

Frequently Asked Questions Related to Northshore Fire Department's Contract for Services

Revised 9/17/2021

1. What is the difference between a fire district, a fire district using a “contract for services”, and a city fire department?

- Fire districts are municipal corporations that have their own taxing authority and are responsible for providing fire prevention, fire suppression and emergency medical services. (See RCW 52.12.011 and RCW 52.02.020). The Fire Board of Commissioners is the governing body.
- Many smaller fire districts choose to contract some or all of their services out to larger Districts or local municipalities. This is common practice and happens for a wide variety of reasons all over King and Snohomish Counties. Under a contract for services each fire district retains its identity, governance and taxing authority. This is allowed under the “Inter-local Cooperation Act” RCW chapter 39.34.
- A city or municipal fire department is one part of a full-service city. The city is the taxing authority and funds the fire department. The City Council is the governing body.

2. Why is the Northshore Fire Department Board of Commissioners requesting contract for services offers?

- Contract for services offers have been requested to gain operational efficiencies and assure quality and dependable services can be provided far into the future.
- Small fire districts have a difficult time providing the same level of specialization of services as a more regional system. The Northshore Fire Department serves the Cities of Lake Forest Park and Kenmore with one fire station in each city.
- Small fire departments may have a difficult time hiring fire fighters and leadership positions due to the lack of advancement potential. We already contract out our Fire Chief and Fire Marshal services.
- Most small fire departments throughout King and Snohomish Counties, both municipal and districts, have taken a more regional approach, either merging or contracting for services.
- Contracting for services maintains local control compared to other consolidation options.
- The Northshore Fire Department expects to more efficiently provide the same or better level of service through contracting with another agency.
- The Northshore Fire Department expects to save money by avoiding some duplication of services. Larger departments already have the capacity to add some of our work needs to their present work force.

- The Board of Commissioners requested proposals from Shoreline Fire Department which serves the City of Woodway and the Eastside Fire and Rescue which is a consortium of several east King County Fire Districts serving Issaquah, North Bend, Sammamish, Woodinville, and Fire Districts 10 and 38 with headquarters in Issaquah.

3. Will there be any changes to the Medic One program?

No. The medic unit will remain stationed at Lake Forest Park Station 57. Medic One is a King County-wide program and will not be impacted by a Northshore contract for services.

4. How will the contract service provider be selected?

The Board of Fire Commissioners has developed a list of criteria to assess the contract proposals. These criteria focus on the best interests of the citizens of the Kenmore and Lake Forest Park. Criteria include quality of service, range of services available, contracting experience, reputation and cost. [Click here for pdf copy.](#)

5. What are some local examples of “contracting for service”?

The City of Kenmore is an example. They contract with the King County Sheriff’s Department for police services. They rely on Northshore Utility District for utilities. They have an agreement with Republic Services to provide garbage service.

Some fire districts across the region also contract with other fire districts or municipal departments to provide fire and EMS services to their jurisdictions. Here are several local examples. Details on these contracts can be found at the Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington. <https://mrsc.org/Home/Explore-Topics/Public-Safety/Fire-Protection/Local-Government-Fire-Protection-Service-Providers.aspx>.

- The City of Bothell provides fire and EMS services for Snohomish County Fire District No. 10 under a contract for services.
- Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority provides fire and EMS services to King County Fire District No. 37 and Fire District No. 43 under contracts for services.
- Renton Regional Fire Authority provides fire and EMS services to King County Fire District No. 25 and Fire District No. 40 under contracts for services.
- Valley Regional Fire Authority provides fire and EMS services to King County Fire District No. 31 under a contract for services.
- The City of Redmond provides fire and EMS services to King County Fire District No. 34 under a contract for services.

6. What is the difference between a “contract for services” and a merger?

- **In a contract for services agreement**, local control is maintained by the Board of Commissioners, who are elected by the voters of Kenmore and Lake Forest Park, while the day-to-day operations are managed by a different entity. The Board of Commissioners for Northshore would determine the level of service under the contract, set the tax levy and fire benefit charge; pay the bond debt; maintain and manage reserve accounts; and retain ownership of the two fire stations, apparatus, and equipment. The Board will continue to provide oversight of the service and costs and give input as needed. A contract for services would not necessarily change the levy rate and/or fire benefit charge for Northshore. The other agency would provide fire, EMS, and other services to Northshore as part of a contractual agreement. While some current Northshore firefighters may be assigned to stations outside of our area, we anticipate that most will remain in their current assignments. We will continue to participate in the mutual aid program, which assures that area fire agencies respond to area calls as a team.
- **In a merger**, two fire districts are consolidated into a single fire district. The surviving district's jurisdiction would expand to include the jurisdiction of both districts involved in the merger. Immediately after the merger, the Board of Commissioners of the surviving fire department would consist of all the Fire Commissioners of the two districts. The number of members on the board then reduces whenever a vacancy occurs on the Board, until the number of remaining members is reduced to a permanent number of members. With a merger, the surviving district would charge the levy rate and/or fire benefit charge through its jurisdiction. But, only the properties within Northshore's current jurisdiction would be liable for the bond levy.

