

No.	Comment/Question	Response
General Questions on the Transition to Regional Fire Services		
01	Why consider adopting a regional fire services model?	<p>To ensure the City can continue providing effective and sustainable services, the City of Mercer Island, at the recommendation of the City Manager, is considering adopting a regional fire services model.</p> <p>A regional fire services model is defined as a single, larger fire agency providing comprehensive fire services across multiple communities. In this scenario, Mercer Island would be served by a larger, regional fire agency instead of the City operating its own, smaller department. Mercer Island fire personnel would transition to the regional fire agency and both Island fire stations would remain open.</p>
02	Would the safety of Mercer Island residents be impacted by this decision?	<p>No, the goal in pursuing a regional services model for fire services is to enhance fire safety and emergency management services for Mercer Island residents and businesses while reducing costs and improving operational efficiencies. Being part of a larger agency would mean our firefighters would have access to expanded resources and equipment, and increased training and career growth opportunities; supporting them in their ability to respond to a broad range of emergencies here on Mercer Island.</p>
03	Would any firefighters lose their jobs?	<p>If a regional fire services model is adopted, the City has every intention to secure employment opportunities for all Fire Department personnel and is committed to working through employment impacts with the fire union. We rely on the dedicated work of these employees to keep the community safe, and they have our assurance that their employment is a priority. A few positions within the department might shift because of the transition to a regional fire services model (further detailed in the Q&A below), but these changes would not have an impact on fire department operations.</p>
04	What regional fire agencies were considered to provide fire services to the City of Mercer Island?	<p>Upon receiving direction from the City Council at the April 4, 2023 City Council meeting, the City Manager invited the City of Bellevue (Bellevue) and Eastside Fire & Rescue (EFR) to submit responses to a Request for Proposals (RFP). Both agencies submitted timely proposals. The information on Consideration of a Regional Fire Services Model is available on the City's Let's Talk Page.</p>
05	Would the City of Mercer Island's fire stations close if the City transitions to a regional fire services model?	<p>No, both Mercer Island Fire Stations (Station 91 and Station 92) would remain open and operational under a regional fire services model and that is reflected in the proposals received from both Bellevue and EFR.</p>

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06	Who would oversee Mercer's Island's day-to-day fire services if the City adopts a regional fire services model?	Leadership from the regional fire agency would oversee fire services on Mercer Island with the respective Fire Chief reporting directly to the City Manager for Mercer Island-specific needs. Mercer Island's fire chief is currently fulfilled through an interim, part-time role (under a contract agreement with Eastside Fire and Rescue) - a regional fire services model would bring the leadership and staff support of a larger fire agency to the Island's fire operations.
07	Would a regional fire service model impact City taxes?	The regional fire agency would not have taxing authority on Mercer Island. Consequently, adopting a regional fire services model would not have an impact on City taxes.
General Questions on the Regional Fire Service Proposals		
08	Where can I review the regional fire service proposals?	The proposals received from the City of Bellevue (Bellevue) and Eastside Fire & Rescue (EFR) are posted to the City's Let's Talk page .
09	Who would determine service levels under a regional fire services model?	The City of Mercer Island would continue to control service levels for fire safety and emergency medical services provided on Mercer Island. Service levels would be negotiated and agreed to with a regional services provider.
10	What would be the initial length of service under a regional fire services model?	The typical initial length for adopting a regional fire services model is 10 years. The exact length, however, would be determined during negotiations after an agency is selected.
11	How would escalation of costs be managed over time? What about COLA increases?	The City and the selected regional fire service provider would have to reach an agreement on the terms of annual increases or cost escalators such as COLAs prior to implementation of a regional fire services model.

