

CITY ADMINISTRATOR  
ROBERT OMANS

ASSISTANT CITY  
ADMINISTRATOR  
ERICA KRUM

CITY CLERK  
DEBBIE LEE

FINANCE DIRECTOR  
ROBIN NEWCOMB

PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR  
MATHEW BAILEY

POLICE CHIEF  
RICH ALBO

FIRE CHIEF  
ED MILLS

PLANNER  
SHANNON JOHNSON

**Special Meeting**  
**Study Session on Fire Protection**  
**April 14, 2026**  
**4:00 PM**



119 W FIRST STREET  
CLE ELUM, WA 98922

MAYOR  
MATTHEW LUNDH

DEPUTY MAYOR  
CASSIDY BUECHLE - CURTIS

CITY COUNCIL  
CASSIDY BUECHLE-CURTIS  
BETH WILLIAMS  
JON CORNELIUS  
KEN RATLIFF  
STEVEN COOK  
AUDREY MALEK  
STEVEN HARPER

CITY ATTORNEY  
CURTIS CHAMBERS

Join Virtually via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/7573184018?pwd=dERndiBJVC9GdVQ1d2ISRExwZFhXZz09>  
Meeting ID: 757 318 4018 Passcode: 98922

Join by Phone: 1-(253)215-8782, Meeting ID: 757 318 4018, Passcode:98922

TextMyGov

Receive city text alerts: text CLEELUM to 91896

**DISCLAIMER: The City does not guarantee that virtual or telephonic access to the City Council meeting will be available, and the City does not warrant audio quality. Attendees are encouraged to attend in person.**

1. **Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance, and Roll Call**
2. **New Business**
  - a. Discussion with the Fire Advisory Committee
    - Council Options
    - Council Fire 1
    - Regional Fire Authority
    - Interlocal Cooperation in Fire Services

3. **Adjournment**

***Upcoming Meetings:***

***Civil Service Commission Meeting — April 15, 2026, at 5:15 p.m.***

***Historical Preservation Commission Meeting — April 21, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.***

***Planning Commission Meeting — April 21, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.***

***General Government Committee Meeting — April 22, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.***

***Regular Council Meeting — April 28, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.***

***Coal Mines Trail Commission Meeting — May 4, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.***

***Public Works & Community Development Committee Meeting — May 5, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.***

***Lodging Tax & Events Committee Meeting — May 13, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.***

***Public Safety & Health Committee Meeting — May 14, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.***

**Special Meeting Agenda  
April 14, 2026**

119 W FIRST STREET  
CLE ELUM, WA 98922

## CLE ELUM FIRE DEPARTMENT FUNDING OPTIONS 2026-31

- **Define the issue at question :**

From the inception of the Fire Department until 2022 the Department was an all volunteer Department. The annual budget provided to the Department was \$100,000 per year or less. When there was an identified capital need short term levies were supported by the citizens. In 2015 the Department was lagging in several areas due to the lack of funds to “maintain currency” and in need of acquiring a new primary pump truck. A \$.50/1000 levy was passed with the expectation of providing approximately \$200,000 per year for six years (through 2020). The levy did provide the funds as expected however, due to an anomaly in the ballot resolution the levy funds were directed into the current fund. Expenditures were difficult to separate the expectations of capital expenditures from routine operating funds. In 2017 a resolution creating the fire oversight committee was passed by Council to better track expenditures and develop future needs (attachment 1). In 2020 a Strategic Plan was developed by the Department members to look towards 2030. An excerpt from that plan reads:

“The planning team initially examined the community in a context larger than the City itself. The impact of rapid growth stressed the department’s ability to provide emergency services as outlined in the Mission Statement. The Fire Department’s leadership has, to this point, been able to continue to meet the needs of Cle Elum, but we now find our department reactive instead of proactively planning for the current and future needs of Cle Elum.

To meet the changing needs of Cle Elum, the Fire Department has averaged 34 volunteer members over the last 5 years. Current staffing includes a part time administrative Fire Chief, two Assistant Chiefs, 4 Captains, 4 Lieutenants, approx. 22 firefighters with six fire fighter/EMTs. To meet the needs of a growing community, our department will need to add additional volunteers as well as a sleepover program, redeveloped stipend system and potentially adding paid staff to cover the increase in emergency services response and requirements. We believe it is critical to be proactive in response capabilities

At the end of 2020 there were inadequate funds to acquire a needed first response fire engine. The City Council provided a “loan” for the additional funds, however that required supporting a second levy with the same parameters as the first levy, \$.50/1000. This is the current levy that expires in Dec 2026. The levy has made great progress in bringing more current equipment and training but a significant amount of this levy has been utilized in a full time Fire Chief and a part time assistant. This again leaves the truck reserve fund with inadequate funds to purchase any needed new apparatus.

**The issue:**

The 2026 Fire Department budget is \$486,000. The expiration of the current levy from the anticipated Fire Department budget leaves a loss of approximately \$289,000 for 2027. The funding also does not continue the \$100,000 for current fund allotment for operations . This removes approximately \$328,000 from the 2027 budget. The only remaining funds are approximately \$100,000 of “one time” from developer commitments.

The Fire Department will become unfunded in January 2027 unless a solution can be developed and acted on by May1 , or a special funding request is placed on a special ballot at the sole

expense of the City. April 30 is the deadline for ballot measures to be placed on the August primary ballot. This allows revenues to be generated without a 1 year lag. Later ballot dates will not provide funds until 2028.

