

CENTRAL WHIDBEY ISLAND FIRE & RESCUE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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Goal for station renovations? Improve response times and firefighter health and safety

COUPEVILLE, WASH. – Central Whidbey Island Fire & Rescue is considering asking voters to approve a bond this fall to renovate a fire station and replace three engines. Fire Chief Ed Hartin says the goal for the station renovation project is to improve response times as well as firefighter health and safety inside the facility.

Station 53 on Race Road in Coupeville was built 25 years ago when the fire district was a largely volunteer fire department serving 6,700 people and responding to 408 calls that year. Today Central Whidbey Island Fire & Rescue still has volunteer firefighters, but also full-time and part-time emergency personnel. The agency provides fire suppression and emergency medical services to 10,000 people and responded to 1,312 calls in 2016. (Emergency call volumes have increased 30.68% in the past seven years alone.)

“Our community has grown and our stations haven’t kept up,” said Fire Chief Ed Hartin. “Adequate facilities are important to community and firefighter safety.”

Station 53 is well-maintained and in good condition, and renovating the facility would be less expensive than building a new one. Bond funding would add much needed space for apparatus and sleeping quarters in the main building to help firefighters respond to calls faster. It also would add sprinklers to increase firefighter safety and to protect the taxpayer-funded facility and equipment in case of fire.

Firefighter health and safety is another reason driving these renovations. Station 53 needs upgraded mechanical systems to move diesel exhaust fumes – a known carcinogen – away from fire department personnel and community members who frequently use the facility. It also requires better decontamination units and storage spaces where firefighters can keep their protective gear. This will reduce their risk of exposure to cancer-causing agents that accumulate on protective clothing at fires and other emergencies.

James Meek, a Lieutenant at Central Whidbey Island Fire & Rescue since 2007, says that he appreciates the community and the fire district’s willingness to consider a bond for station improvements. The fire district will take public input on the bond idea this summer before voting whether or not to place it on the November 2017 General Election ballot.

“We need to provide emergency personnel with a safe operating environment to whatever extent possible,” said Lieutenant Meek. “Safe and updated facilities are important to recruit and retain emergency personnel and serve the needs of our community.”

Another benefit for the Central Whidbey community will be environmental improvements. Station 53 needs to update and increase the size its septic system. Bond funding also would be used to replace the current fire protection water tanks which are painted with lead paint, and ensure environmental compliance for apparatus room drains and storm water runoff.

At current market rates, the bond would cost \$0.22 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, or approximately \$5.50 per month (\$66 per year) for the owner of a \$300,000 home. The bond would last for 20 years and includes \$1,959,000 to replace three fire engines, and \$5,417,000 for station renovations and improvements.

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Since 1928 residents of central Whidbey Island have volunteered their time and financial support to provide emergency services for the community. Today Central Whidbey Island Fire and Rescue provides 24-hour emergency response to nearly 10,000 people with a combination of volunteer, part-time, and full-time personnel. We are currently debt-free, operate under a balanced budget, and have passed all financial and accountability audits with the state. For more information, visit www.cwfire.org.