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12	Would current staffing levels be maintained if the City adopts a regional fire services model?	<p>Yes, current staffing levels would be maintained.</p> <p>The EFR proposal and the Bellevue Model #1 proposal commits to maintaining current staffing levels, which is 7 on-duty personnel per shift.</p> <p>The Bellevue Model # 2 proposes an integration over time of the Mercer Island and Bellevue Factoria Battalion Chief Stations. This would mean 6 on-duty personnel stationed on Mercer Island, with a shared Battalion Chief stationed in Factoria.</p> <p>Under both proposals, leadership of fire services would be provided by the regional fire service provider.</p>
13	The City of Mercer Island participates in the Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) Program, which is funded by the 2020-2025 King County Medic One/EMS Levy. Will this program continue? How will this program be incorporated into a regional fire services model?	<p>Yes, the MIH program will continue even if the City adopts a regional fire services model. The MIH program is currently staffed by a member of the Youth & Family Services Department and the Mercer Island Fire Department. The details of the relationship and specific staff roles would be negotiated and agreed to with a regional services provider.</p>
14	How will ownership of equipment be determined?	<p>Generally, the City's intention is to maintain ownership of all fire department equipment, specifically the large apparatus, such as the fire trucks and vehicles. There may be situations where it is more operationally practical to have the regional agency assume ownership and maintenance of some of the equipment. This will be a component of the negotiations with the selected regional fire service provider.</p>
15	Who provides liability insurance under a regional services model?	<p>Liability insurance is included as part of the operations costs in both proposals. There are many details to sort out related to insurance and this is one item that will need to be negotiated. The City of Mercer Island will also need to discuss coverage requirements with WCIA, the City's insurance provider.</p>
16	Can Mercer Island expect its overall insurance costs to be reduced?	<p>The exact changes (if any) to insurance costs are not known at this time and will be a component of the negotiations with the selected regional fire service provider.</p>
17	Does the presence of a Public Information Officer (PIO) result in any service improvement to Mercer Island compared to the communications provided today by the Mercer Island's Communications Manager?	<p>Both the City of Bellevue and Eastside Fire & Rescue have a PIO and communications staff to support their work. The availability of a PIO at each agency would add an additional resource for the Mercer Island Communications Manager to coordinate and partner with. The added depth of coverage will provide an increase in capacity for fire and emergency management related communications.</p>

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18	Are there anticipated cost savings to Mercer Island for internal services if the City moves to a regional fire service model?	Preliminary estimates identify 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.
19	To what extent does either agency intend to have preventative maintenance or janitorial duties performed by on-duty fire personnel?	Under both proposals, firefighters would continue to provide basic custodial services at the fire stations, consistent with current practice. Preventative maintenance, facility repairs, and similar work would be performed by other staff or contractors. Both the cost of preventative maintenance and basic custodial services are included in the proposals.
20	How will technology needs be met under a regional fire services model? Who will provide computer equipment? And IT support?	The details of equipment ownership (including computers), maintenance/replacement, and staff support would be negotiated and agreed to with a regional services provider. The cost to maintain and operate the equipment is included in the proposals.
21	What is current term for the Bellevue Fire and Eastside Fire & Rescue Collective Bargaining Agreements?	<p>At the City of Bellevue, the captains collective bargaining agreement (CBA) for Firefighters expires at the end of 2023. The Battalion Chief and Fire Marshal CBA's have expired and the City of Bellevue is currently bargaining new agreements.</p> <p>Eastside Fire & Rescue has a firefighter and support staff (e.g., Fire Marshal) CBA through the end of 2024 and a Battalion Chief CBA through the end of 2026.</p>
Questions on Bellevue Proposal for Regional Fire Services		
22	Bellevue's proposal included two different staffing models, what is the difference between "Model 1" and "Model 2"? Why is Model 2 the only option being evaluated?	<p>Model 1 was included to represent preservation of the Mercer Island staffing positions exactly as they exist today – same rank and same positions.</p> <p>Model 2 proposes a staffing model consistent with Bellevue's staffing model, which includes different positions and ranks as compared to Mercer Island. For example, the roles of "Captain" and "Engineer" are included in Model 2 and these positions do not exist in the Mercer Island Fire Department today.</p> <p>City of Mercer Island staff, upon analyzing these options, do not believe that Model 1 is viable as it would not align with Bellevue's CBA.</p> <p>If Bellevue is selected to provide regional fire services to Mercer Island, current staff would be integrated into the Bellevue staffing model, which is "Model 2" and that was used for the purposes of the staff analysis.</p>