- **the desired outcome :**

Fire protection and the associated services are a core function of the City of Cle Elum. The resolution of the pending financial crisis needs to assure that there is a stable, predictable, professional and affordable system of fire protection while also providing a “best value” to the citizens of Cle Elum.

The Cle Elum Fire Department has a rich history and a legacy that requires honoring and preserving . This need is to be included within every option to be discussed in the document.

- **define alternatives from efficiency, savings or cost, legal issues:**

1. “Continue with an “as is.” status quo. Council approves maintaining the \$100,000 commitment from the current fund in the 2027 budget, and requests a continuation of \$.50/1000 levy by April 30. This will only fund any additional staffing or reserves by the annual 1% allowable increment and the “in growth” of the City. The ingrowth has a minimum of a 1 year lag, so the impact will be felt well ahead of the revenue. This option also needs to ensure the security of all “one time” funds as emergency only. Selecting this option will not provide adequate addition to the equipment reserve fund.

2. Consultant Brian Carlson provided insight on a **continuation levy** request in the absence of the current fund . The current levy of \$.50/1000 would have to increased. One additional fee of \$.15 added to the \$.50 will cover the current fund replacement of \$100,000. A second- \$.15 increment allow the one time funds to be secured as emergency reserve. The equipment replacement fund is significantly lagging therefore an additional third \$.15 will provide \$100,000 annually to the replacement fund. If adding additional employees or even stipends to volunteer shift work is required, adding at least 1 fte additional to the Chief as an absolute minimum for the next 1- 6 years an additional \$.15 will provide for that. This option requires a May 1 decision to request a levy of 1-6 years for a minimum of \$.95/1000 (adding no additional staffing) or \$1.10/1000 to potentially hire 1 additional fte.

3. This option is the same as option 2 above but provides for requesting additional funding for adding staff within the next 1-6 years. For instance, adding 2 additional staff to the 2 anticipated above would add another \$.30/1000 . That will bring the request to \$1.40/1000 . All employees will be subject to successful levy request in subsequent years. This is not a sustainable employee option.

4. This option is not feasible as a short term or immediate solution. This option could require more than a year to accomplish, therefore an "interim" immediate solution would be required.

Develop a Regional Fire Authority with adjacent cities and/or Districts. This is a concept utilized many areas. A Regional Fire Authority is initiated by each of the involved entities providing for elected officials to forming a "Planning Committee". It requires agreements by the involved entities to bring a public vote to the affected entities. If an RFA is formed the delegation of operation and funding is determined by a Board consisting of representatives of the entities. The Board becomes the decision maker on stations, staffing, operations and funding. Often the development of an RFA can take time to meet the capabilities of the parties. Again, the initial step is to appoint a "Planning Committee" of elected officials. (see attachment Regional Fire Authorities) **Regional Fire Authorities can be a long term solution to working together for best value fire protection and agreed to criteria and funding.**

5. Revert to an all volunteer department with no paid employees . This is what served the communities for many years. The budget becomes simply current fund supported for routine operating expenses, insurance, and equipment reserves. The 2026 current fund budget appears to be \$100,000 The concept of "automatic aid" would be a necessity as the unknown and unpredictable number of volunteers available to respond at any time or day can rely heavily on support from other entities. This becomes problematic when other entities count on that aid and there is very little response. The City will have to develop criteria for selecting a Chief to lead in the current litigious environment. Volunteers choose whether or not they will (or can) respond. This concept is likely the least cost highest risk option. Recruiting and retaining volunteers is a challenge as is meeting training standards and qualifications. The City also has to maintain training records to ensure that managing the risks of actions by responders subject to L&I standards.

6. Take an action initiating and requesting of a Fire District "within a reasonable distance" to annex the City into an annexation into another already existing Fire District. It was discussed at the recent study session what is entailed in an annexation to an already existing District. The City has apparently also had discussions with a Fire District that is not adjacent to the City boundary. In either case , if it is possible to have disconnected boundaries, there needs to be clear understanding of the process, disposition of equipment, infrastructure, Commission representation, and station location as well as volunteer status. This requires a formal document and a vote of Council to place the issue onto a ballot if the receiving District is supportive of the annexation. **is** As a junior taxing district and in the public safety limits the sum total of that is \$1.50/1000 of which KCHD2 maintains a \$.25/1000 levy which restricts the maximum funding to \$1.25/1000 levy lid. Selecting this option may be a heavy lift for establishing questions and answers in the time allotted.

7. Institute a city "Fire District" as a stand alone citywide fire protection entity. This option is within statute. There is a process to for developing a City District. The District would become its own stand alone junior taxing authority and subject to the same rules and constraints as all fire districts. All actions of the Department would be accomplished by public vote of elected Fire Commissioners. This option would require a public vote to come under the statutes of every

Fire District such as elected Commissioners, levy limits. The Fire Commissioners are independent of the City Council and has sole control of funding, operations and staffing enforcement and insuring and accountability . The District is a political subdivision separate of the City of Cle Elum.

