

Cities of Olympia and Tumwater  
Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Planning Committee  
DRAFT website content/FAQs

Mar. 2022

The Cities of Olympia and Tumwater have agreed to explore the potential of creating a Regional Fire Authority encompassing both jurisdictions. A Planning Committee, composed of three city council members from each city has been created to lead discussions.

The **mission of the Planning Committee** is to create and propose to the elected leadership of both cities a plan for a regional fire authority encompassing the entire territory within the jurisdictional boundaries of both cities, including the proposed governance, design, financing and development of fire protection and emergency service facilities and operations, including maintenance and preservation of facilities or system. The Committee's responsibilities are set forth in Ch. 52.26 RCW. The Planning Committee is advisory to the city councils.

The Planning Committee held its first meeting on August 16, 2021.

All Planning Committee Meetings are being conducted via Zoom [see link] and are open to the public.

Click here for information on **future Planning Committee meetings**: [link]

All **agendas and materials for the Planning Committee** can be accessed here: [link]

**Questions or comments?** Please email [insert email]; your questions and comments will be shared with the Planning Committee. Staff will respond to your email.

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

#### **Q: What is a Regional Fire Authority?**

**A:** A Regional Fire Authority (RFA) is a special purpose district established by voters in a service area that provides funding for fire and emergency medical services. State law provides the framework for cities, towns, fire districts, ports and other agencies with authority to provide fire service to consider forming an RFA to gain service efficiencies through consolidation while retaining local control. The creation of an RFA is authorized by state law ([Title 52.26, Revised Code of Washington](#)).

**Q: How is an RFA created?**

**A:** First, participating agencies must reach agreement on a plan for the RFA; that is the mission of the Planning Committee. The proposed Plan must then be approved by the City Councils of both Olympia and Tumwater, who would then call for an election on proposal. All voters in the proposed service area would be able to vote on the proposition.

**Q: Why create an RFA?**

**A:** Creating an RFA will enable full consolidation of the two separate fire agencies and provide an opportunity to achieve further efficiencies in the delivery of fire and emergency services, providing a more efficient oversight structure through a single governance board, and stabilize funding in support of fire suppression and basic life support services.

**Q: Who else has created an RFA?**

**A:** There are currently thirteen RFAs in the state of Washington including South Whatcom Fire Authority, North Snohomish County Fire Authority; Marysville Fire Authority, South Snohomish County Fire Authority, Renton Regional Fire Authority, Valley Regional Fire Authority, West Benton Fire & Rescue, Kent Fire Department Regional Fire Authority, Riverside Fire Authority, North Mason Regional Fire Authority, Southeast Thurston Fire Authority, West Thurston Regional Fire Authority.

**Q: What happens to the firefighters and staff in the two cities—will they still be providing service to my community?** Yes. If the RFA is approved by voters, firefighters and other staff from both Olympia and Tumwater will become employees of the RFA. Similarly, the fire stations and fire trucks and other emergency response vehicles will become the responsibility of the RFA.

**Q: How is the RFA funded? Does this funding differ from current fire services funding?**

**A:** The RFA has the same funding authority as a fire district. In sum, the RFA can either be funded by a property tax, or a combination of a property tax and a “**fire benefit charge**.” The RFA Planning Committee will make a recommendation on the funding plan.

**Q: What is a fire benefit charge?**

**A:** A fire benefit charge (FBC) is a charge based on a national standard and considers required firefighting resources, the size of the building(s) on a property, and the hazards associated with those building(s). For example, a business storing pressurized gas products would pay a larger FBC than an office building of the same size. A new house and an older house of the same size will typically pay the same amount. Eligible low-income senior citizens and disabled persons would typically receive the same percentage discounts on their FBC as they currently do for property taxes. The FBC funding mechanism requires approval of not less than 60% of the voters and must be re-approved by voters every six years.

**Q: How much will the RFA cost?**

**A: Costs** cannot be firmly estimated until the RFA Plan being developed by the Planning Committee is completed.

**Q: When will I know what the plan is for the RFA and how much it will cost me?  
How can I have input into the process?**

**A: The** Planning Committee will conduct public meetings as the Plan is developed to answer questions and get input. Meeting summaries and materials the Planning Committee is reviewing will be posted on the website **[insert link]**. You can also submit questions and comments at **[insert link]**.

**Q: What is the timeline for the project?**

**A:** The schedule calls for the RFA Plan to be developed and submitted to the City Councils by October 2022, and approved by early February 2023. There will be public hearings associated with the consideration of the RFA Plan and there will be public education and outreach efforts following the adoption of the RFA Plan so that voters can be well informed. If approved by the City Councils the RFA could be placed on the ballot as soon as April 2023.

**Q: How is the RFA governed?**

**A:** The RFA is to be governed by a Board of Commissioners that will initially be comprised of elected officials from both cities. The Planning Committee will develop a more detailed governance proposal in the coming months. Once created, the RFA Board is responsible for approving the RFA budget each year and must conduct a public hearing as part of the budget process.

**Q: Will my fire station be closed?**

**A:** Fire Stations are located in areas to ensure targeted response times can be met

consistently throughout the service territory. The RFA Plan will evaluate response times and resource needs to determine whether to propose any change to current firefighter staffing and station's locations.