



# THE FIRST RESPONDER

A South King Fire Publication

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## MESSAGE FROM CHIEF VAN VALKENBURG

SUMMER 2024



I am honored to serve as the Fire Chief of South King, and I take great pride in the exceptional service provided by our firefighters, who work 24 hours a day to serve our communities.

South King Fire is celebrating 75 years of service to the communities of Des

Moines, Federal Way, and unincorporated King County. To help us commemorate this occasion, we held two open houses. These events provide the opportunity to learn more about our services, meet our dedicated firefighters, and explore our facilities.

Over the past decade, our communities have experienced a significant increase in emergencies. Because of this, the demands on South King Fire's resources are steadily increasing, and it's becoming challenging for us to keep pace. Our firefighters are responding to a greater number of incidents than ever before, and the severity and frequency of 911 calls have placed great demands on our staff.

We understand the importance of being proactive in meeting the needs of our communities and are committed to ensuring your safety and well-being. In doing so, the Board of Fire Commissioners recently approved placing a new funding approach, the Fire Benefit Charge (FBC), on the August 6, 2024, ballot.

This decision marks a significant step forward for our district. It responds to the growing demands of our communities and will enhance our services and increase the amount of time our firefighters are available to serve you. The FBC is a more equitable and consistent funding approach that better supports current and future needs. Read more about the FBC in this newsletter and learn how you can reach us to answer your questions.

I hope you are enjoying the spring weather. Check out our "Summer Safety & Fire Prevention" tips featured in this newsletter, designed to provide valuable information for a safe and fun summer.

If you haven't yet, stop by and see us at the local farmers markets, community events, and more. It's always a highlight to see members of our communities getting together.

We look forward to seeing you and appreciate your continued support of South King Fire.

**Dave Van Valkenburg,**  
Fire Chief

## EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARDS

On May 18, 2024, South King held its Annual Awards Banquet. Nominations were held for the Officer, Driver Engineer, Firefighter, and Employee of the Year. Congratulations to this year's award recipients!



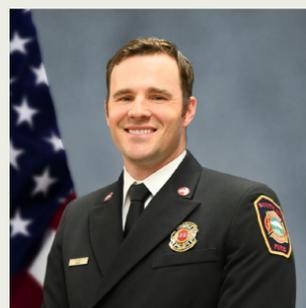
### **Employee of the Year, Kirk Cummings**

Kirk was nominated for always having a can-do attitude, a smile on his face, and being willing to help anyone, no matter the task. Over the years, Kirk maintains a cheerful demeanor and willingness to assist his fellow staff members.



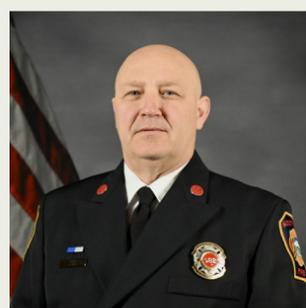
### **Firefighter of the Year, Jacob Jones**

FF Jones celebrated his 18th anniversary with South King Fire on May 8, 2024, making him the second most senior firefighter in the department. Assigned to Station 67 in Des Moines, he plays a crucial role on the Marine Team, Peer Fitness Team, Peer Support Team, and Surface Water Rescue Swimmer Team.



### **Driver Engineer of the Year, Brian Jack**

Brian was nominated for knowledge of his response area, engine, and equipment. His experience and passion for excellence make the Engine Company at Station 65 a better place. He attends to the important details of E365 that matter most when seconds count. Jack was appointed to the SKCFTC Recruit Academy as a Driver/Engineer Training Officer.



### **Officer of the Year, Captain Jerry Clos**

Now entering his 25th year, Captain J. Clos was nominated for his outstanding leadership to the Marine Team, the dept., peers, and the community. One nomination noted, "Even during the toughest of challenges, [Capt. Clos] will push through to get the job done with integrity. He is a respected, true leader, and prioritizes people over everything else, both on and off duty."

### **It's Our 75th Anniversary!**

Since 1949, South King Fire has proudly served our communities. Check out page 2 for our feature commemorating this milestone.

