination of board seats from such boards.

Candidates for the board are required to qualify with the county supervisor of elections. Except as specifically stated in chapter 191, Florida Statutes, elections must be held at the same time and in the same manner as prescribed by law for holding general elections in accordance with subsections 189.405(2)(a) and (3), Florida Statutes. Each member is elected for a term of 4 years and serves until the member's successor is chosen and qualified. Candidates for the board must qualify by paying a filing fee equal to 3 percent of the salary or honorarium paid for the office, or a filing fee of \$25, whichever is more. In the alternative, candidates may qualify by submitting a petition that contains the signatures of at least 3 percent of the district's registered electors, or any lesser amount of signatures as directed by chapter 99, chapter 582, or other general or special law. No election or party assessment shall be levied if the election is nonpartisan. The forms are to be submitted and checked in the same manner as petitions filed by nonpartisan judicial candidates pursuant to section 105.035, Florida Statutes.

If a district presently elects members of its board, the next election must be conducted in accordance with section 191.005, F.S. This section does not require the early expiration of any member's term of office by more than 60 days.

Members of the board may each be paid a salary or honorarium that is determined by at least a majority-plus-one vote of the board. Such salary or honorarium is prohibited from exceeding \$500 per month for each member. Members may be reimbursed for travel and per diem expenses pursuant to section 112.061, Florida Statutes.

When a vacancy occurs on the board, the remaining members are permitted to appoint a qualified person to fill the seat until the next general election, at which time an election must be held to fill the vacancy. Upon assuming office, each member must take and subscribe to the oath of office and within 30 days after assuming office, give a surety bond in the sum of \$5,000. The cost of such bond is borne by the district.

The board is required to maintain records of all meetings, resolutions, proceedings, certificates, bonds given by commissioners, and corporate acts. The records are open to inspection in the same manner as state, county, and municipal records are open under chapter 119, Florida Statutes. All meetings of the board are open to the public and governed by chapter 286, Florida Statutes, section 189.417, Florida Statutes, and other applicable general laws.

#### Powers of the District

The district's general governmental powers, which may be exercised by majority vote, include but are not limited to the following:

- To provide for a pension or retirement plan for its employees. The board is also authorized to provide for an extra compensation program, including a lump-sum bonus payment program, to reward outstanding employees.
- To adopt resolutions and procedures prescribing the powers, duties, and functions of the officers of the district, the conduct of the business of the district, the maintenance of records, and the form of other documents and records of the district. The board is also authorized to adopt ordinances and resolutions that are necessary to conduct district business.
- To acquire, by purchase, lease, gift, dedication, devise, or otherwise, real and personal property or any estate for any purpose authorized in the Act.

- To hold, control, and acquire by donation or purchase any public easement, dedication to public use, platted reservation for public purposes, or reservation for those purposes authorized by the Act.
- To borrow money and issue bonds, revenue anticipation notes, or certificates payable from and secured by a pledge of funds, revenues, taxes, and assessments, warrants, notes, or other evidence of indebtedness, and to mortgage real and personal property when necessary.
- To charge user and impact fees authorized by resolution of the board, in amounts necessary to conduct district activities and services, and to enforce their receipt and collection “in the manner prescribed by resolution not inconsistent with law.”
- To levy non-ad valorem assessments against the taxable real estate lying within the territorial bounds of the District. As provided in section 191.009(2), Florida Statutes, non-ad valorem assessment rates set by the board may exceed the maximum rates established by special act, county ordinance, the previous year’s resolution, or referendum, in an amount not to exceed the average annual growth rate in Florida personal income over the previous five years.
- To exercise the power of eminent domain pursuant to chapter 73, Florida Statutes, or chapter 74, Florida Statutes, over any property within the district, except municipal, county, state, special district, or federal property used for a public purpose. Eminent domain may only be exercised for district purposes relating solely to the establishment and maintenance of fire stations and substations.
- To assess and impose upon real property in the district ad valorem taxes and special assessments.
- To impose and foreclose special assessment liens or to impose, collect, and enforce non-ad valorem assessments pursuant to chapter 197, Florida Statutes.

