

City of Mercer Island

Fire Services Community Q&A

1. Why is the City of Mercer Island considering adopting a regional fire services model?

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. 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.

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.

The safety and wellbeing of Mercer Island residents is and always has been the top priority for the City of Mercer Island. Taking that priority seriously means ensuring our public fire and safety operations meet the needs of the community now and into the future while employing the best practices possible. Calls to the Fire Department today are much different than even a few decades ago. Originally created to specifically address fire emergencies, our fire department today covers emergency medical services, hazmat services, special rescue, water rescue and recovery services, mobile integrated health, and more.

Since its inception, the City's fire department has done a remarkable job keeping the Mercer Island community safe. We are proud of our dedicated fire staff and want to ensure they remain an integral part of our community through a fire services model that provides the greatest support, training, and professional development opportunities.

The Mercer Island Fire Department is one of the few remaining stand-alone fire departments in the region, with most surrounding communities having moved to regional services along the lines of what is being evaluated for Mercer Island. Adopting a regional fire services model would embed the expertise and resources of a larger, integrated fire agency directly within the Mercer Island community.

2. Would my safety and the safety of Mercer Island residents be impacted by this decision?

No, the goal in pursuing a regional services model for fire services is to enhance these 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.

3. What would change about fire department services on Mercer Island if the City adopts a regional fire services model?

Under a regional fire services model, our residents should expect very little change, if any, to emergency response, fire inspections, or even inviting your child to sit in a fire truck. The City of Mercer Island would continue to control service levels for fire services provided on Mercer Island. Fire Stations 91 and 92 would remain open and staffed, meeting or exceeding current services levels.

So, what would change? Under a regional services model, fire services would be managed and fulfilled by a regional fire agency instead of being directly operated by the City of Mercer Island. The City would, however, establish service levels and ensure the delivery of fire services continues to meet or exceed current service levels. The leadership of the Fire Department, namely the Chief and Deputy Chief, would be provided by the regional fire agency. The internal services needed to support the Fire Department – Human Resources, IT, Finance, for example - would also be largely provided by the regional fire agency.

4. Would any firefighters lose their jobs?

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 our 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, but these changes would not have an impact on fire department operations.

5. 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.

The City of Mercer Island would continue to control service levels for fire and safety emergency medical services provided on Mercer Island.

6. What criteria are being considered to evaluate a possible regional fire service provider?

The City has compiled a list of objectives and factors to guide the evaluation of regional fire services proposals. These include:

- Services provided under a regional fire services model will maintain or improve current fire and emergency medical service levels.
- Both fire stations 91 and 92 will remain open.
- Transitioning to the regional fire services model may result in operating efficiencies and cost savings for the City of Mercer Island but will concentrate the city's financial resources on the

staff and delivery of services while reducing the overhead and administration burden of managing a small department.

- Mercer Island fire employees will be hired by the regional agency in their current or comparable positions and will have opportunities for career growth, enhanced training, and other professional development opportunities.
- Other considerations include agency experience in delivering regional fire and emergency medical services as well as the agency's governance model, communications strategies, leadership approach, annual report, and more. The full scope of the RFP is available on the City's Let's Talk Page ([linked here](#)).

7. Would the City of Mercer Island's fire stations close?

No, both Mercer Island Fire Stations (Station 91 and Station 92) would remain open and operational and provide services that meet or exceed today's standards.

8. Would this have an impact on my 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 your taxes.

9. Are there other examples of local fire departments moving to a regional fire services model?

The Mercer Island Fire Department is one of the few remaining stand-alone fire departments in the region, with most surrounding communities having moved to regional services along the lines of what is being evaluated for Mercer Island; these recently include Edmonds, Woodinville, Tukwila, Lynnwood, and Northshore, with other communities such as Duvall in a similar phase of decision-making. While our regional model would be similar to these other entities, we are focused on a model that meets the specific needs of Mercer Island residents and businesses.

10. Is the City planning to transition other services to a regional model?

No, the City of Mercer Island is only considering what a regional fire services model would look like for the Mercer Island Fire Department. No other departments or services are being considered.

11. Would I have to call a different number to get fire department services?

No, you would still call 911 in case of any emergency and could still reach the fire department's headquarters by calling (206) 275-7607.