



North Whatcom Fire and Rescue

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Public meetings to learn more about fire levy lid lift

"We're struggling," states Fire Chief Jason Van Der Veen

Lynden, WA. – North Whatcom Fire and Rescue is asking voters to consider a fire levy lid lift on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot. The lid lift would fund up to eight emergency personnel over six years to respond to higher call volumes and put into service another response unit for medical emergencies; it would also replace a ladder truck and three engines that have reached the end of their usable lives.

Residents are encouraged to attend one of several public meetings hosted by Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen to ask questions and learn more:

- Wednesday, July 17 at 5:30 p.m. at the Blaine Senior Center (763 G St., Blaine)
- Wednesday, July 24 at 7 p.m. at Station 61 (9408 Odell Road, Blaine)
- Thursday, July 25 at 5 p.m., at Station 63 (4581 Birch Bay Lynden Rd, Blaine). *Attendees at this session can enjoy hot dogs provided by Local 106.*
- Saturday, July 27 at 9 a.m. at Laurel Grange (6172 Guide Meridian Road, Lynden)

Call volumes have nearly doubled in the last 10 years, and EMS calls have increased by 50 percent, resulting in 71 percent of all calls being EMS-related. Another challenge is the more frequent occurrence of simultaneous calls.

"At least 30 percent of the time, there are multiple emergencies happening all at once," says Fire Chief Van der Veen. "We aren't staffed to respond to multiple overlapping calls. The result is longer response times when minutes count."

NWFR 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. Fire levy rates actually fall as property values rise to limit a fire district to roughly the same amount of revenue per year. The result is called “levy compression.”

When initially approved by voters, the fire levy rate was \$1.42 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. It has since dropped to \$0.76. This is insufficient to keep up with cost increases of 4 to 5 percent each year.

“For the first time in nearly 20 years,” says Fire Chief Van der Veen, “we need to ask voters to reset the fire levy to its original amount.”

NWFR is asking voters for a \$0.34 lid lift on the August primary election ballot, which would reset the fire levy rate to \$1.10 per \$1,000. The lid lift would cost the owner of a \$500,000 home an additional \$14.16 per month or \$170 per year.

Please attend an upcoming information session, visit www.nwfrs.net, or contact Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen at 360-318-9933 or jvanderveen@nwfrs.com.

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North Whatcom Fire and Rescue provides fire and life safety services to 33,800 people over 156 square miles, including the communities of Lynden, Laurel, Blaine, Custer, Birch Bay and Semiahmoo. NWFR also serves the residents of Whatcom County Fire District 4 through a contract agreement. In 2023, NWFR responded to 5,753 calls – of which 71 percent were for emergency medical service (EMS). Call volumes have almost doubled in the last 10 years, and overlapping calls happen 30 percent of the time. NWFR operates under a balanced budget and is debt-free.