

Frequently Asked Questions

Regional Fire Authority

What is an RFA?

RFA is an abbreviation for Regional Fire Authority. The RFA law is a legal process allowing voters to consider fire service consolidation and regionalization of services resulting in increased service efficiencies.

How will a change to an RFA affect service?

- Yelm Fire District 2 and Rainier Fire District 4 currently operate as one fire department; however, the City of Yelm contracts for fire and emergency medical response service.
- Presently, the citizens within Yelm city limits cannot vote on issues affecting the fire department and have no representation on the fire commissioner boards.
- The current situation allows for each entity to pay a different levy rate and creates challenges when bonds are needed for facilities and/or equipment to be used within the city limits or when other funding issues are on the ballot.
- Approval of Southeast Thurston Regional Fire Authority (SETRFA) would equalize funding and representation, allow for creation of a comprehensive strategic and capital facilities plan which incorporates all assets, property, and funding sources into one entity.

How big can an RFA be?

As an example, a new S.E. Thurston Fire & EMS RFA (SETRFA) with Rainier District #4, Yelm District, and the City of Yelm would serve approximately 32,000 citizens in 84 square miles, with a 2008 operating budget of \$3.2 million, 18 career firefighters, 1 Fire Chief, 1 Deputy Chief, 1 Assistant Chief, 15 active volunteers and support service personnel. (Total assessed value for the service area: \$2,182,195,180)

How is the RFA set up?

A Planning Committee made a plan regarding the creation of the RFA. They wrote the operational plan that will be set before voters Aug. 18, 2009.

Who determines whether an RFA is right for the people?

The people decide through the ballot process.

Who would be in charge of the RFA?

The RFA Plan, as created by the Planning Committee, must include a Governing Board with authority to carry out the purposes and functions of the RFA.

What is the name of the RFA?

S.E. Thurston Fire & EMS Regional Fire Authority - SETRFA

Who are the members of the S.E. Thurston Fire & EMS RFA (SETRFA) Planning Committee?

The members of the RFA Planning Committee include three (3) members from each participating agency: Rainier Fire Commissioners; Yelm Fire Commissioners; and three City of Yelm Council Members. Thus, the RFA Planning Committee consists of nine (9) members.

How will the RFA be funded?

The funding options for the Regional Fire Authority are the same as those available for the Fire Districts. Those options include property tax funded fire levies and bonds.

Currently, District 4 and District 2 pay the same levy rates. City of Yelm contracts for services at a lower rate and the city residents do not pay directly for fire service. Additionally the City collects impact fees on new developments which are used for capital equipment purchases needed by the Fire District.

How much would it cost county residents if voters approve the RFA?

County residents would see little difference in their current taxes and funding would be \$1.50 per \$1,000 assessed property value, or \$375 per year for a house with an assessed value of \$250,000.

How much will it cost City residents if approved?

City of Yelm residents will pay the same rate as county residents: \$1.50 per \$1,000 assessed property value.

What do City of Yelm residents pay now?

Currently, City of Yelm residents are not assessed directly for the fire and EMS services they receive. Instead, the City contracts with S.E. Thurston Fire & EMS and pays them a fee for service from the taxes the City receives.

How does passage of an RFA affect the current taxes paid by City of Yelm citizens?

City residents would see a decrease in the portion of their property taxes that is paid to the City of Yelm, but they would also see a new item on their property taxes for the RFA at \$1.50 per \$1,000 assessed value.

Why did Yelm City Council approve Resolution 499 to put the RFA on the August ballot?

Formation of the RFA will allow Yelm citizens to have equal representation in the governance of their fire department and stabilize funding for fire services without impacting other services provided by the City, such as Police, Parks, Streets, etc.

If approved by voters in August, when would the RFA go into affect?

The RFA Governance Board would take over January 1, 2010. City of Yelm taxpayers would see the RFA tax on their property tax bills one year later, in 2011.

Do the voters elect new commissioners?

The RFA Planning Committee proposed that the RFA have nine (9) elected board members with 6-year terms. Three (3) Governance Board members would be elected from each of three precincts. The timeline for Governance Board elections as well as the new precinct boundaries are included in the SETRFA plan.

What are the precincts?

The geographic area of the two fire districts and the City of Yelm were combined and new boundaries drawn to create precincts. The new precincts were determined by square mileage and the boundaries cross all current district and city lines. Each precinct would have three representatives, selected by all voters in the RFA.

Would City of Yelm residents have representation?

Yes, for the first time ever, city residents would have the opportunity to participate directly in the governance of their fire protection service provider. They become members of a precinct and those living inside their respective precincts could run for election to the SETRFA Governance Board.

Is a position on the Governance Board a paid position?

The Governing Board may establish a compensation amount in the governance policies and rules in accordance with the RCW: from \$0 compensation up to a maximum of \$104 per meeting, not to exceed \$9,984 annually.

Any commissioner may waive all or any portion of his or her compensation at any time by filing a written waiver.

What are other funding sources?

The RFA may issue bonds with approval of the voters.

How does forming an RFA differ from a merge?

Merge: A larger department absorbs a small department, resulting in a single entity.

RFA: Provides a mechanism for the City of Yelm, which has no fire department, to become a part of the fire department without annexing into the district. The City retains the ability to collect fire impact fees from new development.

Can an established RFA be dissolved?

Yes, by a majority vote of the registered voters of the district.

Can a fire district or municipality belong to more than one RFA?

No.

What if voters do not approve the plan?

The RFA Planning Committee will evaluate results of the election and determine whether to try again or abandon the plan.