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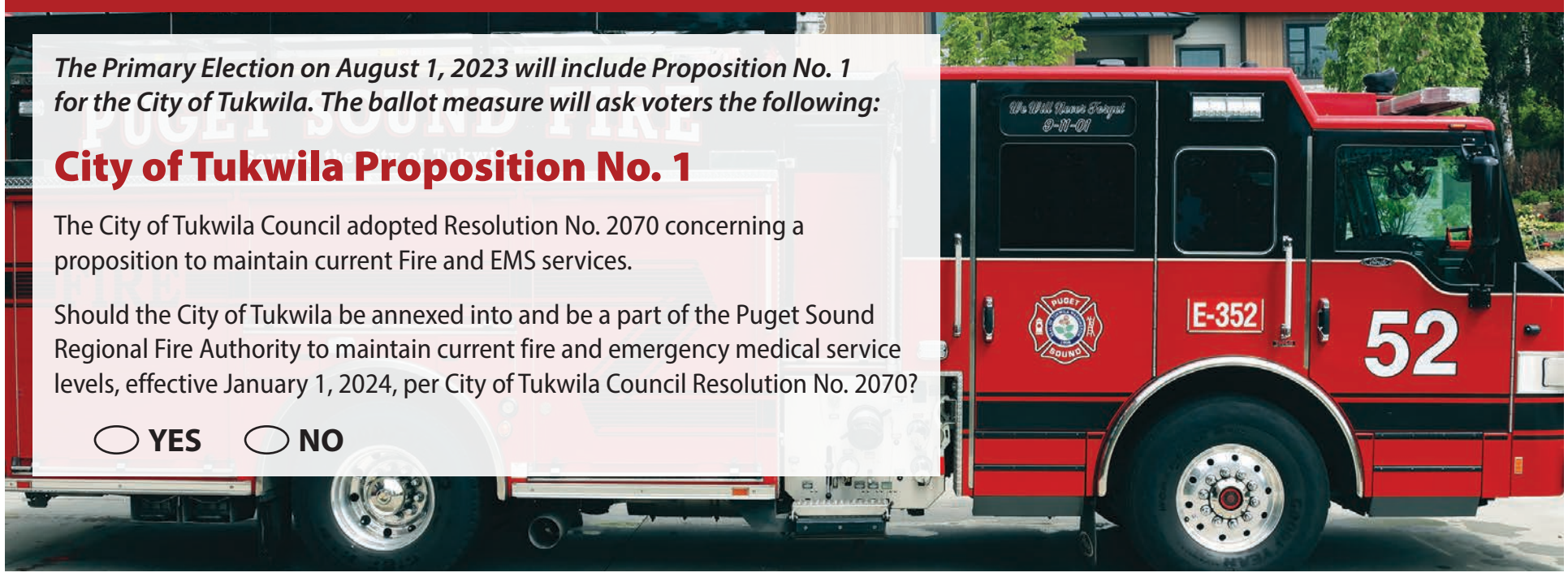
A PUGET SOUND REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY PUBLICATION

SUMMER 2023 – SPECIAL PRIMARY ELECTION ISSUE – CITY OF TUKWILA

PROPOSITION NO. 1 - PLEASE VOTE!



The Primary Election on August 1, 2023 will include Proposition No. 1 for the City of Tukwila. The ballot measure will ask voters the following:

City of Tukwila Proposition No. 1

The City of Tukwila Council adopted Resolution No. 2070 concerning a proposition to maintain current Fire and EMS services.

Should the City of Tukwila be annexed into and be a part of the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority to maintain current fire and emergency medical service levels, effective January 1, 2024, per City of Tukwila Council Resolution No. 2070?

⬭ **YES** ⬭ **NO**

BRIAN CARSON
Fire Chief

From Fire Chief Brian Carson

The Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority (Puget Sound Fire/RFA) is proud to be a trusted partner in the communities we serve. Today, the cities of Kent and Covington are within the RFA borders, as is King County Fire District #37. The cities of SeaTac and Tukwila contract with the RFA for service, and the City of Maple Valley receives service through the RFA's contract with King County Fire District #43. Regardless of the structure, we share with each community the desire to enjoy a safe and sustainable place to live, work, and visit. Our vision is effective and sustainable fire and EMS services that maximize the resources entrusted to us. The RFA strives to earn your trust each day – the trust you, as a community, place in our fire department is greatly appreciated and never taken for granted.

