

# SOUTH WHIDBEY FIRE/EMS

5579 BAYVIEW ROAD  
LANGLEY, WA 98260

WWW.SWFE.ORG  
360-321-1533

 SWFireEMS



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: February 28, 2024

Contact: Fire Chief Nick Walsh | 360-321-1533 | [chief@swfe.org](mailto:chief@swfe.org)

### **Board of Fire Commissioners to meet on fire levy resolution**

*Community invited to learn more and provide comment*

Langley, WA – The South Whidbey Fire/EMS Board of Fire Commissioners will meet March 14 to discuss a resolution to place a fire levy lid lift on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot. The community is encouraged to attend the meeting at 5:30 p.m. at Station 36/district administration office, 5579 Bayview Road.

SWFE relies on full-time and volunteer personnel to provide emergency services, but SWFE is struggling to recruit and retain new volunteers to respond to calls (an issue that impacts fire districts nationwide).

Revenue from the current fire levy is not keeping up with costs to provide emergency services. The fire district needs more full-time personnel, in addition to volunteers, to respond to emergencies, and some of SWFE's fire engines and apparatus have reached the end of their usable lives and need to be replaced to ensure service reliability when responding to calls.

"We need to hire more full-time firefighters to keep up with call volumes and reduce response times," Fire Chief Nick Walsh said. "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."

If approved by voters, the fire levy lid lift will fund two more firefighters per day to reduce response times for fire and EMS calls to 10 minutes or less on average, and staff a third station in the southeast part of the district to decrease response times by an average of five minutes. The lid lift will also fund firefighter training programs and replacement of aging fire engines and equipment to ensure service reliability when responding to calls.

SWFE prefers to pay cash for the capital items instead of borrowing money through a bond, which costs taxpayers more in interest payments. The fire levy lid lift would continue this cost-saving measure.

SWFE is considering asking voters to reset the fire levy from \$0.81 to \$1.20 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The \$0.39 lid lift would cost an additional \$19.50 per month for the owner of a \$600,000 home.

Learn more at [www.swfe.org](http://www.swfe.org). Fire Chief Nick Walsh also welcomes your questions at 360-321-1533 or [chief@swfe.org](mailto:chief@swfe.org).

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*South Whidbey Fire/EMS provides fire and life safety services to people on Whidbey Island south of Mutiny Bay Road. SWFE serves approximately 15,000 residents and 10,000 visitors and 533 businesses over 66 square miles. SWFE relies on full-time and volunteer emergency personnel and responds to an average of 2,600 calls per year. SWFE firefighter/EMTs are highly trained to provide services for fire suppression and prevention, EMS, technical rescue, hazardous material spills, vehicle accidents and extrication, and life safety education programs. The district operates under a balanced budget and has passed all financial and accountability audits by the state.*