VOTE NO ON LWFR BOND ISSUE, THIS TIME, AGAIN

David Stoller, Lake Wenatchee Resident

Lake Wenatchee Fire and Rescue (LWFR) is asking us for money again.

Do you realize that passage of the LWFR Proposition 1 (the Bond), in addition to last year's levy, would put our tiny community on the hook for 2.99 million dollars every year for the foreseeable future (at least 20 years)? Let me explain.

In January 2024 LWFR ran a levy suggesting that their revenue was decreasing and inadequate to maintain the provided services because their effective levy rate had decreased from $0.82/$1000 of assessed valuation in 2020 to $0.58/$1000 valuation in 2024. **The reality was that their revenue was not decreasing.** The levy rate went down not because they were receiving less but because the valuation of our properties went up. The money received by LWFR is based on the assessed value at the time of the levy. The levy does not change during the term of the levy if the calculated rate changes. The newly passed levy was for $0.95/$1000 valuation of each taxable property within the district. It was a double whammy… increased rate and an increase in assessed value.

The numbers are clear. Revenues to LWFR, after the 2024 levy passed went up from $1.02 million dollars per year from the 2020 levy to $1.89 million dollars per year after the 2024 levy. A staggering 80.5% increase to just maintain services.

Now the LWFR is asking us to pass a 20-year bond for $15 million dollars. A bond is different from a levy. A bond is essentially a mortgage with us, the taxpayers, as collateral. **With this bond, we will be responsible for paying principle plus interest of about $1.1 million dollars per year for 20 years.**

If this bond issue passes, we will be taxed $2.99 million dollars per year (2024 levy + 2025 bond) for the next 20 years. That seems like a big ask for a community of our small size.

Now, you might ask, as I have, do we need to pay this to keep us safe, to maintain our fire insurance, maintain our fire and emergency medical services? Well maybe we do. **BUT** the fire department has not made their process of needs assessments open, transparent and open to public comment. I have not been able to see their data or their process of decision making. I have not been able to offer my comments during the planning process. The first that most of us have heard of this bond issue was when the signs went up. So, I do not honestly know if this is appropriate or not. Informed voters need more information and an opportunity to participate in the process.

I suggest that we VOTE NO on this bond issue now. There is no emergency. Let us begin a process of open dialogue with public meetings and workshops to allow for open and constructive dialogue, review of alternatives and for public participation in the development of a plan with a bond issue to follow, if needed, in a future election.

VOTE NO NOW, and let's let LWFR know we want a more open process.

ADDENDUM: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Since I wrote this piece in early July, LWFR released incomplete plans for their "pie in the sky" new fire station. The plans were dated 2023. Plans included sleeping quarters for 5 on duty firefighters. So where are salaries and benefits for 2 shifts of 5 coming from? I don't know. There is notation for two "future" buildings. Where is funding for these buildings coming from? I don't know. Where have you been LWFR? Why have you neglected to engage us in the development process? LWFR has also just scheduled a community presentation to present their plans…for 2 weeks **after** our ballots will be sent out and a scant week prior to the last day our ballots can be returned. There is no opportunity for our community to participate in this planning process other than by voting!

They can do better, we deserve better.

Vote NO this time on LWFR Proposition 1