



# North Whatcom Fire and Rescue

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: February 20, 2024  
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### **Board of Fire Commissioners to meet on fire levy resolution March 6**

*Community invited to learn more and provide comment*

Lynden, Wash. – The North Whatcom Fire and Rescue (NWFR) Board of Fire Commissioners will meet March 6 to discuss a resolution to place a fire levy lid lift on the August 6, 2024, primary election ballot. The community is encouraged to attend the meeting at 7 p.m. at Station 61, 9408 Odell Road.

Revenue from the fire district's fire levy of \$0.76 per \$1,000 of assessed property value is not keeping up with the demand for and costs to provide emergency services. Call volumes have almost doubled in the last 10 years. EMS calls have increased by 50 percent and now account for most of all calls – 71 percent. Multiple emergencies happening at the same time are also occurring more frequently, at least 30 percent of the time. As a result, NWFR is experiencing longer response times.

"We're struggling right now. Revenue from our fire levy is not keeping up with demand and costs to provide emergency services," Fire Chief Jason Van Der Veen said. "We have no choice but to dip into our reserves to cover daily operations. This is not sustainable and why we're considering asking voters for a fire levy lid lift in the August primary."

If voters approve a levy lid lift, it will fund:

- Up to eight emergency personnel over six years to respond to higher call volumes, meet staffing requirements at fire stations, and put into service another response unit for medical emergencies
- Replacement of a ladder truck and three engines that have reached the end of their usable lives

The fire district can pay for its operational needs and most of its capital projects without asking for voter-approved debt, such as a bond, which costs taxpayers more in interest payments. The fire district can pay for these projects through its regular fire levy.

The lid lift would also help fund the replacement of Station 63 in Birch Bay (a bond may be needed to complete this project) to improve response times and service reliability in the area. The Birch Bay station is the fire district's busiest station.

### **EMS calls now account for 71 percent of all calls**

Right now, emergency personnel are unavailable for as long as two hours when transporting a patient to St. Joseph Hospital in Bellingham. This increases response times for other emergency calls that come in during that time.

Hiring more personnel will allow the fire district to reduce response times, improve staffing levels at district fire stations and reduce NWFR's reliance on mutual aid from other agencies. Having to rely on mutual aid puts additional strain on them and can lead to longer response times.

The fire district is considering asking voters to reset the fire levy from \$0.76 to \$1.10 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The \$0.34 lid lift would cost the owner of a \$500,000 home an additional \$14.16 per month or \$170 per year. If approved by voters, this would be the first levy lid lift in almost 20 years.

Learn more at [www.nwfrs.net](http://www.nwfrs.net). Fire Chief Jason Van Der Veen also welcomes questions at 360-318-9933 or [jvanderveen@nwfrs.com](mailto:jvanderveen@nwfrs.com).

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*North Whatcom Fire and Rescue provides fire and life safety services to 33,800 people over 156 square miles, including the communities of Lynden, Laurel, Blaine, Custer, Birch Bay and Semiahmoo. NWFR also serves the residents of Whatcom County Fire District 4 through a contract agreement. In 2023, NWFR responded to 5,753 calls – of which 71 percent were for emergency medical service (EMS). Call volumes have almost doubled in the last 10 years, and overlapping calls happen 30 percent of the time. NWFR operates under a balanced budget and is debt-free.*