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## Fire Suppression Assessment FAQ

### What is a Benefit Assessment?

A provision in the California Constitution that allows “any levy or charge upon real property by an agency for a special benefit conferred upon the real property”. What this means in our case is that we want to levy a fire suppression benefit assessment upon parcels in our service area for the purpose of enhanced fire suppression services.

### What is a Benefit Assessment District?

It is a *financing tool* Rough and Ready Fire is using to provide specific, enhanced, services to property owners that directly benefit their property.

### What does the fire department want to use the funds for?

The Benefit Assessment District will provide a steady stream of income for the purpose of hiring firefighters that will staff the fire station and respond to calls 24/7, 365.

### Doesn't the fire department already receive money from property taxes?

Yes; but the fire department has historically been minimally funded and has operated entirely as a *volunteer* fire department providing little for salaries.

### Why can't this be handled by volunteer firefighters?

Volunteerism is on the decline in our area, as well as nationwide. Only two of our active firefighters live within the fire district boundaries, and they both have jobs outside the district. This leaves nobody able to respond during daytime hours, and even afterhours, many of the volunteers have a 10- or 15-minute commute to get to the fire station; this results in a very poor response time, if there is a response at all.

### Are you getting rid of the volunteer firefighters or are they being forced out?

Absolutely not! We welcome volunteer firefighters as they are an important part of our heritage. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to find fire departments that will accept volunteers, but we will continue to do so if it provides a benefit to the community. Once trained, volunteer firefighters provide a valuable and needed resource at a fire incident.





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## Isn't the station already staffed?

We have a paid officer on-duty 24/7 and have been hiring summer seasonal firefighters to help with the increasing demands of wildland fire season over the last several years. For the first time, we hired firefighters to be on duty over the winter season of 2018/2019. In order to pay for it, we used money that was raised by selling baked potatoes from the Nevada County Fair. Selling baked potatoes to fund the fire department is not a long-term solution.

## Will my insurance rates go down since the fire station will be staffed fulltime?

This is a difficult question to answer since each insurance company calculates their rates in a different manner, and some rely on ISO ratings more than others. All we have control over is our ISO rating, and even with that, the performance and capabilities of the local fire department only accounts for about half the rating.

## How did the fire department arrive at the assessed amount?

We contracted with an outside engineering firm to use accepted practices to arrive at the special benefit that each parcel would realize, should the assessment pass. The engineering firm looked at our overall budget, call volume, training hours, etc. to establish how much of our resources are dedicated to fire suppression (as opposed to rescue services). They then took this information and the overall dollar amount that we need in order to hire the minimum number of firefighters to provide adequate fire protection, factored in the number of parcels, and the types of homes on those parcels, to arrive at the dollar amount. It's a complicated process that is fully documented and available at the fire station should anyone want to review it.

## If the assessment passes, will it reduce the response time?

It depends on the type of call, but in general, yes. If there is only one person staffing the station and we get a call for a fire, we must wait for volunteers to show up before we can respond. Having two people at the station full-time will allow us to respond right away, and if volunteers show up afterwards, they can be the second-engine in.

## What will happen if the assessment doesn't pass?

We will only be able to afford to staff the station with one person on a regular basis. Other staffing will be evaluated on a quarterly basis and the decision will be based on the budget. We have aging fire equipment that requires replacement, and if funds targeted for equipment are used for staffing, then we will be forced to use the equipment well past its expiration date. The worst-case scenario is if we can't respond to calls on a regular and timely manner, our fire district could be absorbed by a neighboring district, and there is no guarantee that our station would be staffed.

