

FIRE DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Eric Carpenter, City Manager
FROM: Digna Abello, Fire Chief
DATE: December 2, 2024
SUBJECT: UTILIZE 7605 COLLINS AVENUE FOR OCEAN RESCUE

RECOMMENDATION:

The purpose of this Letter to Commission (LTC) is to inform the Commission about recent discussions surrounding the Ocean Rescue Division (ORD) Headquarters relocation and the suitability of The Betsy House facility for our operational needs. After a thorough review of our current space requirements, constraints, and alternative solutions, I recommend that we pursue options that ensure the continuity of our essential services without compromising functionality or staff wellbeing. Splitting the Betsy House into two separate floors to accommodate two different departments does not work currently with our operational needs.

BACKGROUND HISTORY:

As directed, our team conducted a walkthrough of The Betsy House to evaluate its viability as a future Ocean Rescue Division facility. While The Betsy House offers certain advantages, its use is complicated by the building department's need for both floors following their significant \$8 million investment. Sharing the facility poses several challenges, particularly due to our unique space requirements, including:

- Separate locker rooms and restrooms for male and female staff up to 18 personnel to ensure privacy and compliance with workplace standards.
- Designated areas for lifesaving equipment storage, Ocean Rescue emergency vehicle storage (9 Ocean Rescue Vehicle assets, small and heavy equipment), staff training, and administrative functions.
- Adequate parking facilities (up to 18 personal vehicles), especially in the northern zones where space is already constrained.

In its current configuration, The Betsy House does not adequately address these needs, and sharing the facility would result in operational inefficiencies. The current layout is not suitable with all the assets the Ocean Rescue Division oversees.

ANALYSIS:

Space Allocation:

In agreement with CWA President sharing a building and locker areas with another department, particularly one with different operational needs, is not viable for our Ocean Rescue Division. Ocean Rescue staff require dedicated changing areas, restrooms, and equipment storage to ensure readiness and professionalism. Combining spaces or even limiting areas would compromise efficiency, privacy and operational readiness.

Parking Constraints:

Parking availability remains a critical issue, particularly for staff working in the northern sectors. A shortage of parking disrupts operations, especially during peak hours when staff transitions are frequent. Currently Ocean Rescue personnel staff up 18 personnel just at that location. Reconfiguring the lot to add parking spaces, potentially through a perimeter fence adjustment, could partially address this concern.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

Reevaluate Facility Options:

While The Betsy House may not be suitable for shared use, exploring other nearby properties, modular building enhancements, or waiting till the new 79th street Ocean Rescue Headquarters east of Collins Avenue is built could offer better long-term solutions. This approach would ensure that our specific space requirements are met without conflicting with the building department's needs.

Temporary Trailer Use:

While we explore long-term solutions, the temporary trailer currently housing the Ocean Rescue Division continues to meet our basic operational needs. It's continued use allows us to carefully assess all available options and avoid rushing into decisions that could hinder our ability to function effectively.

Lot Reconfiguration of the Current Ocean Rescue 79th street Sub-Head Quarters for Parking Optimization:

To address the persistent parking shortages in the northern sectors of Miami Beach we propose assigning a team to assess the feasibility of reconfiguring the existing parking lot at 79th street to create additional public parking spaces is essential. A simple adjustment, such as moving the perimeter fence, could gain up to 4,500 square feet and significantly improve public parking availability without requiring substantial investment. Parking availability is a pressing issue in the northern sectors of Miami

Beach, and reconfiguring the lot where Ocean Rescue Sub-Headquarters currently sits could provide a temporary yet impactful solution. Specifically, if the southern perimeter fence were moved closer to the south side of the trailer, this adjustment could create space for 8-10 additional public parking spots. This change would significantly help alleviate the ongoing parking issues in North Beach, particularly during peak times. Attached is a proposed rendering that shows the possibility of capturing 8-10 parking spots.

Relocation of the Outdoor Gym:

The current outdoor gym on the south side of the compound would need to be relocated to the north side. This relocation would require collaboration with Property Management/Facilities to rebuild the gym in a functional and accessible layout.

Conclusion

The Ocean Rescue Division's role is vital to public safety, and any changes to our facilities must prioritize operational efficiency, staff wellbeing, and readiness. I strongly recommend that we:

- Continue to utilize the temporary trailer while pursuing facility options that fully meet our needs.
- Implement the proposed parking lot reconfiguration at 79th street to create additional public parking spaces and alleviate parking issues for the public in the northern sectors of Miami Beach.

These steps will help us maintain high standards of service while addressing space and resource allocation challenges in a thoughtful and equitable manner.