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Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee

**Public Hearing on the Regional Fire Authority
Plan Proposal to Impose Benefit Charges to
Support a Regional Fire Authority's Legally
Authorized Activities that will Maintain or
Improve the Services Afforded in the Authority,
if Approved by voters in Olympia and
Tumwater, as Provided by Law**

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Title

Public Hearing on the Regional Fire Authority Plan Proposal to Impose Benefit Charges to Support a Regional Fire Authority's Legally Authorized Activities that will Maintain or Improve the Services Afforded in the Authority, if Approved by voters in Olympia and Tumwater, as Provided by Law

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Hold a Public Hearing on the Regional Fire Authority Plan Proposal to impose benefit charges to support a Regional Fire Authority for the support of a regional fire authority's legally authorized activities that will maintain or improve the services afforded in the Authority, if approved by voters in Olympia and Tumwater, as provided by law.

Report

Issue:

Whether to hold a Public Hearing on the Regional Fire Authority Plan to Impose Benefit Charges to Support a Regional Fire Authority for the support of its legally authorized activities that will maintain or improve the services afforded in the Authority, if approved by voters in Olympia and Tumwater, as provided by law. The public hearing is to comply with the requirements of RCW 52.26.230.

Staff Contact:

Jay Burney, City Manager, 360.753.8740

Presenter(s):

Jay Burney, City Manager

Background and Analysis:

In 2019, the City of Olympia participated with the City of Tumwater and other local Fire agencies in a study to evaluate options for an RFA.

The study looked at opportunities to improve emergency services in the Olympia and Tumwater communities and explored partnership opportunities to provide these services regionally. Findings from this study, which were presented at an elected official's workshop in November 2019, recommended further exploration of a Regional Fire Authority as Olympia and Tumwater share similar risk profiles, histories, and organizational structures, there may be a potential to control costs and improve service delivery, it would level tax rates across the region, provide greater equity, and leverages individual agency strengths, and minimizes weaknesses.

On May 19, 2021, the City Council authorized an Interlocal Agreement between the City of Olympia and the City of Tumwater which provides the framework for a planning process that looks at the viability of a Regional Fire Authority between the cities of Olympia and Tumwater.

The Planning Committee first met on August 16, 2021. On November 14, 2022, the Planning Committee conducted a public hearing on formation of the Authority and the Plan. Following the public hearing, upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Planning Committee moved to recommend the formation of the Authority and its Plan to the Olympia City Council and Tumwater City Council. Copies of the Plan were made available from the administrative offices of the City of Olympia and the City of Tumwater City Clerk.

The Cities are authorized to form a regional fire protection service authority by Chapter 52.26 RCW, which requires that in order to create a regional fire protection service authority, the formation of the Authority and its Plan must be approved by the voters of the area affected by the Plan.

Therefore, in accordance with the Plan and state law, a ballot proposition on whether or not the Olympia Tumwater Fire Authority should be formed and funded by existing property tax levy and a new six-year benefit charge, and the approval or rejection of the Plan for its governance, operation, and financing, must be submitted to the voters of Olympia and Tumwater.

On December 6, 2022, the Olympia City Council and the Tumwater City Council each passed a joint Resolution to form a Regional Fire Protection Authority and approve an Operations and Finance Plan related thereto, and providing for submission to the voters at the April 25, 2023, Special Election of the Cities of Olympia and Tumwater a ballot proposition to create a Regional Fire Protection Service Authority within the boundaries of the cities of Olympia and Tumwater and approve an Operations and Finance Plan Related thereto.

This hearing of the Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee on imposition of a benefit charge is to comply with the requirements of RCW 52.26.230.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

A collaborative partnership and shared responsibility among local and regional governments and the private sector is better able to provide for an effective fire protection and emergency medical system than the Cities acting separately can provide. The delivery of core emergency services and timely development of significant projects can best be achieved through the use of stable funding options

provided for by state law for regional fire protection and emergency medical services.

Options:

1. Conduct a public hearing to receive testimony on the imposition of a fire benefit charge as required by RCW 52.26.230.
2. Do not conduct a public hearing.
3. Conduct a public hearing at another time.

Financial Impact:

If voters approve the formation of the RFA, the City will lose \$1.00 of its current year (2024) levy rate per \$1,000 Assessed Valuation as well as a \$1.00 reduction off the City's maximum statutory rate. The estimated impact on City revenue from Property Tax collections in 2024 is a reduction of \$13,005,000. At the same time, if the voters approve the RFA, the City's General Fund net expenses related to Fire activities would reduce by an estimated \$13,490,000, resulting in an estimated favorable variance to the City of \$485,000. The reduction of the \$1.00 on the City's levy rate is a shift from the City to the RFA. As this is a shift, there is no change in the tax burden on property owners within the City. Imposition of a benefit charge cannot exceed 60% of the Regional Fire Authority's operating budget.

Attachments:

Agenda
Presentation