



## Walla Walla County Fire District #4

2251 S. Howard St., Walla Walla, WA 99362  
(509) 529-1282 • [www.wwfire4.com](http://www.wwfire4.com)

[f wwfiredistrict4](https://www.facebook.com/wwfiredistrict4) [@ wallawallacountyfiredistrict4](https://www.instagram.com/wallawallacountyfiredistrict4)

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: February 5, 2024

Contact: Chief Rocky Eastman | (509) 529-1282 | [reastman@wwfire4.com](mailto:reastman@wwfire4.com)

### **Walla Walla County Fire District 4 adopts 2024 budget**

*“We operate under a balanced budget to fund emergency services,” fire chief says*

Walla Walla, Wash. – Walla Walla County Fire District 4 adopted its 2024 budget. The fire district operates under a balanced budget and its funding decisions are guided by strategic planning, which identifies the operational and capital needs to provide fire and EMS to the community.

Strategic plans are approved by the Board of Fire Commissioners who are locally 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.

“Openness and accountability are key to maintaining public trust,” Fire Chief Rocky Eastman said. “We report to you and believe it is important for our community to understand how we are funded. This is a partnership to save lives and property, and we are grateful for the community’s support.”

### **How we fund emergency services**

Fire District 4’s daily operations are funded by a fire levy capped at \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The fire levy accounts for almost 60 percent of the budget and helps fund EMS, which is only partially funded through a countywide levy capped at \$0.50. The fire district’s EMS program provides Basic and Advanced Lift Support ambulance transport to area hospitals. (EMS accounts for 68 percent of all calls.)

In 2003, the fire levy rate was \$1.39. Since then, the rate has dropped to \$0.88. There is a common misconception that revenue for the fire district increases annually by the same amount as assessed property values. That is not the case. State law limits fire district levies to a 1 percent revenue increase per year.

This means fire levy rates fall as property values rise to limit fire districts to approximately the same amount of revenue each year plus the 1 percent increase allowed by state law. This is called “levy compression” and impacts a fire district’s ability to provide emergency services.

“Revenue from our current fire levy of \$0.88 is not keeping up with costs to provide service,” Chief Eastman said. “Our costs increase 4 to 5 percent each year, but we are limited to just a 1 percent revenue increase. For the first time in almost 40 years, we need to consider a levy lid lift.”

Fire District 4's call volumes have increased by 30 percent from 2018 to 2022. Calls for EMS are also increasing and now account for 68 percent of all emergencies.

The fire district is considering asking voters to reset the levy rate from \$0.88 to \$1.26 sometime this year to keep up with costs and demand for service.

The \$0.38 lid lift would maintain essential emergency services, fund additional personnel to respond to calls faster, renovations at Station 41 to add additional sleeping quarters, and replace aging apparatus to ensure service reliability when responding to calls. The final decision for a lid lift will be made after a public process is conducted before the Board of Fire Commissioners in the coming months.

### **Stretching tax dollars further**

Fire District 4 can meet its operational and capital needs through its regular fire levy as opposed to borrowing money through a voter-approved bond, which costs taxpayers more in interest payments. It also works with neighboring agencies to share costs and improve emergency service levels.

In addition to operating under a balanced budget, Fire District 4 is debt-free and has passed all its independent financial and accountability audits.

Learn more at [www.wwfire4.com](http://www.wwfire4.com). Fire Chief Rocky Eastman also welcomes your questions at 509-529-1282 or [reastman@wwfire4.com](mailto:reastman@wwfire4.com).

###

*Walla Walla County Fire District 4 provides fire suppression and emergency medical service (EMS) to 9,250 people over 125 square miles in the unincorporated areas west, south, and east of the cities of Walla Walla and College Place, and the Port of Walla Walla Regional Airport. Fire District 4 is a combination fire district that relies on volunteer, part-time and full-time emergency personnel who are highly trained to provide structural and wildland fire suppression, Basic and Advanced Life Support EMS, ambulance transport, vehicle accidents and extrication, and life safety programs. Fire District 4 is debt free, has passed all independent financial audits by the state, and works with neighboring agencies to share costs and improve emergency service levels.*