#### Special Powers of the District

Independent special fire control districts are granted “special powers” relating to the provision of fire suppression and prevention, which involves the establishment and maintenance of fire stations and substations and the acquisition and maintenance of firefighting and fire-protection equipment deemed necessary to prevent or fight fires. The board is authorized to carry out the following powers:

- Establish and maintain emergency medical and rescue response services and acquire and maintain rescue, medical, and other emergency equipment, pursuant to chapter 401, Florida Statutes, and any certificate of public convenience and necessity or its equivalent issued for those purposes.
- Employ, train, and equip firefighting and other personnel, including volunteer firefighters, as necessary to accomplish the duties of the district.
- Conduct public education to promote awareness of methods to prevent fires and reduce loss of life and property.
- Adopt and enforce fire safety standards and codes and enforce the rules of the State Fire Marshal.
- Conduct arson investigations and cause-and-origin investigations.
- Adopt hazardous material safety plans and emergency response plans in coordination with the county emergency management agency, as provided in chapter 252, Florida Statutes.

- Contract with general-purpose local government for emergency management planning and services.

## Taxes and Assessments

Districts are authorized to levy ad valorem taxes and non-ad valorem assessments for district purposes. Each district is authorized by this general provision to levy ad valorem taxes up to 3.75 mills, upon voter approval, notwithstanding lower millage caps in the special acts of individual districts. This provision applies unless a higher amount has previously been authorized. In that event, the higher, previously authorized rate applies. With respect to user charges, the board is permitted to provide a schedule of charges for emergency services, including firefighting occurring in or to structures outside the district.

The board may establish a schedule of impact fees, if the general-purpose local government has not adopted an impact fee for fire services. The schedule of impact fees must be in compliance with any standards set by general law for new construction to pay for the cost of new facilities and equipment. The board may enter into agreements with general-purpose local governments to share in the revenues from fire protection impact fees imposed by such governments.

## Bonds

Independent special fire control districts are authorized to issue various types of bonds, including general obligation bonds, assessment bonds, revenue bonds, notes, bond anticipation notes, or other evidences of indebtedness to finance all or part of any proposed improvements by this Act or under general law or special law. The total annual payments for the principal and interest on such indebtedness must not exceed 50 percent of the total annual budgeted revenues of the district. The bonds are payable from the non-ad valorem assessments or other non-ad valorem revenues, including user fees or charges or rental income authorized by this Act or general law. No proceedings may be required for the issuance of bonds other than those provided by this section and by general law. Detailed and lengthy provisions are set forth relating to issuance of bonds and the use of bond proceeds, and authority is given for the issuance of refunding bonds.

## Boundaries and Mergers

There are conditions under which the boundaries of an independent special fire control district are permitted to be modified, extended, enlarged or dissolved. Lands may be added or deleted from a district only by special act of the Legislature. In order to levy ad valorem taxes in a newly annexed area, approval at referendum is required.

The merger of a district with all or part of another independent special district or dependent fire control district is effective only when it is ratified by the Legislature. A district's merger with another governmental entity is not justification for increasing the ad valorem taxes on property within the original limits of the district beyond the maximum established by the district's enabling legislation, unless such increase is approved by the electors of the district by referendum.

A district may only be dissolved by special act of the Legislature, subject to referendum vote of the electors of the district. If legislative dissolution of a district is proposed in order to consolidate fire services under county government, the county is required to prepare a report describing the plans for merger. The county commission is required to consider the report at a public hearing. If the commission adopts the report, the request for legislative dissolution is permitted to proceed. The report must be filed as an attachment to the economic impact statement regarding the special act or general law of local application dissolving the district.

## **Municipal Annexation within Independent Special Districts**

The municipality may make an election by adopting a resolution evidencing the election and forwarding the resolution to the office of the special district and the property appraiser and tax collector of the county in which the annexed property is located. In addition, the municipality may incorporate its election into the annexation ordinance.

Upon a municipality's election to assume the district's responsibilities, the municipality and the district may enter into an interlocal agreement addressing the orderly transfer of service responsibilities, real assets, equipment, and personnel to the municipality. The agreement addresses allocation of responsibility for special district services, avoidance of double taxation of property owners for such services in the area of overlapping jurisdiction, prevention of loss of any district revenues which may be detrimental to the continued operations of the independent district, avoidance of impairment of existing district contracts, disposition of property and equipment of the independent district and any assumption of indebtedness for it, the status and employee rights of any adversely affected employees of the independent district, and any other matter reasonably related to the transfer of responsibilities.

