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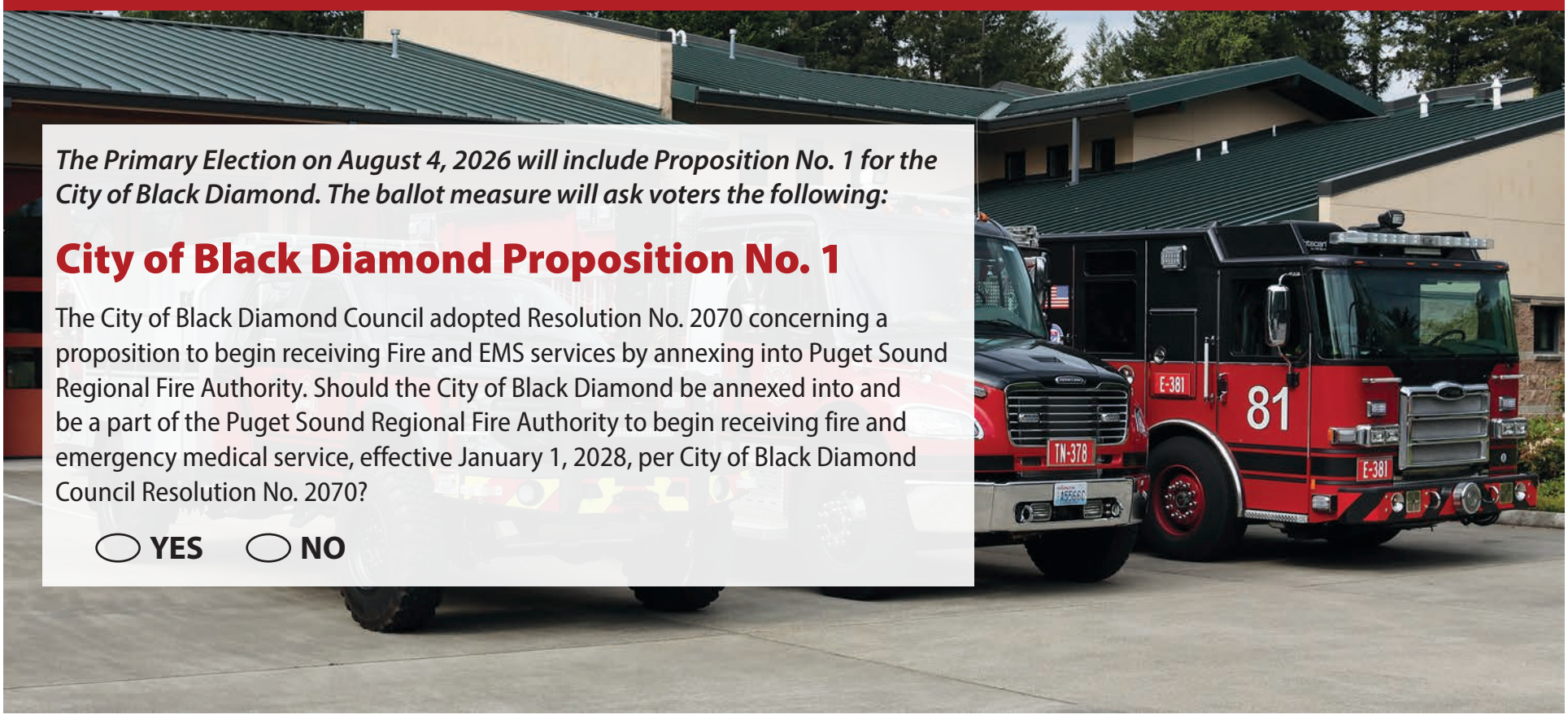
A PUGET SOUND REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY PUBLICATION

SUMMER 2026 – SPECIAL PRIMARY ELECTION ISSUE – CITY OF BLACK DIAMOND

PROPOSITION NO. 1 - PLEASE VOTE!