In the City of Tukwila, the contract for service is new for 2023. The city's fire department was disbanded in a formal ceremony on December 15th, 2022, and the city's fire personnel became Puget Sound Fire employees on January 1, 2023. The contract expanded on a long-term relationship that already existed between the city and the RFA, and I am incredibly honored to see Puget Sound Fire serve Tukwila.

> ***…Puget Sound Fire will always focus on taking care of people and being a trusted partner in the community.***

Regionalization has several benefits, and we continuously seek opportunities to gain efficiency through process improvement and cost reduction strategies. Your governance board provides strong leadership and guidance to ensure the practices and services of the RFA are sustainable.

In August, the City of Tukwila will submit to voters the opportunity to fully annex into Puget Sound Fire. The RFA and the city have approved an RFA plan amendment that will be effective in 2025 should voters approve the ballot measure. Although the RFA is already serving the city, annexation makes that relationship permanent, and allows the city to have a voice in guiding the RFA through three governance board seats.

Regardless, Puget Sound Fire will continue to serve the City of Tukwila and each of our regional partners with compassion and professionalism. It is my commitment to you that Puget Sound Fire will always focus on taking care of people and being a trusted partner in the community. We value your support and will remain focused on providing exceptional services. I encourage you to get out and vote on this important ballot measure and have your voice heard. Thank you. ■

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THE BENEFITS OF A REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY

By Division Chief Norman Golden

City of Tukwila officials asked for a solution for providing high-quality fire and emergency medical services (fire/EMS) to the Tukwila community at a sustainable cost. In October 2021, the Tukwila Mayor and City Council appointed 12 members to the Future of Fire/EMS Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and hired two consultants. The CAC held their inaugural meeting on November 9, 2021, and held 10 meetings before presenting a final report in May 2022. The CAC considered nine options for fire/EMS services. The CAC consensus view was to annex into the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority (RFA). The pathway to annexation was to enter a short-term service contract and then immediately focus on the annexation process.

In June 2022, the city council considered all the information provided on the future of fire/EMS services and agreed to pursue a service contract with the RFA. The City of Tukwila negotiated an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) with the RFA that would lead to an annexation. After two months of work, a mutually agreed-upon ILA was drafted and a service contract with the RFA began on January 1, 2023.

Currently, the contract has mutually agreed-upon terms that determine the provided services. The RFA-provided services are determined by a governance board consisting of voting members and non-voting "advisory" members. The entities that contract with the RFA each have one non-voting member on the governance board.

The City of Kent, and King County Fire District #37 (which includes the City of Covington) are member entities of the RFA. The City of Kent and King County Fire District #37 each have three voting members on the board while the City of Covington has a single non-voting seat on the board. The RFA has contracts with the cities of SeaTac, Covington , and Tukwila, with each having a single non-voting seat on the board.

Enhanced Levels of Service

The fire/EMS service contract with Puget Sound Fire has increased and enhanced the levels of service for the Tukwila community in the following ways:

- Community relations and **public education** programs now provide civic groups, schools, businesses, and residents with fire and life safety training and community engagement resources.
- The community injury and illness prevention program, **FD CARES** now provides non-emergency medical services and connects residents to community resources that will better meet their needs than a call to 9-1-1.
- An expanded **Fire Marshal Office** is reducing the time it takes to receive fire-related building permits and provides fire prevention and safety guidance through routine fire inspections.

The Tukwila community is already benefiting from the enhanced levels of services that Puget Sound Fire provides through the fire/EMS service contract. For full annexation into the RFA to take place, Tukwila voters must approve the ballot measure in the primary election on August 1.

Voters Will Decide in August Election

On August 1, Tukwila voters will decide whether the city should fully annex into the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority. We encourage you to vote and weigh in on this important ballot measure. If this measure does not pass, the City of Tukwila will continue to be responsible for funding fire department costs by either continuing to contract for fire/EMS services from Puget Sound Fire or reconstituting the city fire department. If the ballot measure passes, Tukwila will no longer have responsibility for funding fire department costs. The Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority Governance Board, which Tukwila would have three voting seats on the board, would control the budget and decide on its service levels and program offerings. ■

ANNEXATION VS. SERVICE CONTRACT WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

Tukwila's city-appointed Community Advisory Committee (CAC) concluded that the best option for the city is to fully annex into the RFA rather than continue long term with a fire/EMS service contract.

Managing Fire/EMS Services

Currently, the city manages fire/EMS services through the terms of the service contract. Contract terms are set for the duration of the contract, and changes to the contract would be slow to implement, requiring mutual agreement between parties. Under this service contract model, the city has limited ability to manage fire/EMS services. Although the city currently has control over the terms of the service contract, full annexation would give the city a stronger voice in service and cost decisions affecting Tukwila.