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23	Exhibit 1: What expenses are included in the City of Bellevue "Personnel & Operational Expenses" line item?	<p>This line item includes two categories of expenses: personnel expenses and operational expenses.</p> <p>Personnel expenses include the employee compensation costs of 29 firefighter and fire officer positions, including overtime expenses.</p> <p>Operational expenses include costs for items such as equipment, supplies, facilities maintenance, and insurance.</p>
24	Exhibit 1: What staff positions are assumed in Model 2?	<p>The Bellevue Model 2 includes the following positions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Battalion Chiefs • 2 Captains • 4 Lieutenants • 6 Firefighters/Engineers • 13 Firefighters <p>There are a total of eight potential promotional opportunities available under this scenario, as compared to Mercer Island's current staffing model.</p>
25	Exhibit 1: What expenses are included in the City of Bellevue "Apparatus Repair and Maintenance" line item?	<p>The City of Mercer Island currently contracts with EFR for apparatus repair and maintenance. The Bellevue proposal assumes Mercer Island will continue this agreement with EFR even if regional fire services are provided by the City of Bellevue.</p> <p>Mercer Island staff reached out to EFR leadership to confirm this was possible. EFR stated that in the short-term, it is likely the arrangement could continue. However, EFR is evaluating the capacity of the EFR Mechanic Team to continue to provide services to outside entities. While EFR has made no final policy decision, this means there is some risk in the coming years that EFR would no longer be able to provide apparatus repair and maintenance services to the City of Mercer Island.</p> <p>Mercer Island asked Bellevue staff to provide a cost estimate for the City of Bellevue to perform this service and they responded with an estimated cost of \$380,000 annually, but indicated this was likely a high estimate and would be further refined.</p>

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26	Exhibit 1: What expenses are included in the “MI Interfund Fleet Replacement”? Why is the number the same across all three scenarios?	<p>The MI Interfund charge for Fleet Replacement is the current financial model used by the City to pay for vehicle replacement. Every Mercer Island owned vehicle has a depreciation and replacement cycle, and our financial models produce the necessary funds needed each year to, over time, replace every vehicle at the end of its useful life. Because the City plans to maintain ownership of all fire vehicles*, each proposal assumes the City will continue to manage and pay for the replacement of fire vehicles.</p> <p>* "Vehicles" do not include the large fire apparatuses (e.g., fire trucks). Those are budgeted separately.</p>
27	Exhibit 1: What expenses are included in the “MI Interfund Computer Replacement?”	<p>The MI Interfund charge for Computer Replacement is the current financial model used by the City to pay for computer and related technology replacement. Every Mercer Island owned computer and related computer equipment has a depreciation and replacement cycle, and our financial models produce the necessary funds needed each year to, over time, replace every computer at the end of its useful life.</p> <p>The Bellevue proposal assumes the City will continue to fund the replacement of computers and technology through this funding mechanism. Additional discussions are needed to clarify the ownership and administration of technology under a regional services model, and this would be negotiated and agreed to prior to implementation.</p>
28	Exhibit 1: What services does the 5% Administrative Fee cover?	<p>The Bellevue 5% administrative fee covers the overhead costs of operating the fire department, including fire leadership (Fire Chief, Deputy Chiefs), human resources, payroll, etc.</p>
29	Exhibit 1: What is included in “CIP Minor Tools and Equipment”? How is this equipment different than fleet replacement?	<p>The City’s current Capital Improvement Program (CIP) includes funding for the replacement of aging equipment, tools, and household items that are outside of the Fire Department’s maintenance and operating budget. As proposed by Bellevue, purchasing and replacement of this type of equipment would continue to be managed by the City. This would likely be subject to negotiation.</p> <p>This line item does not include costs of replacing vehicles or apparatuses and is therefore separate from the MI Interfund Fleet Replacement line item.</p>

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30	Exhibit 1: What is the “Large Fire Apparatus Replacement Fund”? Will Mercer Island continue to own this equipment?	<p>The Large Fire Apparatus Replacement fund is an annual property tax revenue set aside by the City for down payments and lease payments on new and existing large fire apparatus (e.g., fire trucks). This is budgeted separately from other Fire Department vehicles, which are funded through the MI Feet Replacement Interfund charge. The City will continue to own and manage the replacement of large fire apparatus, so this funding will continue under either proposal or if the City maintained a stand-alone fire department.</p>
31	Exhibit 1: Please clarify the methodology used to convert Bellevue’s 2023 cost estimates to 2024 figures?	<p>The City of Bellevue submitted their proposal with 2023 cost estimates and an adjustment was made to allow for a side-by-side comparison of 2024 cost estimates.</p> <p>Bellevue’s policy for establishing COLAS is 90% of the CPI-W annual average from July to June. This number is released in July and Bellevue staff are currently forecasting it to be anywhere from 4 to 6%. Bellevue said to use this number as an escalator for all of their costs in the conversion from 2023 to 2024.</p> <p>For consistency and for the purposes of analysis, the 2024 escalator for Bellevue costs was set at 4%, which is the same escalator used in the EFR proposal.</p>

