

# Steamboat Springs Fire Rescue Present, 2019 Election, and Potential Future FAQ

## **Who is Steamboat Springs Fire Rescue and how are the services they provide managed and funded?**

Steamboat Springs Fire Rescue (SSFR) is a department of the City of Steamboat Springs (City). As a department of the City, SSFR management and leadership is provided by the Fire Chief (Mel Stewart), who reports to the City Manager (Gary Suiter) and SSFR is ultimately governed by the City Council.

The department is funded from three primary sources; the City's general fund (sales tax), the Steamboat Springs Area Fire Protection District (property tax) and ambulance fees and other charges. Roughly, the City pays for 58% of the budget of the annual budget, the District pays 22% and Ambulance fees and other charges cover 20%.

## **What is the Steamboat Springs Area Fire Protection District (SSAFPD)?**

The Steamboat Springs Area Fire Protection District (SSAFPD) is a fire district that was formed in 1974 to ensure fire and emergency services to the district. The current area of the SSAFPD surrounds the City but **does not** include the area within the city limits. Currently, only those who own property in the District pay property taxes for fire/EMS services. The SSAFPD is governed by an elected five-member Board of Directors. Since 2002, the City of Steamboat Springs has managed fire and emergency services (SSFR) and provided services to the District through an Intergovernmental Agreement with the District.

## **Can City residents serve on the SSAFPD Board?**

Current City residents who own property in the District (and can legally vote in Colorado) can serve on the Board; if the City is incorporated into the District, then anyone (who is a legal voter) living or owning property in the City would also be eligible to serve on the Board.

## **I hear there is an election planned in May 2019, what is that about? And why?**

The City and SSAFPD, as partners in providing emergency services, have decided to ask the voters in the City of Steamboat Springs if they will agree to be included in the SSAFPD, thus providing consistent funding (property tax) throughout the Steamboat Springs area (City and District). The purpose of the ballot question is to address the longer-term staffing, infrastructure and funding needs. Increasing demand (emergency calls) means there is a need for additional staff and a (new) central station. The new central station is needed to house the additional staff and existing equipment. Staffing a central station will provide a better response in the downtown and west areas of Steamboat Springs, plus strengthen the overall capability to respond to all emergencies.

## **Why now?**

A vote in May allows the Fire Department to increase funding in January 2020; a vote in the November 2019 election would delay funding increase until 2021, and further delay currently needed staff and facilities.

## **Who can vote in the proposed May 2019 election?**

Anyone who currently is a registered voter in the State of Colorado and meets at least one of the following requirements:

- A resident of the City of Steamboat Springs

- Owns taxable property in the City of Steamboat Springs
- Spouse or Civil Union Partner of a Property Owner in the City of Steamboat Springs
- A person who is obligated to pay taxes under a contract to purchase taxable real property in the City of Steamboat Springs

**What will be the tax impact on my home? (the tax impact will be different for commercial property)**

Steamboat Springs Area Fire Protection District

Estimated Tax Obligation at 9 mills

| Actual Property Value | Residential Assessment Rate | Taxable Property Value | Annual Property Tax at 9 mills |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| \$100,000             | 7.20%                       | \$7,200                | \$64.80                        |
| \$300,000             | 7.20%                       | \$21,600               | \$194.40                       |
| \$500,000             | 7.20%                       | \$36,000               | \$324.00                       |
| \$1,000,000           | 7.20%                       | \$72,000               | \$648.00                       |
| \$3,000,000           | 7.20%                       | \$216,000              | \$1,944.00                     |
| \$5,000,000           | 7.20%                       | \$360,000              | \$3,240.00                     |

**Why am I potentially going to be taxed at 9 mills?**

The tax rate could go up to 9 mills, but may be less. Tax rates (mills) are determined and set once budgets are approved and when other variables are determined, such as the up-dated assessed valuation of existing and new properties. The current approved maximum that the District could tax is 9 mills.

**Isn't 9 mills more than the current Fire Department budget/ tax assessment?**

Yes, as noted before, with increasing demand (calls) there is a need for increased operating expense (mainly personnel) and the need to save/ build reserves for a new central (downtown) station. The District will have to increase the tax rate (mills) to address the expected increased budget.

