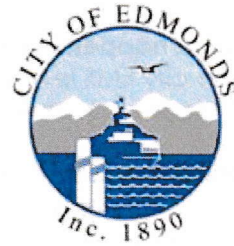


RFA Annexation Frequently Asked Questions



What is on my ballot?

The City of Edmonds is asking voters to consider annexing to the South County Fire Regional Fire Authority (South County Fire) for fire and emergency medical service.

Why is my city proposing this?

Currently, the city contracts with South County Fire for fire/EMS service. Property owners pay for the contract through a general property tax levy paid to the city. Costs continue to increase and the city cannot afford to renew the contract when it ends in 2025.

Why can't the city afford higher contract costs?

Edmonds faces a fiscal emergency. Years of historic inflation have outpaced revenues and contributed to a growing budget deficit. City leaders have made significant cuts, borrowed funds, and used reserves. However, these measures are not sustainable. Annexation is a possible first step to sustainability. It will free up money from the fire contract for other basic city services such as police, roads, and parks.

Is annexing to South County Fire the lowest cost option to maintain the level and quality of emergency services for Edmonds residents?

Yes. The city researched starting its own fire department and reached out to other fire/EMS providers. Annexing to South County Fire was the lowest cost option to maintain the level and quality of emergency services our community receives. South County Fire also provides a reliable response on land or overwater to complex rescue emergencies and releases of hazardous or toxic chemicals.

What does a property owner currently pay for fire service?

Currently, Edmonds collects a general levy of \$0.74 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The fire service contract costs \$0.47/\$1,000. There is also a city EMS levy of \$0.28/\$1,000. A house valued at \$895,700, considered the average in Edmonds, pays approximately \$671.78 for fire/EMS in 2025.

What would a property owner pay under annexation for fire/EMS services?

Under annexation, property owners would pay South County Fire directly for service and the city EMS levy would be eliminated. In 2025, the rate for fire/EMS through South County Fire is approximately \$1.16 per \$1,000 plus a "benefit charge." If annexation were in effect today, the owner of a 2,500-square-foot house valued at \$895,700 would have paid a net increase of \$445.93 (\$37.16 per month). The annual total for the same property would be \$1,117.71.

What happens to the \$0.47/\$1,000 property owners are currently paying for the contract?

The city will retain this amount to use toward services such as its police department, roads, and parks.

What is a benefit charge?

A fire benefit charge moves away from the traditional assessed value/property tax funding model. It funds emergency services based on a property's size and risk of fire instead. Single-family homes are charged less than commercial and high-fire risk structures because it costs less to serve them in a fire. (Learn more about a benefit charge at <https://www.southsnofire.org/about-us/funding/benefit-charge>.)

If approved, when will annexation take effect?

Property owners would begin paying South County Fire directly in 2026.

RFA Annexation Frequently Asked Questions

What happens to the city's EMS levy?

The city EMS levy would be eliminated. Instead, property owners would pay an EMS levy to South County Fire.

Will this impact service when I call 911?

No. The quality and level of emergency services our community receives will continue uninterrupted.

What happens to our fire station and apparatus?

South County Fire already owns all the emergency apparatus. Stations 16 (Maplewood) and 20 (Esperance) will eventually be part of South County Fire's capital assets. Station 20 needs to be replaced at an estimated cost of \$20 million. Station 17 (downtown Edmonds) would remain the city's property and would be used by South County Fire at no charge as long as it remains a fire station.

Will firefighters lose their jobs?

No. All emergency personnel will continue to work for South County Fire, just like they do now. This is important to maintain service levels for our community.

Why did the city choose South County Fire?

- Least expensive option to maintain the level and quality of emergency services residents currently receive.
- Gives residents a vote and direct representation on South County Fire's Board of Fire Commissioners.
- South County Fire knows Edmonds and has served the city successfully for 15 years.
- The ability to plan long-term for emergency services as our city grows.
- More cost-effective for taxpayers with economies of scale and buying power for emergency apparatus, equipment and supply orders.

Why can't we just renew the fire services contract?

Edmonds signed a contract many years ago when costs for emergency services were much lower. The contract could not be renewed unless Edmonds property owners pay the same rate as property owners in other communities served by South County Fire. The city cannot afford this increase and still provide other city services residents require due to its budget constraints.

Where is South County Fire located?

South County Fire is headquartered south of Everett and serves nearly 300,000 residents in Brier, Edmonds, Lynnwood, Mill Creek, Mountlake Terrace, and unincorporated southwest Snohomish County.

Have other cities annexed into South County Fire?

Yes. South County Fire was created by a merger of former Snohomish County Fire District 1 and the city of Lynnwood. Since then, voters in the cities of Mill Creek, Mountlake Terrace and Brier have annexed to South County Fire.

When is the election?

Annexation will be on the April 22, 2025 Special Election ballot.

Can South County Fire increase taxes on annexed cities whenever they want to?

No. South County Fire has revenue limits by law or those that must be approved by voters.

Will residents be able to influence decisions related to our fire/EMS service?

Residents will have the opportunity to vote for representatives to serve on South County Fire's Board of Fire Commissioners. Residents can also run to serve as a fire commissioner.

Have further questions? Email RFAinfo@edmondswa.gov