

SOUTH WHIDBEY FIRE/EMS

5579 BAYVIEW ROAD
LANGLEY, WA 98260

WWW.SWFE.ORG
360-321-1533

 SWFireEMS



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 8, 2024

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

Public meetings to learn more about fire levy lid lift

Proposal to fund more firefighters on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot

Langley, Wash. – South Whidbey Fire/EMS invites the community to learn more about the fire levy lid lift that will be on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot. The lid lift would fund additional firefighters, staff a third station in the southeast part of the district to reduce response times district wide, replace aging fire engines, and improve firefighter training programs.

Residents are encouraged to attend one of two public meetings hosted by Fire Chief Nick Walsh to ask questions and learn more:

- Saturday, July 20, at 9 a.m., at Station 32 (6435 Central Avenue, Clinton)
- Tuesday, July 23, at 7 p.m. at Station 36 (5579 Bayview Road, Langley)

SWFE relies on both full-time and volunteer personnel to provide emergency services. Like many fire districts nationwide, SWFE is struggling to recruit and retain new volunteers to respond to calls. The fire district needs to hire more full-time firefighters to keep up with call volumes and reduce response times.

“Our average response time for fire and EMS calls is 15 minutes, which is concerning,” said Chief Walsh. “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.”

Additionally, some of the district’s fire engines have reached the end of their usable lives and need to be replaced to ensure service reliability when responding to calls.

SWFE has a history of good financial stewardship, having passed all independent and accountability audits, but revenue from the fire levy is not keeping up with demand for and costs to provide services.

A common misconception is that revenue for the fire district increases by the same amount as assessed property values. This is incorrect. State law limits fire districts to a one-percent revenue increase annually (or an amount approved by voters). As a result, the fire levy rate actually falls as property values rise to limit a fire district to roughly the same amount of revenue per year.

With costs increasing four to five percent per year, the fire levy is not keeping up with the current costs to provide service.

SWFE is asking voters to consider a \$0.39 lid lift on the August primary election ballot, which would raise the fire levy rate from \$0.81 to \$1.20 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

“From time to time, we must ask voters to reset our fire levy to keep up with rising costs to provide service,” says Chief Walsh. “The additional revenue will fund critical improvements to decrease our response times and improve service reliability districtwide.”

The lid lift would cost an additional \$19.50 per month for the owner of a \$600,000 home. Learn more at one of the upcoming public meetings or at www.swfe.org. Chief Walsh also welcomes your questions at 360-321-1533 or chief@swfe.org.

###

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.