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32	Exhibit 1: Please describe the purpose of the one-time fees assessed by the City of Bellevue to transition to a regional fire services proposal?	<p>The one-time fees are as follows:</p> <p>A charge of \$50,525 for training personnel for the transition of emergency services to Bellevue Fire's platform.</p> <p>Bellevue's one-time cost of \$363,327 for uniforms assumed they would need to replace all of the uniforms. This is the cost estimate for the worst-case scenario should every Mercer Island employee require a new uniform. The number is likely to be lower based on actual condition of uniforms. There will certainly be an opportunity to discuss branding, use of logos, and other forms of agency representation as part of the negotiation process.</p> <p>The \$490,202 charge covers the cost of the liability of accrued vacation and sick leave. The Bellevue policy is to have funds covering 100% of vacation time at the average cost of pay rates. Bellevue Fire provides 10% of accrued sick leave as cash payout upon separation, the value of which is included in this one-time transition fee. Bellevue calculated this value using the accrued leave values Mercer Island provided and based it on the projected Bellevue pay rates of each employee.</p> <p>The \$50,000 charge for new equipment is to cover the cost of procuring new equipment to ensure there is uniformity in the type of equipment being used across the Bellevue Fire system, especially uniformity in equipment on the apparatus. Mercer Island would retain ownership of this equipment, as Mercer Island funds would be used for procurement.</p> <p>The \$50,000 charge for IT & system integration is for anticipated expenses in transitioning Mercer Island owned and operated computer and other IT related equipment from the Mercer Island IT system to the City of Bellevue system.</p> <p>All these items would be subject to negotiation, and agreement would need to be reached prior to implementation.</p>
33	Bellevue currently provides a ladder truck to the City of Mercer Island in exchange for marine patrol services. How will this be impacted by the transition to a regional fire services model?	<p>If the City of Mercer Island adopts a regional fire service model with Bellevue, the current agreement for exchange of services will need to be revisited and its terms addressed appropriately for the new situation.</p>

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34	What is Bellevue's assumptions around overtime costs? Are those included in personnel expenditures? What happens when costs exceed those assumptions?	<p>An overtime estimate is included in the "personnel & operational expenses" line item. At the end of each contract year, Bellevue will perform a reconciliation process where Mercer Island would pay for personnel costs that exceeded contract estimates or would receive a refund if there was savings.</p> <p>The mechanics of the reconciliation process would need to be negotiated prior to implementation.</p>
35	Would the accreditation of the Bellevue Fire Department and other City of Bellevue departments result in additional costs to Mercer Island?	<p>The City of Bellevue would bear the full cost to meet current accreditation standards.</p>
Questions on Eastside Fire & Rescue Proposal for Regional Fire Services		
36	Exhibit 1: What expenses are included in the EFR "Personnel & Operational Expenses" line item?	<p>This line item includes two categories of expenses: personnel expenses and operational expenses. Personnel expenses include compensation costs for all employees that will become employees of EFR based on the relevant EFR collective bargaining agreement(s) and policies. Personnel costs also include a portion of the operations overtime budget that is estimated to be attributable to Mercer Island.</p> <p>Operational expenses include the estimated portion attributable to Mercer Island for the annual cost of supplies and services incurred to operate the fire department. These expenses include, but are not limited to, such things as EMS supplies, tools, equipment, uniforms and accessories, fuel, apparatus maintenance and repairs, NORCOM dispatch fee, etc.</p>
37	Exhibit 1: What staff positions are assumed in the EFR proposal?	<p>The EFR staffing model includes the following positions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Battalion Chiefs • 2 Station Captains • 6 Lieutenants • 8 Engineers • 8 Firefighters. <p>There are a total of eleven potential promotion opportunities available under this scenario, as compared to Mercer Island's current staffing model.</p>

