

# SOUTH WHIDBEY FIRE/EMS

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 SWFireEMS



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **South Whidbey Fire/EMS adopts 2024 budget**

*"We operate under a balanced budget to fund emergency services," fire chief says*

Langley, WA – South Whidbey Fire/EMS adopted its 2024 budget. The fire district operates under a balanced budget and its funding decisions are guided by a strategic plan, which identifies the operational and capital needs to provide fire and EMS to the community.

The strategic plan is approved by the Board of Fire Commissioners who are locally elected to represent the community's priorities. All board meetings are open to the public and meeting information can be found on the fire district's website.

In addition to operating under a balanced budget, SWFE has passed all financial and accountability audits by the state.

"Transparency and accountability are key to maintaining public trust," Fire Chief Nick Walsh said. "We report to you and believe it is critical for our community to understand how we are funded. This is a partnership to save lives and property and we're grateful for the community's support."

### **How we fund emergency services**

SWFE funds its daily operations through a fire levy. In 2021, voters approved a fire levy rate of \$0.95. Since then, the levy rate has dropped to \$0.81.

"There is a common misconception that revenue for the fire district increases annually by the same percentage as assessed property values," Chief Walsh said. "That is not the case."

Each year we are allowed to collect a set amount of revenue. State law limits us to that amount plus a small annual increase approved by voters. Our revenue does not increase at the same rate as property values. This means the fire levy rate falls as property values rise to limit our budget to the approved amount each year.

This is called "levy compression" and impacts our ability to provide emergency services.

"Revenue from our current fire levy of \$0.81 is not keeping up with call volumes and costs to provide service." Chief Walsh said. "We need additional personnel to respond to calls."

SWFE relies on full-time and volunteer personnel to provide emergency services. Like other fire districts across the country, SWFE is struggling to recruit new volunteers to respond to calls. The fire district needs more full-time personnel, in addition to volunteers, to respond to emergencies. Additionally, 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.

SWFE is considering asking voters to reset the fire levy rate from \$0.81 to \$1.20 in the August 2024 primary election.

The final decision to ask voters for a levy lid lift will be made after a public process is conducted before the Board of Fire Commissioners later this year.

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.*