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A PUGET SOUND REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY PUBLICATION

SUMMER 2026 – SPECIAL PRIMARY ELECTION ISSUE – KING COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #43

PROPOSITION NO. 1 - PLEASE VOTE!

The Primary Election on August 4, 2026 will include Proposition No. 1 for King County Fire District #43. The ballot measure will ask voters:

King County Fire District #43 Proposition No. 1

King County Fire Protection District No. 43 (District) proposes to annex into the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority (Puget Sound Fire). Annexation of the District would be subject to the terms of the Puget Sound Fire plan amendment attached to District Resolution No. R-2026-002. Shall District voters approve of the Puget Sound Fire plan amendment and annexation of the District into Puget Sound Fire, making the District a part of Puget Sound Fire?

◯ **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 King County Fire District #43 (KCFD #43) contracts with Puget Sound Fire to provide fire and emergency medical services to the Maple Valley area.

The partnership between KCFD #43 and Puget Sound Fire formally began in 2018 through a contract for service, when fire district personnel became Puget Sound Fire employees. That agreement expanded on a long-standing relationship between the two organizations and created a regional approach to delivering fire and EMS services within the community.

Regionalization allows agencies to coordinate staffing, training, apparatus, and specialty services under a unified system. Through shared resources and regional planning, fire departments can improve operational efficiency, strengthen service delivery capabilities, and better manage increasing demands for emergency services while remaining focused on long-term sustainability.

Puget Sound Fire currently 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 throughout the region.

In August, voters within KCFD #43 will have the opportunity to decide whether to fully annex into Puget Sound Fire. The Puget Sound Fire Governance Board and KCFD #43 Commissioners have approved an amendment to the Regional Fire Authority Plan that would take effect in 2027 if approved by voters. While Puget Sound Fire already provides service to the district through contract, annexation would formalize that relationship within the Regional Fire Authority structure and provide KCFD #43 representation on the Puget Sound Fire Governance Board.

Regardless of the outcome, Puget Sound Fire remains committed to serving the KCFD #43 community and all of our regional partners with professionalism, compassion, and accountability. I encourage all eligible voters to learn about the ballot measure and participate in the election process so their voices 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. ■

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BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

By Assistant Chief Sean Penwell

In 2018, King County Fire District #43 (KCFD #43) was in a financial crisis. Facing station closures and potential layoffs, KCFD #43 sought a solution by contracting with Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority. This contract eliminated staffing redundancies and reduced operating costs. These changes, combined with a successful levy lid lift, ultimately preserved fire and EMS services in Maple Valley and all unincorporated are-as of KCFD #43. The potential closure of fire stations led to longer response times and increased concern among residents about their safety. Community members voiced their support for maintaining local fire and EMS services during public meetings, highlighting the significance of these actions taken to ensure continued protection for the Maple Valley area.

Recent Financial Improvements and Infrastructure Investments

In 2023, KCFD #43 successfully conducted another levy lid lift, resulting in significant improvements to the district's financial stability. A 35% reserve fund was established, providing a strong financial foundation. The district has also replaced outdated apparatus and purchased new equipment specifically designed to address the growing threat of wildland urban interface fires.

Station 84, originally built as a volunteer facility at 16855 194th Ave SE in the Maple Valley Heights neighborhood, is scheduled for remodeling in 2026. This project will upgrade the station to support full-time staffing, enhancing service delivery to the community. Additionally, plans for Station 87—a new, fully staffed station located at 24416 SE 216th Street near Tahoma Elementary School—are moving forward. The station is in the permitting and design phase, with an anticipated opening in mid-2030.

These initiatives, including apparatus upgrades and station development, are being funded by the district's current financial resources, demonstrating prudent fiscal management and a commitment to maintaining and improving fire and EMS services for Maple Valley residents.

The Benefits of Annexation

Annexation builds upon the groundwork established through the contract with Puget Sound Fire, offering several advantages for KCFD #43. One key benefit is the implementation of the Fire Benefit Charge (FBC), which introduces a stable and equitable two-part funding system. The FBC serves as a financial "shock absorber" maintaining consistent service levels even as property values change, ensuring reliable fire and EMS delivery into the future. 80% of homeowners will see a decrease or no change to their fire assessments.

