

City of Tumwater

Public Safety Lid Lift FAQs

1. How much will this cost me?

The calculation of the cost is highly variable and can change from year to year as a function of the economy, overall property value changes, individual property valuation, and the increase in new construction within the City. Consequently, any estimate of cost is a broad estimate based on the average tax-payer. The City's levy lid lift requires an additional \$1.443 million in property tax revenue in 2012. While we can only estimate the overall assessed valuation for the City in 2012, based on our estimate, the property tax rate would increase by \$0.667/\$1,000 and a house that is valued at \$231,250 next year would pay an additional \$155/year or \$12.92/month. This assumes that the overall assessed valuation drops by about 7.5%. (Without that drop, the same house would be worth \$250,000 and would have an increase of \$0.62/\$1,000 which would result in the same increased property tax of \$155 per year.) The City intends to adjust the rate in 2012 to limit the revenue to \$1.443 million in that first year.

2. Why doesn't the City annex into a fire district or form a fire authority?

The City has had preliminary talks with other jurisdictions about sharing fire services. For Tumwater businesses and residents, such a merger needs to make sense, save money, and result in better service. At this time, the City's priority needs to be on improving our facilities and services so that we can be a good partner in a merger. We don't want Tumwater tax dollars to subsidize another area; nor does any other community want to spend their money bringing Tumwater services up to standard.

3. Did the firefighters or police officers receive a raise this year?

Members of the fire department collective bargaining unit (both Tumwater employees and those paid by the County) received a COLA and a 1% market adjustment as provided for in their contract. The Police Officers are currently operating without a contract and negotiating with the City.

4. Isn't the new Walmart going to bring in lots of new tax dollars?

The Walmart project will bring in additional sales and property taxes, but not enough to pay for expanding services. This revenue will help us fill the gaps from other lost revenue and the City's increased costs. As a result of the recession, the typical increase in new construction has not occurred resulting in reduced property tax and construction sales tax. Business activity is down which reduces Business & Occupation tax revenue. Although about 10% of the City's workforce has been eliminated, costs continue to increase because of medical benefits, compliance with collective bargaining agreements, and energy costs.

5. What input did the City get before deciding to propose this to voters?

In 2009 the City adopted a Fire Department Master Plan that examined the needs and options for the fire service. It also established the 7-minute standard for response time. In addition to City Council review, that Plan was developed with the input of a citizens' advisory committee. In late 2010, the City created a 20-member task force to review fire and police service options. They met three times and provided input to the City Council to proceed with improvements at this time.

In April, the City commissioned the Washington State University Social & Economic Sciences Research Center to conduct a telephone survey asking about the relative priorities and importance of various city services including parks, trails, police, fire, and streets. The survey was considered statistically valid and was based on more than 400 respondents. Prior to adopting the ordinance putting the proposal on the ballot, the City Council held a public hearing on May 3rd.

6. Why don't we just wait until the economy gets better and then we will have enough revenue to pay for these improvements without raising taxes?

Waiting does not mean that we will not have to raise taxes. By every projection we hear, this will be gradual climb out of the recession. Without the proposal, slowly increasing revenues will be used primarily to cover the increased cost of existing services at current levels. Expanded services will require additional funding. Because of the recession this is a good time to pursue construction and to be hiring new employees.

7. Why are we the only ones proposing these improvements?

In 2008, the voters in Olympia approved a bond levy for the construction of an additional fire station and a training center. In 2010, the City of Olympia voters approved a lid lift to pay for 16 additional firefighters. Fire District 15, which is adjacent to Tumwater and receives all of its services from Tumwater, is planning a levy lid lift in August also.

8. Why does the Police Department need an expansion? Don't police officers do most of their report writing inside their cars?

Officers may do some report writing and research in their vehicles. It is no longer considered the best practice to do that. Work in the office is still required when there is evidence to be processed, paper records to review, significant research, and a need to interview victims or suspects. The use of high technology, beyond computers for writing reports, has become a significant part of law enforcement and may not be done in a vehicle.

9. Isn't the City already paying off a bond for construction?

The City is currently paying off a voter-approved bond that funded the construction of the library and the Headquarters Fire Station. This bond currently amounts to 16.3 cents of the per \$1000 rate. It will expire in 2018.

10. What have you done to keep the costs down on this proposal?

We are reusing one of the existing fire engines by making upgrades to it. We are creating a fire engine replacement fund which avoids costly levy elections every 10 years, as the City has done in the past. We are planning to utilize the expensive spaces in the existing police facility and only construct less expensive areas. We have trimmed out elements of the project that are not public safety construction and are designing the minimum amount of space expansion. We are reusing the existing investment in buildings and land.