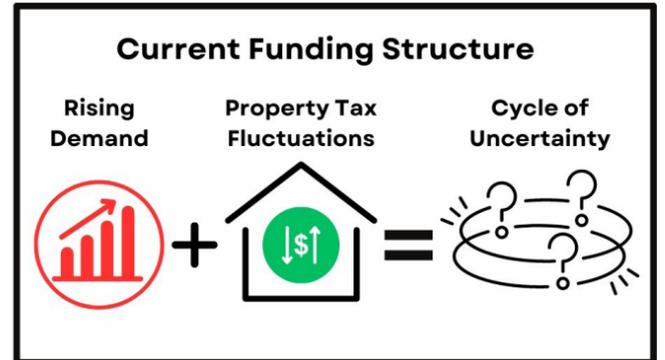
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# STRATEGIC BRIDGE PLAN UPDATE

Adopted in January 2023 by your Board of Fire Commissioners, the Strategic Bridge Plan is nearing completion. Focused on four pillars—Funding, Accountability, Leadership, and Communication—it has served as a roadmap to increase operational effectiveness and identify the best future funding mechanism for our communities, sustaining our operations and supporting the growth of the vital services we provide.

The rising demand for emergency response calls has created unsustainable conditions, negatively impacting response times and resource availability. The current funding model, heavily reliant on property taxes, is outdated and unstable, leading to a “cycle of uncertainty” in regards to funding and meeting the growing needs of our communities.

Every two to four years, the district has to run costly ballot measures to ensure adequate funding. It becomes difficult to plan for the future when funding is uncertain due to fluctuations in property tax revenue. To address this, SKF has spent the last 16 months researching and identifying a funding model that better meets the growing demand. Utilized by many neighboring fire districts, some as far back as 2003, the Fire Benefit Charge (FBC) emerged as the recommended funding model to present to the Board.



At the April 2024 Board meeting, the Board of Fire Commissioners unanimously approved placing a Fire Benefit Charge (FBC) on the ballot for voter consideration. “This is not the same Fire District as it once was,” says long-time Board Commissioner Bill Gates. “Our services and 911 calls have doubled in the last decade. It’s time to modernize our funding to match our neighboring fire agencies like Kent and Auburn.”

“The FBC will remove the peaks and valleys in our revenue,” says Executive Director Joe Ganem. “It will help better meet the current and future demands of our community by providing improved access to resources when responding to fire and emergency situations.”

Read more about **South King Fire’s Better Plan for the Future with the FBC** on page 4 of this newsletter.

## A CAUSE TO CELEBRATE: 75 YEARS OF SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES



South King Fire has come a long way since its inception 75 years ago, starting with just one fire engine and a handful of dedicated volunteers. Over the years, we expanded through mergers with five neighboring fire districts. Today, we have seven fire stations and more than 150 firefighters serving a growing population of over 160,000 residents across Des Moines, Federal Way, and unincorporated King County and 12 miles of Puget Sound coastline.

To celebrate, we hosted open houses on June 8 and 15 at two of our fire stations. Thanks to all who attended to help us honor 75 years of service to our communities. We look forward to continuing to serve you for the next 75 years and beyond!

### A History E“merging”: Fun Facts of Our 75 Years of Service

#### Fire District #30 – Star Lake

- There was no one to call when three separate fires in the Star Lake area burned three homes to the ground in 1945. The losses motivated local men to form a volunteer fire department to combat future blazes, while local women organized the Star Lake Women’s Benefit Fund to raise money for firefighting equipment.
- Thanks to the efforts of the Star Lake Women’s Benefit Fund, 1946 saw the purchase of the volunteer firefighters’ first “fire engine,” a 1935 Ford truck. It soon had all the trappings of a proper fire truck, including a ladder on an overhead rack and some hose.

#### Fire District #26 – Des Moines

- Using funds from the Des Moines-Zenith Improvement Club, local mechanic Otto Marshall put two 60-gallon chemical tanks on a 1923 Ford Model T chassis. Called “The Des Moines Chemical Fire Wagon,” it became the city’s first line of fire defense.

#### Fire District #32 – Redondo

- Redondo in the 1930s and 40s was a vacation town with few year-round residents. Early fire protection was provided by volunteers with one flatbed truck and a few hundred feet of hose.

#### Fire District #22 – Steel Lake

- District 22 in the 1960s would have been unrecognizable to its founders. The 1962 opening of I-5 fueled more growth, and a full-time fire chief was needed to manage it all.
- Before World War II, neighbors took care of fires in the Steel Lake area. Volunteer residents protected local homes with a borrowed trailer and one hose.
- After the war, the population grew, and a more formal solution was needed. Residents circulated petitions to get fire district organization on the ballot, and District 22 was approved 109-10 in a special election held on September 7, 1944.

