

CENTRAL GRAYS HARBOR REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY (CGHRFA)

FAQS

Information concerning the November 2, 2021 ballot measure asking to form the Central Grays Harbor Regional Fire Authority.

WHAT IS AN RFA?

A Regional Fire Authority (RFA) is a special purpose district established by voters in a service area that provides funding for fire and emergency medical services (EMS). State law provides the framework for fire districts, cities, and other local government jurisdictions to consider forming a RFA as a means to gain service efficiencies while retaining local control. Creation of a RFA is authorized by state law. (RCW 52.26)

WHY CREATE AN RFA?

In a study on fire services commissioned by the Cities of Aberdeen and Hoquiam (Emergency Services Consulting International {ESCI} Fire Department Cooperative Services Feasibility Study), it was found that the current status of the two fire departments was not sustainable. To establish a fire and emergency services department that would be viable into the future, it was recommended that the two departments merge operations.

By creating the Central Grays Harbor Regional Fire Authority (CGHRFA), stability and sustainability could be achieved by...

- Economics of scale
 - Larger buying power, more personnel to allow for staffing options as needs dictate
- Providing depth of response
 - Pooled resources can provide depth of response across the system
 - Ability to seamlessly better handle multiple calls as well as more complex incidents
- Resource allocation shifted to reflect risk
 - NFPA 1710 – Response times and staffing guidelines
 - NFPA suggests how many firefighters should be on a particular scene at a time, and what tasks should be completed.
 - Effective Response Force
- Services can be enhanced by design
 - Proactive outreach: Prevention/Outreach has been deferred secondary to increased calls volume- not having time/ resources to conduct classes, inspections
- Leveraging the strengths of each agency while minimizing weaknesses
- Creating equity across tax base
 - All citizens within the CGHRFA service area will be charged in the same fashion
- Enhancing recruitment and retention of personnel

Effective Response Force

(ESCI Feasibility Study pg. 41)

Each department's minimal daily staffing resources was compared to the NFPA and CFAI criteria. Not surprisingly, this comparison shows neither department alone, or combined, is currently able to independently meet the staffing standard for up to a Moderate Risk incident. *It must also be noted that this comparison assumes all on-duty personnel and response units are available to*

respond to the incident in any one department, and does not consider off-duty response backfill. Concurrent calls can severely impact either department's ability to safely and effectively mitigate a Moderate to High Risk incident.

Why not another option instead of a RFA?

OPTION	ADVANTAGE	DISADVANTAGE
Status Quo	No increased cost, nothing changes	Current system will struggle to meet the needs of the communities they serve on an individual basis
Municipal Fire District	Similar to a RFA	Untried, no track record
Contract for Services (Administrative Only)	No cost increase, nothing changes, except we have a chief balancing the needs of 2 separate departments.	Two city administrations and councils along with multiple budgets to manage. No economies of scale, separate union contracts to follow
Contract for Services (Operational)	Consolidates all operations under 1 administration.	Loss of local control for City being contracted for. Potential increase in costs to fulfill contract for services.
Regional Fire Authority	Economies of scale, depth of response, increased services, increased recruitment and retention	Increased cost, loss of "Identity"

DO THE FIREFIGHTERS SUPPORT THIS PLAN?

Yes. Both firefighter union locals, Aberdeen IAFF Local #2639 & Hoquiam IAFF Local #315, support this plan and have taken steps to ensure the transition goes as smoothly as possible.

HOW WOULD THE CGHRFA BE FUNDED?

There are many mechanisms available to fund an RFA. The initial funding for the CGHRFA would come from the following:

- **Fire Tax Levy**
\$1.00 per thousand of assessed valuation
 Each City's tax rate would be decreased in this amount to offset the fire tax levy.
- **EMS Levy**
\$0.50 per thousand of assessed valuation
 Hoquiam currently has an EMS levy; this would replace the EMS levy held through the City. This is a new levy for Aberdeen.
- **Ambulance Utility Fees**
\$12.33/month
 A decrease of the current \$23.87/month for Aberdeen and \$19.23/month for Hoquiam
- **Fire Benefit Charge**
 Charges based on the size and type of improvements in real property. Rate based on a formula contained in Appendix C of the CGHRFA Plan. The benefit charge will have discounts

available for senior and low income households as well as for buildings equipped with a fire sprinkler system.