The Primary Election on August 4, 2026 will include Proposition No. 1 for the City of Black Diamond. The ballot measure will ask voters the following:

City of Black Diamond Proposition No. 1

The City of Black Diamond Council adopted Resolution No. 2070 concerning a proposition to begin receiving Fire and EMS services by annexing into Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority. Should the City of Black Diamond be annexed into and be a part of the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority to begin receiving fire and emergency medical service, effective January 1, 2028, per City of Black Diamond Council Resolution No. 2070?

◯ **YES** ◯ **NO**

MARK JONES
Fire Chief

From Fire Chief Mark Jones

The Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority (Puget Sound Fire) is proud to serve communities throughout South King County. Today, the cities of Kent, Covington, and Tukwila are members of the Regional Fire Authority, along with King County Fire District #37. The City of SeaTac contracts with Puget Sound Fire for services, and the City of Maple Valley receives service through Puget Sound Fire's contract with King County Fire District #43.

Regionalization allows fire departments to work together under a coordinated system designed to improve efficiency, strengthen operational capabilities, and provide long-term sustainability for fire and emergency medical services. Through shared resources, regional planning, and coordinated staffing, regional fire authorities can better manage rising service demands while maintaining a high level of service to the communities they protect.

Puget Sound Fire responds to nearly 48,000 calls for service annually and provides fire suppression, advanced life support transport, technical rescue, hazardous materials response, community risk reduction, and mobile integrated healthcare services across the region. Our focus remains on delivering professional and compassionate service while being responsible stewards of public resources.

In August, Black Diamond voters will have the opportunity to decide whether to fully annex into Puget Sound Fire. This ballot measure will allow community members to determine the future structure of fire and emergency medical services within Black Diamond.

No matter the outcome, Puget Sound Fire remains committed to maintaining strong partnerships focused on public safety.

I encourage everyone to take time to learn about the measure and participate in the election process so your voice can be heard.

Thank you for your continued support of emergency services and the firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, and civilian personnel who serve our communities every day. ■

Mark Jones, Fire Chief

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A TRANSITION FOR FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

By Assistant Chief Sean Penwell

The current contract between the City of Black Diamond and King County Fire District #44 (Mountain View Fire and Rescue) is set to expire on January 1, 2028. In preparation for this change, both Puget Sound Fire and Mountain View Fire and Rescue delivered presentations to the Black Diamond City Council. These presentations addressed key topics including funding mechanisms—specifically, the Fire Benefit Charge (FBC) versus a $1.50 levy— three-person versus two-person apparatus staffing, and staffing Station 99 (currently the newly built unstaffed station).

The Council recognized that annexation would result in increased costs, regardless of which provider was chosen. Their responsibility was to identify the option that offered the most value for the Black Diamond community. After careful deliberation, the Council selected Puget Sound Fire as the preferred provider.

A vote in favor of annexation into Puget Sound Fire will ensure that Black Diamond residents receive expanded emergency services, a stable and equitable funding model, and representation on the Puget Sound Fire Governance Board.

Service Provided by Puget Sound Fire

Puget Sound Fire stands out as a comprehensive, all-hazards organization, serving the region with excellence in a variety of emergency response disciplines. Puget Sound Fire is recognized as a regional leader in technical rescue operations, wildland firefighting, and Mobile Integrated Health through the FD CARES program that focuses on non-emergent response.

Technical Rescue Capabilities

The Puget Sound Fire Technical Rescue Teams possess specialized training in high and low angle rescue, swift and still water rescue, elevator and machinery entrapment, hazardous materials response, and confined space rescue. These teams are well trained, well equipped, very experienced, and ready to respond to a wide range of complex emergencies.

Wildland Rescue Capabilities

Puget Sound Fire's wildland team comprises more than 30 Red Card certified firefighters, demonstrating their expertise and readiness for wildland firefighting. The department operates three tenders, three type 5 wildland engines, and two type 3 wildland engines, enabling deployment not only within the local community but also statewide and nationally when needed.

