Movin' On Up

Manhattan Fire Protection District

District Overview

The Manhattan Fire Protection District (MFPD) serves more than 26,000 residents across over 142 square miles in Will County, Illinois. Its service area includes the Villages of Manhattan and Peotone, along with portions of Manhattan, Wilton Center, Jackson, Will, Peotone, and Green Garden Townships. The District provides a comprehensive range of emergency services, including fire suppression, emergency medical response, motor vehicle accident response, technical rescue, fire prevention, and public education.

Following its 2023 consolidation with the Peotone Fire Protection District, MFPD has grown into one of the region's largest and most capable fire protection districts. The consolidation expanded the District's service area and operational responsibilities while strengthening its ability to provide coordinated emergency services to a growing population.

The District operates three fire stations and responded to 2,733 calls in 2025, averaging approximately eight calls per day. Approximately 70% of those calls involve emergency medical services and motor vehicle accidents, highlighting the essential role the District plays in providing both fire protection and emergency medical response.

MFPD operates as a combination department, supported by 28 career personnel, 28 part-time personnel, and six interns. Its leadership and administrative team includes a Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, Administrative Battalion Chief, Fire Marshal, Fire and Life Safety Educator, administrative assistant, and receptionist. Daily staffing is planned for 13 personnel across the three stations, with a minimum staffing target of 10 personnel to maintain operational readiness and emergency response coverage.

As the District continues to grow, it is also investing in its leadership structure and long-term operational capacity. Effective November 1, 2026, the District will promote its first three career Battalion Chiefs, marking a significant milestone in its organizational development. This advancement will strengthen command-level leadership, enhance supervision and coordination, and position the District to meet the increasing demands of its expanding service area.

Under the leadership of Fire Chief Steve Malone and the Board of Trustees, the District continues to invest in its personnel, facilities, equipment, and emergency response capabilities. The District achieved an **ISO Class 1 rating in 2020 and is expected to maintain that in 2026 after completing their latest ISO review**, reflecting its commitment to excellence in fire protection and service to the community.

Then and Now

As Manhattan and the surrounding areas continued to grow, the District recognized the importance of evaluating its emergency response capabilities and ensuring its facilities were positioned to meet the community's changing needs.

Beginning in early 2022, the District undertook an extensive planning and evaluation process to determine the best long-term solution for relocating Station 81. Using five years of call data, response-time information, population growth patterns. Regarding the projected community needs, the District evaluated multiple options, including maintaining two stations in separate areas versus relocating Station 81 to a more strategically positioned site. The goal was to improve response times to heavily populated and high-traffic areas while maintaining effective service to the downtown district. After careful consideration, the District determined that relocating Station 81 to a new site near Eastern Avenue and Smith Road offered the most effective and cost-conscious solution for meeting current and future needs.

This project represents more than the construction of a new building. It reflects the District's commitment to long-range planning, responsible financial management, and ensuring that emergency services keep pace with community growth. The project is an important part of the District's 20-year vision for maintaining strong, reliable fire protection services.

Improvements

The relocation and construction of the new Station 81 is the District's most significant recent facility improvement. Designed to combine the tradition and

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identity of the Manhattan Fire Protection District with modern functionality, the new station provides an improved environment for firefighters while supporting the demands of today's emergency services.

The facility was designed with operational efficiency, firefighter readiness, and the needs of a growing community in mind. Its modern design honors the District's history while providing the infrastructure necessary to support its future. Prior to 2025, the District ensured the two other stations were up to date, knowing the cost of the new station would be priority in 2026.

The project began with an original estimated construction cost of approximately $9 million. As planning, negotiations, and site-development requirements progressed, the anticipated cost increased to approximately $11 million. Additional challenges included delays in intergovernmental negotiations and unexpected water, sewer, and wastewater infrastructure expenses. The District used alternative revenue bonds for funding the project as well as grant money from a local business development.

The District worked through these challenges while continuing to advance the project and protect its long-term operational objectives. The new station represents a significant investment in the community and the District's ability to provide effective emergency response for decades to come.

The site-development process also involved collaboration with local governmental partners. The larger property provides opportunities to coordinate future public-service needs, demonstrating how intergovernmental cooperation can support broader community objectives while advancing a critical public safety project.

What did we learn?

One of the most important lessons from the Station 81 project is the value of comprehensive planning, early coordination, and realistic budgeting. A major facility project involves much more than the cost of the building itself. Land acquisition, utility extensions, wastewater management, site preparation, and other infrastructure requirements can significantly affect the final cost.

Districts considering similar projects should evaluate the entire site-development process as early as possible, including utility availability, connection costs, drainage, wastewater requirements, and the responsibilities of potential governmental partners. Establishing clear intergovernmental agreements and defining financial obligations before construction begins can help reduce uncertainty and avoid costly delays.

The District's experience also reinforces the importance of using historical call data and response-time analysis to guide major capital decisions. Rather than simply replacing an aging facility or selecting a location based on convenience, the District evaluated how different options would affect service delivery across its coverage area.

Finally, strong leadership, collaboration with local officials, and support from the community are essential. Large public safety projects require a long-term perspective and a willingness to work through unexpected challenges while remaining focused on the ultimate goal: providing the best possible service to residents.

What's Next?

The completion and opening of the new Station 81 marks an important milestone in the Manhattan Fire Protection District's continued development. The District will focus on maximizing the benefits of the new facility, supporting its firefighters, and maintaining the equipment and infrastructure necessary to meet evolving emergency response demands.

Looking ahead, the District will continue to evaluate staffing, equipment, technology, training, and facility needs as the community grows. Leadership will remain focused on strategic planning, fiscal responsibility, intergovernmental cooperation, and maintaining the highest possible level of emergency services.

The Station 81 relocation project demonstrates that investing in the future requires more than building a new facility. It requires thoughtful planning, a clear vision, and a commitment to the people who depend on the District every day.

For the Manhattan Fire Protection District, moving forward means continuing to build on its tradition of service while preparing for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

The Manhattan Fire Protection District continues to take a proactive approach to maintaining its fleet and ensuring personnel have the equipment necessary to respond safely and effectively to emergencies. As part of this commitment, MFPD implemented a comprehensive 10-year fleet replacement plan that is reviewed and updated annually to account for changing operational needs, vehicle conditions, and long-term budget priorities. Several key fleet investments are planned over the next three years. In 2026, the District expects delivery of two brush trucks, representing an investment of approximately $800,000 and strengthening its capabilities for brush fires, wildland incidents, and other emergencies requiring specialized apparatus. In 2027, the District plans to replace a staff vehicle and anticipates ordering a new pumper tender to maintain reliable water supply capabilities throughout its service area. In 2028, the District expects delivery of an ambulance remount, extending the useful life of its ambulance investment while maintaining dependable emergency medical response capabilities.

The District uses a structured financing approach to support these purchases. Fire engines and pumper tenders are financed, while other vehicles are purchased using capital funds. This approach, combined with the annual review of its 10-year fleet replacement plan, allows the District to anticipate major expenditures, distribute costs over time when appropriate, and prioritize equipment needs without losing sight of long-term financial sustainability.

These investments reflect MFPD's continued commitment to planning ahead, maintaining dependable emergency response resources, and ensuring its personnel are prepared to serve the more than 26,000 residents across its 142-square-mile service area. Along with the new Station 81 and the expansion of its command structure, the District's fleet replacement strategy is another important step in preparing for the future of fire and emergency services. ■