

# Community Update



10/22 Photo Courtesy of Marsha Hobert

## EVFPD board considering mill levy increase and bond to address equipment, facility, and staffing needs

The Estes Valley Fire Protection District provides firefighting, emergency, wildland and other services for an area of 66 square miles that includes the Town of Estes Park, unincorporated Larimer County and parts of Rocky Mountain National Park. The District serves about 11,500 full-time residents and many local businesses, as well as an estimated 5 million visitors who come to the area to enjoy the National Park and other local amenities.

The District was formed in 2010 by voters to provide enhanced fire and emergency services for the Town of Estes Park and the surrounding areas. Since its creation, the District has focused on core capabilities, including:

- **Operations:** Providing emergency response from two stations using multiple apparatus, including engines, tenders, brush trucks and a ladder truck.
- **Prevention:** Providing resources and assistance to residential and commercial construction to help reduce fire risk. This includes fire safety inspections and education to help keep the community safe.
- **Training:** Ensuring that the District's career and volunteer members receive ongoing training to respond to structure and wildland fires, vehicle accidents, water rescues, rope rescues and other emergencies,

▶ Visit [estesvalleyfire.org](https://www.estesvalleyfire.org) for more information

▶ Take EVFPD survey at [bit.ly/EVFPDSurvey](https://bit.ly/EVFPDSurvey)



as well as personal safety, first aid, and other training to keep our community safe.

- **Wildfire:** Addressing the mitigation of risk and preparation needed for living in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). This includes implementing fire bans, providing education, reducing fuels, and issuing burn permits.

These core services are carried out by the District's career staff of eight employees. Since 1907, the District has depended on community volunteer members as a critical part of providing these services. The District typically has 30 to 40 trained volunteers working as firefighters, serving an important role in safeguarding the Estes Valley community.

# EVFPD population and wildfire risk increasing

## EVFPD's Challenges

Our community is growing, and the demand for EVFPD services is increasing. Since the District was formed over a decade ago, the region's population has increased by more than 2,000 residents (20% growth), and visitation to the Estes

There have been several significant wildfires just outside of EVFPD's boundaries over the past 10 years, including the Kruger Mountain, Cameron Peak, East Troublesome, Calwood and High Park fires. Unfortunately, wildfires and wildfire risk are not going away in our

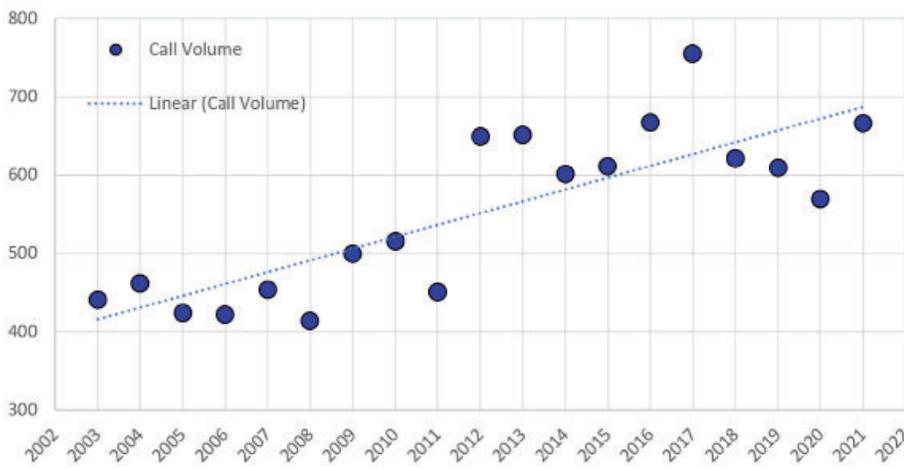
approximately half of its funding from a 1.958 mill property tax and another half from a portion of Town of Estes Park sales tax. The District also collects fees from plan review, operational permits, and impact fees and actively applies for grants to address funding needs.

