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For Immediate Release

Fire and EMS Service Changing for Mill Creek Property Owners

City Council to Reduce Tax Collections If Voters Approve Annexation into South County Fire

Mill Creek, Wash. – The Mill Creek City Council has passed a resolution to reduce its property tax collections by \$4.3 million if voters approve annexing into South Snohomish County Fire & Rescue Regional Fire Authority (South County Fire). That amount is equal to what the City pays for fire and emergency medical service (EMS) in 2022 to a third-party provider.

The City started looking at options for funding fire and EMS when it learned that it could not renew its existing contract without a substantial cost increase. The increase would have almost doubled the contract costs to Mill Creek property owners, and resulted in the City making cuts to other services and raising taxes.

“We have been fortunate to receive a high level of service for about half the rate of what most property owners pay. That contract will expire at the end of the year,” said Interim City Manager Martin Yamamoto. “Annexing to South County Fire is the lowest-cost option for City property owners providing the same level and quality of service.”

Many property owners in Snohomish County pay close to \$2 per \$1,000 of assessed property value for fire and EMS. In 2022 under the expiring contract, Mill Creek property owners are paying the equivalent of \$0.88 per \$1,000. By annexing into South County Fire, the average homeowner would have paid the equivalent of \$1.51 per \$1,000 in 2022.

To offset the increase, the City Council has agreed to lower the general property tax levy in 2023 by \$0.51 per \$1,000 or \$2.6 million. In addition, the City will eliminate the EMS levy of \$0.37 per \$1,000, accounting for \$1.7 million in revenue. These two amounts reflect \$4.3 million the City is paying for emergency services in 2022.

South County Fire relies less on property taxes in exchange for something called a “fire benefit charge.” With a fire benefit charge, the maximum fire levy rate is reduced from \$1.50 to \$1 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. South County Fire’s 2022 fire levy rate is \$0.93. In addition, South County Fire has an EMS levy with a 2022 rate of \$0.42. They then apply a fire benefit charge based on a property’s size and risk for fire.

Single family homes pay less than commercial developments and multi-story buildings because it costs less to defend them in a fire. In 2022, a 2,000 square foot home pays a benefit charge of \$70.03 to South County Fire.

Community members still have a chance to provide public comment to the Mill Creek City Council on the annexation issue. Council is scheduled to take action on a resolution to place annexation on the April 26, 2022 Special Election ballot at its February 15 meeting at 6:00 p.m. The meeting will be held virtually, access information via YouTube and Zoom is found on the City website https://www.cityofmillcreek.com/city_government/city_council.

South County Fire is headquartered south of Everett and serves unincorporated southeast Snohomish County north and west of Mill Creek, and the city of Lynnwood. It also provides fire and emergency medical service (EMS) to Brier, Edmonds, and Mountlake Terrace under three separate service contracts.

South County Fire operates 14 fire stations, several of them close to City borders. South County Fire is often the closest available unit for Mill Creek 911 calls and frequently responds to fire and EMS calls in Mill Creek today. If annexation is approved, South County Fire will also begin operating out of the current Mill Creek Fire Station and will continue the current 5-person crew staffing from that station. As part of the annexation agreement, the station will become part of the Regional Fire Authority's capital assets.

More information can be found on the City's website at www.cityofmillcreek.com/fire.

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Incorporated in 1983, the City of Mill Creek is located in Snohomish County, Wash., and is home to nearly 21,000 people. Mill Creek is a physically active community with ten attractive neighborhood and community parks, more than 23 miles of nature trails, and facilities that support diverse recreational opportunities. Mill Creek offers an exceptional community experience, where natural beauty is preserved, neighborhoods flourish, businesses thrive and recreational opportunities abound. For more information, visit www.cityofmillcreek.com or follow us on social media at [Facebook.com/MillCreekWA](https://www.facebook.com/MillCreekWA), [Twitter.com/MillCreekWA](https://twitter.com/MillCreekWA) and [Instagram.com/CityofMillCreek](https://www.instagram.com/CityofMillCreek).