

# North Whatcom Fire & Rescue and Whatcom Fire District #4

*Why Consider a Regional Fire Authority?*

A public virtual open house

Thursday, February 18 and Tuesday, February 23, 2021

# Introductions

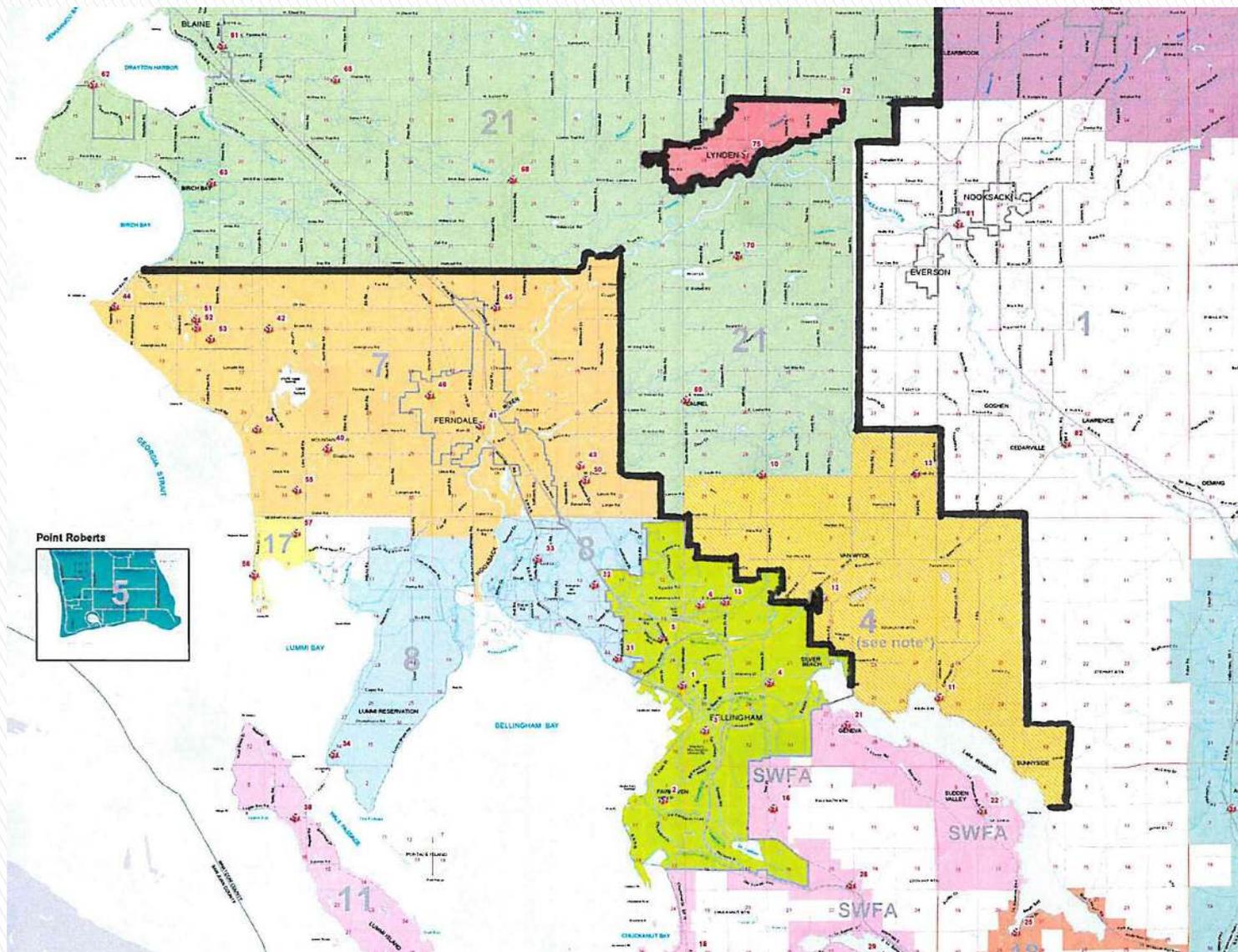
- ▶ Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen
- ▶ *North Whatcom Fire & Rescue (District 21) Commissioners:*
  - Commissioner Rich Bosman
  - Commissioner John Crawford
  - Commissioner Bruce Ansell
  - Commissioner Scott Fischer
  - Commissioner Kimberly McMurray
- ▶ *District 4 Fire Commissioners:*
  - Commissioner Harry Andrews
  - Commissioner Dave Hanson  
(Currently processing applications to fill vacant seat)

# NWFR and WCFD4

- ▶ NWFR was established in 2006, by consolidation of multiple fire districts
- ▶ WCFD4 was established in the 1940s
- ▶ The 2 agencies have combined operations by contract for 10+ years, but continue to have separate boards and separate levies
- ▶ Combined service area is 182 square miles and a population of about 45,000 --largely rural, low density development
- ▶ 4 fire stations with 3 Firefighter/EMTs on duty at all times; 23 volunteers
- ▶ Response times vary depending on station locations