7. What did we learn from Proposition 1 that attempted to merge the Northshore Fire Department into Woodinville Fire and Rescue?

The citizens of Kenmore and Lake Forest Park and Northshore's firefighters were not interested in a merger with Woodinville Fire and Rescue. The Northshore Fire Department Board of Commissioners respects that vote and appreciates the direction given by the voters.

8. If the voters just decided they did not want a merger with Woodinville, why is the Northshore Fire Department entering into a contract for services?

A merger and a contract for services have substantial differences. One of the most important is maintaining local control over the level of taxation through your elected officials and ownership of Northshore Fire Department assets while achieving the efficiencies of service associated with regionalization. See FAQ numbers 2 and 5.

9. What is the history and timeline behind the present decision to seek a contract for services?

For roughly the past decade members of the Northshore Board of Fire Commissioners, its firefighters and administration have been studying, evaluating and implementing different forms of cooperation and consolidation with its regional partners. In 2015, the Northshore Fire Department evaluated an option with Bothell and Woodinville. In 2019 to 2021 the Northshore Fire Department evaluated and brought to a vote of the people Proposition 1 which was a merger of the Northshore Fire Department with Woodinville Fire and Rescue. At times during this process, we contracted Fire Chief, Fire Marshal and IT services. We are now considering the best option to get all leadership and administrative functions back up to full capacity. The Board of Commissioners believes that a contract for services is the best way to accomplish this.

10. What input do the citizens and Cities of Lake Forest Park and Kenmore have in the decision of how to provide fire and emergency services to the two cities?

- Northshore Fire Department Board meetings are on the first and third Tuesday of each month. They welcome citizen input during the citizen comment period.
- There will be designated a virtual open house to get input and opinions. See the Northshore Fire Department website under Public Input: <https://www.northshorefire.com/contract-for-services/>.
- There will be presentations from the Northshore Fire Department Board to the Cities of Kenmore and Lake Forest Park. These are open public meetings for the public to attend virtually. See the Northshore Fire Department website under Key Dates: <https://www.northshorefire.com/contract-for-services/>.
- The Northshore Fire Department Board will be seeking input from all stakeholders including the public, the Cities of Kenmore and Lake Forest Park, and the Firefighters Union. This information will be incorporated with the proposals from the Shoreline Fire Department and Eastside Fire and Rescue and all other relevant information such as budget and levy deadlines imposed by the State.

11. Does the Firefighter Labor Union support consolidation?

Yes, labor has expressed support for consolidation over the past decade.

Statement from union President Jeremiah Ingersoll: “The Northshore Firefighters Local 2459 supports thoughtful consolidations that provide operational efficiencies with other agencies that share borders.”

12. Do we have information from other small fire districts that joined larger entities?

The Northshore Fire Department Board is gathering information through a series of interviews to determine the efficacy of these contracts. Our interview questions will be

posted on the Northshore Fire Department website under Agency Interviews:
<https://www.northshorefire.com/contract-for-services/>.

13. What is the timeline for making a decision on a contract for services and what factors affect that timeline?

- The timeline will be posted on the Northshore Fire Department's website at <https://www.northshorefire.com/contract-for-services/>.
- By Washington State mandate, Northshore Fire Department is required to submit a budget by November 15, 2021. Whether we provide full services as we have in the past or contract some of those services with another agency, it will have a major impact on how we do our budget.
- The budget needs to be determined before the levy rate, fire benefit charge, and levy lid lifts can be determined. The deadline for this is November 1, 2021.
- The Interlocal Agreement (ILA) for Fire Chief's services will end October 1, 2021.
- The ILA for Fire Marshal Services will end September 30, 2021.
- The ILA for IT services agreement will end September 30, 2021.
- The labor contract with the IAFF, Local 2459 expires on December 31, 2021.

14. Where can I get more information related to the how the Northshore Fire Department will provide fire and emergency services?

The Northshore Fire Department website at <https://www.northshorefire.com/contract-for-services/>.