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City of Edmonds Proposes Annexation to South County Fire

Move addresses budget challenges while preserving emergency services

EDMONDS, WA — The City of Edmonds is taking decisive steps to address long-standing budget challenges while ensuring the community continues to receive high-quality emergency and essential services.

Years of historic inflation have significantly outpaced revenues, creating a growing budget deficit and fiscal emergency. For each dollar that Edmonds' residents pay in property taxes, the city receives about 14 cents, yet property taxes account for a substantial portion of the city's budget. State law caps the city's annual increase in property tax revenue at just 1%, which is not close to being able to keep pace with rising costs.

To fund critical services, Edmonds has been borrowing money and drawing from its limited reserves. Significant cuts were made by the Mayor and City Council, which included eliminating staff positions and reducing services, however, these measures cannot fully address the financial gap.

Fire/EMS and police services are top priorities for Edmonds residents, and the city has developed a plan to maintain them while addressing the budget crisis. The plan includes asking voters to annex to South County Fire and, in the future, increasing the general property tax levy beyond the current 1% cap.

Why annexation to South County Fire?

Edmonds no longer operates its own fire department and has contracted with South County Fire for fire and emergency medical services since 2010. If annexation is approved by voters, Edmonds property owners would pay South County Fire directly for these services.

Alternatives such as contracting with other providers, continuing to contract with South County Fire, or re-establishing a city-run fire department were explored but were determined to either be more costly for taxpayers, or provide fewer benefits.

Annexation would protect the current level and quality of emergency response, allow residents

to vote on fire authority issues and run for the Board of Fire Commissioners.

South County Fire Chief Bob Eastman said other communities have realized the benefits of annexation.

“Residents in Mill Creek, Brier, and Mountlake Terrace have successfully annexed into South County Fire,” Eastman said. “We love serving the people of Edmonds and want to continue doing so. Annexation allows us to plan for Edmonds’ long-term emergency service needs and brings an entire network of protection beyond the city’s borders.”

The funds the city currently collects that have been used to pay for services provided by South County Fire would continue to be collected to fund other critical services, such as maintaining the police department, parks, trails, and road improvements.

To help residents understand the decision they will be making and get answers to their questions, the city is planning several public meetings, preparing information for the website, and creating an online calculator so residents can understand the financial impacts for them.

“Emergency response is vital, no matter the financial challenges we face. South County Fire has consistently protected Edmonds’ residents, workers, and visitors. Annexation ensures that we can preserve the fast, effective service that Edmonds has trusted and relied on for years,” said Mayor Mike Rosen. “This is about safeguarding our community and ensuring we continue to receive the critical services we depend on.”

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The City of Edmonds is a full-service city providing police, fire/EMS (through a contract with South County Fire), parks, streets, sidewalks, planning, economic development, and public utilities. Edmonds boasts an exceptionally high quality of life rating from its residents. Find more information at www.edmondswa.gov.

South County Fire provides fire and emergency medical services to nearly 300,000 residents of Brier, Edmonds, Lynnwood, Mill Creek, Mountlake Terrace and unincorporated southwest Snohomish County. Learn more at www.southsnofire.org.