



Clallam County Fire District 3

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Clallam County Fire District 3 to consider fire levy lid lift in 2018 *Budget is not sustainable after 2018*

SEQUIM, WASH. – The Board of Fire Commissioners for Clallam County Fire District 3 unanimously approved the operating budget for next year at a recent meeting. The issue facing the fire district is that the budget is not sustainable after 2018.

“All our revenue is going to respond to emergency calls,” said Fire Chief Ben Andrews. “Personnel have no time for training, building inspections or other duties that are just as important to public safety. We also are unable to put money aside for capital needs, like replacing apparatus and equipment, maintaining facilities, or training personnel.”

Emergency call volumes have increased 27.4 percent in the last five years, and nearly tripled in the past 20 years. In contrast, the fire district is limited to a one percent revenue increase by law, which is not keeping up with inflation. Fire agency officials say that revenue isn’t keeping up with demand for emergency services.

The fire district will have to draw down reserves after 2018 just to maintain emergency service levels. This deficit spending is not sustainable long-term, and impacts the financial health of the agency.

“We have an obligation to communicate both good news and bad with our community – this is what it means to be transparent,” said Chief Andrews. “We provide quality emergency services; however, we will not be able to sustain this level of service without additional revenue.”

The fire district provides fire suppression, fire and injury prevention, hazardous materials response, technical and water rescue, as well as emergency medical service (EMS). In fact, EMS accounts for more than 85 percent of the agency’s calls due to an older population that has chosen to retire in the Sequim area.

Clallam County Fire District 3 primarily funds emergency medical service and fire suppression through two property tax levies. Over time, these levy rates fall as property values rise, which limits the fire district to roughly the same amount of revenue per year plus a 1% increase allowed by law. The 1% increase in revenue is not keeping up with the cost to provide service through inflation.

For example, voters in Clallam County Fire District 3 approved a general levy of \$1.50/\$1,000 in 2004. Since that time, it has fallen to \$1.26. To restore funding for emergency services, the fire district will consider asking voters to “lift the lid” back to \$1.50/\$1,000, or 24 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property

value. The owner of a \$250,000 home would pay an addition \$60 per year (\$5 per month). Funding would be used to maintain emergency service levels, improve staffing as we are able, train personnel, and fund reserves for facility and apparatus needs.

“This will be a public process, and we want to know what people think as we enter these deliberations,” said Chief Andrews.

The fire district will hold meetings sometime in early spring to hear from the public. In the meantime, interested parties are encouraged to send their thoughts to Chief Andrews at bandrews@ccfd3.org or 323 N. 5th Avenue, Sequim, Wash. 98382. All communication is welcome and becomes part of the public record.

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Since 1914 residents of Clallam County have volunteered their time and financial support to provide emergency services for the greater Sequim community. Today Clallam County Fire District 3 provides a 24-hour fire and emergency medical response to 30,000 people with a combination of volunteer, part-time, and full-time personnel. We respond to an average of 7,300 emergency calls per year, and appreciate the support from our community.