11. These are difficult times for many people, why are we considering this proposal now?

Public safety services have been designated the highest priority community service in several community surveys. These services are currently insufficient for the need and will not be remedied with just time. These economic conditions make it a good time for hiring new employees as there are many people looking for work. It is also a good time to pursue construction because the City can get good prices.

12. Does this mean that the northend station will be staffed?

With these three firefighters, in addition to the three that are planned for 2012 to come from annexation revenue, we estimate that the station can be open and fully staffed at least 35% of the time. The addition of six more firefighters (bringing the total at that station to 12) would allow it to be staffed 100% of the time. The City will work toward that goal in the future.

13. I thought that my property taxes couldn't go up more than 1% per year?

The voter-approved initiative 747 limits the rate of property tax income growth to 1% per year, with exceptions for new construction and annexations. It also created a process for the voters to approve increases in the property tax for specific items. If approved, this revenue would be restricted to public safety expenses.

14. Do we use volunteer firefighters and police officers?

The City does have a volunteer program in the Fire Department. Because of the training requirements and the commitments required for full volunteer firefighters, few people can make that type of commitment. Our Fire volunteers work at special events, such as football games, to provide back-up. They are also involved in public education and outreach events. The Police Department does not have a volunteer program at this time. With additional staffing, the City will look at ways to increase crime prevention programs, including bringing back a volunteer program.

15. Why do fire trucks cost so much? Is it true they only last 10 years?

The national standard for fire trucks is replacement or major refurbishment after 15 years of front-line service, then keep in service for another 10 years as a reserve vehicle, provided it has been upgraded. The design, purchase and manufacture process for a new engine will take about 2 years. Tumwater's current frontline engines are both 11 years old, and the reserves are 23 and 24 years old. Fire engines are expensive because they use specialized equipment and

safety gear and need to be highly reliable to operate dependably for many years in adverse and hazardous conditions (in fires, along freeways, in cold/wet and snowy weather, in contaminated sites, etc.). The standards for equipment, mission requirements, and safety standards on fire engines also change over time as a result of accidents, new threats, and research.

16. Why do police officers take their cars home?

Tumwater has a take-home car program for police officers. Officers are allowed to drive their cars to and from work provided they have a residence in Thurston County. Their car is not available of other personal use. This program extends the life of the cars, results in better vehicle maintenance and care, and saves the City the cost of parking and securing cars on-site. Having a police car parked at an officer's residence is also a deterrent to crime in that officer's neighborhood.

17. When there is a medical call, why does the big fire engine show up?

Because we are a relatively small fire department, we do not have enough people to fully staff a medic or fire engine vehicle so it can operate alone. As a result, when firefighters are called to a scene, they need to have all their equipment with them. While the current call could be a broken leg, the next one could be a car accident or a fire. If they have to leave one scene and go to another, which frequently happens, they don't want to have to drive back to the station to switch vehicles. Even if this approach made sense, it is a small number of calls for which this could even be considered. Firefighters drive the engine so that they have everything with them that they may need. We have studied the question and estimate that 50% of the time, it is directly appropriate to send the engine to the scene either because of a fire, special rescue needs, or a car accident, etc.

18. Does my medic one tax pay for services in Tumwater?

Property owners in Thurston County pay an emergency medical property tax of up to 50 cents per \$1,000; currently the rate is \$0.336/\$1,000. That money is distributed by the County to agencies which provide paramedic services. We receive 80% of the cost of a Tumwater paramedic from the County. We are also fully paid for the cost of paramedics that provide the contracted service to the Rochester area. There is no charge for treatment and transport if the patient is deemed to have a serious or life threatening condition and requires paramedic services. There may be a charge for private / BLS transport only, if the injury or illness is not determined to be serious.

19. Why can't people file police reports online?

We would like to add the ability to file police reports online, but we think that it should be an alternative option for those who want to do it. We want to avoid online filing being the only option for smaller crimes.

20. How many calls do the firefighters and police officers go on?

In 2010, which was a normal year, the fire department's engine company went on 2,600 calls. 2,500 calls is generally considered capacity for an urban engine company. That is an average of 6.8 calls per day. The Medic 5 unit responded to 1,618 calls for service throughout the county. The Sprint 14 unit responded to an additional 476 calls in the South County, with one paramedic requiring another paramedic unit to respond with them for transport (normally Medic 5 from Tumwater). Medic 14 responded by themselves 413 times to South County with 2 paramedics. Whether it is a SPRINT or a Medic unit depends on the number of people on duty. When 5 Paramedics are on duty, we are required to operate as a medic unit. The advantage to Tumwater to having Medic 14 is that Medic 5 stays in the Tumwater area and is available for help on other calls like fires.