8. The City of Cle Elum could contract for Fire Services from an adjacent or nearby fire district or department. By interlocal agreement the City could develop an agreement to issue a contract for protection that would include use of infrastructure, equipment, insurance, a hold harmless agreement, and responder qualifications. The City would provide oversight and ensure compliance which may be time consuming. The funding would be a line item budget of current fund or a voter approved levy to provide new revenue dedicated to the contract. .The actions of a contractor may not relieve the City of accountability or risk. The City would have oversight responsibility to ensure that insurance, training records, and administrative development of required data.

9. This option is a combination of options 2, and 6. Place a ballot request to the voters for a short term levy of \$1.10/1000. This meets the time sensitive request for meeting the current deadline. At the same time simultaneously pass a resolution to request annexation into a nearby Fire District. This option would relieve the current very short time frame to develop a long term solution to fire protection. By increasing the levy for a 1 or 2 year period provides continuous operations and all the issues discussed in option 2 while providing the City the ability to complete an intention to complete an annexation agreement. This option requires 2 voter requests and a commitment of intent for future years. The levy amount would be as developed from 2 above and be reduced by any portions not required in the next year.

10. This option is a combination of options 2 and 4. Place a ballot request for a 2 year period as listed in option 2 in the amount of \$1.10 (or less depending on portions that may be deemed excess in the next 244 months. Simultaneously pass a resolution committing to actively engaging with adjacent cities and fire district with the intent of developing a Regional Fire Authority prior to the end of the levy request. This option places the City as a leader in bringing local communities to explore fully the concept of regionalization, while providing continuing fire protection per item 2.

**Create the proper staff to address the issue:**

Options 4, 6, 9, 10 require active and ongoing participation and a commitment by City Council members, City staff, and potentially a citizen volunteer group to define a path forward that creates a long term “best alternative.

## City Fire protection Information

Currently the City of Cle Elum is showing a Fire Department 2026 budget of \$486,000. This includes a Current fund contribution of \$100,000, a “one time” set of funds of approximately \$104,000 and the remainder is from an expiring \$.50/1000 levy that is placed into the current fund directly.

The levy is set to expire at the end of 2026 and the City is planning to no longer provide current fund contribution to the Department. That leaves no funds for the fire department, with the exception of approximately \$100,000 which are listed as “one time funds” mostly developer mitigation agreements. If the current funding level is considered adequate for the needs of the City that is approximately a \$389,000 unfunded department as of 1/1/27.

The City Council is interested in and is exploring all options available to ensure the best value for the city residents in light of the projected growth of new homes, apartments and commercial development. Council is looking at options and whether to request another (3<sup>rd</sup>) levy in the last 12 years to fully fund the needs of the Department, creating a junior taxing City Fire District, annexing into an adjacent or nearby Fire District, or perhaps the creation of a Regional Fire Authority which would replace the current “automatic aid” agreements with other Cities and Fire Districts.

**The critical need is for a decision to be developed and any needed ballot title agreed to by the end of April 2026 if there is a desire to place a ballot question to the voters prior to the general election, which means the August primary election cycle.**

The volunteer Fire Department created in 1903 has served the City well and was also a critical community support organization as the Department has responded to floods, snowfall events and has held parades, social events, and even funerals. As a result of those and historic events that occurred in a coal mining community, there exists a wealth of historic, cultural, and legendary artifacts, equipment, and photos that are held in high regard by the volunteers, past volunteers, and association volunteers not to mention the general public.

This history and its preservation is an important consideration as the process of change in fire protection.

The range of options has a range of variables in organization and cost as well as impact.

### What we know:

1. Public health and safety are a core function of the city
2. City has gradually moved to one fte (Chief) and a partial fte (admin) from a historically volunteer organization (approximately \$200,000)
3. Historically the Dept. as a Volunteer organization was semi independent from employee/subordinate relationship. Electing from the ranks an annual selection of Chief. Mayor provided oversight and council developed and approved budget
4. The Volunteer organization maintained an “auxiliary” or “association” for parades, social events, funerals etc. donations were co- mingled for many years, but are now separate from City current fund.
5. Historically when large capital for buildings or equipment were required a special levy was supported by the voters
6. ~~For~~ The current account funding in years prior to the 2 recent 6 year levies was generally less than \$100,000 but the City supported special levies for equipment and station 2 .

7. Many other issues to maintain mandated new standards were deferred or pursued as possible by grants of “opportunity”
8. In 2014 a “defacto” fire advisory committee worked with volunteers and Council to request a \$.50/1000 real estate levy . At that time the levy was estimated to provide approximately \$250,000 each year. There is a brochure that the volunteers developed to explain the need for capital expenditures like trucks, breathing apparatus, training, turnouts etc. The levy funds simply were identified as a portion of the general fund and were not identified as designated for those specific uses.
9. There were concerns that the levy was intertwined with Fire Department operating funds. In 2017 a Resolution was passed creating the Fire Oversight Committee.(attached #1)
10. At the end of the initial levy in 2020 there were inadequate funds to purchase a needed new “primary” engine and the Council agreed to provide the shortfall as a loan to be recovered in the next upcoming levy (attached #2)
11. The second (current) levy was advertised and supported essentially the same reasoning as the initial request.
12. The Council appointed a full time Chief but with the “normal” current fund Fire department budget not able to fully fund the position, the levy has had to be utilized substantially for wages that may now include a partial fte as well.
13. As the current levy expires there will not be adequate funds in the replacement account to provide funds for major mechanical issues or replace any upcoming need for a pumper replacement. The estimate in reserve is \$290,600
14. The expiring levy, based on the assessed value of the city of approximately \$600M, appears to generate approximately \$289,000 based on the budget. **This means that a \$.15/1000 levy generates \$100,000 as does every \$.15 after .**
15. Depending on the decision facing Council on a course of action that may be resolved at the primary election, The City may have to sustain the Fire Department from the current fund budget going forward in 2027.
16. The next opportunity following the primary would be November , February, or April 2027 unless there would be a “special” election funded solely by the City.
17. The “one time “ funds of \$100,000 are the only secure funds available for 2027
18. The Fire Department currently does not utilize stipends for volunteer fire staff filling shifts .
19. The maximum taxing authority for EMS and Fire is \$1.50/1000 value. EMS currently has a \$.25/1000 levy.
20. The potential growth of the City could be up to 1000 new units completed by 2031
21. **If funding is not somehow secured for the Fire Department in the August 2026 primary election date. Future elections could have a 1 year lag in revenue generation that will leave the Department potentially unfunded (Is this fact?)**

