

SOUTH WHIDBEY FIRE/EMS

5579 BAYVIEW ROAD
LANGLEY, WA 98260

WWW.SWFE.ORG
360-321-1533

 SWFireEMS



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Fire Chief Nick Walsh | 360-321-1533 | chief@swfe.org

Board of Fire Commissioners passes fire levy lid lift resolution

Proposition will appear on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot

Langley, WA – The Board of Fire Commissioners passed a resolution to place a fire levy lid lift on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot. The lid lift would fund additional emergency personnel to improve response times and replace aging fire engines and equipment.

Revenue from the fire district's current fire levy is not keeping up with costs to provide emergency services, and the fire district needs to hire more full-time personnel to respond to fire and EMS calls.

"Our fire district relies on full-time and volunteer personnel to provide emergency services," Fire Chief Nick Walsh said. "Our volunteers do an amazing job, and like many fire districts across the country, we are struggling to recruit and retain new volunteers to respond to calls."

The fire district needs to hire more full-time firefighters, in addition to volunteers, to keep up with call volumes and reduce response times. Additionally, some of the district's fire engines and apparatus have reached the end of their usable lives and need to be replaced.

If approved by voters, the fire levy lid lift will fund:

- Two more firefighters per day
- Staffing at a third station in the southeast part of the district
- Firefighter training programs
- Replacement of aging engines and equipment

These improvements would reduce response times and improve service reliability across the district. Right now, the average response time for fire and EMS calls is 15 minutes, which is a concern. Every minute counts to improve outcomes for fire and medical emergencies. Hiring two more firefighters per day would reduce response times to 10 minutes or less on average.

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

Learn more at www.swfe.org. Fire Chief Nick Walsh also welcomes your questions at 360-321-1533 or 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.