



**BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND**

**AB 6307  
July 5, 2023  
Regular Business**

**AGENDA BILL INFORMATION**

<b>TITLE:</b>	AB 6307: Interlocal Agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue for Regional Fire and Emergency Medical Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resolution
<b>RECOMMENDED ACTION:</b>	Adopt Resolution No. 1645 approving the Interlocal Agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue.	

<b>DEPARTMENT:</b>	City Manager
<b>STAFF:</b>	Jessi Bon, City Manager Robbie Cunningham Adams, Management Analyst
<b>COUNCIL LIAISON:</b>	n/a
<b>EXHIBITS:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resolution No. 1645 approving the Interlocal Agreement with Eastside Fire &amp; Rescue for Regional Fire and Emergency Medical Services</li> <li>Draft Interlocal Agreement for Fire and Emergency Medical Services with Eastside Fire &amp; Rescue</li> <li>Overview of Automatic Aid and Mutual Aid</li> </ol>
<b>CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY:</b>	4. Focus efforts and actions to be an environmentally and fiscally sustainable, connected, and diverse community.

<b>AMOUNT OF EXPENDITURE</b>	\$ n/a
<b>AMOUNT BUDGETED</b>	\$ n/a
<b>APPROPRIATION REQUIRED</b>	\$ n/a

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this agenda bill is to present the City Manager’s recommendation on regional fire services and to present a draft Interlocal agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue (Exhibit 1 and 2).

- The City Council directed the City Manager to seek proposals for regional fire services from the City of Bellevue and Eastside Fire & Rescue at the April 4, 2023 City Council meeting (see [AB 6249](#)).
- The City posted the request for proposals (RFP) for regional fire services on the City’s Let’s Talk Page and received timely proposals from the City of Bellevue and Eastside Fire & Rescue.
- On May 2, 2023 the City Council created the Regional Fire Service Proposal Review Ad Hoc Committee to assist the City Manager with review and evaluation of the regional fire service proposals (see [AB 6264](#)).
- On June 6, 2023 staff presented an initial overview and analysis of the regional fire services proposals to the City Council (see [AB 6283](#)).
- During the June 20, 2023 City Council meeting, the City Council held an Executive Session to discuss collective bargaining and potential litigation on matters related to adoption of a regional fire model.

After the Executive Session concluded the City Council returned to the open portion of the City Council meeting and passed a motion directing the City Manager to begin negotiating an agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue for regional fire services.

- Regionalization of the City's Fire services will maintain or enhance current levels of service while balancing the shared responsibility for long-term cost-effective fire and emergency medical service delivery.
- The City Manager is recommending Eastside Fire & Rescue to provide fire and emergency medical services to the City of Mercer Island. Eastside Fire & Rescue's long-time experience as a dedicated fire agency; proven model concerning public safety, resource sharing, and shared governance; increased wages, benefits, and career opportunities for Mercer Island Firefighters; and strong history of collaboration with the City of Mercer Island provide assurances that they are well-suited to partner with the City of Mercer Island on these services.

The City Manager is seeking City Council approval of Resolution No. 1645 (Exhibit 1), approving the execution of the interlocal agreement ("ILA") with Eastside Fire & Rescue, and authorizing the City Manager to prepare and execute additional measures or documents that may be necessary to effectuate the ILA (Exhibit 2). Additional support materials explaining Automatic Aid and Mutual Aid were also developed to address questions posed by the City Council and community members (Exhibit 3).

## BACKGROUND

During the April 4, 2023 City Council Meeting, the Council authorized and directed the City Manager to seek proposals from the City of Bellevue and Eastside Fire & Rescue ("Eastside") for a regional fire service model (see [AB 6249](#)). The City posted the [request for proposals \(RFP\) for regional fire services](#) on the City's Let's Talk Page and received timely proposals from the [City of Bellevue](#) and [Eastside Fire & Rescue](#).

The City Council discussed the process to evaluate these proposals during its Meeting on May 2, 2023 (see [AB 6264](#)). Acting on the City Manager's recommendation, the City Council created the Regional Fire Service Proposal Review Ad Hoc Committee to assist the City Manager with review and evaluation of the proposals in May and June of 2023. The City Manager, City Staff, and the Ad Hoc Committee met several times in May to review and evaluate the proposals in preparation for a presentation and update to the City Council.

During the June 6, 2023 City Council Meeting (see [AB 6283](#)), staff presented an initial overview and analysis of the regional fire services proposals received from the City of Bellevue and Eastside Fire & Rescue, including an initial financial analysis.

During the June 20, 2023 City Council meeting, the City Council held an Executive Session to discuss collective bargaining and potential litigation on matters related to the adoption of a regional fire model. After the Executive Session concluded the City Council returned to the open portion of the City Council meeting and passed a motion directing the City Manager to begin negotiating an agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue. They also directed the City Manager to return to the City Council with an agenda bill presenting the City Manager's recommendation.

