

Phone survey results from interview with King County Fire District 34 Fire Commissioner Tom Johnston, 9/16/21

Interview conducted by Northshore Fire Commissioner Eric Adman

King County Fire District # 34 is adjacent to the City of Redmond, with 3 stations and an annual budget of about \$8 million. The City of Redmond has 4 stations, so combined they operate as one fire department with 7 stations.

1. Did you merge with another Fire Department or contract for service?

Contract with the City of Redmond Fire Department.

2. What year did that happen?

King County Fire District # 34 has a long contract relationship with the City of Redmond, going back to the 1940's. In the 1940's, FD34 provided all service to the area. Since the 1970's, the City of Redmond Fire Department has provided service, and FD 34 has contracted with them.

3. What were some of the reasons you chose that action?

- Long-standing partnership since the 1940's.
- Logical partner
- Created "right-sized" fire department (see more under # 9 below)

4. Did you get the services you needed? Why or why not?

Yes. Redmond Fire Department provides all the services. However, there have been some challenges over the years.

5. What were some of the challenges?

*Loss of autonomy and control over staffing levels.* When Redmond was short-staffed, they would pull staff from FD34 and decrease staffing down from a 3-person engine to a 2-person aid car. The relationship had to be renegotiated to ensure full staffing, which meant paying more.

*Annual budget and cost reconciliation.* Each year, FD34 would have to pay extra for overages compared with budgeted expenses. This was difficult to plan for. This was in the "partner" model. As a result, they switched to a "customer" model, with a higher annual cost, but where Redmond takes care of any overages.

6. Are you satisfied with the input your agency has regarding provision of services?

Yes. The fire commissioners have meetings with the City Council and mayor twice per year. The Fire Chief attends the commissioner's monthly meetings and they can talk there.

7. Are you satisfied with the cost of the services you are receiving?

Yes. However, costs have been going up a lot, so they feel the need to address it. Looking at either a levy lid lift or some way of reducing costs.

8. Would you take the same action again?

Yes.

9. Other thoughts

I described the options we were considering (EF&R and Shoreline) to Commissioner Johnston, and he offered some considerations.

- If we go with a non-contiguous partner, we might not get as much efficiency.
- What will be the relationship with our service provider? Are we paying for a certain level of services or going in as a partner? Who will be on the hook for overages in costs? Who makes the decision when there are staffing issues which could affect the ability to fully staff a station?
- There is a right-sized department. Bigger is not always better. Once you get over a certain size, you lose some of the efficiencies. A mid-sized department like the RFD-FD34's 7-station department is a good size. Northshore might be better off teaming off with Shoreline because they are a similar-sized department. NFD would not be a bit player with Shoreline. With EFR, NFD would be a small fish in a big pond. EFR seems to be trying to establish a county-wide department and is in growth mode.
- Some questions and issues he said we should consider:
  - How will costs be assigned between the jurisdictions or partners?
  - Make sure the agreement calls for regular joint meetings.
  - How much control do we want to keep or relinquish?
  - How do you resolve disputes?