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Skagit 911 Pulls Sales Tax Increase from the General Election Ballot

SKAGIT COUNTY, WASH. – The Board of Directors for Skagit County 911 will not run a one-tenth of one percent sales tax increase (the equivalent of \$0.10 on a \$100 purchase) on the November General Election ballot. For two years, the agency has been discussing how to raise additional revenue to fund infrastructure improvements to cybersecurity, technology and equipment to ensure reliable 911 coverage throughout Skagit County.

Skagit 911 dispatches all emergency calls in Skagit County for fire, emergency medical service, law enforcement, and disaster agencies. In order to be on the ballot, all its partners have to sign a revised interlocal agreement (ILA) for Skagit 911 to collect up to two-tenths of one percent sales tax, if passed by the voters of Skagit County. The agency is waiting on one, possibly two, cities to sign the ILA so the proposal cannot move forward to the November ballot unless they are signed in time.

“It makes more sense to fund the 911 system with sales tax instead of increasing user fees because visitors to Skagit County for shopping, dining and recreation also would pay their fair share,” said Helen Rasmussen, Director of Skagit 911. “The only option now is to increase user fees, which will take more revenue away from services that cities and all our partners can provide to residents.”

If voters had been able to vote on the sales tax increase, and if it had passed, sales tax in Skagit County would be lower than in Snohomish County.

Skagit 911 is currently funded by a one-tenth of one percent sales tax, a 911 tax on phone bills, and user fees that come directly from the general fund budgets of individual jurisdictions. The agency operates under a balanced budget and actively applies for grants to stretch tax dollars further. That funding model no longer meets the needs of first responders, or the communities they serve.

With a 13% population increase in the last 12 years, Skagit 911 has become the ninth busiest dispatch agency in the state. It requires additional space for operations and infrastructure improvements to keep pace with the emergency calls of Skagit County residents and visitors who call 911.

“It all starts with 911,” said Director Rasmussen. “We will work harder to convince all our partners that this is the better way to fund 911. Saving lives depends on an effective system.”

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Skagit 911 is the first number you call in an emergency. It is the 9th busiest in the state for 911 calls. Dispatchers respond to an average of 230,000 calls a year. The agency dispatches all calls for fire, emergency medical service, law enforcement, and disaster agencies in Skagit County. The agency provides family-wage jobs to 45 people covering 1,731 miles and 132,000 residents – a 13% population increase since 2010.