- **EMS Transport Fees**
Fees collected for ambulance transport (no change)
- **Contracts for Service**
Contract for fire and EMS services to various districts and entities. Aberdeen and Hoquiam currently have differing charge methods. This would be negotiated with districts so all districts are billed in the same fashion

Current		
	Aberdeen	Hoquiam
Square Footage	1,694	1,694
Assessed Value	\$150,000	\$150,000
<i>City Property Taxes</i>		
City - Regular Levy	\$408.97	\$442.63
City - EMS Levy	N/A	\$60.61
City - 2013 Fire Truck	N/A	\$28.19
City - GO Bond	N/A	\$22.68
Ambulance Utility Fee	286.44	230.76
TOTAL	\$695.41	\$784.87

Proposed		
	Aberdeen	Hoquiam
<i>City Property Taxes</i>		
City - Regular Levy	\$258.97	\$292.63
City - 2013 Fire Truck	N/A	\$28.19
City - GO Bond	N/A	\$22.68
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$258.97</i>	<i>\$343.50</i>
<i>Fire & EMS Services</i>		
RFA - Basic	\$150.00	\$150.00
RFA - EMS Levy	\$75.00	\$75.00
Benefit Charge	\$401.61	\$401.61
Ambulance Utility Fee	\$147.96	\$147.96
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$774.57</i>	<i>\$774.57</i>
TOTAL	\$1,033.54	\$1,118.07
ANNUAL INCREASE	\$338.13	\$333.20

RENTALS AND APARTMENTS:

Rentals and apartments will be charged based on square footage. This is a result of what it would take to fight a fire in that structure. A small 800 sq. ft. single family home takes less resources (water, personnel, time) to mitigate than a 2 story multifamily dwelling. An undeveloped empty lot will not be subject to the Benefit Charge. This is not a new formula, just new to this area. It is an attempt to make charges equitable to the respective building owners.

WILL CONSOLIDATION SAVE MONEY?

Yes, but not right away. The CGHRFA planning Committee (along with ESCI Study) found that both Aberdeen and Hoquiam need investment to maintain the quality of fire and emergency medical service. The most cost-effective way to approach this is to make these investments as one cohesive entity.

ISN'T THE SYSTEM WORKING NOW?

The current system is not sustainable into the future to adequately respond to calls for service as outlined in the ESCI study. Both departments have been under funded and understaffed for years. The systems abilities will be improved as outlined in this study in this FAQ sheet.

Currently, the departments are responding to multiple calls for service at the same time. In 2020, Aberdeen was on overlapping (2 or more calls at the same time) 43% of the time. 29% of the time for Hoquiam.

- Hoquiam – Ability to handle up to 2 basic aid calls
- Aberdeen – Ability to handle up to 3 basic aid calls
 - MEDIC/CPR/MVA type calls typically require additional resources, decreasing response capability.

WHY DO YOU NEED MORE STAFFING?

As detailed in the ESCI report, both Aberdeen and Hoquiam Fire Departments are understaffed by a combined 10 positions. We are looking to add 7 positions, 6 firefighters and 1 Medical Services Officer.

The new firefighter positions would be added to the staffing to help bolster response capabilities. The Medical Services Officer (MSO) will be a new position to oversee the EMS operations of the CGHRFA. This work is currently being done by individuals who are Captains within their respective department. Balancing their workload of that as an Officer and a Medical Services Officer while on duty has been problematic, and results in increased overtime costs to ensure that required MSO duties are completed.

