



SNOHOMISH REGIONAL FIRE & RESCUE

For Immediate Release

Date: June 10, 2021
Contact: Heather Chadwick, Public Information Officer
Hchadwick@snofire7.org • 425-245-2662

Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue conducted a community survey

Residents convey satisfaction in service and provide guidance for district

[Monroe, WA] – Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue conducted a Community Survey at the beginning of May. They are a growing fire and emergency services district that now serves over 175,000 residents. The fire district is committed to engaging with community members in order to serve them better and incorporate their needs into future planning efforts. Residents gave feedback on multiple aspects of the fire district, including:

- satisfaction with fire services from Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue
- how to pay for fire services
- what residents think of alternative tools to property tax funding
- the urgency of capital facilities priorities

Residents living within Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue's jurisdiction completed the survey online and over the phone. The survey was completed by 590 residents, and 79% of respondents are highly satisfied with fire and emergency services.

Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue thanks everyone who took the time to provide feedback through the survey. The findings from this survey will inform the ongoing work of the Revenue Steering Committee. The full Executive Summary is attached to this release.

For more information, you can reach Heather Chadwick, Public Information Officer, at Hchadwick@snofire7.org or 425-245-2662.

###

At the beginning of 2020, Lake Stevens Fire and Snohomish County Fire District 7 merged agencies and formed Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue. The district serves over 175,000 people over 140 square miles and is dedicated to saving lives, protecting property, safeguarding the environment, and taking care of people in a fiscally responsible manner. Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue serves the cities of Lake Stevens, Mill Creek, and Monroe along with the unincorporated areas surrounding these communities. In 2020, emergency personnel responded to more than 16,000 emergency calls. Through community support, Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue has built an advanced emergency response system in Snohomish County with highly trained personnel and progressive rescue programs. We appreciate your support and are grateful for the opportunity to serve our community.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the N=590 community surveys received between May 5, 2021, and May 16, 2021 to help inform conversations underway between the Revenue Committee and fire district leadership at Snohomish Regional Fire & Rescue (SRFR).

Public input opportunities

Public review and input are essential components of a district-wide vote on new revenue to fund district operations and capital projects. Before moving forward, however, households living within the fire district were invited to learn more about the potential projects, give feedback and offer comments.

The objectives of the community survey included efforts to:

- **Promote awareness** about current funding levels and what services are funded by levies
- **Listen to community input** on their attitudes about the 2019 levy failures
- **Gain feedback** on what residents think about fire and emergency services and bond projects and whether they are priorities of the public or not
- **Collect** questions and comments about alternatives to levy funding

During early May 2021, the community was able to access the survey in the following ways:

- *Facebook & Instagram:* SRFR district's social media pages posted a link to the survey on several occasions before the survey launched and during data collection
- *Online:* Residents received an email with the survey link in the email
- *Phone:* Residents received a phone call (landline or cell) with an opportunity to complete the survey with a live interviewer
- *District Website:* SRFR district posted a link to the survey on its main website



Who we heard from

A strong effort (e.g. online, phone, social media) helped promote the survey to all residents of the community. The results presented in this summary were not weighted and reflect the distribution of responses received.

The survey was especially successful reaching residents over 40. Participation from women and older residents was high and mirrors general interest and household decision-making related to community issues and public safety topics.

Table 1.0: Sample Demographics

Subgroup	% of Survey	Subgroup	% of Survey
Female	54%	In city limits (Monroe or Lake Stevens)	37%
Male	44%	Rural	35%
Under 40	26%	Former Fire District 3	26%
40 to 59	38%	Former Fire District 7	22%
60+	36%	Former Fire District 8	39%

**Not all survey participants provided their precise street address, and some unincorporated communities overlap district boundaries*

Key takeaways and themes

The survey was completed by 590 residents.

Survey responses emphasized the following overarching themes:

- **Satisfaction with fire and emergency services is extremely high** (79% district-wide) and aligns with a positive response to the district's involvement in communication vaccination during COVID-19 (also 79% very satisfied). Fire services and public schools are the top two funding priorities (46% and 38%, respectively), far ahead of funding for transportation and parks (10% and 6%, respectively).

- Information recall about the **2019 levy failures was low** (60% unaware of the result) and 60% could not be sure about the restrictions on raising levy rates above 1% without voter approval.
- Residents have anxiety about increasing property taxes and respond affirmatively to alternative methods of raising revenue that are separate from their home's assessed value. **People want to pay less and differently.**
- After prompts and information about how levy dollars pay for valued services, **78% of residents say the levy should be placed on the ballot for consideration.** Service cuts are not a desired outcome, and yet residents do want to hear about **different approaches** to paying for fire services or potential capital projects.



Other information gaps, challenges:

- Lake Stevens residents are a large, new addition to the district. Their attitudes and reactions to levy messages were different than what we heard from Monroe residents and residents in more rural areas.
- About 50% of residents have interacted with the district in a fire or emergency. Fewer residents have

participated in community events or classes.

- The budget adjustments made after the 2019 levy failure have not been widely seen or felt. People may not know the future consequences of not placing a levy on the ballot.
- Residents want information about the district and its funding needs to be posted frequently and in multiple places—online, in print, and through in-person community engagement. Communications channels have changed during COVID and this may continue to be a challenge for an election in 2021.
- In the absence of clear levy messaging, residents will fall back on concerns about costs, taxes, economic uncertainty, etc. If they haven't noticed cuts, they may think they wouldn't see or feel future cuts unless they are reminded what would be lost (e.g. staffing, response times, training, specialized services/programs).

At a high level, the survey data indicate:

- **The district must clearly communicate what valued services are at risk without ongoing levy funding from the community.** In the absence of a simple message framework, confusion and frustration take over quickly. However, if more details about fire services are provided, at least three core elements are high priorities for most residents:
 - Maintaining response times
 - Maintaining firefighter and EMT staffing levels
 - More specialized programs such as accident prevention, water rescue, and building safety.
- **Residents want to pay for fire services differently.** While a Fire Benefit Charge is unfamiliar to almost 80% of residents, paying for fire services almost exclusively through bonds and levies is a growing concern as property values escalate. Older residents on fixed incomes are extremely sensitive to this economic trend. Even if a Fire Benefit Charge may not reach the desired funding level as a result of charges on commercial parcels, the district's residential customers would likely view the alternative as more fair and more sustainable over the long-term. A signal that this option is being considered makes sense given the survey findings.
- **The community does not want to see service cuts.** If people know their assessed valuations are growing, they also likely see and feel the impacts of residential growth in their areas (e.g. traffic, new construction, sprawl). Growing communities want services maintained or expanded—not cut. Levies deliver on this need.
- **Informed residents are more satisfied with SRFR district services.** Printed newsletters and social media channels are equally important ways to communicate with residents across multiple communities. With a larger service area now brought under one umbrella, positive stories from every corner of the district and clear descriptions of services provided are an important priority especially during COVID when in-person events are still limited.

Next steps

The findings from this survey will inform the ongoing work of the Revenue Steering Committee in May and June. The Board of Commissioners will decide if and when to place a levy measure on the ballot.

If an election occurs in 2021 or 2022, public involvement and education would be organized by a separate campaign committee of volunteers from the community. However, the fire district is permitted to distribute one fact sheet to each household in the district prior to the election. Guidelines can be found [here](#).