

LOCAL OPTION TAX DIRECTOR'S "CHEAT SHEET"

The following information is being provided to YRFPD directors to assist them in discussing key points and answer questions about the upcoming Ballot Measure 21-214 request for a renewal, with an increase, in our Local Option Tax.

For questions regarding the history, responsibilities, purpose, organization, and funding of either Yachats Fire or South Lincoln Ambulance, please provide the questioner with copies of "Who are Yachats Volunteer Fire Department and Yachats Rural Fire Protection District?" and "Who is South Lincoln Ambulance?". The information contained in these documents is verified factual.

Q: Why are you asking for an increase?

A: YRFPD has not asked for an increase in our tax levy for operations for 15 years. All operational costs have increased more than inflation since then, including gas, water, and communications, but especially personnel.

Q: What is special about personnel?

A: Although the Department's name is still "Yachats Volunteer Fire Department", we are now almost a fully PAID department. Fifteen years ago, we had 15-20 volunteers and ONE paid firefighter/paramedic. Since then, like most volunteer fire departments in the country, our volunteer base has shrunk, but in our case it has almost completely disappeared. We now have FOUR volunteers on our roster, and of these, one is beyond the age of being able to pull hose, one is only in our district about 40 hours a week, one lives outside the district and is only able to respond occasionally, and only one lives here and mostly works here. Today we have SIX paid firefighter/medics, 2 on shift any time, with vacations/sick/etc. being covered by part-time employees. Within the City of Yachats, there is a documented aging population base, and likely one in the portion of our District to the north, so our base of people from which to draw volunteer firefighters is likely to remain quite limited. We do not believe we will ever be primarily a volunteer department again.

Q: How much additional are you requesting?

A: \$1.00 per \$1,000 assessed value. For a house or business valued at \$350,000, this is essentially \$1.00 per day!

Q: Why do you need two firefighter/medics on shift?

A: For a fire call, it takes a minimum of two firefighters just to be able to pump any water, one to hold the hose and one to operate the pump. For a medical call, regardless of the severity, one medic is limited in the speed with which care can be provided, and at least a medic and an EMT are required just to legally operate the ambulance. Even a simple lift assist is potentially dangerous to both patient and firefighter with just one person. Also, if we were at a one-person level, Lincoln County may likely cancel our Ambulance Assignment.

Q: Are you responding to more calls than before?

A: We now have almost exactly 100% more calls than we had 15 years ago.

Q: I heard you had Bond money left over. Why can't you use that?

A: By law, the money raised from issuing the bonds can ONLY be used to construct and equip the new station.

Q: Why did you wait 15 years?

A: Leading up to the request for the bond, the need for a new station was so important that we didn't want to jeopardize it by asking for an operations tax increase just before the bond request. Then, just after the bond, we didn't want to immediately ask for more operating money. With the Local Option Tax system in place, it is VERY difficult to increase taxes except once every five years when the existing LOTs come up for renewal. Also, no matter what inflation is doing, it is not possible to have an LOT that increases a small amount every year. In retrospect, we may have waited just a bit too long. Taxpayers got a 15 year "holiday" from rising taxes, but that is something that most people probably did not notice.

Q: What about the new construction that is going on?

A: Good question! YRFPD is only able to levy taxes on IMPROVED land. That is, one with a structure on it, so yes, we are cheering on all the builders we see working around us. However, for ONE MILLION DOLLARS of new construction YRFPD only collects \$1,490 per year at our current rate, or \$2,490 at the requested rate. There is currently very limited growth space available within the City of Yachats Urban Growth Boundary, so we would be pleased to see more development between Yachats and Waldport.

Q: Do you bill for services?

A: Residents of the District, who are the ones that pay for us to be here for them, never get a bill from YRFPD for fire, rescue or EMS services. (Note 1) Anyone who is transported to the hospital will receive a bill from South Lincoln Ambulance (SLA) for the use of the ambulance. The rate charged is about 60% of what Pacific West Ambulance charges, and SLA generously allows for payment plans for charges in excess of insurance payments. Besides donations, this is the total income source for SLA. Visitors may get billed by YRFPD for responses, often for vehicle accidents.

(Note 1) Residents who illegally CAUSED an event, such as an illegal burn which we had to extinguish, may be billed.

Q: Do you work with Waldport Fire?

A: Absolutely! We have an automatic Mutual Aid Agreement with Waldport (actually, Central Oregon Coast Fire and Rescue District) and Seal Rock Rural Fire Protection District for any fire calls in any of the three districts. Our firefighters also train with them when the opportunity arises. We also have Mutual Aid Agreements with every Fire District in Lincoln County, and we have one with Lane County for areas to our south.

Q: Is this increase going to fix all of your problems?

A: No. This increase will allow us to maintain our current level of service. We have two additional major areas that need to be addressed in the near future. First, YRFPD has never had to pay for the services of a Fire Chief. When our current volunteer Chief decides to step down, we will immediately need to hire a Fire Chief. This will cost us between \$200,000 and \$250,000 per year, including taxes, insurance, PERS, vacation, etc. This is not addressed in our latest budget.

Second, it is unfortunate, but fire engines do not last forever. We have a Five Year Plan for Apparatus Replacement that has worked quite well for about 20 years, but we have been unable to fund this for the last 5-10 years. This plan should be funded to at least \$175,000-\$200,000 per year at today's costs. That amount should allow us to replace our engines at about their 20-year life, an ambitious, but doable, target.

These two areas must be addressed in the very near future.

Q: Is YRFPD investigating any grant programs?

A: Absolutely! We are continually looking for opportunities to respond to grant programs from the Federal, State, Tribal and local levels, as well as private grants. We regularly receive significant discounts from one of our insurance providers by actively participating in their loss

prevention program. Grants are usually for specific THINGS, but not for operations. There is a relatively new Federal grant that may provide us some support in firefighter hiring, and we will be aggressively pursuing that in the November/December time frame. If we are successful in obtaining any relief in our personnel costs, that money will be redirected to the vehicle replacement or Fire Chief areas of the budget.

Q: I heard that your Tax rate is higher than other Fire Districts. Is this true, and why?

A: Yes, this is true. The demographic of each Fire District is unique. YRFPD is mostly very rural with a rather small "city" within it. The City of Yachats, from whom we receive NO financial support, is very small and not very dense, especially its commercial core. In order to meet the requirement to have a fire station within 5 miles of any residence, YRFPD maintains three fire stations, one upriver and one at the northern end of the District, Corona Court, across from Copeland's, along with our main station. There is at least one engine at each station. The low density of improved property in the District produces lower tax revenue than many other Districts, even if our call volume is higher. Highway 101 generates an occasional call, but doesn't contribute to our tax base.

Q: Have you thought about merging with Central Coast?

A: Yes; in fact, the Fire Districts of Lincoln County funded a formal, detailed, professional study of the question of mergers about ten years ago. Due to many reasons, some very complex, such as funding, and others as simple as the shape of the populated areas of the county, the company conducting the study determined that there was little, if anything, to be gained by merging. The merging of several smaller groupings within the county was also studied, and the results were the same. Little has changed since that study, so there is no reason to believe that the situation is any different today.

Q: What does YRFPD need from me?

A: First, we need your YES vote on Measure 21-214. Second, we need your support among your friends and neighbors. Also, there are two information papers recently released to provide our patrons, new and old, with detailed information about Yachats Fire and South Lincoln Ambulance Incorporated. These are highly recommended for your reading. They are available on our website at YRFPD.ORG, or at the fire station, or by calling the Fire Station at 541-547-3266, M-F 8:00 to 3:30, unless we are out on a call.