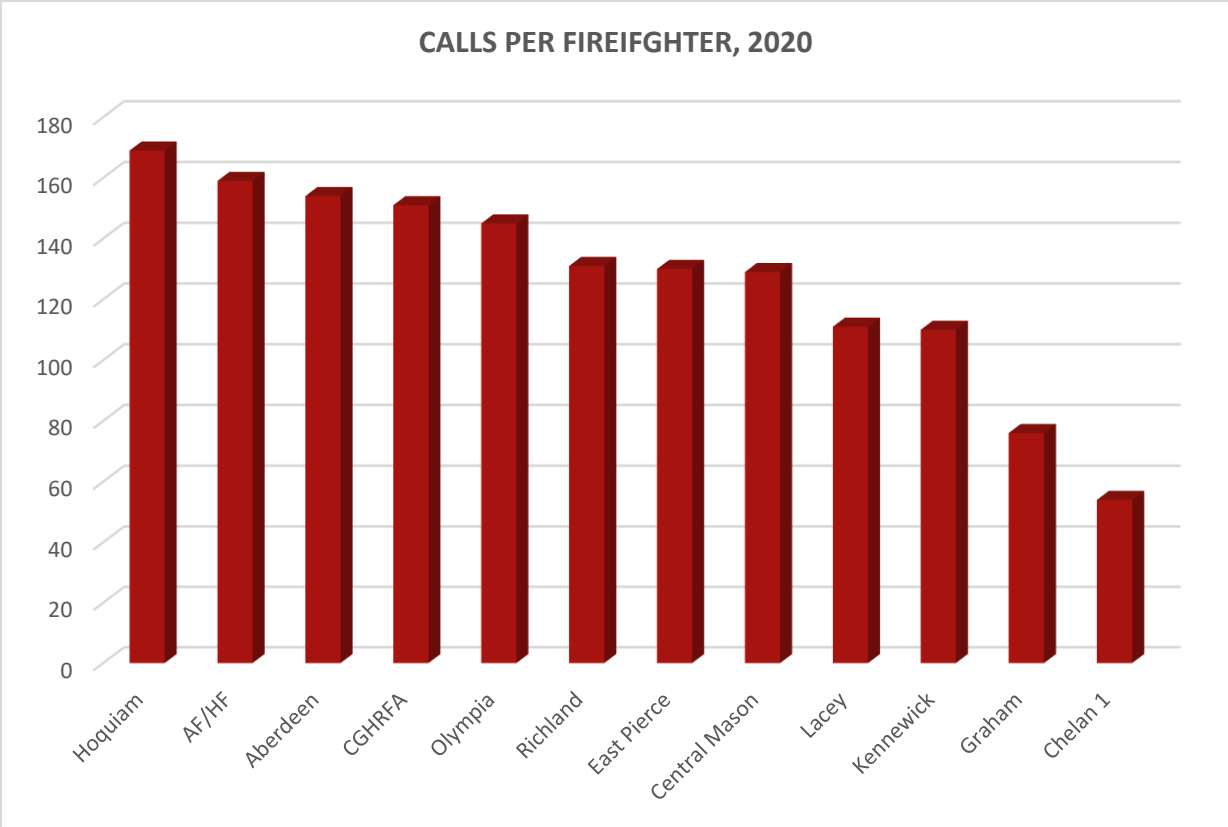
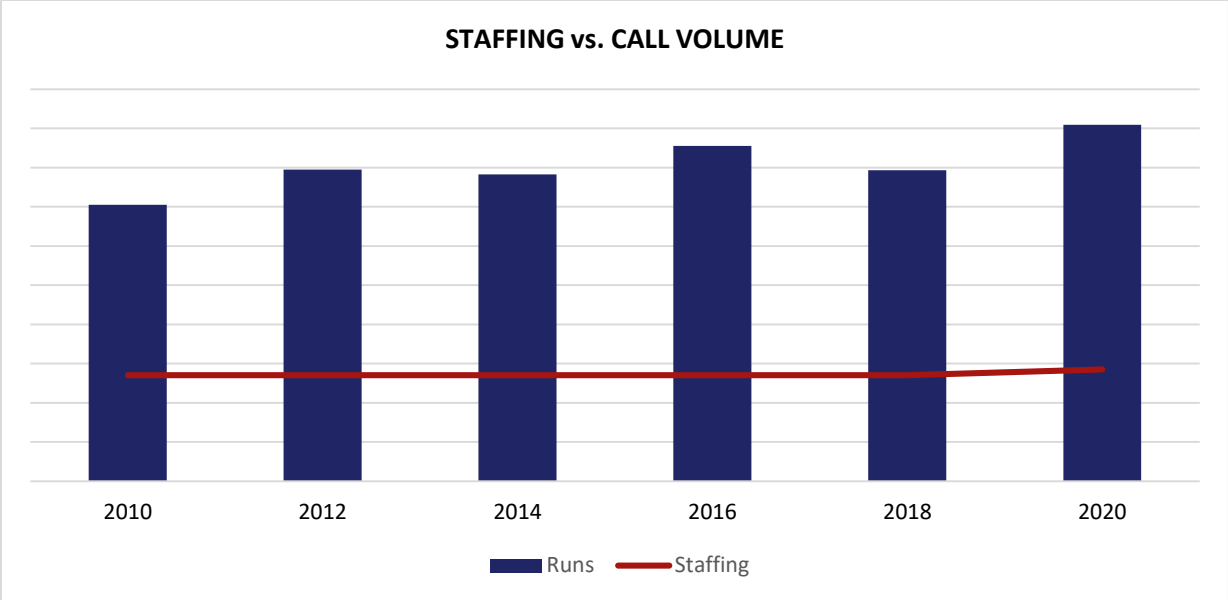
Both Aberdeen and Hoquiam run a substantial number of calls as compared to other departments in the state.

