



## **Background and Needs**

For many decades the Shoreline Fire Department (SHFD) and Northshore Fire Department (NSFD) have talked off and on about some type of regionalization. These discussions have included options such as a service contract, merger, and regional fire authority (RFA). These efforts have received more attention especially over the past eight years, which included the potential of multiple fire departments across north King County joining together in a RFA. Ultimately, it was decided to start smaller and build into something bigger. One of the more obvious consolidations was between SHFD and NSFD.

In 2022 the NSFD entered into a contract, or an interlocal agreement (ILA), with SHFD to provide full services to the Cities of Lake Forest Park and Kenmore. The SHFD is an all-hazards fire department providing the following services through different Divisions:

- Administrative Services,
- Emergency Medical Services (BLS),
- Emergency Medical Services (ALS),
- Fire Suppression,
- Training as part of the North King County Training Consortium,
- Fire Marshal Services,
- Public Information and Education through Community Outreach,
- Technical Rescue (Low/High Angle, Confined Space, Trench, Surface Water),
- Hazardous Materials Operations,
- Mobile Integrated Health Care,
- Maintenance (Fleet, Facilities), and
- Emergency Management as part of the City of Shoreline Fire.

The ILA included the transfer of all NSFD employees to SHFD as the two Departments would be operating as one. The NSFD still exists with a Board of Fire Commissioners and District Secretary, who ensure that the ILA is being executed properly, and the Department still owns the existing fire stations and apparatus. They also have taxing authority, receiving revenues from the fire tax levy and fire benefit charge (FBC), which they use to pay the contract with SHFD and NSFD centric expenses. This ILA resulted in many benefits including improved levels of service as described below:

- Improved depth in dedicated administrative positions.
- Succession development.
- Increased Fire Marshal Office capabilities.
- Expanded PIO and PEO services.
- Improved Mobile Integrated Healthcare integration, including a peer support program.
- Increased BLS unit coverage.
- BLS transport patient continuity of care.
- Access for professional career growth in the ALS program.
- Improved ALS personnel integration into suppression activities.
- Improved Firefighter safety.
- Improved driver training and competency.
- Improved truck training, operations, and coverage.



- Information Technology.
- Improved fleet maintenance.
- Improved facilities maintenance.
- Better coordinated emergency management.
- Improved health and safety officer coverage and management.
- Diversified revenue sources.
- Increased experience in developing other revenue sources.
- Experience with other public funding opportunities.

While the ILA provides many benefits and efficiencies, it is not a full consolidation. It has been an expectation that after showing success of consolidating under an ILA, that there would be an opportunity for something more complete, such as a merger or RFA. Either a merger or RFA would allow for accessing the remaining efficiencies; financial, operational, and logistical. The two Departments are already accomplishing many of the things that a RFA will formalize; one administration, one labor group representation, one training division, and all employees working as one organization. After deliberation by both Department's Board of Commissioners it was decided to pursue a RFA.

There are many advantages of joining the two Departments together in a RFA, including overall financial savings as it removes the last pieces of redundancy. However, one of the more significant reasons pertains to governance. Establishing a RFA is similar to starting a new fire district in which you establish the governance model you prefer. This would potentially allow for NSFD Commissioners to sit on the new RFA governing board and have the opportunity for direct input. Currently, NSFD has authority over NSFD assets and the execution of the ILA, but not over the strategic operation of the SHFD. A RFA would also remove some barriers and allow other organizations to potentially join the new organization with governing board approval in the future.

Regionalization in whatever form has been an industry trend for decades. It has been wholeheartedly embraced in other States, and even in other counties around Washington. The King County area has been slower to move in this direction, but is gaining much momentum. The biggest reason is the service needs and expectations for fire departments continue to increase every year, while there is also increased pressure on taxes that residents pay. A RFA will allow for highest level of service and provide the best efficiencies, ensuring the people we serve will have the best service while stretching their tax dollars as far as possible.

The following is a summary of our needs and challenges:

1. The ability to respond to emergency situations by fire protection and emergency services jurisdictions has not kept up or progressed with the community's needs and special service demands. Anticipated increase in population will likely exacerbate this problem.
2. Providing fire protection and emergency medical service system requires a collaborative partnership and responsibility among local and regional governments, the private sector, and the communities we serve.
3. There are efficiencies to be gained by regional fire protection and emergency medical service delivery, while maintaining local control.



4. Timely development of critical, significant projects can best be achieved through enhanced funding options for regional fire protection, emergency services, specialized rescue, hazardous material mitigation, and other services.
5. Northshore and Shoreline have a long history of a cooperative approach to meeting the needs of their citizens. The Districts have operationally worked together on a daily basis for many decades, all IAFF Union employees are represented by one body, the Departments have engaged in a joint training consortium since 2020, they have been led by one Fire Chief and administration, functionally operating as a single provider since 2022.
6. On March 14, 2024, the Boards of Commissioners of each District authorized the formation of a Planning Committee to explore the feasibility of forming a regional fire authority and to draft a regional fire authority plan.
7. On approval of this Plan by both District's Boards of Commissioners, the Districts will then be asking its citizens to consider combining all functions and services currently provided by the two jurisdictions into a single entity, called a Regional Fire Authority.