

South Whidbey Fire/EMS

Letter to the editor

January 30, 2024

To the editor:

I'd like to start a conversation with our community about the service challenges we are facing at South Whidbey Fire/EMS. We're struggling to recruit and retain new volunteers to respond to calls (an issue that impacts fire districts nationwide) and revenue is not keeping up with costs to provide emergency services for our community.

We need to hire more full-time firefighters to reduce response times for fire and EMS calls to 10 minutes or less on average. Our current response time is 15 minutes on average. This is a concern because every minute counts to improve outcomes for fire and medical emergencies. The additional personnel will also allow us to staff a third fire station in the southeast part of the district to decrease response times by an average of five minutes. We also need to replace aging fire engines to ensure service reliability when responding to calls. Some of our fire engines date back to the 1990s and parts for them no longer exist.

We are considering asking voters for a fire levy lid lift sometime in 2024 to improve and keep up with higher costs to provide services. This will be a public process and there will be an opportunity to provide feedback before a final decision is made by the Board of Fire Commissioners.

We report to you, and we hope you take part in this important discussion. Please learn more at www.swfe.org.

Thank you,

Nick Walsh
Fire Chief