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38	Exhibit 1: Why did EFR <u>not</u> include funding for “Apparatus Repair and Maintenance”?	The costs for apparatus repair and maintenance are included in the operational expenses line item. EFR currently provides apparatus repair and maintenance to the City through an ILA. Consequently, the ILA would be terminated if the City adopts a regional fire services model with EFR.
39	Exhibit 1: What expenses are included in the “MI Interfund Fleet Replacement”? Why is the number the same across all three scenarios?	<p>The MI Interfund Charge for Fleet Replacement is the current financial model used by the City to pay for vehicle replacement. Every Mercer Island owned vehicle has a depreciation and replacement cycle, and our financial models produce the necessary funds needed each year to, over time, replace every vehicle at the end of its useful life. Because the City requested to maintain ownership of all fire vehicles*, each proposal assumes the City will continue to manage and pay for the replacement of fire vehicles.</p> <p>*Vehicles do not include the large fire apparatuses (e.g., fire trucks). Those are budgeted separately.</p>
40	Exhibit 1: Why did EFR <u>not</u> include funding for “MI Interfund Computer Replacement”?	<p>The EFR Equipment Replacement Fund pays for computer replacement and is intended to replace the MI Interfund Computer Replacement line.</p> <p>Additional discussions are needed to clarify the ownership and administration of technology under a regional services model, and this would be included in negotiations.</p>
41	Exhibit 1: What services does the 10% Administrative Fee cover?	The EFR 10% administrative fee covers the overhead costs of operating the fire department, including fire leadership (Fire Chief, Deputy Chiefs), human resources, payroll, etc. Mercer Island receives the services of all the personnel listed in the "At-A-Glance" section in EFR's proposal.
42	Exhibit 1: What is the “Equipment Replacement fund”?	The EFR Equipment Replacement Fund pays for bunker gear, computers, PT equipment, Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), etc. (See Exhibit A of Proposal for full list). This will replace the current Mercer Island computer interfund charge and CIP Minor Tools and Equipment. Also includes facilities preventative maintenance costs.

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43	Exhibit 1: What is the “Capital Facilities Maintenance Fund?”	<p>The EFR Capital Facilities fund charge (\$30,000 per year) will support pre-planned capital facilities maintenance projects for station 91 and 92. These are minor repair projects, not major capital projects (see Exhibit D of the proposal for examples). This is part of a larger fund shared among other agencies, but the intent is only to pay for work done at Mercer Island fire stations. This fund does not pay for EFR headquarter facilities or other EFR fire stations.</p> <p>This is subject to negotiation. The City would need to evaluate whether or not it makes sense for EFR to manage this work and these funds, or for Mercer Island to continue managing the minor capital projects at the Mercer Island fire stations.</p>
44	Exhibit 1: Why did EFR <u>not</u> include the “CIP Minor Fire Tools and Equipment?”	<p>The City’s current Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) includes funding for the replacement of aging equipment, tools, and household items that are outside of Fire Department’s maintenance and operating budget in 2024. As proposed, these CIP costs would be replaced by the “Equipment Replacement Fund” under the EFR proposal. This would likely be subject to negotiation.</p>
45	Exhibit 1: What is the “Large Fire Apparatus Replacement Fund? Will Mercer Island continue to own this equipment?”	<p>The Large Fire Apparatus Replacement fund is an annual property tax revenue set aside that the City uses for down payments and lease payments on new and existing large fire apparatus (e.g., fire trucks). This is budgeted separately from other fire department vehicles, which are funded through the MI Fleet Replacement Interfund Charge. The City will continue to own and manage the replacement of large fire apparatus. So, this line item would continue under either proposal or if the City maintained a stand-alone fire department.</p>

