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Date: June 15, 2023
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Snohomish County Fire District 17 facing service challenges

Board of Fire Commissioners to meet on fire levy resolution; community invited to attend

Snohomish County Fire District 17 (also known as the Granite Falls Fire Department) reports emergency personnel responded to a record-high of 2,800 emergency calls in 2022, of which 68 percent were for emergency medical service (EMS). Since 2020, call volumes have increased 40 percent – 23 percent in the last year alone. Additionally, overlapping calls – when two or more emergencies come in at the same time – are happening more and more often.

Fire Chief Jim Haverfield says that revenue is not keeping up with the demand for and costs to provide service.

“We want to be transparent with our community,” Fire Chief Haverfield said. “We are struggling to keep up with higher call volumes. We need more firefighters and adequate facilities to meet the emergency service needs of our community.”

The Board of Fire Commissioners will meet Monday, June 26, to discuss a resolution to place a fire levy lid lift on the November 7, 2023, general election ballot. The community is encouraged to attend the meeting at 7 p.m. at Station 87 (headquarters) 116 S. Granite Ave. to learn more and provide feedback.

Funding is required to meet emergency service needs of the community

Daily operations are funded by a fire levy capped at \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. There is also a levy for emergency medical service (EMS) capped at \$0.50 per \$1,000. Both are paid through property taxes.

Over time, levy rates fall as property values rise to limit the fire department to the same amount of revenue per year plus a one percent increase allowed by state law. In 2019 voters approved a fire levy rate of \$1.50. Since then, the rate has fallen to \$0.98 per \$1,000. Even if property values double, the fire department can only collect one percent more in revenue.

Granite Falls has grown and call volumes have, too

The Granite Falls community has grown significantly since the last fire levy lid lift. Call volumes are up 40 percent since then – 23 percent in the last year alone. The fire department relies on full-time, part-time, and volunteer personnel to respond to calls. Due to the limited availability of part-time personnel and volunteers, full-time firefighters are working significant overtime hours, which ultimately costs taxpayers more.

The fire department also has plans to build a new station to replace an existing one that was built in the early 1900s and is vulnerable to failure in the event of an earthquake. The existing station does not have enough space for firefighters, modern equipment doesn't fit in engine bays, and it lacks adequate decontamination facilities for firefighters to wash off carcinogens and medical waste after calls.

If approved by voters, the fire levy lid lift will fund:

- Up to seven firefighters over three years to reduce overtime costs and improve response times
- Construction of a new headquarters fire station
- Replace a fire engine and ambulance over the next six years.

In addition to improving response times, these projects will increase service capacity districtwide – and will be paid for with cash instead of borrowing money, which costs taxpayers more in interest payments.

In 2019, voters approved a fire levy rate of \$1.50 per \$1,000. This time, the fire department is asking voters for a lid lift of \$0.22 per \$1,000. This would change the fire levy rate from \$0.98 to \$1.20 and cost an additional \$7.33 per month or \$88 per year for the owner of a \$400,000 home (considered average).

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Snohomish County Fire District 17, known as Granite Falls Fire Department, provides fire suppression and prevention, emergency medical service (EMS) and serves 14,641 people over 50.5 square miles, including the city of Granite Falls. In 2022, the fire department responded to a record-high of 2,800 calls. The fire department is a separate taxing district independent of the county, operates under a balanced budget and has passed all its independent financial audits.