If the municipality and the district are unable to enter into an interlocal agreement, the municipality advises the district and the property appraiser and tax collector of the county in which the annexed property is located and, effective October 1 of the calendar year immediately following the calendar year in which the municipality declares its intent to assume service responsibilities in the annexed area, the district remains the service provider in the annexed area for a period of 4 years. During the 4-year period, the municipality pays the district an amount equal to the ad valorem taxes or assessments that would have been collected had the property remained in the district.

By the end of the 4-year period, or any extension mutually agreed upon by the district and the municipality, the municipality and the district must enter into an agreement that identifies the existing district property located in the municipality or primarily serving the municipality that will be assumed by the municipality, the fair market value of such property, and the manner of transfer of such property and any associated indebtedness. If the municipality and district are unable to agree to an equitable distribution of the district's property and indebtedness, the matter must proceed to circuit court. In equitably distributing the district's property and associated indebtedness, the taxes and other revenues paid the district by or on behalf of the residents of the annexed area are taken into consideration.

During the 4-year period, or during any mutually agreed upon extension, district service and capital expenditures within the annexed area shall continue to be rationally related to the annexed area's service needs. Service and capital expenditures within the annexed area continues to be rationally related to the percentage of district revenue received on behalf of the residents of the annexed area when compared to the district's total revenue. A capital expenditure greater than \$25,000 shall not be made by the district for use primarily within the annexed area without the express consent of the municipality.

If the municipality elects not to assume the district's responsibilities, the district remains the service provider in the annexed area, the geographical boundaries of the district shall continue to include the annexed area, and the district may continue to levy ad valorem taxes and assessments on the real property located within the annexed area. If the municipality elects to assume the district's responsibilities, the district's boundaries shall contract to exclude the annexed area at the time and in the manner provided in the agreement.

If the municipality elects to assume the district's responsibilities and the municipality and the district are unable to enter into an interlocal agreement, and the district continues to remain the service provider in the annexed area, the geographical boundaries of the district shall contract to exclude the annexed area on the effective date of the beginning of the 4-year period provided. Nothing in this section precludes the contraction of the boundary of any independent special district by special act of the Legislature. The district shall not levy ad valorem taxes or assessments on the annexed property in the calendar year in which its boundaries contract and subsequent years, but it may continue to collect and

use all ad valorem taxes and assessments levied in prior years. Nothing in this section prohibits the district from assessing user charges and impact fees within the annexed area while it remains the service provider.

In addition to any other authority provided by law, a municipality is authorized to levy assessments on property located in an annexed area to offset all or a portion of the costs incurred by the municipality in assuming district responsibilities pursuant to this section. Such assessments may be collected pursuant to and in accordance with applicable law.

This section does not apply to districts created pursuant to chapter 190 or chapter 373, Florida Statutes.

## **Codification**

Codification is the process of bringing a special act up-to-date. After a special district is created, special acts often amend or alter the special district's charter provisions. To ascertain the current status of a special district's charter, it is necessary to research all amendments or changes made to the charter since its inception or original passage by the Legislature. Codification of special district charters is important because it allows readers to more easily determine the current charter of a district.

Codification of special district charters was initially authorized by the 1997 Legislature and is codified in section 189.429, F.S. and s. 191.015, F.S. The 1998 Legislature subsequently amended both sections of statute. Current law provides for codification of all special district charters by December 1, 2004. The 1998 law allows for the adoption of the codification schedule provided for in an October 3, 1997, memorandum issued by the Chair of the Committee on Community Affairs. Any codified act relating to a special district must provide for the repeal of all prior special acts of the Legislature relating to the district. Additionally, the 2001 Legislature amended section 189.429, Florida Statutes to provide that reenactment of existing law pursuant to section 189.429: (1) shall not be construed to grant additional authority nor to supercede the authority of an entity; (2) shall continue the application of exceptions to law contained in special acts reenacted pursuant to the section; (3) shall not be construed to modify, amend, or alter any covenants, contracts, or other obligations of any district with respect to bonded indebtedness; and (4) shall not be construed to affect a district's ability to levy and collect taxes, assessments, fees, or charges for the purpose of redeeming or servicing the district's bonded indebtedness.

