

2024 Fire Levy Lid Lift



North Whatcom Fire and Rescue is asking voters for a fire levy lid lift in the August primary election to hire more firefighters and improve emergency services.

Do my property taxes increase by the same percent of my home's assessed value?

No. We can only increase our revenue by 1 percent each year per state law. Any amount higher than that must be approved by voters. Even if your property value increases by double-digits, we can only collect 1 percent more (or any voter-approved increase).

This means the fire levy rate falls as property values rise to limit our budget to the amount approved by voters. Our fire levy rate has dropped from \$1.42 in 2006 to \$0.76 and is no longer adequate to meet the emergency service level needs of our community.



HOW ARE WE FUNDED? We pay for daily operations through a fire levy capped at \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. In 2006, voters approved a levy rate of \$1.42. Since then, the rate has dropped to \$0.76.

WHAT WILL BE ON THE BALLOT? We are asking voters for a \$0.34 lid lift, which would reset the fire levy rate to \$1.10 per \$1,000 on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot.

WHAT WILL THE LID LIFT FUND?

- Up to eight emergency personnel over six years to respond to higher call volumes, adequately staff our fire stations, and put into service another response unit for medical emergencies
- Replace a ladder truck and three fire engines that have reached the end of their usable lives
- Help fund replacement of Station 63 in Birch Bay to improve service reliability in the area

WHY ARE WE ASKING FOR THIS? Revenue from our fire levy is not keeping up with the demand for and costs to provide emergency service. Our fire stations are not adequately staffed to respond

to call volumes, which have almost doubled in the last 10 years. The fire district is too reliant on mutual aid, which takes longer to reach people in emergencies. Emergency medical service (EMS) calls have increased 50 percent and now account for 71 percent of all emergencies. Emergency personnel are unavailable for as long as two hours when transporting a patient to St. Joseph Hospital in Bellingham, increasing response times for other emergency calls during this time. Station 63 in Birch Bay needs to be replaced. We also need to replace a response unit for medical emergencies and aging apparatus that have reached the end of their usable lives.

WHAT WILL THIS COST?* The lid lift would cost the owner of a \$500,000 home (considered average) an additional \$170 per year or \$14.16 per month. If approved by voters, this would be our first levy lid lift in almost 20 years.

*Homeowners who are 61 years or older and others who meet income and eligibility requirements may qualify for a property tax exemption. Contact the Whatcom County Assessor at 360-778-5050 or online at www.whatcomcounty.us/3406/Exemptions-Tax-Relief to see if you qualify.