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Skagit 911 Considers Sales Tax Increase for November Election

Measure will fund needed upgrades and improve emergency response

SKAGIT COUNTY, WASH. – When 132,000 residents in Skagit County have emergency needs for fire, medical, or police services, they call Skagit 911, the ninth busiest dispatch agency in the state. This service employs 45 people and is charged with covering an area that has seen a 13% increase in population in the last 12 years.

Skagit 911 is funded by one-tenth of one percent of sales tax, a 911 tax on phone bills, and user fees. The agency operates under a balanced budget and actively applies for grants to stretch tax dollars further. However, a recent assessment indicated that, under its current funding, Skagit 911's infrastructure does not meet the needs of first responders.

Existing technology and equipment are outdated, and some parts of the county lack radio coverage needed to communicate in an emergency. System upgrades are needed to ensure that 911 is not susceptible to cybersecurity attacks that have plagued other agencies.

This November, Skagit 911 may request a sales tax increase of one-tenth of one percent—or 10 cents on a \$100 sale—to fund their system and capital needs. This increase would allow additional capacity for radio coverage, space for more emergency dispatchers and technology upgrades to bring the system to industry standards. As a result, Skagit County would be better prepared for, and able to more efficiently handle, emergencies and natural disasters.

With this increase, sales tax in Skagit County would still be lower than in Snohomish County and comparable to Whatcom County. Retail visitors from Canada and neighboring counties would also contribute to Skagit County's safety infrastructure. Several counties in Washington, including Snohomish, Cowlitz, Kitsap, Thurston and Whitman, have passed similar measures to fund critical emergency needs.

More information on the potential proposed sales tax increase can be found on the Skagit 911 website at www.skagit911.us. Skagit 911 Director Helen Rasmussen also is available to answer questions at (360) 428-3201 or RasmussenH@skagit911.us.

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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.