

**NEWMAN LAKE FIRE & RESCUE**  
**Spokane County Fire District No. 13**  
Minutes for March 18, 2024  
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING  
COMMUNITY MEETING

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Board of Fire Commissioners of Spokane County Fire Protection District No. 13 met on March 18, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at Station No. 1, 9324 N Starr Rd., Newman Lake, Washington.

**ROLL CALL**

Board: Commissioners Teresa Phelps and Ben Kaiser

Others Present: Chief Daron Bement, Secretary Robin Harbin, Carleen Vanderostyne, and Michael Garrison Stuber, Gayle Furness, Pat Brown, Lynn Haugh, Jerel and Karen Row, Wendy Burley, Ted and Jean Demars, Deb Davis, Mark and Debbie Wisher, and three other community members.

**TOWN HALL MEETING OPENING & INTRODUCTIONS:**

Chief Bement opened the meeting with the pledge of allegiance. Commissioner Phelps welcomed attendees and introduced the meeting. Chief Bement gave an overview of the evening's agenda.

**FINANCIAL DATA**

Secretary Harbin reviewed the financial data on the handout which answered the following questions: 1) Why does the fire department need a levy lid lift? 2) How much more will I have to pay if the fire levy is increased to \$1.10/1K? 3) What will my tax rate be if the Fire Levy "Lid" is lifted from 1% to 3%?

- At a conservative estimate, without a levy lid lift, the district will be \$41,444 short of meeting expenses in 2025; \$306,873 short in 2026; \$344,624 short in 2027; and \$384,487 short in 2028.
- The tax increase from the current \$0.79/\$1K to \$1.10/\$1K assessed property value is \$31.00 per \$100,000 (\$2.58 per month). A \$500,000 home would be only \$155.00 more per year (\$12.92 per month).
- If the tax levy is restored to \$1.10 for 2025 and increased by 3% for the following three years, the levy rate will be approximately \$1.13/\$1K in 2026; \$1.17/\$1K in 2027; and \$1.20/\$1K in 2028. This is based on current assessed property values. If property values go up, the levy rate will go down.

Chief Bement pointed out that the 3% increase is on the amount of money collected by the fire department the previous year, not on assessed property value. For example, if the

department collects \$767,027 in 2025 with a levy lid lift, the 3% increase would be on that amount for a collection of \$790,038 in 2026.

Harbin discussed her conversation with State Farm Insurance and data collected from Vashon Fire District. Based on insurance increase estimates from Vashon Fire, going from a rating of 5 to 9 would increase insurance rates by \$1,315 for a \$500,000 home; \$2,550 for a \$1 million home. Homes in our district have a rating of 6 if within 1000 feet of a hydrant; the majority of the remaining homes have a rating of 8A. Without a levy lid lift, more staffing and programs will need to be cut, resulting in a rating of 9A or 10 for most of the district, per Eric Cunningham of the Washington State Ratings Bureau (WSRB). Detailed ratings information will be forthcoming but it's clear the impact of insurance rating increases will be hundreds to thousands of dollars for homeowners, at least five times more than a levy increase needed to support continued fire emergency services. Some community members have expressed an interest in becoming part of Spokane Valley Fire District. However, Valley Fire is not interested in taking on our district and would charge homeowners for response if requested due to unavailability of Newman Lake Fire and Rescue. According to State Farm, the industry standard for coverage eligibility is to be within 10 miles of a fire station. Those with an insurance rating over 9 would not be renewed. This impact should be taken into consideration in light of a needed levy lid lift.

#### **BALLOT MEASURE DRAFT:**

Chief Bement reviewed drafts of possible ballot measures based on previous community meeting suggestions. Both restore the levy to the rate of \$1.10 per thousand. Both are limited to four years rather than six. One draft sets the increase limit to a flat 3%; the other draft includes an incremental limit factor of 2% in 2026, 3% in 2027, and 4% in year 2028. Community members present expressed a preference for the flat 3% limit factor. This will mean that the district cannot ask for more than 3% more than they collected the prior year for 2026 to 2028. After 2028, the district cannot ask for more than 1% more than they collected the prior year.

#### **OPEN FORUM DISCUSSION:**

Community members asked for confirmation that the 3% limit factor for the fire levy is based on the amount the fire district collected the prior year. That was confirmed. Attendees asked how we can get this information out to the entire community. Information will be included in our next Smoke Signals Newsletter to go out in June 2024. Additional mailings will not be possible due to budget constraints. The Newman Lake Property Owners' Association has been kind to include information in their mass emails to the community. We will ask if they will continue to help us in this way. One community member brought up the fact that many of the homeowners around the lake cannot vote in this district as their lake homes are not their primary residence. Chief Bement reported that several such homeowners have expressed their disappointment that the levy lid lift has not passed as they realize the importance of continued fire and EMS services in our area. Harbin relayed the suggestion made by one community member to contact your neighbors

with the information you gather about the fire district's budget and need for a levy lid lift. A member of the Newman Lake Property Owners' Association asked if we will have a presence and share this information at the Spring Cleanup Event scheduled at Station 1 on Saturday, April 20, at 9:00 a.m.

**DISCUSSION SUMMARY:**

Chief Bement stated we will convey the community members' feedback at the Commissioners' Meeting on Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup>. Commissioners will use that information to determine whether or not to place a levy lid lift on the ballot for the August 6, 2024 primary elections. Due to sharing the ballot costs with many entities, the cost should be minimal.

**ADJOURNMENT**

As there was no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

Eileen Weyrauch  
Eileen Weyrauch, Chairperson

4-18-24  
Date

Robin Harbin  
Robin Harbin, District Secretary

4-18-24  
Date