



Fire District Benefit Charge

by Peter Rimbos, GMVUAC Corresponding Secretary

On Monday, May 4, the Area Council held its Regular Monthly Meeting at the Maple Valley Fire Station at 22225 SE 231st St and via Zoom. Major topics discussed were: (1) Fire District Benefit; (2) Local Subarea Plan; and (3) Multi-Family Tax Exemption.

Fire District Benefit

Puget Sound Fire Authority's Fire Chief, Mark Jones discussed the proposed fire benefit district charge. Mark has been 35-yr firefighter and public safety officer.

Fire Chief Jones stated funding for the Fire District is based on property taxes, which is not a very stable funding model. However, State law authorizes, with the approval of voters in a service area, regional fire authorities to assess a Fire Benefit Charge on residential and business property owners.

Fire District revenues face a problem: as property taxes are restricted, revenues generated fall behind inflation. To maintain revenues what is proposed is a two-part funding model with property taxes going down plus adding a benefit charge based on risk (e.g., what it takes to fight a fire) with commercial paying more than a residence. It considers that those who benefit more from fire protection services (i.e. large structures and high fire-risk structures) should pay more for that service.

Fire Chief Jones clarified that the Fire Benefit Charge is applied only to improvements to real property, not land. People can go to <https://pugetsoundfire.org/benefit-charge/>, type in their Parcel Number, and determine their personal benefit charge.

The Fire Benefit Charge system was proposed in 2017 and since has been voted down twice. This new proposal will be presented for a vote in August of this year. If approved, it would take effect on 2027's property statements.

Local Subarea Plan

The Area Council discussed the status of its review and comment on the *Preliminary Draft* of the Greater Maple Valley/Cedar River (GMV/CR) Community Service Area (CSA) Subarea Plan—a long-range community vision over the next 20 years.

The Area Council four subject-matter committees—Economic; Environment; Growth Management; and Transportation—each discussed its efforts since the public release by King County of the *Preliminary Draft* on April 15 [see [Plan Site](#)]. Those efforts have included: a review of the *Preliminary Draft* and preparation of a set of comments. So far, each committee has concentrated on the Community Priorities and Policies listed in each main chapter.

In general, the Area Council's review is on-time with the following key dates remaining: Thursday, May 14—*Special Area Council Meeting* to conduct a final internal review of each Committee's Com-

ments and vote on a final package and Monday, May 18, the Public Comment period closes and the Area Council will submit its formal set of Comments.

The Area Council encourages members of the Public to provide comments to King County [here](#).

Multi-Family Tax Exemption

The City of Maple Valley is contemplating granting a Multi-Family Tax Exemption (MFTE) authorized by State law (RCW 84.14). In so doing, due to a tax shift, unincorporated area residents could pay higher property taxes. The Area Council wondered why and how? Area Council members discussed the results of their research on this topic:

1. The City would approve use of an MFTE for a particular proposed development possessing an affordable housing component and forward a Certificate to that end to the King County Assessor. [*]
2. The King County Assessor then adjusts the tax rolls based on the City's Certificate, which states that the qualifying property is exempt from property tax—all property tax, and then identifies all the affected taxing districts (School, Fire, Water, etc.) that would be affected.
3. Consequently, residents in such taxing districts (with Urban and Unincorporated) will experience a slight increase in their property taxes for as long as the property in question is qualified under the program, which could be upon to 20 years.

[*] *To qualify as affordable housing under this State statute at least 25% of the units must be built by or sold to a qualified nonprofit or local government that will assure permanent affordable homeownership. The remaining 75% of units may be rented or sold at market rates.*

While the Area Council considers this unfair, i.e., “*taxation without representation*,” but it is legal. The Area Council has communicated with Maple Valley City Council members and has attended Council meetings where this has been discussed. The City has not made a final decision to use the MFTE—which is optional, not required, but could soon.

Next Area Council Meeting

The next Area Council monthly meeting will be held **Monday, June 1, 2026**, from 7 - 9:30 PM at the Maple Valley Fire Station at 22225 SE 231st St (across from the KC Sheriff's Precinct).

Meetings are held on the *first* Monday of the month (except for Holidays, when they are held on the *second* Monday). All meeting announcements, agendas, and Zoom information are posted on the [Area Council's Website](#) and local *NextDoor* platforms. You can also find us on our [FaceBook page](#). Each meeting begins with an open Public Comment period where anyone can voice concerns, comments, etc.

Area Council Membership

Your Area Council, founded in 1978, is one of the longest continuously active local councils in King County. It serves as an all-volunteer, locally recognized advisory body to King County on behalf of all rural unincorporated area residents living in the Tahoma School District (TSD). The Area Council, in “*working to keep the Rural Area rural*,” collaborates *regionally* with other King County Rural Area organizations through both the *Joint Rural Team* and its *Joint Transportation Initiative*.

The twelve-seat Area Council has four open seats. If you wish to join, please send an e-mail to: info@gmvuac.org *or* attend (either in-person or virtually) a monthly meeting and express your interest. To be eligible to join as a *Member* you need to live *within* the TSD.

Residents, even those not living *within* the TSD, are eligible to become *Associate Members* who can serve on any Area Council Committee: *Economic, Environment, Growth Management, Trans-*

portation, Public Relations, or Train Show—please see the Area Council's [Website](#) and use the drop-down menu under *Committees*.

On our Home page recent *Monthly Meeting Summary Articles* can be in the *2026/2025 GMVUAC Monthly Meeting Articles* box (or by using the drop-down menu under *Correspondence*).