FD CARES Program

Recognizing that the emergency room is not always the most appropriate destination, Puget Sound Fire's FD CARES program pairs a nurse and a social worker/care coordinator to assist residents experiencing crises or chronic health issues. This team helps navigate individuals to the proper resources, facilitating better patient outcomes and reducing strain on emergency response crews.

Staffing and Community Engagement

Puget Sound Fire is committed to three-person staffing at Stations 98 and 99, ensuring residents benefit from rapid and reliable emergency response. Additionally, the department employs a robust Community Relations Division, actively fostering strong connections between Puget Sound Fire and the Black Diamond community.

Fire Benefit Charge: A Stable and Equitable Funding Model

With annexation, Puget Sound Fire introduces the Fire Benefit Charge—a two-part funding system designed to provide both stability and fairness for the community. This mechanism ensures that the fire department is supported by a reliable financial foundation, helping maintain essential services and resources.

Equitable Contribution

The Fire Benefit Charge is equitable because it requires structures that demand more resources or involve hazardous operations to contribute proportionally. By aligning contributions with the level of risk and potential need for emergency response, the system supports an effective and responsive fire protection network across the community.

Stable Funding Approach

Stability is achieved through the two-part funding model, which consists of a levy set at $1.00 per $1,000 of assessed property value and the Fire Benefit Charge, which is set annually by the Governance Board at a Public Hearing. This reduces reliance on a single revenue source and protects Puget Sound Fire's level of service. The FBC approach differs from a traditional levy set at $1.50 per $1,000 of assessed value. A levy only system is more vulnerable to statutory erosion and is more sensitive to economic fluctuation.

Governance and Community Representation

Having a say in how the fire department operates and is funded is vital to any community. All annexed cities have two voting seats ensuring equal representation on the Governance Board. This structure guarantees that Black Diamond will have the same influence in Puget Sound Fire finance and operations as the Cities of Kent, Covington, and Tukwila.

Voters Will Decide in August Election

On August 4, voters in Black Diamond will make an important decision regarding the proposed annexation into Puget Sound Fire. Annexation will open Station 99, increase staffing on engines to three firefighters, give Black Diamond a governing voice, and provide an equitable and stable funding model. We encourage you to vote in the August 4 Primary Election and weigh in on this important ballot measure. ■

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

BlackDiamondRFAVote@PugetSoundFire.org

A MESSAGE FROM THE RFA GOVERNANCE BOARD

By Verna Seal - RFA Governance Board Chairperson

The Puget Sound Fire Governance Board would like to encourage you to vote in the Primary Election on August 4 concerning Proposition No. 1 which proposes an annexation of City of Black Diamond into the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority. Over the past several years, Puget Sound Fire has partnered extensively, including training together in the Fire Training Consortium, 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 Black Diamond 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 Black Diamond 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 Black Diamond would have two voting seats on the governance board and have greater input on service levels and program offerings. Additionally, the Black Diamond community would 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 4 and look forward to serving the Black Diamond community professionally and compassionately. ■

VERNA SEAL
RFA Governance Board Chairperson

UNDERSTANDING THE FIRE BENEFIT CHARGE

By Assistant Chief Sean Penwell

What is the Fire Benefit Charge?

Puget Sound Fire operates as a Regional Fire Authority (RFA) established under Chapter 52 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). This chapter grants Puget Sound Fire the statutory authority to utilize two distinct funding sources: a property tax levy and Fire Benefit Charge (FBC).

Upon voter approval of the FBC, the standard maximum tax collection limit outlined in RCW 52.26 is reduced from $1.50 per thousand dollars to $1.00 per thousand dollars of a parcel's assessed value. In addition to the levy, Puget Sound Fire applies the FBC, which is calculated based on the size, use, and risk associated with the structures on each parcel.

Understanding the Fire Benefit Charge

The FBC is a fee assessed to properties that reflects the advantages of having dedicated fire-based services within the community. As part of a two-part funding system, the FBC plays a crucial role in ensuring that expanding communities are able to maintain high-quality fire and life safety services. The FBC is not a fee based on the number of emergency calls or the assessed value of a property. It provides an equitable, stable, and reliable funding mechanism. This system secures the operating funds needed for Puget Sound Fire by distributing the costs in a manner that considers the specific benefits provided to different property types.