Additional information on the consideration of a regional fire services model is available on the City's [Let's Talk page](#), including the Request for Proposals and responses from the City of Bellevue and Eastside Fire & Rescue.

## ISSUE/DISCUSSION

After completing a thorough review of the proposals and negotiations with Eastside Fire & Rescue, the City Manager is recommending the City Council execute the attached interlocal agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue for fire and emergency response services to the City of Mercer Island (Exhibit 1 and 2). A summary of the basis for this recommendation is provided below.

### Adoption of a Regional Fire Services Model

The purpose of adopting a regional fire service model is to maintain or enhance current levels of service while balancing the shared responsibility for long-term cost-effective fire and emergency medical service delivery. A regional collaboration would allow the City to offer even stronger fire and emergency medical services to the Mercer Island community, with more cohesion, more consistent leadership, and a deeper bench of resources, specialty services, and growth opportunities.

### Eastside Fire & Rescue's Experience as a Dedicated Fire Agency

For over twenty years, Eastside Fire & Rescue has served as an organization singularly dedicated to providing fire and emergency services. Eastside operates as a consortium of many similar sized cities and towns with a shared governance model and commitment to equitable partnership. Eastside operates as a governmental-non-profit that focuses only on providing fire and emergency response services. Their board includes representatives from member cities and regional fire districts, providing a diverse array of stakeholders who hold each other accountable and provide input from differing perspectives. This model provides a high level of accountability to the leadership of Eastside.

Eastside has proven the effectiveness of their model concerning public safety, resource sharing, and shared governance. The City Manager believes this is the best model for the City of Mercer Island. Mercer Island has already successfully partnered with Eastside for interim fire leadership and apparatus repair and maintenance for nearly three years.

### Increased Wages, Benefits, and Career Opportunities for Mercer Island Firefighters

The City of Mercer Island is in a competitive job market for employees, especially fire service employees. The City has experienced attrition in its fire service due to competing fire agencies who have higher pay, benefits, and career opportunities.

Eastside provides the highest level of total compensation of the three options considered, while continuing to provide cost efficiencies and savings to the City. The Eastside staffing model provides 7 on-island fire service staff members, matching what is existing today. This includes the preservation of an on-island stationed Battalion Chief. This ensures the staffing remains the same as exists currently, preserving the work arrangement for existing staff. Additionally, the staffing model of Eastside offers 11 promotional opportunities for Mercer Island firefighters.

Eastside has in recent years demonstrated an ability to negotiate high quality and equitable collective bargaining agreements in a regular cadence, and typically in multi-year agreements. This provides more certainty for both employees and management.

This increase in pay and opportunities strengthens the ability to attract and retain talented employees, stabilizing fire services on Mercer Island.

### Cost Savings and Efficiencies

While cost savings was not the singular driver for considering adoption of a regional fire services model, it is an important aspect in evaluating this transition.

As discussed during the June 6 2023 City Council meeting, either proposal would have provided efficiencies and cost savings compared to maintaining a standalone city fire department. Initial staff analysis suggests an estimated savings of \$260,000 in 2024 through a regional model with Eastside compared to estimated costs with an independent stand-alone Mercer Island fire department. These savings are realized through shared leadership and administrative overhead, economies of scale regarding management of fire apparatus and equipment, and more efficient shift scheduling.

The City Manager also anticipates additional workload reductions will be realized for internal staff teams that support various Fire Department operations as many of these duties will transfer to Eastside Fire & Rescue. Preliminary analysis identifies potential cost savings in legal services and a reduction in some functions of payroll and benefits management. Other internal services that will see a workload reduction on fire-related issues include finance, human resources, customer service, legal, IT, GIS, fleet, and facilities.

While there will be one-time costs in the short-term related to the transition to Eastside, regionalization will result in long-term savings to the City compared to maintaining a stand-alone independent fire department.

### Training Consortium

Eastside Fire is one of 15 King County Fire agencies (there are 21 including Seattle) that train under the South King County Training Consortium (SKCTC). Being part of this consortium provides for top tier consistent training, as all 15 agencies receive the exact same training by a robust professional full-time training staff. Mercer Island is currently a part of East Metro Training Group.

The SKCTC provides an opportunity for Mercer Island firefighters to receive training on a larger array of equipment and across more specialties, including working alongside the many specialty technicians across the Eastside Fire and SKCTC network. Compared to the East Metro Training group, SKCTC provides four training towers compared to one, a larger and diverse training area (additional types of rivers, water rescue contexts, types of buildings, an airport, etc.), different apparatus for training, including types of apparatus that only exists in zone 3, and over 20 professional and full-time training officers.