**Notes:**

22. In all cases the ‘one time” funds are key to making the department whole in any lag in funding even if the voters pass funding.
23. Levies can be from 1 – 6 years but must be clearly stated in the ballot request.
24. Chief Mills was asked to provide information on Fire ratings comparing various levels. Chief Mill has that information.
25. In any scenario the preservation or enhancement of the more than 120 year history of the department is critical.
26. The Cle Elum Fire Department Strategic Plan has an outdated equipment list. Currently being revised.

Attachment 1:

**RESOLUTION : 2017-1-01 ??**

**City of Cle Elum authorization for Fire Department Oversight Committee**

Whereas the voters of the City of Cle Elum authorized a Fire Department levy of \$.50 per \$1000 assessed valuation in \_\_\_\_ 2015 and

Whereas the levy will be in effect for the years of 2016-2020 only and monies are to be dedicated to the Cle Elum Fire Department in addition to funds currently provided by the Cle Elum City budget

Whereas there is a commitment of the City of Cle Elum to ensure the appropriate expenditure and accounting of the funds derived from the authorized levy and

Whereas there is agreement that a "Fire Department Oversight Committee" is the best method to ensure the funds collected are utilized only for Cle Elum Fire Department benefit and

Whereas the Cle Elum City Council is in support of an "Oversight" Committee to provide a review of proposed and actual expenditures

It is hereby resolved to authorize the Mayor of the City of Cle Elum to appoint and direct said committee consisting of 3 members, one City Council member, one retired City Fire Chief, and one citizen at large who shall meet as needed and provide a written report to City Council each April, July, and October concerning expenditures and budget.

Attachment 2 levy shortfall 2020

**FIRE DEPARTMENT FINANCES ESTIMATE 2020 DECEMBER**

In a meeting with Robin last week, she provided me with the requests we made in projecting the status of the truck reserve, operating budget, and expected available funds for the purchase of a replacement pumper at the end of 2020.

1. The anticipated 2020 operating budget , current fund, is \$74,235.00
2. Based on expenditures in 2019 and the expected expenditures of the fire dept. for the remainder of 2019, the expected balance for 12/31/19 is \$114,070.00

3. The 2019 levy is based on an assessed value of the City at \$346,948,028.00 and is expected to generate \$173,474.00 at the end of 2019
4. The levy balance as of 12/31/2018 was \$173,066.00
5. Adding the expected balance at end of 2019 \$(#2 above) to the balance of 2018 (#4) above , **the estimated balance on 12/31/2019 is \$287,136.00**
6. The “pumper reserve” funds were \$79,068.00 on 12/31/18 and are projected to be \$86,318.00 at the end of 2019 . These are City current fund provided funds (and possibly fire department savings?)
7. It appears to Robin that there are plans for the fire department to spend \$65,000 of levy funds in 2020, which when subtracted from the expected levy collection in 2020 of \$175,000 will provide \$110,000 to the levy funds by end of 2020.
8. When the available pumper funds are added as projected for 12/31/2020, adding (#5 above) \$287,136.00 plus (#6 above) pumper reserve of \$86,318.00 and the anticipated levy funds collected and not committed on 12/31/2020 (#7 above) **That at the end of 2020 there will be \$483,454.00 available for commitment.**

Understand that the 2020 funds will not actually be under city control until the 2020 tax collections are distributed with collections due in April and October annually, so realistically **by the end of 2019 there should be only #5 above total of \$287,136.00 and the reserve #6 above \$86,318.00 under city decision authority. Total of \$373,454.00**

If the City decides to proceed with an authorization to accept bids there will be some shortfall that may require interim financing at best case, if the bids are less than the expected 2020 total (#8 above) or a longer term financing arrangement that will require payments to extend beyond the current levy and will add financing interest to the truck bid cost.

# REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY

---

## Overview

A regional fire protection service authority – commonly known as a regional fire authority (RFA) – is a special purpose district created by the vote of the people residing in the proposed district ([chapter 52.26 RCW](#)). Its boundaries encompass two or more fire protection jurisdictions (fire district, city, town, port district, municipal airport, another regional fire authority, or Indian tribe) located within "reasonable proximity."

