

2024 PROPOSITION 1

Proposed Ballot Measure FAQs

As communicated to you last year, the property tax levy rate restoration approved by voters at the 2023 Primary Election was the first step of a two-step process needed to fully fund our operations. This document answers questions you may have about the second proposed ballot measure now being proposed.

About Us

Thurston County Fire Protection District 8 (“District”) provides round-the-clock firefighting, emergency medical and community risk prevention services to more than 13,000 residents over a thirty-one square mile area north of the cities of Olympia and Lacey. Fire District 8 (South Bay) and Fire District 7 (North Olympia) were separately incorporated in 1953 and merged together in 2015. The District has received a Public Protection Class 3 rating by the Washington Survey & Rating Bureau. It responds to over 1,300 calls per year from two primary firestations at South Bay and North Olympia. *Unfortunately, staffing at the North Olympia Firestation remains inconsistent.*

Funding

For many years, the District has been funded through a property tax levy rate up to \$1.50 per thousand of assessed real property value. Voters approved the 2023 Primary Election ballot measure to restore the levy rate to \$1.50 from the (then) current diminished rate of \$1.20. Even so, for the last several years expenses have grown beyond available tax revenues so the District deferred tax increases by supplementing its income through use of available unreserved funds (*more information below*). While the current \$1.50 levy rate helps to address increasing costs for labor, materials and services, *it is not sufficient to allow the District to achieve fully consistent staffing and operational support for both firestations.*

In order to address the issue of inconsistent staffing and support, the District is proposing a Primary Election ballot measure (“**Proposition 1**”) on **August 6, 2024** that would authorize an excess property tax levy with a combined estimated rate of \$2.01 per thousand of assessed valuation for collection beginning in 2025. The 2024 Proposition 1 was included in the public presentations made by District officials in 2023 as part of a two-stage effort for funding of its five year plan.

Stretching \$\$\$

Comparable fire districts in the area have typically assessed an aggregate tax rate over \$2.00 for many years. The District does not directly receive property tax revenue from Thurston County Medic One other than funding for EMS training and some expense reimbursement for supplies and equipment. The District has been able to delay property tax increases by carefully managing its budget, having a robust volunteer responder program and leveraging tax dollars through partnerships with neighboring agencies. The District also reduced the costs for firestations and apparatus upkeep by selling four properties deemed no longer necessary for service delivery. Proceeds from these sales have been used to supplement funding of services at current levels without raising additional property taxes in 2022, 2023 and 2024. This supplemental funding will no longer be available after 2024.

Why Does the District need more money?

There are several reasons why the District is asking for additional funding, including:

- Increasing call volumes, especially for emergency medical services;
- The incidence of two or more calls happening simultaneously is increasing, requiring the use of more than one fire or aid company of responders;
- Decreasing ability to attract and retain volunteer responders who historically formed the core of the District’s incident readiness and response force;
- A growing number of higher-cost full-time career responders are required to sustain or improve delivery of emergency services in lieu of diminishing numbers of volunteer responders;
- Rising costs for i) operations (including utilities, supplies, fuel, maintenance, equipment, etc.) and ii) administration (including insurance, communications, business functions, etc.); and

- Skyrocketing costs for major equipment and apparatus: the District has maintained a self-funded capital asset program for many years which has allowed a prudent replacement of needed items at lower cost to taxpayers.

How will the extra tax money be used?

The District will use the additional funding to:

- Maintain the growing demand for full-time career responders in the District;
- Continue to provide high-quality training for District career and volunteer staff;
- Provide sufficient funding for planned future replacement of capital assets; and
- Help pay for increasing ongoing costs for District operations and administration.

How much will this cost a District taxpayer?

- The current (2024) basic property tax levy rate is \$1.50 per thousand of assessed value;
- The homeowner of a \$590,000 residence (*average assessed value for real property in the District*) will pay an estimated \$886 in property tax this year to the District;
- If Proposition 1 is approved by voters in **2024**, the property tax levy rate paid by homeowners would be an estimated \$2.01 per thousand of their assessed valuation in **2025**;
- If Proposition 1 is approved by voters in 2024, the homeowner of a \$590,000 residence would pay an estimated \$1,186 in property tax to the District in 2025; and
- After 2025, the property tax levy rate is estimated to decrease year over year due to inflation.

How will this improve service to you?

- In 2023, the District had 18 full-time career responders and an average of 27 volunteer responders;
- Staffing of a fire engine company at the North Olympia Firestation was only achieved 57% of the time;
- In the District's current five-year plan, it is proposed to staff with 28 full-time career responders and an average of 25 volunteer responders by year 2028, allowing consistent staffing at *both* primary firestations;
- The District's current (2023) average response time is 7 minutes and 17 seconds; and
- With voter approval of the Proposition 1 in 2024, the District could implement the recommended staffing plan, ultimately reducing the average response time by an estimated 1 to 1-1/2 minutes.

What will happen if this measure doesn't pass?

- Over time, the staffing coverage at the North Olympia Firestation would be reduced; without the proposed additional funding, the firestation would eventually need to be closed;
- Service levels would be impacted throughout the District because only one crew would be available to serve the entire District at any given time. This would preclude the ability to support concurrent calls;
- Estimated average response times would increase by an average of one to two minutes over the next three to four years; and
- The ability of the District to continue to self-fund capital asset replacement would be placed in jeopardy or ultimately eliminated.

Where can you get more information?

- Additional information is posted on our website at southbayfire.com .
- You can call Chief VanCamp at **360-491-5320** or email him at vancamp@southbayfire.com.