Our Growing Fire Protection and Emergency Services Dilemma

The Challenge

Our Big Bear community is AT RISK when a medical emergency, fire, natural disaster or other emergency strikes.

The Big Bear Fire Department (BBFD) is one of the busiest rural fire departments in the region, serving approximately 25,000 permanent residents. The department has experienced a 15.4% increase in emergency medical and fire incidents from 2014-2016. There is clear evidence that emergency incidents will continue to increase at a rapid rate for the foreseeable future.

Last year, we responded to 4,564 emergency medical service and fire incidents. The firefighting and paramedic staff serving our community hasn’t increased in 15 years, even though our population and the number of emergency incidents have increased substantially.

We have a large local senior population that requires increased emergency medical services. **58% of BBFD emergency medical incidents are for people over 50 years of age.**

With a growing demand for emergency services, a shoestring operating budget and virtually NO funding help from the State or County, it’s getting a lot harder to serve Big Bear’s increasing demand for emergency medical response, fire protection and seasonal readiness so we are prepared when an emergency strikes.

The Need Is Great!

- In 2017, more than 57% of all 911 calls in our community were medical emergencies, such as heart attacks, strokes and car accidents. The call volume is the highest we have seen, and that percentage is trending up for 2018. Every minute counts in a medical emergency.

- The American Heart Association says brain deterioration starts between four and six minutes after a person stops breathing. The average 911 response time in Big Bear is currently 9 minutes 26 seconds.

- Weather conditions are fueling larger local fires like the most recent devastating fires in Big Bear including the Summit Fire, the Holcomb Fire and the Lake Fire. Big Bear firefighters need the resources and tools to fight fires effectively when a fire strikes here in the Big Bear Valley.

- Big Bear Fire Department does not have enough personnel or life-saving equipment to meet the current service demands for day-to-day operations. Our community’s risk profile is a mix of emergency medical calls that are considered high-frequency and low-risk to the community and a mix of wildland and structure fire emergencies which are considered low-frequency and high-risk to the community.
Our Proposed Solution

After an extensive 2-year study, the Big Bear Fire Department is asking residents to consider the following options for your local emergency medical and fire service needs. These services include: maintaining or strengthening Big Bear firefighters and paramedics efforts to provide advanced life-saving emergency medical services, prevent “fire,” life and property loss and improve response times to local emergency incidents.

Option 1: Do Nothing

- Without additional funding for the Big Bear Fire Department, cuts will be required to existing services. This will affect maintaining life-saving emergency medical services, prevention of life or property loss and an increase to existing response times to local emergencies.
- Residents will experience fire department emergency response failures and significant delays as critical life-saving services will be reduced.

Option 2: Maintain Existing Services

- Maintains current Big Bear Fire Department service levels.
- Does NOT address the growing demand in our community for emergency medical, fire and community risk reduction services.
- Does NOT fix the number of level zero personnel and apparatus draw-downs the department faces (i.e. ALL resources are assigned to calls—therefore, responders cannot get to the next 911 call). Currently BBFD is at 82 level zero draw-downs for this year. This is almost certainly a pathway to future emergency response failure, or delayed response when seconds count.
- Requires a local revenue measure (approximately $90 parcel tax/annually OR $7.50 a month).

Option 3: Strengthen Services

- Ensures that we have enough firefighters and paramedics to respond quickly and reduce response times to 911 medical emergencies and fire incidents.
- Maintains the number of professional firefighters and paramedics needed to keep our community safe.
- Improves ambulance response capability and capacity with an additional ambulance placed into service and reduces the number and frequency of level zero draw-downs.
- Repairs or replaces emergency medical equipment and fire protection equipment.
- Increases local homeowner’s ability to maintain or acquire fire insurance in a climate in which many insurance companies are canceling policies or limiting coverage areas within very high fire-risk communities.
- Requires a local revenue measure (approximately $150 parcel tax/annually OR $12.50 a month).

Option 4: Optimal Services

- Includes everything listed under OPTION 3 and...
- Improves fire response by placing an additional fire engine and/or rescue squad into service daily.
- Significant reductions in fire and 911 medical emergency response times.
- Eliminates level zero draw-down to the point it is a rare occurrence (i.e. ALL resources are assigned to calls—therefore, responders cannot get to the next 911 call).
- Requires a local revenue measure (approximately $240 parcel tax/annually OR $20.00 a month).

Community Input Is Welcome

BIG BEAR FIRE DEPARTMENT welcomes input from you in our study process. It is our responsibility to keep YOU informed to ensure adequate emergency medical service, fire protection and community risk reduction services for the future.

For more information, visit our website at: www.bigbearfire.com

OR please contact Fire Chief Jeff Willis to share your input.
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Provided for your information only as a public service from Big Bear Fire Authority.