The District's tax collections have increased over the past decade, and EVFPD has utilized the additional tax revenue to modernize its emergency vehicles and firefighter gear and added staff to address prevention and increasing demands for service. EVFPD has done this without adding debt while also building a reserve fund to prepare for budgetary and operational emergencies.

For local taxpayers, our current mill levy only makes up 2.6 percent of their property tax bills, and much of the District's sales tax share from the Town of Estes Park is paid by tourists and visitors.

When compared to neighboring fire districts, Estes Valley Fire has the lowest property tax rate. Poudre Canyon FPD is 21.142 mills, Allenspark is 7.507 and Pinewood Springs is 6.271. Even when EVFPD's sales tax and property tax numbers are combined, the District has an equivalent mill of 5.618. Even if voters approved a substantial increase for EVFPD, the District would still have the lowest property tax rate for a fire district in the region.

## EVFPD Calls for Service: 2003 to 2021



Park region and Rocky Mountain National Park has jumped from 3 million visitors to nearly 5 million last year (67% growth).

Along with this growth comes an increase in emergency calls. In 2010, EVFPD received just over 500 calls per year; the District now averages nearly 700 calls for service per year. We are handling this increase in call volume and population with the same number of facilities and equipment as in 2010. This directly impacts the amount of time it takes to respond to an emergency and the readiness of our volunteer firefighters to meet the needs of our community.

The District has been able to increase its full-time staff from 5 to 8 positions over this time due to the increasing Estes Park sales tax, which helps with our ability to respond.

On top of that, wildfires and wildfire risk continue to grow.

mountain communities. Fifteen of the largest wildfires in Colorado's history have happened in the past 10 years, with Cameron Peak and East Troublesome being the largest in state history.

## Current Funding

Up until 2009, the District was part of the Town of Estes Park. Voters approved creation of the District that year and authorized property and sales tax funding for emergency services. The District receives

## Estes Valley Region Property Tax Summary

|  | Mill Levy    | Percent of Total |
|--|--------------|------------------|
| Park R-3 School District General Fund        | 27.341       | 36.8%            |
| Larimer County                               | 22.425       | 30.1%            |
| Park Hospital                                | 7.505        | 10.1%            |
| Estes Valley Recreation and Park District    | 6.069        | 8.2%             |
| Estes Park Library District                  | 4.544        | 6.1%             |
| Park R-3 Bond Repayment                      | 3.550        | 4.8%             |
| <b>Estes Valley Fire Protection District</b> | <b>1.958</b> | <b>2.6%</b>      |
| Northern CO Water Conservation District      | 1.000        | 1.3%             |

# Strategic Planning process identifies service, staffing, and facility improvements to address growth and risk

Responding to growth, increased service calls, and the threat of wildfires and other emergencies, the District launched a Strategic Planning initiative to identify service improvements, staffing needs, equipment and facility updates, and other investments in the District's services. The objectives of the District's Strategic Plan include:

1. Increasing services to better protect lives and property within the District,
2. Evolving as demands for service and risks to the community continue to increase, and
3. Maintaining balance between revenue sources such as sales tax and property tax.

As part of the Strategic Plan, the District identified the following improvements to help address the first two objectives:

- Decreasing wildfire risk by the addition of a full-time Fuels Mitigation Supervisor and seasonal fuels crew to conduct mitigation work within District,
- Improving fire prevention by adding educators to support existing commercial structures and to keep up with increasing plan review submissions,
- Improving operational readiness and emergency response by adding full-time officers and volunteers to provide more consistent round-the-clock staffing,
- Constructing and equipping a new station to reduce response times and provide much needed additional office space for career and volunteer staff.

## Funding Proposal and Spring 2023 Election

The staffing, service and facility improvements identified in the Strategic Planning process are estimated to cost about \$1.75 million annually. To accomplish this, the District would need additional revenue.

