

Whitefish Fire Service Area Board  
PO Box 1311  
Whitefish, MT 59937

May 1, 2020

Dear Whitefish Fire Service Area Homeowner,

You are receiving this letter because you are a homeowner in the Whitefish Fire Service Area. As the Board of the Whitefish Fire Service Area and your neighbors in the Fire Service Area, we are regularly evaluating the best approach to protect our community, lives and property from fire and other natural disasters. Currently, our fire services are provided by the City of Whitefish, pursuant to a five-year agreement. We pay a set fee for these services. Whitefish has done a good job for the Fire Service area for years and is now proposing a new five-year agreement.

After considerable deliberation, we believe that there are two options worth consideration. First is a proposal from the Whitefish Fire Department to continue its provision of fire service in our area. The agreement would require payment of \$326,000 in 2021, rising to \$426,500 in 2026. This represents a 30+% increase between 2021 and 2026. Notably, five years ago our household rates increased from \$90 annually to \$144 today, an increase of 60%.

Operationally, it would be easiest to continue to pay Whitefish for this much-needed service. We are concerned, however, that the 6% per year increase Whitefish has proposed is unreasonable and not reflective of the long-term sustainable partnership this type of utility requires. We also believe that the other option could permit us greater responsiveness, flexibility, and cost management.

The second option is to establish a volunteer fire department of our own with a paid fire chief. We currently own a debt-free fire hall off Whitefish Stage Rd. where we can immediately house the chief, volunteers, and equipment. We have sufficient reserve funds on hand that we can pay for start-up costs, hiring of a chief and the purchase of equipment without raising the current annual fee. We also expect sufficient savings from operating the volunteer fire department to be able to acquire a new fire hall west of Whitefish in the next few years. This will allow us to decrease our response times and allow us to better assist neighboring fire departments. We believe that we can provide the same or better service as what we currently receive from Whitefish.

To be successful, we will need 10-15 volunteers. Based on the experiences of other volunteer fire departments throughout the Valley, we believe this is easily achievable. Please contact us if you are willing to volunteer (see contact info below). We will supply the training, so come join us!

We need to hear from you on this matter so your Board can make an informed decision. Our timeline requires a decision by June 2020 with implementation in July 2021. Please e-mail us or drop us your written comments before June 1, 2020. Our e-mail is [jdyonwfsa@gmail.com](mailto:jdyonwfsa@gmail.com) and our mailing address is WFSA, PO Box 1311, Whitefish, MT 59937. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Best,

Mark Carlson, 406-407-1573

Jim Dyon

Dennis Oliver

Jimmy Deats

Kyle Newbury