



Walla Walla County Fire District #4 NEWSLETTER

Spring 2024

5-YEAR SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

2022	1104
2021	1034
2020	841
2019	932
2018	859

**EMS CALLS ACCOUNT
FOR THE MAJORITY
OF ALL CALLS – 68%**

FIRE COMMISSIONERS

Vern Myrick
Larry Hector
Keith Farrens



2251 S. Howard St.
Walla Walla, WA 99362
(509) 529-1282
www.wwfire4.com

Message From the Chief



I want to update you on our fire levy lid lift that will appear on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot. If approved by voters, it would be our first levy lid lift in almost 40 years. We operate under a balanced budget and our funding decisions are guided by strategic planning, which identifies the operational and capital needs to provide fire and EMS to our community.

The revenue from our current fire levy is not keeping up with annual costs to provide emergency services. Our daily costs increase 4 to 5 percent each year, but state law limits us to just a 1 percent revenue increase per year. Additionally, our call volumes have increased 30 percent from 2018 to 2022. EMS calls are also increasing and now account for the majority of all calls – 68 percent.

We serve a large area – 125 square miles around the cities of Walla Walla and College Place – and higher demand for services requires additional personnel to respond to calls faster and more efficiently.

This is why for the first time in almost 40 years, we must ask voters for a fire levy lid lift to maintain essential services and keep up with higher costs and call volumes. In 2003, our fire levy rate was \$1.39 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Since then, the rate has dropped to \$0.88.

Why did the rate drop?

There is a common misconception that revenue for the fire district increases annually by the same percentage as assessed property values. This 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 per year plus the 1 percent increase allowed by state law. This is called “levy compression” and impacts our ability to provide emergency services.

We are asking voters to change the levy rate from \$0.88 to \$1.26, which equates to a \$0.38 lid lift. If approved by voters, the lid lift would fund:

- Essential emergency services
- Up to three additional firefighter/paramedics to respond to higher call volumes and reduce response times
- Station 41 (Howard Street) renovations to add sleeping quarters and update the ventilation system to protect the health and safety of our firefighters
- Replace aging apparatus to ensure service reliability when responding to calls

We can meet our daily operational and capital needs through our regular fire levy and pay cash for these items instead of borrowing money through a bond, which costs taxpayers more in interest payments. The \$0.38 lid lift would cost an additional \$12.67 per month or \$152 per year for the owner of a \$400,000 home.

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 your support. You can learn more at www.wwfire4.com and I’m also available to answer any of your questions. You can reach me at 509-529-1282 or reastman@wwfire4.com.



Are you wildfire ready?

We are working with the Department of Natural Resources to help residents reduce the risk wildfires pose to homes and the community. The program is called Wildfire Ready Neighbors and offers services to prepare your home and protect your neighbors from the threat of wildfires.

One way you can protect your property's perimeter is by creating a defensible space with zone-by-zone actions. You can also take a simple survey and have a local wildfire expert craft a Wildfire Ready Plan just for you that works for your property, budget, and lifestyle.

Visit wildfireready.dnr.wa.gov to find the survey and more information about the program.

BY THE NUMBERS

5,710 – Wildfire Ready Neighbors signed up

3,044 – Requests for in-person home visits or forest health consultations

29,016 – Actions participants committed to take on their properties



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Fire District 4 has long history of clean financial audits

We are primarily funded through a fire levy and EMS levy and so openness and accountability are key to maintaining public trust. We take the responsibility of managing public funds seriously and strive to use every dollar in the most efficient manner.

We operate under a balanced budget and our strategic plan identifies the funding we need for daily operations, apparatus and equipment replacements, and maintaining our facilities. We are proud to once again share that our most recent independent financial and accountability audit conducted by the state found no findings.

This clean audit continues our long history of clean audits, dating back 20 years or more. We are proud to serve this community and the work we do to be good stewards of your tax dollars.



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