Since the enactment of sections 189.429 and 191.015, F.S., 122 special districts have codified their charters.

## **Status Statement Language**

Section 189.404(5), F.S., provides that after October 1, 1997, the charter of any newly created special district shall contain and, as practical, the charter of a preexisting special district shall be amended to contain, a reference to the status of the special district as dependent or independent. When necessary, the status statement shall be amended to conform to the Department of Community Affairs's determination or declaratory statement regarding the status of the district.

## **C. SECTION DIRECTORY:**

**Section 1.** Provides that this act is the District's charter codification required under section 191.015, Florida Statutes; provides Legislative intent; preserves all District authority, including the authority to annually assess and levy against the taxable property in the district an ad valorem tax not to exceed the limit provided in the district's prior special acts.

**Section 2.** Codifies, reenacts, amends, and repeals chapters 80-607, 82-377, and 90-425, Laws of Florida.

- Section 3.** Re-creates the Midway Fire Protection District, renames the district to the Midway Fire District, and re-creates and reenacts the charter as follows:
- Section 1. Provides for definitions.
- Section 2. Provides for the creation, status, charter amendments, boundaries, and District purpose.
- Section 3. Provides for a five member Board of Commissioners; provides for four year term limits; provides for procedures for elections; provides for the employment of personnel; provides for the salaries and any other wages of fire department and emergency service personnel.
- Section 4. Provides for officers, board compensation, and bonds.
- Section 5. Provides for the powers, duties, and responsibilities of the Board.
- Section 6. Provides for impact fees.
- Section 7. Provides for tax liens.
- Section 8. Provides for the deposit of taxes, assessments, fees and authority to disburse funds.
- Section 9. Authorizes Board of Commissioners to borrow money.
- Section 10. Provides for the use of district funds.
- Section 11. Provides for record of board meetings; authorizes the adoption of policies and regulations; provides for annual reports; provides for a budget.
- Section 12. Authorizes the District to enact fire prevention ordinances; authorizes board of commissioners to appoint a fire marshal; provides for the acquiring of land; provides for contracts; authorizes the district to establish and maintain emergency medical and rescue response services and to acquire and maintain rescue, medical, and other emergency equipment, subject ch. 401, F.S.
- Section 13. Provides for annexations by municipalities or other fire control districts to follow procedures in s. 171.093, F.S.
- Section 14. Provides for dissolution.
- Section 15. Provides immunity from tort liability; provides exemption from personal liability; provides district shall be defendant from all claims, with exception.
- Section 16. Provides for district expansion.
- Section 4.** Provides for the liberal construction of act.
- Section 5.** Provides that any part of this act is held void such holding shall not affect any other part.
- Section 6.** Repeals chapters 80-607, 82-377, and 90-425, Laws of Florida.
- Section 7.** Provides that the act shall take effect upon being law.

## II. NOTICE/REFERENDUM AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS



A. NOTICE PUBLISHED? Yes  No

IF YES, WHEN? November 16, 2002

WHERE? Pensacola News Journal, Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida

B. REFERENDUM(S) REQUIRED? Yes  No

IF YES, WHEN?

C. LOCAL BILL CERTIFICATION FILED? Yes, attached  No

D. ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT FILED? Yes, attached  No

### III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES: Not Applicable.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY: Not Applicable.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

Other Comments

The attorney for the District submitted a letter on December 20, 2002, stating "The District's boundaries are updated to provide a more accurate boundary description."

Supremacy Clause

Many local bills contain language providing that in the event of a conflict of the provisions of the local bill with the provisions of any other general or local law, the provisions of the act being considered controls to the extent of the conflict(s). This is referred to as a "supremacy" clause. This language does not allow interested persons or Members of the Legislature knowledge of the specific laws containing potential conflicts. Unless those specific laws in conflict are identified, it is suggested that the "supremacy" clause be removed from the bill.

### IV. AMENDMENT/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

The Committee on Local Government & Veterans' Affairs adopted one amendment on April 2, 2003. The amendment removed section six of the bill, the supremacy clause.