

# 2024 NMRFA Fire Levy Restoration FAQs

**For more information, here are some frequently asked questions and answers.**

**Q: HAS THE FIRE AUTHORITY'S CALL VOLUME INCREASED SINCE VOTERS LAST APPROVED A FIRE LEVY?**

**A:** When the last Fire Levy was approved by voters in 2009 the Fire Authority responded to 1945 requests for emergency service. In 2023 the Fire Authority responded to 2978 requests for emergency service (a 53% increase). In the last three years alone, we have seen a 27% growth in call volume.

**Q: WHAT CURRENT AND FUTURE GROWTH IS IMPACTING THE FIRE AUTHORITY'S ABILITY TO RESPOND TO EMERGENCIES?**

**A:** North Mason is the fastest developing and growing area within Mason County. Over 200 new apartment units and 150 homes sit on the hill adjacent to the Post Office. Afternoon vehicle traffic in town is at a standstill. The bypass will be opening hundreds of acres for new development in Belfair. The South Kitsap Industrial area is set to bring in a racetrack and massive commercial and industrial development that will rely on North Mason for housing, workers, and services. A proposed casino on the Kitsap-Mason border would do the same. The NMRFA wants to position itself to meet the demands of both current and future growth.

**Q: APART FROM SERVING A GROWING COMMUNITY, WHAT IS THE MAIN DRIVER FOR THE NMRFA TO SEEK THE FIRE LEVY RESTORATION?**

**A:** Over the past two years the Fire Authority has seen operating costs rise by more than 10% for basic supplies and 50% for emergency supplies. The rise in cost has significantly increased the NMRFA's costs associated with fuel, insurance, medical supplies, labor, utilities and firefighting equipment. Outside funding resources can no longer keep up with the recent rises in cost that we have seen.

**Q: WHAT FUNDING ALTERNATIVES HAVE THE FIRE AUTHORITY SOUGHT TO PUT OFF THE NEED FOR A FIRE LEVY RESTORATION SINCE 2009?**

**A:** Since 2009 The Fire Authority has obtained over \$6 million dollars in outside grant funding to support its operations. In that same time the Fire Authority has secured a collection of over \$600,000 per year for the transportation of Medicaid patients. These, along with other sources has allowed the Fire Authority to put off a fire levy restoration request for 15 years.

**Q: HOW DOES OUR CURRENT FIRE LEVY RATE COMPARE TO OTHER FIRE LEVY RATES IN MASON AND KITSAP COUNTIES?**

**A:** Of the 15 Fire Districts in Mason and Kitsap Counties, only Mason County Fire District 17 (Hamma, Hamma) and Bainbridge Island have a lower fire levy rate than the NMRFA. Matlock, Dayton, Hoodsport, Allyn, Kamilche and Port Orchard all have higher Fire Levy rates than the NMRFA.

**Q: BY SEEKING THE RESTORATION OF THE FIRE LEVY IS THE NMRFA SEEKING THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT THAT IT CAN COLLECT ON THE FIRE LEVY?**

**A:** No. Voters approved a rate of \$1.49 in 2009. We are NOT asking for a full restoration to the previous levy funding limits. While the Fire Authority can ask for voters to approve a restoration back to the previously approved fire levy rate of \$1.49, we are only asking our voters to meet-us-in-the-middle at \$1.11. We only want to ask for what is absolutely necessary.

**Q: THE FIRE AUTHORITY HAS BROUGHT ON AND ADVERTISED NEW MOBILE HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS FOR THE NORTH MASON COMMUNITY. ARE FIRE AUTHORITY TAX DOLLARS USED TO SUPPORT THESE PROGRAMS?**

**A:** No, our new medical and mental health programs are 100% funded by outside financial resources and will continue to be in the future. These programs have been implemented using outside financial resources as a means to increase access to local health care and reduce the demand for emergency medical 911 services in North Mason.

**Q: WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY RESOURCES OF REVENUE FOR THE FIRE AUTHORITY?**

**A:** The Fire Authority is funded through three primary mechanisms. 1) A fire levy (largest source of funding), 2) and EMS levy, and 3) ambulance transport revenue.

**Q: WHY IS IMPORTANT TO RETAIN OUR FIREFIGHTERS AND PARAMEDICS?**

**A:** Firefighters from the NMRFA are constantly recruited by larger surrounding Fire Districts (Gig Harbor, South Kitsap, Poulsbo, etc.) and employee retention is a challenge. This comes at a tremendous expense to the NMRFA and its taxpayers. The financial cost to train and equip a new firefighter is \$75,000. By keeping salary and benefits competitive with neighboring agencies at a fraction of this cost, we keep the skill, talent and experience working for North Mason while saving taxpayers money and getting the full return on our investment.

**Q: I JUST VOTED ON A PUBLIC SAFETY SALES TAX IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR. WHAT WAS THAT FOR?**

**A:** The sales tax approved by voters in July was to provide additional funding for the 911 emergency communications center in Shelton (MACECOM). MACECOM is a separate entity from the NMRFA. None of the funds raised by the sales tax goes to support your local North Mason Fire Authority.

**Q: YOU SAY THAT THE FIRE LEVY HASN'T BEEN INCREASED IN 15 YEARS, BUT I HAVE VOTED FOR DIFFERENT THINGS FOR THE FIRE AUTHORITY SINCE THEN. WHAT WERE THOSE FOR?**

**A:** Since 2009 the Fire Authority has asked voters to continue its EMS levy twice which is required by state law every six years. In 2019 the Fire Authority passed a bond to build a new headquarters Fire Station.

**Q: HOW MANY FIREFIGHTING POSITIONS DOES THE AUTHORITY HAVE AND HOW MANY HAVE BEEN ADDED SINCE 2009?**

**A:** The Fire Authority has 21 firefighter positions. Despite a 53% increase in the number of emergency calls since 2009 the Fire Authority has only added three firefighter positions since that time.

**Q: DOES THE FIRE AUTHORITY HAVE ANY DEBT?**

**A:** Outside of repaying the voter approved bonds for the new Fire Station, we are proud to share the NMRFA maintains ZERO debt. Customer service and fiscal responsibility have always been and will always remain the two primary pillars of the organization.