

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why is the County implementing a new fire services fee?

As part of the functional consolidation of the City Fire Department and the County Emergency Medical Services Department, the unincorporated area of Leon County is getting a higher level of service than previously. Specifically, there will be an increase of one Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician at each rural station, a 50% increase in staffing from 2 to 3 personnel.

For the new fiscal year, the County reduced property taxes by \$8.8 million; in addition, the County is expecting a reduction of \$2.6 million in state-shared sales tax collections. Combined, this is greater than \$11 million in reduced revenue. In addition, the budget anticipates less revenue from a slowing of building activity and a decline in the County's level of reserves. Overall, the total budget is decreasing \$20.2 million or 7.6%. Since FY2007/2008, the budget decreased by \$37.5 million, or 13% total. The new fire fee is estimated to generate \$6.8 million.

To address the overall reduction in revenue, the County imposed a number of budget changes:

- 61 positions eliminated over the past two years; more than 5% of the Board's total workforce
- No raises for County employees
- Over the past two years, cost savings of over 50% (\$1 million) through a competitive process to purchase property/general liability insurance
- Created a public/private partnership to dispose of recyclable materials saving \$284,500 annually
- Over the past two years, instituted a hiring and travel freeze
- Reduced hours of operation at the branch libraries for an annual cost savings of \$386,985
- Reduced take home vehicles from 49 to 1 (a 24-7, on-call public works supervisor)

The decline in revenues noted above (more than \$11 million) caused the County to evaluate alternative revenues. The County considered a number of options, in addition to the Fire Services Fee:

- Increases to either the Solid Waste or Stormwater Fees. Both of these fees are not adequate to cover the current cost of services. Neither fee has been raised in over a decade. Both of these operations are intended to operate as businesses with their fees fully supporting the program; however Solid Waste receives \$1.4 million and Stormwater receives over \$3 million in general fund revenues. The County did not raise either of these fees.
- Imposition of an additional five-cent gas tax. Currently, the County's transportation program is not supported completely by gas taxes but rather gets a portion of its support through general fund revenues (more than \$2.3 million). The County determined that this was not the time to raise gas taxes.
- Raising the millage rate to offset the \$1 billion decline in property values countywide. The County determined not to pursue raising the tax rate.

To gauge how well the County is managing its resources, an annual survey is conducted of all Florida counties. The County continues to pride itself on how well we compare:

- *Our budget of \$842 per capita is the 5th lowest budget per capita out of all 67 counties in Florida with a range of \$590 to \$4,791 per capita.*
- *Our staffing of 6.6 employees per 1,000 residents is the 6th lowest number of employees for all 67 counties with a range of 4.4 to 22.6 per 1,000 residents.*

Frequently Asked Questions (Cont.)

Q: How will this enhanced service affect me?

With additional firefighters/EMTs at the rural fire stations, there will be an overall improved emergency response countywide. By adding more medically trained firefighting personnel to areas with limited staffing, residents and businesses will benefit from the improved effectiveness and flexibility of first responders.

Q. Why does a fire truck come when I call for an ambulance?

Firefighters from the Tallahassee Fire Department and local volunteer fire departments serve as medical first responders on most emergency calls. They extricate patients from vehicle collisions, burning buildings and other hazardous conditions and assist Leon County Paramedics in patient assessment and stabilization. All Tallahassee Fire Department first responders are trained emergency medical providers, either Emergency Medical Technicians or Paramedics, which is critically important particularly in the first few minutes of an emergency.

Q: When will I be billed and how will I pay the fee?

Leon County Residents on the City Utility service will pay for these enhanced public safety services via their monthly City utility bill.

Leon County Residents who are NOT on city utilities will pay the Fire Service Fee either through a direct quarterly bill or on their annual Property Tax bill received in November. This fee is payable along with your property taxes.

Q: Why did I stop receiving quarterly billing statements for this fee?

If you did not make quarterly payments every quarter that was due then the property was removed from the quarterly billing system and put on the tax roll for the Fire Service Fee. This means that the fee will be on your annual Property Tax bill.

Q: How much is the fee?

- The fee varies depending on a few factors. The residential fee will be split into two categories based on residents' proximity to fire stations: Zone 1 and Zone 2.
- Zone 1 includes all businesses and residences within five miles of two or more core fire stations, which is predominately in the areas closest to the urban core of the city, and Zone 2 would include all other properties. Zone 1 residents will pay \$44.75 quarterly per single family residential, and Zone 2 residents will pay \$40.25 quarterly per single family residential. (A map is available online at LeonCountyFL.gov so that you can determine in which zone you live.)
- For non-residential units, the rates are based on square footage and on the following categories: Commercial, Industrial/warehouse and Non-Government institution. (Depending upon size and zone, the rate ranges from \$27 to \$37,912.)
- Places of worship associated with religious institutions will be exempt.

Q: What will happen if I do not pay the fire services fee?

If you are not a City of Tallahassee Utilities customer, the fee is included on your annual property tax bill. Failure to pay this fee will result in the same consequences as not paying your property tax bill.

City of Tallahassee Utilities customers' fee is included in their monthly utility bill. If the customer chooses not to pay this fee which is part of the total utility bill, service will be disconnected for non-payment of bill.

Q: Where should I go if I have more questions?

For more information, please visit *LeonCountyFL.gov* or call (850) 606-5300 or *Talgov.com* (Fire Department) or call (850) 891-2799.