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Doug Kelly,
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WEST SIDE RURAL FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT REFERS REPLACEMENT LEVY TO THE VOTERS

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The West Side Rural Fire Protection District's Board of Directors have unanimously voted to refer a measure to replace the District's current local option levy to the May 21, 2024 primary ballot. The new levy would replace the local option levy voters last approved in 2019.

According to Board President Jim Gray, the replacement levy would improve services provided by West Side Fire by ensuring that at least 1 fully-trained and licensed firefighter/EMT would be on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. According to Gray, "West Side Fire currently employs three individuals. Two are firefighter/EMTs and one is a Chief who is also a firefighter/paramedic. These staff members ensure that we have one fully-trained/licensed firefighter/EMT on duty from 7 am to 5 pm, seven days a week. During evenings and nights, we currently depend on volunteers to respond to calls." Gray pointed out that about 60% of the District's calls occur during evenings and nights when the District relies on volunteers.

According to Gray, if the replacement levy is approved by voters, two additional fully-trained/licensed firefighter/EMTs would be hired by the District. This would result in:

- ▶ **24/7 coverage by at least 1 fully-trained firefighter/EMT.**
- ▶ **Faster response times.** Because a firefighter/EMT would always be on duty, residents would experience faster response to both medical and fire emergencies. This would be especially true during evenings and nights, when the District currently relies on volunteers who must come from their homes or businesses to respond.
- ▶ **Better cardiac arrest survival rates.** Time is critical during these types of events. Because a fully-trained firefighter/EMT would always be available to respond, cardiac arrest survival rates should improve.

The replacement levy tax rate would be 97¢ per \$1,000 of *assessed* (not market value), an increase of 47¢ over the current levy rate. Cost of the replacement levy for a home valued at \$218,000, about average for the District, would be approximately \$211 per year, or \$17.58 per month. This would be a \$102 per year or \$8.50 per month increase over the current levy.

West Side Fire is the first responder for medical emergencies (both basic and advanced) and fires (both structural and wildland) in the District. Fire prevention services, fire investigation, public education, rescue, hazardous materials, and disaster preparedness services are also provided.

The local option levy is an important part of West Side Fire's budget. According to Chief Administrative Officer Doug Kelly, if a new levy is not approved, West Side Fire would likely have to lay off two of its three current employees and increase its reliance on volunteers. However, Kelly points out, "As people's lifestyles have changed over the past decades and the skills needed to provide emergency medical and firefighting services have increased, the District, like fire district's nationwide, are finding it harder to recruit, train, and retain volunteers."

For more information on West Side Fire District or the replacement levy, contact Chief Administrative Officer, Doug Kelly (541) 386-1550, doug.kelly@westsidefire.com.