	Population	Sq. Mi	2020 Runs	FF's	FF/1,000 Pop	Calls per FF
Hoquiam	8,500	13	3,558	21	0.40	169
AF/HF Combined	25,300	25	9,088	57	0.44	159
Aberdeen	16,800	12	5,530	36	0.47	154
CGHRFA	25,300	25	9,088	60	0.42	151
Olympia	51,534	20	12,754	88	0.59	145
Richland	56,399	42	7,190	55	1.03	131
East Pierce	97,500	153	11,163	86	1.13	130
Central Mason	36,044	157	8,027	62	0.58	129
Lacey (Thurston 3)	100,000	70	14,196	128	0.78	111
Kennewick	81,000	29	10,418	95	0.85	110
Graham (Pierce 21)	66,970	70	7,344	97	0.69	76
Chelan 1 (Wenatchee)	44,000	70	2,749	53	0.83	54

Information from respective department's 2020 annual report.

The combined call volume of the Aberdeen and Hoquiam Fire Departments continues to rise. In 2010, the 2 departments responded to a combined 7,053 call for service. In 2020, there were a combined 9,088 calls for service – an increase of 29% over the past 10 years.

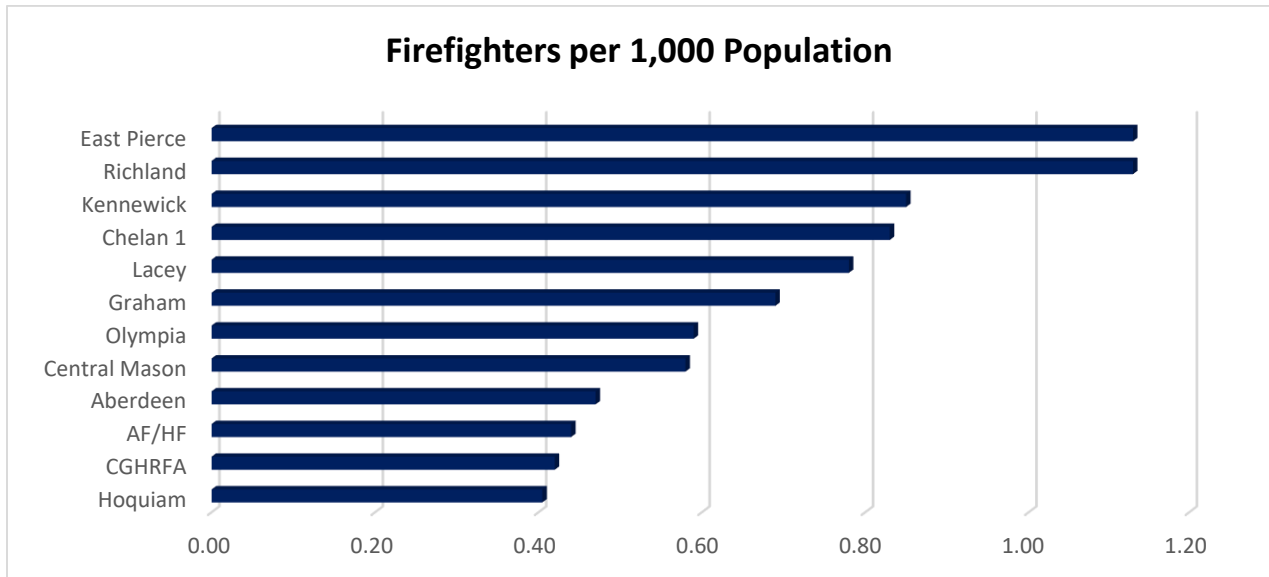
During this time, the staffing increased by only 3 positions between the 2 departments. Even with this minimal increase in staffing, the call per firefighter has continued to increase. In 2010, there were 131 calls per firefighter. In 2020, this figure was 159, an increase despite the addition of the three firefighter positions.



