



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Draft Strategic Plan Available for North County Fire & EMS

Public Encouraged to Review and Comment

Stanwood, Wash. – North County Regional Fire Authority (North County Fire & EMS) has been working on a strategic plan to respond to higher call volumes. The agency provides fire suppression and emergency medical service to 25,000 people over 110 square miles, including the City of Stanwood.

Call volumes have increased 37% in the past five years due to population growth and aging. The Fire Authority started the strategic planning process earlier this year to get ahead of service level issues before they become a problem.

Higher call volumes mean added costs for items out of the Fire Authority's control, such as equipment, fuel, maintenance, and medical supplies. They also require additional staffing and apparatus to maintain emergency response times and service levels for the community.

"We're slipping, and we know that," said Fire Chief John Cermak. "That's why we went through this planning process to identify the personnel and apparatus needed to get us back to where we need to be."

The Fire Authority is limited to a one percent revenue increase per year by law, and that's not keeping up with inflation or the demand for service. The Fire Authority has applied for grants, and secured temporary ones for staffing and replacing firefighter breathing equipment. Grants help stretch tax dollars further, but they aren't a sustainable funding source.

The Strategic Plan identifies challenges to service, and recommends that the Fire Authority consider a fire levy lid lift proposal for taxpayer approval. This would restore funding for emergency services back to previously approved levels.

For example, voters had approved a fire levy of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value in 2008. Over time, levy rates fall as property values rise to limit the Fire Authority to roughly the same amount of revenue per year. The current fire levy has fallen to \$1.36 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

The Board of Fire Commissioners will consider asking voters to "lift the lid" of the fire levy later this year. There will be a public process later this summer before the measure could potentially go to ballot in the fall.

A draft of the Strategic Plan is available on the Fire Authority's web site at www.northcountyfireems.com. People with comments are encouraged to contact Fire Chief John Cermak at (425) 789-8036 or jcermak@northcountyfireems.com.

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North County Regional Fire Authority, known as "North County Fire & EMS," provides fire suppression and emergency medical service to 25,000 people over 110 square miles, including the City of Stanwood. More than 70 emergency personnel respond to approximately 4,200 calls per year. North County Fire & EMS is debt-free, operates under a balanced budget and has passed all its independent audits by the State. More information about the Fire Authority can be found at www.northcountyfireems.com.