The Police department responded to 25,920 calls for service in that same year.

21. I see Tumwater fire vehicles in other communities. Why do they leave Tumwater if we don't have enough staff?

You could see Tumwater fire vehicles in other communities for two different reasons. First, the City receives money from Thurston County to provide medical aid services to the Rochester area. County money is used to hire additional paramedics and a vehicle to serve that area. The advantage to Tumwater is that those paramedics are available in Tumwater when they are not on a call in Rochester. The other reason you could see Tumwater vehicles in other communities is 'mutual aid'. Fire services have historically provided "back-up" to one another through mutual aid agreements. Such agreements started because most cities could only provide enough staff for a car accident, small fire, or medical issue. If there was a large fire, the city needed additional resources that they couldn't afford to keep on-hand all the time. Mutual aid is still a part of meeting the needs of all the departments in Thurston County during big events or if one department is busy with another call.

22. What happened to the School Resource Officer that used to be in the schools? Didn't the School District pay for that officer?

The School District previously had a federally-funded school safety grant which they used to pay for a School Resource Officer. Those grants are no longer available and there has been no School Resource Officer since 2002. A School Resource Officer is a fully-commissioned officer and is available for other assignments when not at the school.

23. What has the City done to save money so that raising taxes is the last resort?

The City has eliminated approximately 10% of the workforce across departments. Capital projects and maintenance in parks and streets have been reduced. Recreation programs have been reduced. Employee healthcare is changing to more economical plans, including significant reductions in the City-paid share for nonpublic safety employees. Employees that are not part of a collective bargaining agreement have received no COLA for 2011. Training, travel, equipment,

supplies, and professional services have all been reduced. Equipment replacement cycles have been extended.

24. Is the reason for more firefighters because of the airport?

No. There are very few calls to the airport. If regular commercial service were to restart at the airport, there would need to be improvements to the firefighting equipment, facilities, and staffing at the airport. It would likely be funded by the Port, air carrier, and FAA.

25. What is Tumwater doing to keep medical services from being abused?

Through Medic 1, callers to 911 have the opportunity to talk with a consulting nurse prior to dispatching a medic unit. For minor emergencies, the consulting nurse can provide guidance to the caller. The Medic 1 system also uses a tiered medical response system. Calls which appear to be basic medical calls (broken arm, burn, laceration) are responded to by firefighters who are also trained Emergency Medical Technicians. Calls with more significant presenting conditions such as chest pain or severe abdominal pain, will have paramedics and the medic unit dispatched.

26. Why can't we use 'mutual aid' to address the needs for fire response?

Mutual Aid is commonly used in the fire service to handle large, complex calls that are difficult to staff due to their infrequent occurrence. These would be considered low-frequency, high-impact events. Currently, when a large fire occurs in Thurston County, it is common to have many departments respond in order to safely handle all of the tasks that must be completed to reduce the impact of the incident on our citizens' lives and property. Even the two largest departments in the county, Olympia and Lacey FD 3, do not have enough staff on duty to handle a commercial fire by themselves, much less multiple concurrent alarms. It is commonly assumed that the number of mutual aid given events will be similar to the received events. In 2010, Tumwater Fire asked for help 88 times while only helping others 27 times. With a minimum of one response vehicle (engine) on duty each day, a second concurrent call requires the use of mutual aid.

27. Do we need this money because of the golf course?

The golf course has capital debt from the original purchase and the improvements that have occurred over the years, just like the library and the headquarters fire station. That debt is paid from the City's Capital Improvement Program using revenue from Utility Tax. The golf course also has a loan from the sewer utility for some additional improvements and operating debts from difficult years. The golf course has historically been making payments, including interest, on that loan. There is no sewer utility subsidy of the golf course. The City has looked at the option of selling the golf course, but believes it is a valuable amenity to the community and that selling it would not be sufficient to pay off the debt. It was decided that continuing to operate the golf course carefully is the best long-term strategy until the loans are paid off.

28. Is the money being used by administrative staff in Police and Fire Departments?

The Police Department has a chief and commander. The remainder of the commissioned officers are patrol, narcotics, detectives, and working sergeants. Two civilian Community Service Officers take care of prisoner transport during the day, manage the evidence room, and parking enforcement. There are three civilian administrative support staff who manage records and provide support to the department. The Fire Department has a chief, deputy chief, and ½ FTE training officer. There are two administrative staff that support the department and provide public information. The remainder of the staff are firefighters and paramedics that respond to calls.

