



SNOHOMISH REGIONAL FIRE & RESCUE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue Asks Voters to Consider Fire Levy Lid Lift

Higher Call Volumes and Inflationary Costs Are Drivers

Monroe, Wash. – The Board of Fire Commissioners for Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue (SRFR) is asking voters to consider a fire levy lid lift during the November 2 General Election. Fire Commissioners unanimously passed a resolution placing the request on the ballot for the upcoming election.

“Inflation and costs for service are outpacing the property tax revenue we receive to provide service,” said Fire Chief Kevin O’Brien. “We’ve made \$1.5 million in cuts to programs and services already. Additional funding is needed to protect the quality and level of service residents require.”

SRFR funds daily operations with a fire levy and a levy for emergency medical service paid through property taxes. As property values rise or new homes are added, the levy rates decrease to limit a fire district to roughly the same amount of property tax revenue per year plus a 1% increase allowed by law. New construction fees can provide a one-time payment, but that funding is inconsistent year-to-year.

In 2021 SRFR’s revenue with new construction increased 2.2%. Inflation is 6.3% for the area making things like medical supplies, fuel, ambulances, and emergency equipment more expensive. The fire district also is responding to 10.2% more calls year to date than the same time period in 2020.

“More calls mean added costs, and those costs are higher than normal because of inflation,” said Chief O’Brien. “Lid lifts help get us back where we need to be to maintain emergency service levels and quality rescue programs.”

Voters last approved a fire levy of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value in 2017. The fire levy has fallen to \$1.27 since that time. In 2021, SRFR cut its Community Resource Paramedic program, firefighter training, fire and life safety prevention program, and some apparatus replacement to maintain a balanced budget.

If approved by voters, the lid lift would last for one year, and cost a home with an assessed value of \$500,000 an additional \$9.58 per month (\$115 per year). (The assessed value of a property is lower than its market value.) SRFR would use the funding to maintain staffing levels, restore firefighter training and fire and life safety prevention programs, replace aging fire engines and ambulances; and, fund fire station projects in the district.



SRFR currently funds capital items like stations and apparatus out of its two operating levies. The agency has no voter-approved bonds, which saves taxpayers money and improves the financial health of the fire district.

By law, fire districts must operate under a balanced budget. If the lid lift is unsuccessful, SRFR would take money from its capital reserve account to fund daily operations. This means that bond funding may be necessary for stations and apparatus in the future.

It also would reduce public outreach, fire prevention, maintenance, training, and specialized emergency response programs thus reducing the quality of the services the agency could provide. The final step would be to layoff emergency personnel, which would increase response times and reduce service levels.

“I think the pandemic has highlighted the importance of emergency services in keeping our communities safe,” said Chief O’Brien. “The fire levy lid lift gives our residents and families an opportunity to protect the quality and level of service they want.”

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In 2019, voters approved a merger between Lake Stevens Fire and Snohomish County Fire District 7. Today, Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue serves 175,000 residents in the cities of Lake Stevens, Monroe, and unincorporated southeast Snohomish County. SRFR responds to an average of 17,000 emergency calls a year with highly-trained personnel and state-of-the-art rescue programs. It operates under a balanced budget and has passed all its independent audits by the state. More information about SRFR can be found at www.srfr.org.