At this point, the District is considering a few options to provide this funding:

1. Increasing the current mill levy rate from 1.958 to 4.9 mills. This increase of 3 mills would be about \$153 per year or \$12.78 per month for a \$750,000



*EVFPD crews work the Cameron Peak Fire in August 2020.*

home in the District. **The mill increase would provide about \$1.15 million, not the full \$1.75 million for all work in the Strategic Plan.** The remainder would come from another revenue source, such as a sales-tax election in the Town of Estes Park.

2. Issuing \$20 million in bonds for construction of a new station to increase capacity and improve response. Over a 20-year bond, this would equate to approximately 4 mills, or an additional increase of \$211 per year or \$17.61 per month for a \$750,000 home. By doing this, the District can make immediate investments. Currently EVFPD has no debt.
3. Working with the Town of Estes Park to pursue additional sales-tax support to maintain a balance between property and sales taxes. This would require an additional election within the Town in 2024. This would allow additional funding to be generated from visitors.

It's important to note that all three of these proposed funding options require voter approval in an election. EVFPD is able to conduct an election for its mill levy and/or bond proposals in May 2023. The District's Board and management believe it's important to have this election as soon as possible so the District can have direction on its Strategic Plan priorities.

Concurrently, the District is working with the Town of Estes Park on a potential sales-tax election for 2024. The current plan for the District is to have a blended approach that balances local support and capturing the increase in tourism.



## Community Input Needed

In order for the District's Board and management to refine its Strategic Plan and funding proposals, we need input from our residents and business owners. The District is asking community members to complete a short survey about the District's priorities and funding proposals. The Board will use the information gathered as part of this survey—as well as public input through community meetings and other outreach—to decide whether to place questions on the 2023 ballot and also how to move forward with the Town of Estes Park.

# Community Opinion Survey

Please take a few minutes to read the questions below, review with other household members, and complete the survey. All surveys are anonymous, and your response will in no way be associated with your name. To take this survey, please do one of the following by November 30, 2022:

- Take this survey online at <http://bit.ly/EVFPDsurvey>
- Drop off at 901 N. Saint Vrain Avenue, Estes Park 80517
- Email the survey to [info@estesvalleyfire.org](mailto:info@estesvalleyfire.org)

**Q1.** In general, how would you rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest, the job that Estes Valley Fire Protection District does protecting the community and providing emergency and firefighting services?

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

**Q2.** In your opinion, should EVFPD's proposal to **add staffing** to improve wildfire and operational response be a high, medium or low priority, or not a priority at all?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High priority         | <input type="checkbox"/> Medium priority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low priority          | <input type="checkbox"/> Not a priority  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/No opinion |  |

**Q3.** Should EVFPD's proposal to **upgrade its facilities**, including addition of a new fire station, be a high, medium or low priority, or not a priority at all?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High priority         | <input type="checkbox"/> Medium priority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low priority          | <input type="checkbox"/> Not a priority  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/No opinion |  |

**Q4.** Please select a statement below that most closely represents your opinion of EVFPD's proposal:

- EVFPD needs to address the challenges presented by its regional growth and wildfire risk and should seek an increase in funding to make those improvements.
- EVFPD should tighten its belt and find ways to maintain its equipment and provide services within the current budget and current staffing levels
- Other, please explain:

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**Q5.** If EVFPD puts a funding question on the ballot, please rank on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest, which elements are most important to your possible support:

Wildfire mitigation program staff, including full-time and seasonal personnel

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

One full-time firefighter per shift to provide 24/7 coverage

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

Resident volunteer fire program to bring additional volunteers to our community

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

Construction of and equipping a new fire station to improve response coverage and add office space

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

Improving prevention by adding educators and inspectors and resources for current and future buildings

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

Continuing to supporting the District's volunteer firefighters and opportunities to expand that program

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

Maintenance of current equipment

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

**Q6.** Please rank on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "no support at all" and 5 being "very supportive," your opinion on the following proposed funding sources:

Increasing the District's mill levy from 1.958 to 4.900 mills

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

Receiving approval to issue \$20 million in bonds to be paid over 20 years, at approximately 4 mills

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

Working with the Town of Estes Park to increase sales tax funding for fire services

