

West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority



ABSTRACT

The City of White Salmon and Klickitat County Fire District #3 have prepared several informational question-and-answer opportunities with regards to the November election proposal to form a Regional Fire Authority by combining both Volunteer Fire Departments

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why have the City of White Salmon and Fire District #3 officials decided to “join forces”?

A: The two Volunteer fire departments have been working closely together for a number of years – but as two separate entities. In recent years, there has been growing concern about the wildfire danger and other 9-1-1 emergencies that are taxing the force of volunteers – whose numbers have been declining in recent years.

Q: What is the West Klickitat Citizens Task Force?

A: The City of White Salmon and Fire District #3 elected officials met together several times in 2022 to discuss emergency services [fire/medical/rescue] in the community. Both entities collectively decided to create a Community Citizens Task Force of residents from both the City and the Fire District to evaluate the current level of emergency services [fire/medical/rescue] AND to determine whether or not emergency services in the greater White Salmon community would be better served by combining forces. During the study, it was determined that both volunteer fire departments had shortfalls, challenges and gaps in service which did not meet the current or future demand for emergency responses. The Task Forces’ report and recommendations endorsed a “regional approach” for providing emergency services among other key findings and recommendations. The Task Force specifically recommended that the City and Fire District form a **Regional Fire Authority** under RCW 52 for the purpose of dedicating funding, robust recruiting of citizen volunteers; improved training for the volunteers; providing funds for replacement of emergency vehicles and equipment; more robust public education programs for fire prevention and emergency medical services – and much more. The full report may be found on both the City of White Salmon and Klickitat County Fire District #3 websites.

Q: What is a Regional Fire Authority?

A: 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. State law provides the framework for fire districts, cities, and other local government jurisdictions to consider forming a RFA as a means to gain service efficiencies while retaining local control. An RFA can be made up of cities, fire districts, port district, municipal airport, or Indian tribe or a combination of the entities (to date neither ports, tribes or airports have participated in the formation of an RFA). Creation of a RFA is authorized by state law ([Title 52.26, Revised Code of Washington](#)).

Q: How is an RFA created?

A: A RFA is created by a vote of the people in the proposed service area. Depending on the proposed funding for the RFA, the vote required is either a simple majority or 60% approval of all those voting in the proposed service area.

Q: Why create an RFA?

A: A RFA provides an opportunity to eliminate duplication and achieve cost savings and efficiencies in the delivery of fire and emergency service by consolidating separate fire agencies into a regional service provider. Population and calls for service in the City of White Salmon and Klickitat County Fire District No. 3 have grown faster than firefighter staffing level for many

years. This is expected to continue in the coming years. An RFA would consolidate resources, create opportunities for efficiencies and provide dedicated funding at more sustainable levels to maintain and enhance fire, rescue and emergency medical services in the entire area over time.

Q: Who else has created an RFA?

A: There are currently fifteen [15] Regional Fire Authorities in the state of Washington. The City and Fire District are hoping for other jurisdictions in the area [Bingen; Lyle; Underwood] to eventually join the West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority as well.

Q: What happens to the firefighters in the City and District—will they still be providing service to my community? Yes. If the RFA is approved by voters in November, firefighters and all other staff from the White Salmon Fire Department and Fire District 3 will serve as firefighters for the RFA.

Q: Who put together the plan for how the proposed RFA will operate?

A: By state law, an RFA Planning Committee comprised of three elected officials from Fire District 3 and the City of White Salmon was created to develop a detailed operating and finance plan called the West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority Plan. It can be found posted on both the City and Fire District websites.

Q: How is the RFA funded?

A: The West Klickitat RFA Plan provides for the following funding sources. An initial property tax rate of \$.76 per thousand of assessed valuation with a maximum *property tax* levy rate of \$1.00 per thousand of assessed valuation unless the voters approve a levy lid lift in the future. Ten percent (10%) of these funds are dedicated to equipment and emergency vehicle replacement and the rest will be dispersed for emergency operations, training, volunteer reimbursement; maintenance, public education, and administration.

Q: How much will the RFA cost me?

A: Costs will vary based on the value of your property. Washington State Office of Financial Management cites the average house value in the White Salmon community to be approximately \$500,000. The annual cost for an average home would be approximately \$380 total per year – or less than \$32 per month. For residents in the Fire District, this levy will replace the existing fire tax currently being levied. For residents of the City of White Salmon, the city property taxes will no longer be required to support the operation of the volunteer fire department and the City Council will use its tax levy revenue to fund other city needs.

Q: How is the RFA governed? Do we lose control of our Fire services?

A: The governance of the RFA will be based on an elected governing board composed of three (3) sitting Fire Commissioners of Klickitat County Fire District #3 and three (3) sitting City Council members from the City of White Salmon. Local control is retained by both agencies.