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46	Exhibit 1: Please describe the purpose of the one-time fees assessed by Eastside Fire & Rescue?	<p>The one-time fees are as follows:</p> <p>The charge of \$1,207,806 is for covering the cost of the liability of accrued vacation and sick leave. EFR policy is to cover 100% of vacation time liability. There is also a sick leave incentive in the EFR CBA for both individuals and workforce. This includes the possibility of a variable sick leave payout at separation. There is also a sick leave cap in the EFR CBA.</p> <p>The one-time accrual liability was estimated using base wages, not premiums, so the estimate may be low. EFR estimates the typical sick leave payout is 50%, the basis for the one-time payment. This sick leave payout at separation is used by EFR to discourage using sick leave for unapproved reasons. The one-time payment of the accrual liability would be subject to negotiation.</p> <p>The charge of \$33,600 to align critical safety equipment is an estimated cost to upgrade the self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) masks to ensure uniformity with those used by EFR operations personnel.</p>

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47	Please describe how the EFR sick-leave payout incentive works?	<p>Per Subsection 18.7.4 of the EFR Firefighter CBA, employees who provide the required separation notice shall receive compensation for their sick leave. Employees must give roughly 10 months of notice ahead of their retirement date to be eligible. This allows EFR to have enough time to hire a replacement firefighter for the retiring firefighter, with the goal of avoiding a gap in shift coverage which leads to significant overtime pressures.</p> <p>There are two metrics that determine the amount of sick leave payout, the individual and workforce incentive. The individual incentive calculation percentage shall be based on the employee's previous 5- year average (immediately preceding retirement) of non-work related sick leave use. 48 hours or less of sick leave use results in a 50% payout, scaling up to 72 hours or more of sick leave use resulting in a 25% payout.</p> <p>The workforce incentive calculation percentage shall be based on the previous five (5) calendar year average of non-work related sick leave use of the entire workforce of Firefighters. 48 hours or less results in a 50% payout, scaling up to 99 hours or more resulting in a 0% payout.</p> <p>The two incentives are added together for the total payout. For example, an employee with an individual sick leave accrual compensation percentage of 50% and a workforce incentive of 25% would receive 75% cash value for unused remaining sick leave accrual.</p> <p>The goal of this incentive program (and other sick leave incentives in the CBA) is to discourage the use of sick leave for non-work related illness and injury reasons. See Subsection 18.7.4 of the EFR Firefighter CBA for more details.</p>
48	Would the City of Mercer Island have a seat on the EFR board?	<p>No, the City of Mercer Island would not be represented on the EFR Board. The City of Mercer Island does not share geographic boundaries with the EFR entities, and therefore cannot contribute shared resources (e.g., fire stations), which is a requirement to become a partner.</p>

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49	What is the EFR assumption on overtime costs? What happens when costs exceed those assumptions?	<p>The overtime assumptions are based on the EFR overtime budget for 2024 and EFR experience with overtime. EFR also factored in some Mercer Island needs, including an assumption for things like staffing MIHS football games. These assumptions determine the budgeted overtime costs. The City however would ultimately pay the actual costs incurred that year. So, if more overtime is required than budgeted the City would pay that additional cost. If less overtime is required than budgeted the City would receive a refund for savings.</p> <p>EFR provided an example in the proposal (see page 15 of the PDF, Section 4.3.b.ii): By October 15th, 2024, Eastside will establish a budgeted Personnel Cost for calendar year 2025. Mercer Island will pay this amount for services rendered in 2025. Eastside will then reconcile the budgeted amount to the Actual Personnel Cost and provide Mercer Island with a reconciliation for 2025 no later than March 31, 2026.</p>
50	What is the difference between EFR's "4-Platoon" shift schedule vs the Mercer Island "3-Platoon" shift schedule?	See exhibit 3 of AB 6283. EFR provided an overview of the differences between the two models.
51	What uniforms and patches will staff wear under the EFR proposal? Is the cost of uniform replacement covered in the proposal?	It is anticipated that fire personnel will wear the patches and uniforms associated with Eastside Fire & Rescue. There will certainly be an opportunity to discuss branding, use of logos, and other forms of agency representation prior to implementation of a regional services model. The cost of patches and uniforms is included in the proposal.
52	What is meant by section 3.3 of the Eastside proposal saying: "Eastside reserves the right to temporarily modify staffing levels from time to time as circumstances may require in its sole reasonable discretion"?	The purpose of this section is to address instances when Eastside needs to send crews for training, staffing large events within the EFR service area which requires increased staffing, etc. This is not intended to result in decreased staffing levels on Mercer Island.