Fire Department Operating Levy Proposed Renewal

The Cornelius Fire Department Operating Levy, which was approved in 2015, will expire in 2020. A measure that if passed, would renew the levy for the current amount will appear on the ballot during the May 2019 Special Election. If the measure passes the cost would remain the same, $.487 per $1,000 of assessed value. For an average home with a value of $200,000 that would amount to about $96 year.

The Cornelius Fire Department is called a combination department, utilizing both career firefighters and volunteers. City of Cornelius has about 45 volunteers in our department, but the volunteers are not in the station most of the time – they respond from home. None of the volunteers work in the City, so during the day, there aren’t enough volunteers in the community to respond.

To meet the City’s emergency response requests, Cornelius has a firefighter intern program. The Fire Department has three interns on duty each day, working under the supervision of a career firefighter. These student volunteers are college students, working on their fire and emergency medical services degrees at a local community college. The students get a stipend to help with their tuition and books, and in exchange for helping Cornelius provide staffing response they get training, education and experience to help them achieve their career goals. This student intern and volunteer program costs about $129,600 per year for nine interns. They are paid $1,200 per month.

Until 2015, the City had been receiving federal grant monies to fund the combination department, so there was always a career firefighter and student interns on duty. Beginning in 2015, the City was no longer able to renew those federal grants. The expiring 2015 levy has funded two firefighter/paramedics and the nine interns in the program. Until this levy had been approved in 2015, Cornelius was the only city in the county to not have 24-hour paramedic coverage available on all emergency calls.

The Cornelius Fire Department responded to over 1900 9-1-1 calls last year for service. If passed the renewal levy would be the same tax rate amount and if renewed would permit Cornelius to continue providing the paramedic coverage and interns to assist the career firefighters/paramedics on each call. If the levy is renewed, Cornelius would also be able to continue providing advanced life support on a routine basis (one on each shift), which is a service all of the surrounding communities receive.

If the levy is renewed for an average home with a value of $200,000 that would amount to about $96 year. Cornelius would also be able to maintain three firefighters on a fire engine, which would reduce homeowners’ fire insurance and would permit the City to continue to provide consistent advanced life support in the community.

If the levy does not pass, when the current levy expires in 2020, the assessment of $.487 per $1000 of assessed value would no longer be made. Two career firefighter/paramedic positions would be eliminated and funding supporting nine student volunteers would be eliminated. Current daily minimum staffing for a Cornelius fire engine is one career firefighter and 2-3 student volunteers. Failure of the levy would reduce staffing to one person during the day, for fire and emergency medical responses on two out of three shifts. The Cornelius Fire Department would not be able to support calls for service 24-hours per day and seven-days per week.

“This information was reviewed by the Oregon Secretary of State’s Office for compliance with ORS 260.432.”