New hires to firefighting go through an academy training process prior to beginning their work in the field. Currently, the City of Mercer Island is paying about \$18,000 per recruit for training, which is in addition to the base fees for training. SKCTC has dedicated training officers, meaning this \$18,000 per recruit cost would no longer apply.

### Technical and Specialized Rescue

Regionalizing with Eastside Fire & Rescue will increase access to training and resources for technical and specialized rescue response capabilities for firefighters serving on Mercer Island. An example of this includes Eastside's membership with the Eastside Hazardous Materials Consortium (HazMat). Eastside's Fire Station 73 houses one of four hazardous materials response units in Zone 1. Zone 1 includes Shoreline Fire, Bothell Fire, Eastside Fire & Rescue, Duvall Fire, Fall City Fire, Kirkland Fire, Redmond Fire, Snoqualmie (City) Fire, Mercer Island Fire, and Bellevue Fire. Having opportunities to routinely train with and have internal access to this apparatus and technicians will provide new opportunities for training on this crucial skillset. Additionally,

partnering with Eastside will provide opportunities to train Eastside's HazMat teams on the specific contexts of emergency response on Mercer Island.

Finally, Eastside is the leader of Wildland (forest fire fighting) response in Western Washington and every Eastside firefighter can receive training on Wildland response and receive state certification, an opportunity only available to six of the City's staff currently. Firefighters staffing Mercer Island stations will be able to better understand and identify hazards and respond accordingly as planned in the Pioneer Park Fire Mitigation Plan.

#### Other Programs and Services

Although not detailed in the interlocal agreement, there will be continuity of services and continuation of community programs and partnerships under the regional services model. For example, Mercer Island firefighters regularly visit schools on the Island to promote public safety and fire prevention. These services will continue under the Interlocal agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue. The Fire Department will also continue to participate in special events, such as Summer Celebration, and provide standby Aid Car support at the Mercer Island High School Football games.

The Mobile Integrated Health program (MIH) will also continue to be led by the City's Youth and Family Services Department with support from firefighters serving Mercer Island.

#### IAFF Local 1762

The City of Mercer Island firefighters are organized under the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) Local 1762, which is a collective bargaining group. The City Administration has met with IAFF Local 1762 leadership members over the past two months to bargain the impacts of fire employees transitioning to another agency.

The City and IAFF Local 1762 conversations have been productive and positive, but agreement on the terms of impact bargaining have not concluded. The City Administration will continue to work in good faith to resolve the outstanding issues.

#### **Overview of Draft Interlocal Agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue**

The relationship between the City of Mercer Island and Eastside Fire & Rescue for regional fire services will be governed by an interlocal agreement (ILA). The draft ILA is included as Exhibit 2. Several highlights of the agreement are discussed below.

This ILA will have a term of 10-years with an implementation date of January 1, 2024. At the conclusion of the initial term, this ILA will automatically renew for successive 10-year terms unless a written notice of termination is given. This ILA sets out levels and types of service provided by Eastside, which matches the level of service currently provided by the Mercer Island Fire Department. The ILA outlines the annual fees, the timing of payment of one-time transition costs and annual ongoing costs, and the methodology for annual adjustment to charges. Ownership, maintenance, and replacement of apparatus, vehicles, equipment, and facilities is also outlined in the ILA.

As a reminder, on June 6, 2023, the staff presented an initial overview and financial analysis of the regional fire services proposals to the City Council (see [AB 6283](#)). The ILA includes an estimated 2024 cost of \$8,018,746 and an estimated one-time transition cost of \$1,241,406.

Should the City Council agree to the terms of the draft ILA, staff have included Resolution No. 1645 (Exhibit 1) for Council approval. This resolution approves the execution of the ILA with Eastside Fire & Rescue and authorizes the City Manager to prepare and execute any additional measures or documents that may be necessary to effectuate the ILA.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Eastside Fire & Rescue Board is scheduled to review and consider adoption of the Interlocal agreement later this month.

Upon approval of the Interlocal agreement by both parties, Mercer Island and Eastside agree to formulate committees comprised of staff members to work collaboratively prior to the commencement date, to establish procedures to govern implementation issues. Both the City and Eastside also acknowledge that as details emerge during this transition period, there may be a need for additional agreements to address matters not sufficiently covered in the ILA. The City Council will be regularly updated on this process.

The exact final costs of the one-time transition payments will not be known until the end of the year, as they are primarily based on vacation and sick leave balances. A final reconciliation will occur at the end of the year and inform the payment plan for accrued liability.

### **Acknowledgement**

The City of Mercer Island would like to thank both the City of Bellevue and Eastside Fire & Rescue for submitting excellent and thorough proposals and for continually being available for clarification and follow-up from City Staff during the review process. The City thanks both entities for the strong working relationships and is committed to maintaining those relationships into the future.

## **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Adopt Resolution No. 1645 approving the interlocal agreement with Eastside Fire & Rescue.