



Truckee fire assessment goes to voters

District wants to use assessment to hire more firefighters

By Greyson Howard

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The Truckee Fire Protection District is turning to local property owners to increase staff and keep down response times.

Ballots went out Friday to property owners around the district, which includes Truckee, Donner Summit and

other parts of unincorporated Nevada and Placer counties. Voters will have until March 18 to decide on the assessment, which could add \$49 per year to a home, and around \$145 to commercial and industrial parcels.

“In a nut shell my responsibility as fire chief is to not only look at today’s operations, but to also look down the road and insure an appropriate level of service is delivered in the future,” said Fire Chief Bryce Keller. “We recognized that as population grows and call volumes increase, it will be difficult to maintain our response time criteria.”

The proposed assessment would fund additional firefighters, which in turn should help keep response times reasonable, Keller said.

“I think it’s a well-justified fee — to me it seems minimal for what it could provide,” said Steve Funk, president of the Tahoe-Sierra Meadows Community Association.

“To me that response time is critical, be it a house fire in Sierra Meadows or be it a fire like Angora.”

Paying for fire protection is part of the territory when living in the forest, he said.

“Times are tough for everyone, and no one likes increased property tax, but I think people who live up here will benefit from it,” Funk said.

After response times temporarily fell below acceptable standards, Keller said the district made some changes internally to become more efficient.

But looking to the future, as call volumes increase by about 5 percent per year, Keller said it’s going to take more personnel to keep up, and that means more money to pay them.

The district first came up with \$1.7 million as the amount needed per year, Keller said.

The district board commissioned a telephone poll, completing 400 interviews to find out what people wanted

Truckee Firefighter Ryan Ochoa pulls out Engine 92, driving to a call for a suspected propane leak Friday. The Truckee Fire Protection District sent out tax assessment ballots to district property owners on Friday.

Seth Lightcap/Sierra Sun



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from the district, and what they would be willing to pay for it, he said.

They found that people wanted short response times and defensible space programs, said Bob Snyder, president of the district board, and that people were willing to pay around \$60 annually.

“We decided to stay comparable to what North Tahoe did with theirs, and came up with \$49 a year for residential, which shouldn’t burden anybody too bad,” Snyder said.

That will add up to about \$800,000 a year, Keller said, which will bring an additional six firefighters, or two per shift, increasing numbers from 11 to 13 at any given time.

Other items to be funded by the assessment would be improvements to the district’s communications and to the district’s defensible space program, Keller said.

The district went to the Town of Truckee last summer to increase their mitigation fee charged to new development to keep up with growth, but Keller said that funding can’t be used for personnel. It can only be used for new stations and equipment.

Normal revenue for the district’s roughly \$8 million budget comes from a percent of property taxes, ambulance fees for service, a special tax for the Donner Summit area, and state and federal grants, he said.

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