# What is an RFA?

- ▶ **A Regional Fire Authority (RFA)** is a special purpose district established by voters in a service area that provides funding for fire and emergency medical services
  - ▶ An RFA can be made up of cities, fire districts, or a combination of the two
  - ▶ There are currently 13 RFAs in Washington
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Proposed boundaries of  
“North Whatcom Regional Fire Authority”

# What are the potential benefits?

- ▶ Ultimately, voters could remove a level of government, and have more efficient oversight through a single governance board
- ▶ Enable full consolidation of the two separate fire agencies, with opportunities for further efficiencies
- ▶ Protect current service levels and response times
- ▶ Eliminate current District 4 fire & EMS levies and NWFR fire levy; replace with single RFA levy— same rate paid throughout entire RFA  
(RFA levy amount not yet determined)

# How is an RFA formed?

- ▶ Participating agencies must reach an agreement on a Plan for the RFA; that is the mission of the Planning Committee
  - ▶ The proposed Plan must be approved by the Boards of both NWFR and WCFD4, who would then call for an election on the proposal
  - ▶ All voters in the proposed service area would be eligible to vote on the proposition; a combined simple majority vote is required to pass
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# How would the RFA be governed?

- ▶ We are proposing that the RFA be governed by a Board of Commissioners that will initially be comprised of representation of all 8 Commissioners from both Fire Districts.
  - ▶ The board would transition to a directly-elected board of 5 At-Large Commissioners. The first election for these positions would be in November 2023, with terms beginning Jan. 2024.
  - ▶ The RFA Board is responsible for approving the RFA budget each year and hiring the Chief.
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# Current and future needs of a growing community

- ▶ NWFR has not asked voters for a tax increase in 11 years.
  - ▶ FD4 has not asked for a fire levy tax increase in 27 Years; voters have more recently approved a bond and the EMS levy.
  - ▶ Population and calls for service continue to grow.
  - ▶ In the RFA, all property owners would pay the **same fire levy rate**, and the current taxes imposed by NWFR and District 4 would be repealed (including the District 4 EMS levy).
  - ▶ We are working on the financial plan now and will report back this spring with more details.
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# What am I currently paying?

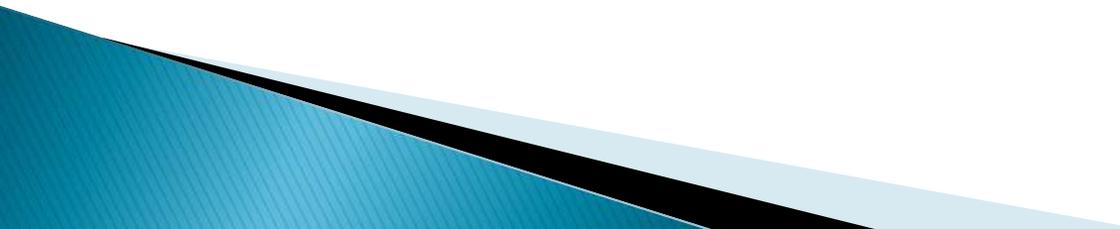
- ▶ Current (2021) Property Tax Levies in NWFR and District 4:

Agency	2021 Fire Levy	EMS Levy	Total
NWFR (District 21)	\$1.146	---	\$1.146
Fire District 4	\$0.821	\$0.212	\$1.033

Tax rates are per \$1,000 of assessed value of real property.

- ▶ These 3 levies will end if the RFA is created, and be replaced by a single RFA levy
- ▶ All taxpayers also pay the Whatcom County EMS Levy (funding paramedic services) at a current levy rate of **\$0.220**

# What will happen to existing fire districts?

- ▶ All current staff will become RFA employees
  - ▶ All fire stations and equipment are anticipated to be transferred to the RFA.
  - ▶ Voters will be asked to dissolve NWFR and WCFD4 once the RFA is up and running.
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# What is the project timeline?

- ▶ The work now is to map out the RFA financial plan
  - ▶ The proposed RFA Plan will be submitted to the Boards of Commissioners in April
  - ▶ There will be public hearings about the RFA Plan
  - ▶ If the Plan is adopted by both Boards, public outreach will take place to so that voters can be well-informed
  - ▶ The schedule calls for the RFA measure to be placed on the **August 3, 2021 ballot**
  - ▶ A combined simple majority of voters in the combined NWFR and District 4 areas is required to approve the RFA
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Thank you!

Questions?  
Comments?

# For more information:

- ▶ <https://www.nwfrs.net/regional-fire-authority-planning-committee/>
- ▶ You can also submit questions at [info@nwfrs.com](mailto:info@nwfrs.com), or
- ▶ Call 360-318-9933

*We appreciate your interest and look forward to providing you additional information as we work.  
Thank you!*