It is a municipal corporation, an independent taxing authority within the meaning of [Article VII, Section 1](#) of the state constitution, and a taxing district within the meaning

**RCW 52.26.010 Findings.** The legislature finds that: (1) The ability to respond to emergency situations by many of Washington state's fire protection jurisdictions has not kept up with the state's needs, particularly in urban regions; (2) Providing a fire protection service system requires a shared partnership and responsibility among the federal, state, local, and regional governments and the private sector; (3) There are efficiencies to be gained by regional fire protection service delivery while retaining local control; and (4) Timely development of significant projects can best be achieved through enhanced funding options for regional fire protection service agencies, using already existing taxing authority to address fire protection emergency service needs and new authority to address critical fire protection projects and emergency services. [2004 c 1

**RCW 52.26.030 Planning committee—Formation—Powers.** Regional fire protection service authority planning committees are advisory entities that are created, convened, and empowered as follows:

(1) Any two or more fire protection jurisdictions located within reasonable proximity may create a regional fire protection service authority and convene a regional fire protection service authority planning committee. No fire protection jurisdiction may participate in more than one created authority.

(2) **Each governing body of the fire protection jurisdictions participating in planning under this chapter shall appoint three elected officials to the authority planning committee.** Members of the planning committee may receive compensation of seventy dollars per day, or portion thereof, not to exceed seven hundred dollars per year, for attendance at planning committee meetings and for performance of other services in behalf of the authority, and may be reimbursed for travel and incidental expenses at the discretion of their respective governing body.

(3) A regional fire protection service authority planning committee may receive state funding, as appropriated by the legislature, or county funding provided by the affected counties for start-up funding to pay for salaries, expenses, overhead, supplies, and similar expenses ordinarily and necessarily incurred. Upon creation of a regional fire protection service authority, the authority shall within one year reimburse the state or county for any sums advanced for these start-up costs from the state or county.

(4) The planning committee shall conduct its affairs and formulate a regional fire protection service authority plan as provided under RCW 52.26.040. (5) At its first meeting, a regional fire protection service authority planning committee may elect officers and provide for the adoption of rules and other operating procedures. (6) The planning committee may dissolve itself at any time by a majority vote of the total membership of the planning committee. Any participating fire protection jurisdiction may withdraw upon thirty calendar days' written notice to the other jurisdictions. [2018 c 28 s 3; 2017 c 196 s 8; 2004 c 129 s 3.]

**RCW 52.26.040 Planning committee—Formulation of service plan—** Competition with private ambulance service. (1) A regional fire protection service authority planning committee shall adopt a regional fire protection service authority plan providing for the governance, design, financing, and development of fire protection and emergency services. The planning committee may consider the following factors in formulating its plan: (a) Land use planning criteria; and (b) The input of cities and counties located within, or partially within, a participating fire protection jurisdiction. (2) The planning committee may coordinate its activities with neighboring cities, towns, and other local governments that engage in fire protection planning. (3) The planning committee shall:

(a) Create opportunities for public input

(b) Adopt a plan proposing the creation of a regional fire protection service authority and recommending governance, design, financing, and development of fire protection and emergency service facilities and operations, including maintenance and preservation of facilities or systems. The plan may authorize the authority to establish a system of ambulance service to be operated by the authority or operated by contract after a call for bids. However, the authority shall not provide for the establishment of an ambulance service that would compete with any existing private ambulance service, unless the authority determines that the region served by the authority, or a substantial portion of the region served by the authority, is not adequately served by an existing private ambulance service. In determining the adequacy of an existing private ambulance service, the authority shall take into consideration objective generally accepted medical standards and reasonable levels of service which must be published by the authority. Following the preliminary conclusion by the authority that the existing private ambulance service is inadequate, and before establishing an ambulance service or issuing a call for bids, the authority shall allow a minimum of sixty days for the private ambulance service to meet the generally accepted medical standards and accepted levels of service. In the event of a second preliminary conclusion of inadequacy within a twenty-four-month period, the authority may immediately issue a call for bids or establish its own ambulance service and is not required to afford the private ambulance service another sixty-day period to meet the generally accepted medical standards and reasonable levels of service. A private ambulance service that is not licensed by the department of health or whose license is denied, suspended, or revoked is not entitled to a sixty-day period within which to demonstrate adequacy and the authority may immediately issue a call for bids or establish an ambulance service; and put in the development of the plan;

(c) In the plan, recommend sources of revenue authorized by RCW 52.26.050, identify the portions of the plan that may be amended by the board of the authority without voter approval, consistent with RCW 52.26.050, and recommend a financing plan to fund selected fire protection and emergency services and projects. (4) Once adopted, the plan must be forwarded to the participating fire protection jurisdictions' governing bodies to initiate the election process under RCW 52.26.060.

(5) If the ballot measure is not approved, the planning committee may redefine the selected regional fire protection service authority projects, financing plan, and the ballot measure. The fire protection jurisdictions' governing bodies may approve the new plan and ballot measure, and may then submit the revised proposition to the voters at a subsequent election or a special election. If a ballot measure is not approved by the voters by the third vote, the planning committee is dissolved. [2011 c 141 s 2; 2006 c 200 s 2; 2004 c 129 s 4.]