29. How much does a police car cost? A fire engine?

Fully outfitted with computers, cameras, lights, taxes, delivery, etc. in 2012 dollars:

Police Car: \$ 65,000

Fire engine: \$550,000

30. How much does this police remodel cost?

The total project cost is \$3,026,400 which includes:

- Planning, design, and construction management
- 5,000 square feet of new construction and site security and access improvements
- Utility and impact fees
- Renovation of the existing 5,100 police facility, improve HVAC, replace portion of roof
- Upgrade security in the lobby

31. How long does it take before a new firefighter or police officer is on the street?

It depends on whether the City hires “laterals,” meaning the officers come from another agency where they were fully trained, or if we hire entry-level. There are advantages to both approaches. An entry level police officer takes 15 weeks of police academy and local training to hit the streets. A lateral is usually on the street within 30 days but typically costs more to hire. Entry-levels require more training, but are more cost-effective. It is similar for firefighters.

32. What do my taxes pay for now?

This year (2011), this is where the property taxes go for a \$250,000 home:

	<u>Levy Rate</u>	<u>2011 Taxes</u>
Tumwater School District	\$ 4.851176097878	\$ 1,212.79
State of Washington	\$ 2.257492692670	\$ 564.37
City of Tumwater - General	\$ 2.106585510098	\$ 526.65
Thurston County	\$ 1.258922633779	\$ 314.73
Timberland Regional Library	\$ 0.356880000000	\$ 89.22
Medic One	\$ 0.336503389350	\$ 84.13
Port of Olympia	\$ 0.172082054394	\$ 43.02
City of Tumwater - G.O. Bonds	\$ 0.163008326720	\$ 40.75
PUD #1	\$ 0.008835817803	\$ 2.21
	\$ 11.511486522692	\$ 2,877.87

33. Where is the annexation money going?

The 2007 study of the annexation estimated the assessed valuation of the area is \$200,000,000. With devaluation that has occurred in the past two years, a rough estimation of assessed value would be somewhere in the range of \$175,000,000 in 2012. Without the levy lid lift that would be about \$398,000 in property taxes revenue at the expected rate of \$2.276/\$1,000.

Since annexation, the City has been paying \$300,000 of that revenue to the prior Fire District (#5) in exchange for services as a part of the annexation agreement with the District to account for the transfer of assets. The City budget includes hiring of three additional firefighters (at a cost of about \$348,000) based on the property tax revenue from the annexation coming to the City at that point. Additional revenue from the annexation area from property tax or other revenues (there are very few sales or utility tax generators) in the area, are used to provide police and street services for the expanded service area.

34. Why can't the Police Department rent space in one of the office buildings instead of building a building?

A police facility requires specialized spaces for holding and processing of evidence, interviewing suspects and victims, technology, management of records, public access, and inside and exterior security. The cost of these improvements makes a lease arrangement impractical. There is no demand currently for a satellite-office-only facility. The current location in close proximity to City Hall makes it convenient for prisoner transport to court, interaction and coordination with other departments, presence at the City government campus, and utilization in the City's existing investment in land and building.

35. What if the levy lid lift doesn't pass?

If the levy lid lift doesn't pass, the City will continue to work with the minimal staffing, outdated equipment, and insufficient facilities that it currently possesses. As the community grows, so do

its needs for public service. Unfortunately, without additional funding for much needed staff, equipment, and facilities; the city will continue to fall behind its standards of service.

36. Why doesn't the City use the County's new Accountability and Restitution Center (ARC)?

The ARC, which is located in the Mottman Industrial Park in Tumwater, was constructed to be a Thurston County jail facility. The County is currently unable to open the facility because of declining jail populations and low finances. The City looked at the facility several times, both as an interim police facility and a future jail site. The City's jail demands are pretty low and are a very small portion of the entire jail capacity which makes it infeasible for us to open or operate the jail alone. Should the County be able to open it in the future, we have indicated we would like to engage them in a discussion of leasing some small portion of the capacity. Such an arrangement would save the City transport time as the officers would not leave Tumwater. The review of the building for other police purposes found the arrangement would not be feasible. It would require an investment to convert administrative spaces in the ARC to police uses and it would preclude the use of the remainder of the building for jail purposes. It would only make sense to the City if the lease could be for extended period of time and the County can't commit the building for that long.

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