Currently both departments run overlapping calls – Aberdeen 43%, Hoquiam 29% - which means that they are involved in 2 or more incidents at the same time.

- Hoquiam – Ability to handle up to 2 basic aid calls
- Aberdeen – Ability to handle up to 3 basic aid calls
 - MEDIC/CPR/MVAs’ typically require more resources, decreasing response capability – Example – A cardiac arrest in Hoquiam requires a response of all on-duty personnel, leaving no one for other responses.

Of the departments that call volume was compared, the number of firefighters per 1,000 of population was also reviewed. Aberdeen and Hoquiam provided less firefighters for their communities as compared to these other agencies.



While the addition of firefighter positions does not drastically improve the number of firefighters per 1,000 of population, what it does do is provide a slight improvement in the calls per firefighter.

DON'T BOTH AGENCIES WORK TOGETHER NOW?

Yes, both Fire Departments have a long-standing partnership in regards to automatic and mutual aid responses. While this system is now being utilized, it can create delays in responses to time critical incidents. Combining both departments into the CGHRFA would streamline responses and improve response times.

The agencies are currently sharing a Fire Chief and a Fire Marshal. This cooperation will have to be reexamined for sustainability if the two departments do not merge.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CURRENT FIRE DEPARTMENTS?

By creating the CGHRFA, a new agency will be formed with only 1 mission, to provide the community with fire and EMS related services. The fire departments of both cities would be removed from City government, allowing the governing board of the RFA to concentrate on the needs of the community as it relates to services provided by this new agency.

WILL WE STILL HAVE OUR LOCAL FIREFIGHTERS AND FIRE STATIONS IN THE CITY?

Yes, all staff and emergency personnel will become employees of CGHRFA. Fire stations, personnel, and equipment would remain as is today, just under a single, cohesive, more substantially staffed department capable of seamlessly handling increased call volume to Fire and EMS incidents.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS IN SERVICE WILL THE RFA PROVIDE?

- The goal of the CGHRFA is to adequately provide for the safety of the community through system enhancements.
- Consolidated department administration - Instead of having 2 departments, both with a fire chief and an assistant fire chief, the CGHRFA would be able to operate with 1 fire chief and 2 assistant fire chiefs who would oversee various aspects of the department's operations.
- Medic Units – currently only 1 staffed medic unit, the RFA plan will allow for the addition of 1 dedicated medic unit.
 - In most instances, when there is an EMS call, all but 1 of the fire engines are effectively taken out of service due to current staffing levels.
- Streamline responses across current boundaries.
 - Closest unit to respond regardless of Myrtle Street –
 - Hoquiam Eastside station's primary response area will include parts of West Aberdeen.
 - Aberdeen's Headquarters station can be the secondary response for part of East Hoquiam.
 - Decrease in delays that happen when using the mutual aid model.
- Additional resources to respond during the initial stages of an incident based on incident complexity.
 - Ability to perform time critical tasks with increased manpower.
- Adds the ability for each fire engine to arrive with adequate personnel to preform rescues at a structure fire when response is an initial call.
- Ability to handle multiple calls for service.
 - More personnel staffed across the system provides a more robust response capability for the entire community.
- Ability to be proactive by providing prevention activates (public education, inspections, outreach).
- Ability to perform training with not being pulled away due to calls – dedicated training time.

WHY NOT JUST HIRE MORE FIREFIGHTERS AND NOT MERGE?

The hiring of additional firefighters as 2 independent departments would not improve the fire and EMS systems in the community as a whole. The benefits that have been outlined could not be achieved if the departments operate as 2 separate entities with 2 separate geographical boundaries. City budgets do not have the ability to fund these positions without either discontinuing other services or by increasing taxes.

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR GRANTS TO HELP FUND THIS?

Staff are continuously looking for grant funding to help support department operation. These grant opportunities are generally small in size with limited use. As for staffing grants, FEMA offers the SAFER grant. This grant is very competitive and only lasts for a period of time. They cannot be relied on to create overall stability into the future.

WHO WILL GOVERN THE RFA?

THE CGHRFA will be governed by a five-person commission, one voted from the city of Aberdeen, one from the City of Hoquiam and one "At-Large" position. The Cities of Aberdeen and Hoquiam will both appoint one advisory, non-voting member selected from their respective city councils.

WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS:

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