A traditional property tax system only takes into account the value of the property and does not address the unique benefits offered by Puget Sound Fire to various properties. The FBC, on the other hand, allocates the costs of fire protection services to those properties that directly benefit from them. The calculation of the FBC is based on the structure's size, its use, and the risk associated with it. This approach recognizes that properties requiring more firefighting resources should contribute more toward the cost of those services. For example, a commercial office building will be charged a lower FBC than an industrial facility that stores flammable or hazardous chemicals, even if the two buildings are similar in size or have the same assessed value. The FBC is applied exclusively to improvements made to real property and does not apply to vacant land.

The two-part funding system, which includes the FBC, is necessary because of tax levy limits outlined in RCW 84.55. These limits can lead to funding erosion over time, making it difficult to sustain emergency response services. To address this challenge, revenues are maintained with the benefit charge portion of the funding system. Voters may be asked to restore the $1.00 levy rate, which reduces the dependency on the FBC. When the levy is restored, the FBC is lowered by the same amount that the increased levy generates.

In April 2010, 72% of voters in the City of Kent and King County Fire District #37 approved the establishment of the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority. This special purpose district, recognized as a municipal corporation, possesses independent taxing authority. In August 2021, 73% of voters authorized a permanent FBC, further solidifying the funding framework for Puget Sound Fire.

Statutory limits are placed on the FBC by RCW Chapter 52. It cannot exceed 60% of Puget Sound Fire's operating budget. In 2026, the FBC accounted for 43.81% of the operating budget. The FBC is determined annually by the Puget Sound Fire Governance Board during public meetings. Establishing the FBC involves several steps:

1. The governance board sets the total charge for the upcoming year.
2. The total charge is apportioned across all properties in Puget Sound Fire's response area using the adopted FBC formula.
3. Puget Sound Fire notifies King County of the charges, which are then included as a separate line item on property tax statements.
4. Property owners receive notice of the FBC via a postcard sent by Puget Sound Fire.
5. Property owners are given the opportunity to appeal the charge during a designated petition period.
6. Discounts are available for monitored alarms, fire sprinkler systems, senior or disabled citizens (according to the criteria established by the King County Assessor's Office), and for recognized agricultural enterprises (excluding marijuana production).

The FBC is an equitable funding mechanism that allocates the cost of fire protection resources to parcels based on their size and risk. Serving as a "shock absorber," this fee helps maintain reliable levels of service, enabling Puget Sound Fire to effectively safeguard the City of Black Diamond and all the communities we serve. ■

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

FD CARES

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Division Chief Pat Pawlak

If the citizens approve the annexation vote for fire/EMS services from the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority, the Black Diamond community will immediately begin 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/care coordinator to low-acuity 9-1-1 calls, other emergency response units now remain available for more critical call types in their response area. The program is making an impact as the following success story demonstrates:

Around midnight in February, 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 help prevent further falls.

The FD CARES program is ready to improve the quality of health throughout the Black Diamond community by connecting residents with the most appropriate care and treatment resources. This program will help provide residents with a longer healthier independent lifestyle and it is just one of multiple enhanced services Puget Sound Fire will provide. ■

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, Puget Sound Fire collects the necessary square footage data from the King County Department of Assessments.

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

COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

By Division Chief Pat Pawlak

If the citizens approve the annexation, for fire/EMS services from Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority, our team will begin providing education programs to Black Diamond civic groups, schools, businesses, and residents with fire and life safety training and community engagement resources. Department members will visit schools, assist at community events such as Black Diamond Miners Day Street Fair, Dock Concerts at Lake Sawyer, Toys for Joy, and our Holiday Engine program, conduct fire extinguisher training, and teach fire and water safety to students and community members. Our community relations and public education programs will work to establish a robust presence and partnership with the community. ■

PUGET SOUND REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY

INTERNATIONALLY ACCREDITED FIRE AGENCY

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Emergency Management	(253) 856-4440
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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