Representation

As a recipient of contract services, the City of Tukwila currently has one non-voting seat on the RFA governance board. Full annexation would give the city three voting seats on the RFAs governance board. The city would become an equal partner in managing fire/EMS services along with the other member entities.

Funding Models

The CAC determined that the funding of fire/EMS services through the city's current system of taxation is not sustainable. The city currently continues to use its same funding model to pay for fire/EMS services through the service contract. Full annexation into the RFA would allow the city to utilize a different two-part funding model that is sustainable and ensures growing communities maintain high quality fire and life safety services. This funding model uses a reduced fire levy rate on property taxes along with a Fire Benefit Charge (FBC). The FBC is a fee that is based on the benefit of having fire-based services and is included with the property tax billing through King County.

(For more information, please see the article "Understanding the Fire Benefit Charge" on page 3.)

For more information, or answers to your questions, please email us at

TukwilaRFAVote@PugetSoundFire.org

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNANCE BOARD

By Les Thomas - Governance Board Chairperson

The Puget Sound Fire Governance Board would like to encourage you to vote in the Primary Election on August 1 concerning Proposition No. 1 which proposes an annexation of City of Tukwila into the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority. The current contract for service with the City of Tukwila has been a win for both agencies. Over the past several years, Puget Sound Fire and the Tukwila Fire Department have partnered extensively, including training together in the South King County Fire Training Consortium, joint entry-level firefighter recruitment and testing, specialty teams, and recruit firefighter academy training. Our firefighters have previously worked seamlessly together on emergency scenes.

This partnership has been a natural continuation and expansion of the work we have already done together, and now the City of Tukwila is asking voters to consider fully annexing the fire department into Puget Sound Fire. The governance board sees this as an opportunity to continue long-term effective fire and EMS services to the Tukwila community. Through our robust systems and stable finances, we will continue to achieve effective, efficient, and sustainable service delivery.

As board members, we value diverse representation for the communities we serve. By annexing into Puget Sound Fire, the City of Tukwila would gain three voting seats on the governance board and have greater input on service levels and program offerings. Additionally, the Tukwila community would continue to benefit from enhanced services such as public education, FD CARES and a larger Fire Marshal office.

Again, we encourage you to vote in the upcoming Primary Election on August 1, and look forward to continuing to serve the Tukwila community professionally and compassionately. ■

LES THOMAS
Governance Board Chairperson

UNDERSTANDING THE FIRE BENEFIT CHARGE

By Deputy Chief Sean Penwell

How is Puget Sound Fire Funded?

Puget Sound Fire (PSF) is a Regional Fire Authority (RFA) formed under Chapter 52 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). RCW Chapter 52 authorizes PSF to use two separate funding mechanisms, a levy, and a Fire Benefit Charge (FBC). Once voters authorize the benefit charge, the normal maximum tax collection authority provided in RCW 52.26, drops from $1.50 per thousand to $1.00 per thousand of a parcel's assessed value. In addition, PSF assesses the FBC based on size, use, and risk of structures on a parcel.

Understanding the Fire Benefit Charge

The FBC is a fee that is based on the benefit of having fire-based services and is part of a two-part funding system that ensures growing communities maintain high-quality fire and life safety services. This fee is not a per call charge and is not based on property value. The FBC provides a stable funding mechanism to secure operating funds for Puget Sound Fire. A property tax system alone only takes into consideration the value of the property and not the benefits provided by PSF to specific property types.

The FBC distributes the costs of providing services to the properties that benefit from the services. The FBC is based on structure size, use, and risk. This fee considers that those who require more fire protection resources should pay more for the service. For example, a commercial office building will have a smaller FBC than an industrial location that houses flammable or other hazardous chemicals, even if the buildings have the same size or assessed value. The FBC is applied to improvements to real property and does not apply to vacant land.

The need for a two-part funding system exists because of tax levy limits set forth in RCW 84.55. This law results in funding erosion over time. Revenues are maintained using the benefit charge portion of the two-part funding system. Periodically, voters are asked to restore the $1.00 levy rate to relieve dependency on the FBC portion of the funding system. When the levy is restored, the FBC can be reduced by the same amount the restored levy generates.

In April 2010, voters in the City of Kent and King County Fire District #37 voted 72% to form Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority. The RFA is a special purpose district known as a municipal corporation with independent taxing authority. In August of 2021, 73% of voters authorized a permanent FBC.

