

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a Regional Fire Authority?

A: A Regional Fire Authority (RFA) is a special purpose district created by a vote of the people to consolidate and regionalize fire and emergency services. State law provides the framework for cities, towns and fire districts to consider forming an RFA as a way to gain service efficiencies through consolidation while retaining local control. This process has been used to successfully establish RFAs throughout the country and locally in Kent, South King County, North Snohomish County and Auburn (Valley RFA). There are nine RFAs in the State of Washington.

Q: Why consolidate Fire Services?

A: The fire service today is facing many of the same problems that challenge private industry. The cost of providing service is expected to be kept at a minimum, while the quality of service increases. Taxpayers are demanding accountability from their city leaders while desiring an increase in safety and quality of life in their neighborhoods.

The consolidation of fire departments in almost any community would mean cost savings for the taxpayers, with an improvement in services which includes government efficiencies. Savings in construction, administrative personnel, equipment, apparatus, staffing, and training are just a few of the areas where a savings would be seen. Additional benefits include providing a constant level of service; a more secure, sustainable, and stable funding foundation; a uniform level of training; and eliminating duplication of positions and services.

Q: Will the Service Be Better?

A: Yes; in public safety we value life safety and the sustainability of services. We provide a variety of emergency services that must be delivered in a fast, safe, and adaptive manner. In order to properly respond to any level of emergency in an instant, the City of Lynnwood has developed mutual aid agreements with our neighboring jurisdictions. Although this agreement fills some gaps in service, it forces us to wholly rely on our partnerships to provide services and work as a single unified team while providing life safety services to our residents. The City of Lynnwood has no control over the resource allocation, type, and capabilities in surrounding jurisdictions, and vice versa.

With a regional, coordinated approach to fire and EMS services, our first responders will have better access to needed resources, more training opportunities, better flexibility in staffing, more access to specialized equipment, companies and apparatus. In general, a

regionally coordinated fire service provides the residents and visitors of our area with the best emergency response possible.

Q: What are the benefits to Lynnwood Residents? Will residents notice a difference in service?

A: Lynnwood residents will continue to receive professional and timely emergency services. The consolidated fire service agency will benefit Lynnwood residents by providing their first responders with access to appropriate equipment and training opportunities; and coordinated, appropriate and timely emergency response.

The only difference Lynnwood residents might notice is a regional logo on the side of fire engines and aide cars.

Q: Are there any other benefits to services?

A: Mergers save money. When fire departments merge they eliminate duplicate positions such as a Fire Chief, Operations Chief, EMS officers, logistics positions, public educators and more. Duplication of services is one of the most common indicators that prompt neighboring fire service jurisdictions to consider consolidation. With this savings, added resources can be better deployed on the front line, rather than as an everyday administrator to provide a higher level of service.

A consolidated fire department can also have fewer reserve fire engines and trucks on hand to backup one that is in the shop for service. A ladder truck can cost up to \$750,000, a Fire Engine upwards of \$450,000 and an Ambulance \$250,000.

Mergers can improve safety for homeowners and for firefighters through a more coordinated response to emergencies, and through a structured training program. Today, the City of Lynnwood has no designated fire training center. This will be needed to meet the growth demands of tomorrow if Lynnwood continues to run its own department.

Other Benefits include

- Centralized and coordinated administration
- Upgrade of professionalism of firefighters through uniform, high level, consistent training programs
- Centralized and coordinated Public Education and volunteer programs
- Centralized Emergency Medical Program
- Centralized Fire Marshal
- Coordinated Grant Funding program
- Shared specialized equipment costs
- Improved response and capability for HazMat and Rescue programs

- Opportunity to improve Homeowner Insurance rates by reducing fire insurance ratings
- Reduce needs for costly excess equipment
- Strategically plan for future fire station placement
- Increase utilization of resources such as debit days, move ups
- Healthier ability to react to changing regional conditions

Q: Will consolidating the Fire Department cost me more in taxes?

A: Consolidated fire service delivery would create a new agency with taxing authority. The new agency would have a publicly elected commission with oversight and policy setting authority. Any new taxing would be subject to the statutory limitations and regulations set by the State of Washington. Taxes for residents and businesses of the new fire agency would be set by both the current Cities Elected Officials and the new entity's planning committees, with input from the public in open meetings.

The Lynnwood Fire Department is currently meeting the response and safety needs of the community, however we are cautiously planning for the anticipated future growth and needs of the City of Lynnwood. Current and future fiscal needs of the fire department are on pace to outweigh the projected growth revenues. A typical stand-alone city-run Fire Departments in our area is typically allocated between 22-25% of the of the city's general fund budget to support all functions of the department. The City of Lynnwood's Fire Department however is allocated 18%. The costs of providing City services will need increases, or reallocate priorities.

Removing the Fire Department from the City's General Fund will alleviate the ever-growing pressures on the general fund and the city will not be forced to choose between funds for fire services vs. other essential needs. The degree of tax payer costs has yet to be determined. It will depend on what the City plans on doing with the money that is no longer going towards the Fire Department. The current Lynnwood Fire Department needs to grow as the City becomes more densely populated, and as multi-story buildings are developed.

Q: What's wrong with the current service? Can't they city provide more resources to the Fire Department?

A: A great concern of the Lynnwood Fire department moving forward is a citywide concern over our financial sustainability and the ability to maintain our current services. The City has a limited amount of revenue and mandated limits on raising additional revenue. The City is limited to 1% property tax increases per year, however the 1% tends to be under the actual inflation rate, and eventually outpaces actual costs for service.

Sales tax revenues are a good source of funding; however sales tax also has limitations and pressures from other taxing entities. Also, sales tax revenue is not a static figure that the city can guarantee. Fluctuations in sales tax revenues are common and can be attributed to many different factors.

The Lynnwood Fire Department is a small department surrounded by a single Fire District. We have limited resources, lack the ability to generate a great deal of succession, and we have no training facility. We have a high dependence on the availability of automatic aid and stability of standby capability.

Q: All the area firefighters are trained the same way, why does this help?

A: Because of size constraints in smaller departments, training is usually forced to become a secondary responsibility of a regular shift officer. As a result, training can become marginalized, dragging down the capability of the entire force. In contrast, a regional department could assign full-time officers to this duty. Physical facilities such as drill towers and fire props become more affordable. Public Safety personnel always strive to provide the best response possible and enhanced training opportunities allows our responders to be prepared for all hazards.

Q: Do we lose control of our Fire Department?

A: Currently, the Fire Chief reports to the Mayor of Lynnwood. Under a Regional Fire Agency, the citizens of the fire district will directly elect their representatives on the governing board.

Q: Will my fire station be closed?

A: Part of the efficiency of a regionalized fire department is to consider response needs through our community and eliminate duplication. Fire Departments follow a National Fire Protection Standard known as NFPA 1710. Areas will be evaluated for response times and resource needs based on this standard. The response time standard is 4 minutes 90% of the time for the first unit, and effective response force on scene within 8 minutes 90% of the time. Based on Lynnwood's current call volume and anticipated growth, it is highly unlikely that any stations will be closed.