**What will be the benefit of the additional funding?**

With additional funding, SSFR can be better prepared to meet the increasing emergency calls and improve both public safety and firefighter safety.

**Can't the City just increase funding to Fire/EMS, and maybe cut funding to other services?**

The City is financially challenged to continue funding all departments as demand on all services increases. Increasing sales tax revenues are not keeping up with increasing demands for services. When the City has tried to cut costs/services in the past, the community has shown that they are not in favor of cutting services. As a result, the City and District felt that a property tax applied to property across the service area was the most logical method to fund (and manage) this public safety service.

**Why doesn't the City just ask for a property tax to support Fire?**

Fire and EMS services are provided to an area much larger than just the City. Currently the City and District fund fire and EMS through an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA). With the need for additional funding, the City Council and Fire District Board agreed that the best structure to provide community

wide services (in and around) Steamboat Springs, is to have a Fire and EMS Department funded by a property tax and managed by the District.

**Can the City fund Fire and EMS services with a real estate transfer tax?**

No. The Taxpayers Bill of Rights (“TABOR”), which was adopted by the voters of the State of Colorado as an amendment to the Colorado Constitution in 1992, prohibits real estate transfer taxes. The City cannot impose a real estate transfer tax until and unless the state constitution is amended.

**What will the City do with the savings if sales tax is no longer used to fund the Fire Department?**

The City Council will determine how the saving will be handled and used and this information will be stated in the ballot question.

**What will happen if the ballot measure is approved (or denied)?**

If voters approve the ballot measure in May 2019, then the District, starting in January 2020, would manage fire and emergency services for all of the Steamboat Springs Area Fire Protection District (including the City) and follow the Strategic Plan by funding services with a property tax.

If denied, the City will continue to manage SSFR and fund the majority of SSFR operations and capital with sales tax. There may be a future ballot/funding question, but without a property tax, the City would most likely delay additional staffing and capital funding for a new station downtown (which would result in further degradation of services, such as delayed response to emergencies). Furthermore, the City would probably have to make cuts to other city services (roads, parks, police, transit), but, as noted before, cuts in other services have not been well received by the community.

**Operations:**

**Who responds on a 911 medical emergency?**

An ambulance responds with a Paramedic (a Paramedic meets the national standard for a high level of prehospital care) and an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), both are also trained and certified as Firefighters. A fire engine also responds, with 3 to 4 Firefighters that are also at least trained as EMTs.

**Why does a fire engine respond with an ambulance to medical emergencies?**

Many Emergency Medical Services (EMS) calls present situations that cannot be adequately addressed by a two-person ambulance crew and no medical call is “routine.” Most require assessing the patient, obtaining their vital signs, providing oxygen therapy, and moving them, at a minimum. The EMS/ambulance crew may also need to place an advanced airway, administer drugs intravenously, or monitor cardiac conditions. All of these procedures are completed more efficiently when the appropriate amount of help is on scene. Efficient care is our goal, and efficient care often is the difference between life and death.

**Who responds on a 911 rescue or fire emergency?**

A fire engine with 3 or 4 firefighters and at least one ambulance with two firefighters initially respond to all rescue or fire emergency calls. (As noted above, all staff are trained and certified in to handle both fire and medical emergencies.)

**Why does an ambulance respond to a rescue or fire emergency?**

Because any rescue or fire requires trained firefighters to address the situation; an ambulance responding to a “non-medical” emergency provides an additional two (2) firefighters (to supplement the 3 or 4 firefighters on the engine). Depending on the emergency, such as finding a working structure fire or someone trapped, it may require all on duty staff plus, a request for off-duty staff and even a request for help from neighboring departments to fully address the emergency.

**Would it save money if someone else provided EMS/Ambulance service?**

No, EMS (ambulance) fees help pay for the EMS service. Even if someone else provided ambulance service, there would still be a need for fire services and the fire department would still respond to many EMS calls. Plus, the Fire Department benefits and gains efficiency from having cross-trained firefighters. Without providing ambulance transports, the costs for personnel would still be a primary expense without the revenue generated from ambulance transports.