Currently, KCFD #43 only holds one advisory, non-voting position on the Puget Sound Fire Governance Board. Through annexation, the district would gain two voting seats, providing representatives with direct influence over the management and operations of Puget Sound Fire.

Annexation enables further savings by consolidating redundant fire stations between KCFD #43 and the City of Black Diamond, which could lead to reduced operating costs. These combined benefits strengthen the district's ability to provide high-quality fire and EMS services for residents while improving fiscal responsibility and governance.

Voters Will Decide in August Election

On August 4, voters in KCFD #43 will make an important decision regarding the proposed annexation into Puget Sound Fire. This annexation aims to provide the district with enhanced and sustainable levels of fire and EMS service, as previously described. The district's ability to maintain these services is vulnerable during economic downturns or periods of declining assessed property values. By joining Puget Sound Fire, KCFD #43 will gain equal representation on the Puget Sound Fire Governance Board, aligning its influence with neighboring communities such as Kent, KCFD #37, and Tukwila. ■

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

KCFD43RFAVote@PugetSoundFire.org

COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

By Division Chief Pat Pawlak

Since King County Fire District #43 (KCFD #43) began contracting for fire/EMS services from the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority in July 2018, new community relations and public education programs have been providing KCFD #43 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, Maple Valley Days, and Maple Valley Kid's festival, 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 4, and numerous other community events. ■

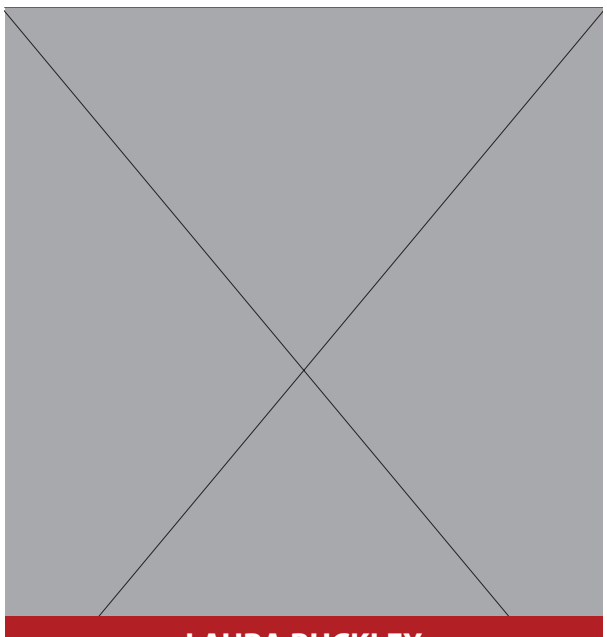
A MESSAGE FROM THE KCFD #43 FIRE COMMISSIONERS

By Laura Buckley - KCFD #43 Board of Commissioners Chairperson

The King County Fire District #43 Commissioners (KCFD #43) would like to encourage every resident to participate in the upcoming Primary Election. Proposition No. 1 asks voters to decide whether KCFD #43 should continue operating under its current service contract with Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority or become fully annexed into the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority. This is an important decision for our community because it involves the future governance, funding, and delivery of fire and EMS services.

For many years, our partnership with Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority has provided high-quality emergency services, operational efficiencies, and expanded programs that benefit our residents. Voters are now being asked to consider important questions about governance, representation, long-term financial sustainability, and how fire and EMS services should be delivered in the future. One consideration is representation on the Puget Sound Fire Governance Board, where annexation would provide KCFD #43 with two voting representatives rather than the existing single non-voting advisory position. This decision will help shape the future of fire and EMS services in our community for years to come.

We encourage you to vote in the upcoming Primary Election on August 4 and look forward to continuing to serve the Greater Maple Valley community professionally and compassionately. ■



LAURA BUCKLEY
KCFD #43 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 Maple Valley and KCFD #43. ■

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

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

By Division Chief Pat Pawlak

Since King County Fire District #43 (KCFD #43) began contracting for fire/EMS services from the Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority in July 2018, King County Fire District #43 community 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/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 one day 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 already improving the quality of health throughout the KCFD #43 community by connecting residents with the most appropriate care and treatment resources. This program helps provide residents with 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, 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.

PUGET SOUND REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY

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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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