#### Fire District #39 – Lakeland (Federal Way)

- Lakeland’s District 39, the predecessor of South King Fire & Rescue and the Federal Way Fire Department, was voted into existence 42 votes to seven in 1949.
- In September 1964, M.L. “Bud” Thorson, who had first joined District 39 as a volunteer in 1950, was appointed as Volunteer Fire Chief. Thorson became the full-time Chief in 1966, earning a \$6,500 yearly salary, and served for the next 35 years.



Pacific Highway South officially opened at Angle Lake in 1928. In 1938, Del Osterhoudt opened a Texaco service station and converted a 1934 Model A tow truck into a fire truck. Del and his wife, Elvina “Wally” Osterhoudt, began operating as a private fire department and answered emergency calls day or night.

Photos and historical information provided by the Historical Society.

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In August 2023, South King Fire received a grant partnership with the Department of Commerce to develop workforce strategies aimed at increasing inclusion and best practices within the organization.

The grant funding enabled the fire department to take a multi-faceted approach toward meeting its strategic goals. As part of this approach, the department developed robust training modules to educate current employees on best practices for fostering innovative work environments and community outreach.

Beyond the trainings, the department expanded mentorship opportunities, established new policies to optimize operations, and rolled out workforce development initiatives. Additionally, the department developed outreach and recruitment connections through a variety of channels, such as intentional marketing campaigns, partnerships with local institutions and industry organizations, employee referral programs, community connections, and the strategic use of social media and online platforms.

This grant work represents a strategic, long-term approach to strengthening the regional labor market and positioning South King Fire for future success while better serving the needs of the community.

# SOUTH KING FIRE IN THE COMMUNITY



South King Fire attended Federal Way Public Schools' inaugural Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) picnic. DHH students had a chance to meet some of our fire personnel and enjoy the outdoors too. What a fun event! *Photo courtesy Federal Way Public Schools*

## SUMMER SAFETY & FIRE PREVENTION

### Water Safety



The sun is here and the weather is warming up. When heading to a lake or a river to cool down this summer, be sure to follow some basic safety tips when either near or in the water. Always be mindful of your surroundings and make sure you are honest about either yours or your child's swimming abilities. Please remember:

- Never leave children unattended near the water.
- Always use life jackets when near or in the water.
- The water temperatures are still cold; be mindful of hypothermia.
- Only swim in designated swimming areas.
- Always swim with a buddy and stay within arms reach of each other.

### July 4th Celebrations

- Fireworks are illegal within the city limits of Federal Way and Des Moines.
- In 2023 fireworks were also banned in unincorporated King County. That means it is illegal to purchase or discharge fireworks in those areas.
- Celebrate safely with family BBQs, neighborhood gatherings, parades, or by attending a professional show.



### Igniting Tomorrow's Innovators

South King Fire participated in Project Invent, an engineering contest for 8th grade students at TAF@Saghalie, a 6th-12th grade STEM public school in Federal Way. SKF personnel met with students to discuss prototypes, conduct experiments, and engage in brainstorming sessions.

We were thrilled to be part of this project-based learning experience and support these creative kids as they invented practical technological solutions for real-world problems that face our community.

### Valhalla Elementary Visit



During a recent SKF visit, Kindergarten and first grade students at Valhalla learned about the role of a firefighter, the uniform they wear, and that firefighters are there to help in a fire or emergency.

### SKF Participates in Hooked on Fishing



On May 4, South King Fire participated in the event Hooked on Fishing at Steel Lake Park. The event encourages families to try their hand at fishing and supplies families with life vests, rods and reels, bait and tackles, and bags of ice. Children checked out the fire truck and met fire personnel.

### Still a Fan Favorite "Touch a Truck"



Also in May, children and families stopped by to see all the "bells and whistles" on the fire truck and got some fun swag too. We enjoyed seeing many of our community members, and we handed out over 400 helmets to kids!

# A BETTER PLAN FOR THE FUTURE: THE FIRE BENEFIT CHARGE (FBC)

## FBC will help address rising demand with stabilized funding model

Population growth, higher density, and community need are driving up the rise in demand for South King Fire’s services, surpassing what the current funding structure can support and negatively impacting response times and resource availability.

To uphold fiscal responsibility and meet this demand, South King Fire is proposing to adopt the FBC, known as **Proposition 1 on the August 6, 2024, ballot**. If the FBC is approved, it will **lower regular property tax rates and eliminate the need for a renewed Maintenance & Operations levy**. It will create a stabilized funding approach that relies less on property tax, which can be subject to fluctuations.