**RCW 52.26.050 Service plan—Taxes and benefit charges.** (1) A regional fire protection service authority planning committee may, as part of a regional fire protection service authority plan, recommend the imposition of some or all of the following revenue sources, which a regional fire protection service authority may impose upon approval of the voters as provided in this chapter: (a) Benefit charges under RCW 52.26.180 through 52.26.270; (b) Property taxes under RCW 52.26.140 through 52.26.170 and 84.52.044 and RCW 84.09.030, 84.52.010, 84.52.052, and 84.52.069; or (c) Both (a) and (b) of this subsection.

(2) The authority may impose taxes and benefit charges as set forth in the regional fire protection service authority plan upon creation of the authority, or as provided for in this chapter after creation of the authority. If the plan authorizes the authority to impose benefit charges or sixty percent voter approved taxes, the plan and creation of the authority must be approved by an affirmative vote of sixty percent of the voters within the boundaries of the authority voting on a ballot proposition as set forth in RCW 52.26.060. However, if the plan provides for alternative sources of revenue that become effective if the plan and creation of the authority is approved only by a majority vote, then the plan with alternative sources of revenue and creation of the authority may be approved by an affirmative vote of the majority of those voters. If the plan does not authorize the authority to impose benefit charges or sixty percent voter approved taxes, the plan and creation of the authority must be approved by an affirmative vote of the majority of the voters within the boundaries of the authority voting on a ballot proposition as set forth in RCW 52.26.060. Except as provided in this section, all other voter approval requirements under law for the levying of property taxes or the imposition of benefit charges apply. Revenues from these taxes and benefit charges may be used only to implement the plan as set forth in this chapter. [2006 c 200 s 3; 2004 c 129 s 5.]

**RCW 52.26.080 Organization and composition of governing board— Commissioner positions, districts.**

(1) The board shall adopt rules for the conduct of business. The board shall adopt bylaws to govern authority affairs, which may include: (a) The time and place of regular meetings; (b) Rules for calling special meetings; (c) The method of keeping records of proceedings and official acts; (d) Procedures for the safekeeping and disbursement of funds; and (e) Any other provisions the board finds necessary to include. (2) The governing board shall be determined by the plan. However, only elected officials of participating fire protection jurisdictions and elected commissioners of the authority as provided in subsection (3) of this section are eligible to serve on the board. (3)(a) A regional fire protection service authority plan may create one or more regional fire protection service authority commissioner positions to serve on a governing board. The following provisions define the qualifications, compensation, terms, and responsibilities of regional fire protection service authority commissioner positions: (i) RCW 52.14.010 governs the compensation, qualifications, and ability to serve as a volunteer firefighter; (ii) RCW 52.14.030 governs the polling places for elections; and (iii) RCW 52.14.050 governs commissioner

vacancies.(b) The terms of office for regional fire protection service authority commissioner positions may be established by the plan, however, no single term may exceed six years and the terms of multiple positions must be staggered.(c) Regional fire protection service authority commissioners shall take an oath of office in the manner specified by RCW 52.14.070. (4)(a) A regional fire protection service authority plan may create commissioner districts. If commissioner districts are created, the population of each commissioner district must be approximately equal. Commissioner districts must be redrawn as provided in chapter 29A.76 RCW. (b) Commissioner districts shall be used as follows: (i) Only a registered voter who resides in a commissioner district may be a candidate for, or serve as, a commissioner of the commissioner district; and (ii) only voters of a commissioner district may vote at a primary to nominate candidates for a commissioner of the commissioner district. All voters of the proposed authority must be eligible to vote at a general election to elect a commissioner of the commissioner district. If a plan includes elected officials from participating fire protection jurisdictions, the commissioner districts may be based, in part, on the jurisdictional boundaries of the participating jurisdictions. [2011 c 141 s 3; 2004 c 129 s 8.]

**RCW 52.26.090 Powers of governing board—Designation of some other person as treasurer, when authorized.** (1) The governing board of the authority is responsible for the execution of the voter-approved plan. Participating jurisdictions shall review the plan every ten years. The board may: (a) Levy taxes and impose benefit charges as authorized in the plan and approved by authority voters; (b) Enter into agreements with federal, state, local, and regional entities and departments as necessary to accomplish authority purposes and protect the authority's investments; (c) Accept gifts, grants, or other contributions of funds that will support the purposes and programs of the authority; (d) Monitor and audit the progress and execution of fire protection and emergency service projects to protect the investment of the public and annually make public its findings; (e) Pay for services and enter into leases and contracts, including professional service contracts; (f) Hire, manage, and terminate employees; and (g) Exercise powers and perform duties as the board determines necessary to carry out the purposes, functions, and projects of the authority in accordance with this title if one of the fire protection jurisdictions is a fire district, unless provided otherwise in the regional fire protection service authority plan, or in accordance with the statutes identified in the plan if none of the fire protection jurisdictions is a fire district.

(2) An authority with more than \$10,000,000 in annual revenues for the preceding three years, or an authority that is being formed by participating jurisdictions that cumulatively had more than \$10,000,000 in annual revenues for three years prior to the formation of the authority, may designate by resolution some other person having experience in financial or fiscal matters as the treasurer of the authority. Such a treasurer shall possess all of the powers, responsibilities, and duties of, and shall be subject to the same restrictions as provided by law for, the county treasurer with regard to a fire district and the county auditor with regard to district financial matters under chapter 52.16 RCW and other applicable statutes. (3) An authority may enforce fire codes as provided under chapter 19.27 RCW. [2022 c 90 s 4; 2006 c 200 s 6; 2004 c 129 s 9.]