1      2      3      4      5      Unsure

**Q7.** If an election were held today, would you vote “yes” in favor, or “no” to oppose, the following potential question:

*Shall Estes Valley Fire Protection District taxes be increased by up to \$1,150,000 in 2024 and in each year thereafter by whatever additional amounts are raised from an operating mill levy imposed at a rate of 4.9 mills with such tax proceeds to be used for the following district operational and capital expenses to ensure reduced response times, address growth, and improve safety for career and volunteer staff, community members, and visitors, including:*

- *Providing additional staff to address wildfire mitigation and prevention education;*
- *Providing additional career firefighting staff to respond to emergency calls; and*
- *Maintaining District facilities, vehicles and emergency equipment?*

Yes     No     Unsure

**Q8.** *Shall Estes Valley Fire Protection District be authorized to issue \$20 million in bonds, with a maximum repayment of \$31.7 million, with such bond proceeds to be used for the following district capital expenses to ensure reduced response times, address growth, and improve safety for career and volunteer staff, community members, and visitors, including:*

- *Constructing and equipping a new fire station;*
- *Renovation of existing facilities;*
- *House additional staff used to address wildfire, education, and operational needs;*
- *Providing housing for volunteers and employees of the District?*

Yes     No     Unsure

**Q9.** If you selected No or Unsure on either of the proposed ballot questions, please provide the most important reason for that decision from the list below:

- District should tighten its belt and do more with current resources.
- Generally do not support tax increases and/or debt.
- Property taxes are already too high in the District.
- Need more information.
- Concerned with priorities the District has identified.
- Other important uses of taxes such as schools or roads.
- Concerned about inflation and economic slowdown.
- Other, please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Q10.** What are your concerns, if any, regarding this proposal, as well as any comments about the District?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Finally, a few questions for demographic purposes:*

**Q11.** Are you female or male?

Female     Male     I'd rather not say

**Q12.** What age range do you fall within?

18-34     35-49     50-64  
 65 or older     I'd rather not say

**Q13.** How long have you lived in the District?

1-5 years     6-10 years     11-20 years  
 21 years or longer     I just moved here

**Q14.** Where do you live within the District?

Town of Estes Park  
 Unincorporated Larimer County  
 Outside of the Estes Valley Fire Protection District

**Q15.** How would you prefer to receive information about EVFPD’s proposal and other information from the District?

Public Meetings/Town Halls  
 Regular e-mails to established list  
 Facebook     Nextdoor  
 District web site     No preference

If you selected e-mail, please consider providing your e-mail address to the District:

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Estes Valley Fire  
Protection District**

901 N. Saint Vrain Ave.  
Estes Park, CO 80517

**Please Open: COMMUNITY SURVEY INSIDE and important information  
about Estes Valley Fire Protection District**

## **Your input will help shape how EVFPD will move forward**

The Estes Valley Fire Protection District Board of Directors is considering a mill-levy and bond question for a May 2023 election. The Board will use the information gathered as part of this community opinion survey—as well as other public input—to decide whether to place the questions on a spring ballot.

## **Quick survey about EVFPD**

Please take a few minutes to fill out the included survey and comment on the proposal. Consider this a town hall meeting around your kitchen table. The survey should take only a few minutes to complete and can be found online at the address below.

## **Questions and Comments**

If you have questions about Estes Valley Fire Protection District and the District's budget, please contact:

**David Wolf, Ph.D.**, Fire Chief  
(970) 577-0900  
[info@estesvalleyfire.org](mailto:info@estesvalleyfire.org)

## **EVFPD Board of Directors**

The Estes Valley Fire Protection District is governed by a five-member Board of Directors who are elected to oversee the budget and policy decisions made within the District.

**Jon Hodde**,  
President/Chair

**Larry Leaming, Ph.D.**  
Vice President

**Brian Tseng, M.D., Ph.D.**  
Treasurer

**Dave Hamrick**,  
Secretary

**Ryan Bross**,  
Director

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