



Yakima County Fire Protection District No. 5

SERVING 700 SQUARE MILES

TODD LUNNING
CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD

ERNEST W. GASSELING - DAVID R. CHARVET
BOARD MEMBERS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: March 30, 2023
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Yakima County Fire District 5 Shares Funding Philosophy

Fire chief: "We want our community to know how we fund emergency services"

Zillah, Wash. – Yakima County Fire District 5 provides fire and emergency medical service (EMS) to 36,000 people over 800 square miles, operates under a balanced budget and has passed all independent financial and accountability audits. The Fire District is the largest fire district in the state geographically and responds to an average of 2,700 calls per year.

"Transparency and accountability are key to maintaining public trust," Fire Chief Ken Shipman said. "We believe it is critical for our community to understand how we are funded. We are partners in this effort to protect and save lives and we are grateful for the support."

How emergency services are funded

The Fire District's daily operations are funded by a fire levy of **\$1.03** per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The fire levy pays for fire suppression and prevention and fire training. Capital projects, like station renovations and equipment replacements, are typically funded through voter-approved bonds. The Fire District currently has no bond debt.

Call volumes have increased by 22 percent since 2015 and the Fire District is struggling to provide adequate facilities, equipment and staffing to respond to the higher demand for emergency services.

First funding request in Fire District history necessary to improve service

The Fire District's strategic plan outlines how to respond to the increasing demand for emergency services. The first step is to renovate stations and replace aging equipment. The second step is to hire additional personnel.

The Fire District has never asked for a tax increase since its formation in 1947. This is no longer an option. The capital projects are too expensive to fund through the fire levy. The Fire District is

considering asking voters for a bond sometime this year to renovate stations and replace aging equipment. These projects will improve the Fire District's ability to respond to emergencies districtwide.

Once the additional space is created and new equipment is in place, the Fire District anticipates asking voters to consider a fire levy lid lift to hire additional personnel. These funding requests will be staggered to ensure tax dollars are being used efficiently.

Fire District 5 has a long tradition of relying on volunteers but recruiting and retaining volunteers is a huge challenge for rural districts like Fire District 5. The job requires a significant time commitment, which for volunteers must come second to work, family, or school. As a result, the Fire District has fewer volunteers and this is leading to gaps in coverage and higher overtime costs. Additional full-time firefighters are required to keep up with higher call volumes and to ensure the success of our volunteer program.

There will be a public process and opportunities to provide input before a final decision is made.

Stretching tax dollars further

The Fire District applies for grants, works with neighboring agencies to share costs, and continues to support and increase its volunteer numbers. These are important cost-saving measures, but they are not enough to pay for the capital projects and personnel required to respond to the growing needs of the community.

The Fire District's funding decisions are guided by its strategic plan. The plan is approved by the Board of Fire Commissioners who are elected to represent the community's priorities. All board meetings are open to the public and meeting information can be found on the Fire District's website at www.ycfd5.org.

Learn more about Fire District 5's funding requests at www.ycfd5.org.

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Yakima County Fire District 5 provides fire suppression, prevention, emergency medical service and a wildland fire response to 36,000 people over 800 square miles from. District 5 is proud to be a "combination department" relying on volunteers, part-time and full-time emergency personnel to respond to calls. Visit www.ycfd5.org to learn more about the fire district. We also welcome volunteer applications online or by contacting our main office at (509) 829-5111.

CORRECTION: Early projections of the fire levy rate for 2023 was \$0.92, which was stated here. The 2023 rate is \$1.03.