

## **We Are Ready**

By Chief Kevin O'Brien, Lake Stevens Fire

Accidents and emergencies happen. You can't predict when and where.

When you work in emergency services, what you can—and must do—is be ready to respond to save lives and property.

Here at Lake Stevens Fire, we are ready to protect you, your loved ones, home or business every single day.

We do our best for every alarm call, but there's another challenge that can sneak up on you, and that's preparing and planning for the future.

Doing so takes vision, collaboration and the courage to tackle tough questions.

- What challenges will we face in the next 10 years?
- How can we stretch every tax dollar to protect a growing population?
- What reforms do we make now to prepare for the changing needs of the community?
- What partnerships can we form with the community to do a better job?

*A growing population*—The biggest challenge we face is a growing number of calls for fire and emergency medical service. Snohomish County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state. In the last six years, total calls in our fire district have grown 35 percent. In 2016, our department responded to 5,655 calls, with 76 percent of those being EMS-related.

*Demand for service exceeding revenue* – Our fire district is financially sound: we're debt-free, operate under a balanced budget and have adequate reserve funds. However, we are seeing the demand for emergency services skyrocket, while our ability to raise revenue is limited to one percent per year.

We are ahead of this issue before it became a problem.

Because of the growing gap between costs and revenues, we undertook a strategic planning process to identify what personnel, facilities, apparatus and revenue is required to keep our growing community safe. The Lake Stevens Fire Strategic Plan 2017 is a blueprint for how we will operate over the next 10 years, and I wanted to briefly share some highlights with you here:

*1. Provide a High Level of Service that is Responsive to Community Growth and Development* –

We will anticipate and meet the emergency service needs of our community as it grows. We also will partner with neighboring agencies where possible to improve efficiencies.

*2. Reduce Community Risk* – We will continue to invest in fire and injury prevention programs. It is far more cost-effective to prevent medical emergencies, car accidents and fires than to send firefighters and paramedics out to help.

*3. Operate Sustainably and Responsibly* – We will continue to look for more efficient ways to operate. All financial decisions will be public and transparent, and we will communicate effectively with the community about our revenue needs.

*4. Cultivate a Culture of Success* – Lake Stevens Fire is comprised of highly trained professionals working as a team to save property and lives. That means making sure every firefighter, paramedic and member of our team has access to the latest training and pathways to professional development.

This was a significant undertaking for our agency. I want to thank the citizens, stakeholders, firefighters, and other experts who gave their time and energy to make this happen.

We are ready today. And with your help and support, we will be ready to answer the call, at any time of night or day, in the future.

On behalf of Lake Stevens Fire, thank you for the opportunity to serve.

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*Lake Stevens Fire Chief Kevin O'Brien can be reached at 425-212-3044. Lake Stevens Fire provides fire suppression and emergency medical service to 44,000 people over 42 square miles. More information about the fire district can be found at [www.lsfire.org](http://www.lsfire.org). The vision of Lake Stevens Fire is to provide the highest level of service possible to our community through proactive planning, preparedness, partnerships, and taking care of people.*