RCW Chapter 52 places statutory limits on the FBC. It cannot exceed 60% of Puget Sound Fire's operating budget. In 2023 the FBC was 38.08% of the operating budget.

The FBC is set by the RFA's governance board annually in public meetings. The steps in setting the FBC are:

1. The governance board sets the total charge for the upcoming year.

2. The total charge is apportioned throughout the properties in PSF's response area using the adopted FBC formula.

3. PSF notifies King County Treasury Operations of the charges. The FBC is included as a separate line item on tax statements.

4. Property owners receive notice of the FBC.

5. Property owners are offered an opportunity to appeal during an identified petition period.

Discounts are available for monitored alarms, fire sprinkler systems, senior/disabled citizens (following the criteria set by the King County Department of Assessments), and for agricultural enterprises (marijuana production does not qualify).

The FBC is an equitable funding mechanism that allocates the cost of resources to parcels based on size and risk. This fee acts as a "shock absorber" to maintain reliable levels of service so that PSF can effectively safeguard the City of Tukwila and other communities we serve. ■

(For a detailed breakdown of the Fire Benefit Charge formula, please see page 4.)

FD CARES

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

On January 1, when the City of Tukwila entered a contract for fire/EMS services from the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority, the Tukwila community immediately began receiving increased and enhanced levels of service. One of these critical services is the community injury and illness prevention program, FD CARES that provides non-emergency medical services and connects residents to community resources that better meet their needs than a call to 9-1-1. The Fire Department Community Assistance, Referrals, and Education Services (FD CARES) program is improving the reliability of fire engines and ladder trucks to respond to fires and other emergencies they are designed to respond to. By deploying a CARES unit with a registered nurse and social worker to low-acuity 9-1-1 calls, other emergency response units now remain available for more critical call types in their response area. In just a short time, the program is making an impact as the following success story demonstrates:

Around midnight on February 21, the fire department responded to a 9-1-1 call for a fall in a resident's home. While on the scene, the engine crew made an FD CARES referral, and the CARES unit made a follow-up visit to the patient's home the very next day. The CARES team provided the patient with resources from King County fall prevention and while conducting a physical assessment, also determined that the patient's blood glucose level was high. Armed with this knowledge, and after multiple visits to her doctor, the patient now has her blood glucose levels under control and has made adjustments to prevent help further falls.

The FD CARES program is already improving the quality of health throughout the Tukwila community by connecting residents with the most appropriate care and treatment resources. This program helps provide residents a longer healthier independent lifestyle and it is just one of the multiple enhanced services provided by Puget Sound Fire. ■

CALCULATING THE FIRE BENEFIT CHARGE

The Fire Benefit Charge (FBC) formula correlates fire flow to the deployment of resources necessary for the "delivery of water to the fire." The FBC formula is:

√ of total square feet x (18)* x (category factor) x (response factor) x (risk factor) x (fire flow factor) x (discount) = Fire Benefit Charge

**18 is a coefficient value based on empirical tests by the Insurance Services Organization (ISO).*

Puget Sound Fire's FBC establishes the minimum amount of water that is needed to protect all buildings on a property. Size is determined by finding the total square footage of all improvements on a property. Total square footage is determined by adding the gross square footage of all floors, basements, garages, and mezzanine spaces on the property. Every year, PSF collects the necessary square footage data from the King County Department of Assessments.

PSF uses the formula to determine the amount of personnel and equipment needed to deliver the base fire flow to the parcel. PSF's formula classifies structures into four categories: single and double family occupancies; manufactured homes in mobile home parks; multi-family or apartments; and commercial structures.

PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Since the City of Tukwila began contracting for fire/EMS services from the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority in January of this year, new community relations and public education programs have been providing Tukwila civic groups, schools, businesses, and residents with fire and life safety training and community engagement resources. Department members have given station tours to students, assisted at community events such as the Easter egg hunt, conducted fire extinguisher training at numerous businesses, and taught fire and water safety to students and community members.

Our community relations and public education programs are working to establish a robust presence and partnership with the community. We look forward to seeing you at upcoming concerts in the park, the National Night Out on August 1, and the "Touch a Truck" event on August 19 at the Westfield Southcenter mall parking lot. ■

PUGET SOUND REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY

INTERNATIONALLY ACCREDITED FIRE AGENCY

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Public Information Officer	(253) 856-4300
Community Risk Reduction	(253) 856-4440
FD CARES	(253) 856-4398
Public Education	(253) 856-4480
CPR and First Aid Classes	(253) 856-4300
Disaster Preparedness	(253) 856-4440
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