The Fire Department Peeks into 2019

January 2019

As we look towards 2019, here is a glimpse at some fire and medical services topics that the City Council and fire department staff will be discussing.

* Ladder Truck. Since the City annexed Harbour Pointe in 1992 and grew to the size it is today, we have operated or contracted for a fire ladder truck. The key feature of a fire ladder truck is the aerial ladder, a tool used for rescues and the ability to deliver water onto a fire from above. In addition to that, ladder trucks provide additional ground ladders, ventilation tools, extrication capability and rescue training required for that apparatus. Last month, the City Council decided to end the current inter-local agreement (ILA) with South Snohomish County Fire for fire ladder truck service effective December 2019. Council members and Fire Commissioners will be meeting in 2019 to discuss the wrap-up of that ILA. Council will also need to discuss how (or if) to replace that service after the end of the ILA. Options could include contracting with another department, purchasing a fire ladder truck for Mukilteo Fire, or doing without the service.
* Battalion Chief/Incident Command Services. Included in the fire ladder truck ILA is a response from a battalion chief to larger, higher risk incidents, such as house fires, to provide incident command and direction to the 20 or more fire personnel operating on the scene. This coordination is vital to the orderly attack on and resolution of the incident. Significant safety issues can arise if no one is in charge and crews freelance their approach to extinguishing the fire. Options to replace this service include contracting with another department or paying to staff three 24/7 battalion chief positions within Mukilteo Fire.
* Medical Services Officer (MSO). The ILA, also with South County Fire, that provides MSO service to the department, ends at the end of June 2019. This position provides medical training and quality oversight as well as evaluation of the medical care provided by our personnel. To maintain the current quality advanced life support the City currently enjoys, this position will need to be replaced internally prior to the end of the ILA.
* Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Levy Lid Lift. The EMS Levy, originally authorized by the voters at $.50 per $1,000 of assessed valuation in 2010 has dropped to $.36 per $1,000 for 2019. A lid lift ballot question did not earn majority support in August 2018. We expect the Council to consider placing this issue back on the ballot in 2019. This funding goes directly to operation of the medical services provided by Mukilteo Fire. Current gaps in funding include funds to replace ambulances and other EMS capital equipment like cardiac monitors. The department needs to do more prevention work such as education on safety and health issues and CPR/first aid classes in the community. The community lacks a community paramedic to work with patients post-hospitalization to help them navigate follow-up care so they don’t wind up back in an ambulance for the same problem. The community engagement and community paramedic functions translate into people to provide those services, which the lid lift could fund.
* Regional Fire Authority (RFA). As cities around the state grapple with how to fund the vital services needed, many are looking at regional fire authorities to provide fire and ambulance service. The RFA is an independent taxing authority whose sole function is to provide those services. South County Fire is the most recent example in Snohomish County. As the Council looks at multi-year revenue and expense projections, they may look to put the RFA issue to the voters. An RFA could take the form of joining South County Fire or forming a new RFA, possibly with the City of Everett. The process to get an RFA question on the ballot is extensive and is probably a multi-year endeavor.
* Facility Renewal. Our fire stations were constructed in 1992 and 1994. While not antique, they have been lived in 24/7 and are starting to exhibit the maintenance issues one might expect. Things like heating, windows, kitchens, flooring, electrical/generator, and plumbing will need attention. The City Public Works Department has a plan to address these needs, but Council will need to decide on a funding mechanism.

The Council is scheduled to discuss the EMS Levy lid lift as well as the Battalion Chief and MSO positions in mid-January. The fire ladder truck is not currently scheduled for Council discussion. If you have thoughts on any (or all) of these items then reach out to your Council members and let them know. You can also get involved by attending Council meetings or watching the meetings online via the City’s website.

As always, I am available to answer your questions about the Fire Department and our services. I can be reached at calexander@mukilteowa.gov or 425-263-8150.

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