## Formation Process

The first step in forming the district is to create an RFA planning committee to draft a regional fire protection service authority plan. The planning committee is composed of three elected officials appointed by the governing bodies of each of the participating fire protection jurisdictions ([RCW 52.26.030](#)).

Upon receipt of the plan, the governing bodies of the fire protection jurisdictions may certify the plan to the ballot and put the plan before the voters for their approval or rejection. A single ballot measure may approve formation of the authority and the plan.

If a simple majority of votes cast are in favor, the district is declared organized by resolution of the county commissioners ([RCW 52.26.060](#)). However, if the plan authorizes the authority to impose fire benefit charges or 60% voter-approved taxes, the plan must be approved by a 60% supermajority ([RCW 52.26.050](#)).

Participating jurisdictions must review the plan every ten years ([RCW 52.26.090](#)(1))

## Governing Board

Per [RCW 52.26.080](#) (2) and (3), the governing board of the regional fire authority is determined by the plan and must consist of elected officials. The statutory language is somewhat unclear, but it appears the board may consist of one of the following options (or a mix of both):

- Current elected officials from the participating fire protection jurisdictions, such as fire protection district (FPD) commissioners or city councilmembers
- Regional fire commissioners elected by the voters of the regional fire authority

For instance, the board could consist of three elected regional fire commissioners, or two city councilmembers and three FPD commissioners from participating jurisdictions, or one city councilmember, one FPD commissioner, and three elected regional fire commissioners (or any number of other combinations).

The plan must establish the terms of office. Per [RCW 52.26.080](#)(3)(b), the terms must be staggered, and no single term may exceed six years. If desired, the regional fire

authority may establish commissioner districts for the purpose of determining commissioner eligibility and voting in primary elections (see [RCW 52.26.080\(4\)](#)).

## **Washington State Fire Chiefs RFA Guide**

Frequently asked questions

<https://www.washingtonfirechiefs.com/rfaimplementationguide>

# **West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority**

**Voters approved the formation of the Regional Fire Authority by vote in November 2023.**

- **The effective date of the WKRFA Governing Board was September 30 2024.**
- **WKRFA became operational on January 1 2025**

Back ground:

**The West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee** created a plan to present to the voting constituents of KCFD3 and the City of White Salmon.

The WKRFA Planning Committee was made up of three Klickitat County Fire District 3 Commissioners and three White Salmon City Council Members.

The WKRFA Planning Committee meetings occurred between April 26 and July 10 2023, in open public sessions held at the City Council Chambers at 119 NE Church Street, White Salmon WA 98672, and available via Zoom.

The final plan was presented to the full White Salmon City Council and KCFD3 Board of Commissioners.

On July 24, 2023, both organizations approved a joint resolution to present the plan to the constituents of KCFD3 and the City of White Salmon for votes.

The WKRFA Ballot Measure appeared on the November 7th, 2023, General Election Ballot.

Final plan

[https://www.kcf3.com/files/937ad17b5/final\\_approved\\_rfa\\_plan\\_07.10.2023.pdf](https://www.kcf3.com/files/937ad17b5/final_approved_rfa_plan_07.10.2023.pdf)

# Interlocal Cooperation in Fire Services

## Overview

While [Article XI, Section 11](#) of the State Constitution grants local governments the authority to enact regulations for public safety, state law does not mandate the provision of fire services. As a result, jurisdictions employ various strategies to meet fire protection needs, including:

- Operating their own fire departments;
- Forming fire protection districts ([RCW 52.02.020](#)). These districts are formed in unincorporated areas to address fire and emergency medical needs without requiring counties to operate their own fire departments;
- Contracting for fire services with neighboring entities; or
- Seeking voter approval for annexation into existing fire districts.

The Interlocal Cooperation Act ([Ch. 39.34 RCW](#)), allows counties, cities, towns, and districts to enter into interlocal agreements related to fire protection services. Types of agreements may include:

- Joint operating agreements, sometimes referred to as functional consolidations or mergers, where several agencies form a joint operating agency with a separate governing board through interlocal contracts;
- Joint operating agreements where two jurisdictions jointly provide fire services; or
- Interlocal service contracts where one jurisdiction provides fire services to another.

## Statutes

- [Ch 39.34 RCW](#) – *Interlocal Cooperation Act*
- [RCW 35.13.238](#) – *Annexation of Territory Served by Fire Districts, Interlocal Agreement Process, Cities and Towns*
- [RCW 35A.14.480](#) – *Annexation of Territory Served by Fire Districts, Interlocal Agreement Process, Code Cities*
- [Ch. 52.04 RCW](#) – *Fire Protection Districts - Annexation*
- [Ch. 52.06 RCW](#) – *Fire Protection Districts - Merger*
- [Ch. 52.26 RCW](#) – *Regional Fire Service Protection Authorities; chapter includes many subsections focused on annexation and interlocal contracts.*
- [RCW 52.30.020](#) – Requires that local governments with property located in or near a fire protection district must enter into a contract with the district for fire

protection services, unless they already provide these services directly or through another contractual arrangement.

## Fire Service Contracts

Only a few cities contract with other cities for fire protection services. Most arrangements are between cities and fire protection districts for fire protection, EMS, and related services. Below are a few selected examples.