From 2012 to 2023, South King Fire experienced a **54% increase in emergency 911 calls compared to a decade ago**. From 2020 to 2023, emergency response needs from its communities rose significantly, both in the severity of call types and the increased number of EMS-related responses that place a higher demand on fire district resources. **Resources are stretched thin and based on population growth projections, the rise in demand will persist in the future.**

“Each day, our firefighters are on the front lines responding to emergencies and fires in our communities,” says Dave Van Valkenburg, Fire Chief for South King Fire. “They handle an increasing number of calls that continue to escalate year after year. The Fire Benefit Charge will allow us to uphold fiscal responsibility by meeting this rising demand with a more fair and stable funding approach.”

The FBC is not a new funding approach. In fact, communities in other fire districts in Washington state have supported the FBC, dating as far back as 2003.

**The FBC is not a tax.** Instead, it is a fee that aims to place more cost on structures with higher fire risk and resource needs, and less cost on those with lower risk or resource needs. **Smaller structures (such as single-family homes) generally pay less than larger buildings** (i.e. commercial buildings) because it takes fewer resources to protect them in a fire.

**Certain exemptions and discounts apply.** To initially implement the FBC, it **requires a 60% majority vote**. After the initial approval (six-year term), voters would decide whether to reauthorize the FBC. Extending it for an additional six or ten years requires a simple majority vote, whereas a permanent extension requires 60% voter approval.



A Better Plan for the Future: The Fire Benefit Charge (FBC)  
Matching Rising Demand with Stabilized Funding

**Video out now!**

Scan the QR code below to learn more about the FBC.



### KEY FACTS ABOUT THE FBC

- The FBC is not a tax.
- The FBC is a fee based on structure size, property use, and fire risk factors.
- If approved, it will lower regular property taxes and eliminate need for renewed M&O levy.
- The FBC places more cost on structures with higher fire risk and resource needs, and less cost on those with lower risk or resource needs.
- Single-family homeowners generally pay less under the FBC.
- Exemptions and discounts apply.
- The FBC requires a 60% majority vote.

### SINGLE FAMILY HOME EXAMPLES

Square Footage	Current Funding Model	**Proposed Funding Model with FBC	Reduction
1,750 SQFT House + 440 SQFT Garage Home AV: \$504,000	*Property Tax Total: \$874.82	*Property Tax: \$549.36 FBC: \$283.50 Total: \$832.86	<b>\$41.96</b>
2,240 SQFT House + 780 SQFT Garage Home AV: \$623,000	*Property Tax Total: \$1,081.38	*Property Tax: \$679.07 FBC: \$342.99 Total: \$1,022.06	<b>\$59.32</b>
2,740 SQFT House + 280 SQFT Basement + 960 SQFT Garage Home AV: \$882,000	*Property Tax Total: \$1,530.93	*Property Tax: \$961.38 FBC: \$452.08 Total: \$1,413.46	<b>\$117.47</b>

\*Fire Portion \*\*These property tax estimates are based off of 2024 collections according to King County's assessed values. FBC rates are estimated using King County's Assessed Value (AV) projections for 2025.



#### More Information

To learn more about South King Fire’s Better Plan for the Future with the FBC, scan the QR code to the left or visit [www.southkingfire.org/fbc](http://www.southkingfire.org/fbc), email [fbc@southkingfire.org](mailto:fbc@southkingfire.org), or call 253-839-6234.

**Remember to vote  
August 6, 2024**

#### SOUTH KING FIRE (SKF) Information:

SKF provides complimentary blood pressure checks, car seat safety check events, and fire station tours upon appointment.

STATION 62 - HEADQUARTERS  
31617 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South  
Federal Way, WA 98003  
253-839-6234  
Business Hours: 8-4:30 M-F



#### Administration

Dave Van Valkenburg, Fire Chief  
Kevin Crossen, Deputy Chief - Community Risk  
Shane Smith, Deputy Chief - Operations

Joe Ganem, Executive Director  
Mary Stevens, Human Resources  
Sean Nichols, Fire Marshal

#### Board of Commissioners:

Greg Baruso, Chair  
Caroline Vadino, Vice Chair

Bill Gates, Commissioner  
Bill Fuller, Commissioner  
Craig Burrus, Commissioner