### Cities Providing Fire Protection Services to Other Jurisdictions

- [Bellevue/Clyde Hill Fire Services Agreement](#) (2017) – Bellevue continues providing fire protection/EMS to Clyde Hill for 10 years; city has similar agreements with several other nearby cities and a fire district.
- [Camas/Washougal Fire Services Agreement](#) (2024) – Camas provides fire, EMS, and ALS transport services to Washougal for 10 years, with consolidated department renamed "Camas-Washougal Fire Department." Also includes prior trial agreement and cost allocation example.
- [Fircrest/Tacoma Agreement/Resolution No. 1572](#) (2019) – Tacoma provides fire protection and emergency medical services to Fircrest; the resolution authorizes Tacoma to assess fees and penalties in Fircrest.

### Fire Districts Providing Fire Protection Services to Cities

- [Clark County Fire District #3/Battle Ground Fire Services Agreement](#) (2016) – Fire district provides service to city; city maintains ownership of fire station and two engines.
- [Liberty Lake/Spokane Valley Fire Department Fire Services Agreement](#) (2019) – The department agrees to maintain a Fire Prevention Division, conduct inspections and investigations, and perform plan reviews. The city will assist with these tasks and pay the department for services rendered.

- [Tonasket/Okanogan Fire District #4 Fire Protection Services Agreement](#) (2018) – Addendum to 2010 interlocal agreement setting a new service rate for property owners whose property is protected by the fire district. Document includes the 2010 interlocal agreement for fire protection services.

## Fire District Annexation

- A city or town with a population of 300,000 or less and located "within reasonable proximity" of a fire district may annex to the district ([RCW 52.04.061](#)), and many cities/towns have taken this approach. "Reasonable proximity" means "geographical areas near enough to each other so that governance, management, and services can be delivered effectively."
- If the annexation is approved by voters, the annual tax levy imposed by the fire protection district then applies within the city.
- Annexation is initiated by the city/town council adopting an ordinance stating an intent to join the fire protection district. The ordinance is then forwarded to the board of fire commissioners of the fire district. Following approval by the district, the jurisdictions must notify the county commission/council and the boundary review board (only for jurisdictions located within counties that have a boundary review board).
- Once these steps have been completed, a special election is held in the city and the fire protection district on the issue. If a majority of the voters in the city and the district are in favor of the annexation, then the city is annexed to the fire protection district.
- Following annexation, the city must still contract with the district to provide fire protection services for city-owned properties and facilities; see earlier discussion of fire service contracts under [RCW 52.30.020](#).
- See a list of cities annexed to fire districts on MRSC page [Local Government Fire Protection Service Providers](#).

## Examples of Fire District Annexations

Below are a few sample resolutions, ordinances and agreements that have been used in the implementation of city and fire district annexations.

- **Chelan County Fire District #1/Wenatchee:**
  - [Chelan County Fire District #1 Resolution No. 2015-001](#) – Concurring with the annexation.

- [Fire Marshal Interlocal Agreement](#) (2015) – Designating which responsibilities the city fire marshal will retain and which the fire district will provide following annexation.
- [Pre-Annexation Agreement](#) (2015) – Transition of fire/EMS responsibilities following voter approval of annexation.
- [Wenatchee Ordinance No. 2015-01](#) (2015) – Initiating annexation into fire district
- **King County Fire District #28 Resolution No. 2016-008** (2016) – Submitting a proposed name change ("Enumclaw Fire Department") to the county, following annexation of the city several years earlier.
- **Kittitas/Kittitas County Fire District #2:**
  - [Kittitas Ordinance No. 17-013](#) (2017) – Declaring city's intent to be annexed and requesting a special election.
  - [Kittitas County Fire District #2 Resolution No. 17-2010](#) (2017) – Concurring with annexation and requesting a special election.

## Fire District Mergers

A fire protection district may merge into another fire protection district "located within reasonable proximity" under [chapter 52.06 RCW](#). "Reasonable proximity" means geographical areas near enough to each other so that governance, management, and services can be delivered effectively ([RCW 52.06.010](#)). (Prior to 2017-2018, merging districts had to be adjacent to each other.)

The district desiring to merge with another is called the "merging district." The district into which the merger is to be made is called the "merger district." Once the merger is complete, the resulting (combined) district is called the "merged district."

The commissioners from the merging district must submit a merger petition to the merger district. They may file the petition on their own, or the petition may be filed by citizens if signed by at least 10% of registered voters in the merging district who voted in the last general municipal election. The petition must state the reasons for the merger, note the terms and conditions under which the merger is proposed, and request the merger.

Such action is subject to potential boundary board review if the merging district is located within a county with a boundary review board. The merger also must be approved by a simple majority of voters in the merging district. However, no election is required if the petition is signed by at least 60% of the qualified electors in the merging district ([RCW 52.06.060](#)).

If the merger is approved, both districts must adopt concurrent resolutions declaring the districts merged. All property and funds belonging to the merging district are transferred

to the merged district, and the merging district is dissolved without any further proceedings.

The board of the merged district initially consists of all fire commissioners from both districts. The number is gradually reduced through attrition to three or five commissioners (depending on whether the merged district will ultimately have a three- or five-member board) over the next three general election cycles, as described in [RCW 52.06.085](#).