



San Juan County Public Hospital District No. 1
Contact: Nathan Butler, PIO
(360) 378-2857 butler@sjcphd1.org

San Juan Island Fire and Rescue
Contact: Chuck Dalldorf, PIO
(916) 248-381 chuckdalldorf@gmail.com

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San Juan Island Emergency Medical Services Integration Planning with San Juan Island Fire and Rescue Continues

Friday Harbor, WA -- A joint San Juan County Public Hospital District No.1 (which operates EMS) and San Juan County Fire Protection District No. 3 committee tasked with integration of EMS with Fire and Rescue continues preparations to bring emergency services into one organization.

“Integration of EMS with Fire and Rescue is completely focused on the level of emergency services we can provide our community, not just today but especially into the future. To be sustainable, we need to maximize resources to provide quality, cost effective emergency response,” said Fire Chief Norvin Collins.

The process of integrating EMS and Fire involves many steps as this extensive planning process moves towards implementation. The next step in the integration process is a planned agreement for administrative management of EMS by the Fire District, pending approval from both governing Boards in September or October 2019.

The proposed administrative agreement is solely focused on administrative services. It creates a single point of leadership during the integration process to coordinate leadership and operations as well as collaborate in developing a combined budget.

“This experience of working under Fire Chief Collins will be essential in helping us explore the benefits of integration before actually going through the process of legally moving EMS to the Fire District,” said Interim EMS Chief Karl Kuetzing. “I’m excited to work with him on behalf of the public.”

Fire District Chairman Bob Jarman added, “One of the big advantages of beginning with an agreement for administrative services is that we can slow things down some, be more deliberate, and take our time as we go through the necessary ballot measures over the next year or two, and ensure that we are communicating with the public, volunteers, and staff about their needs and concerns.”

A draft of this Administrative Services agreement is posted on the hospital district website, <https://sjcphd.org/integration>, and will be discussed at the hospital district’s Regular Board Meeting on September 25th, 3:00 p.m., at the Fire District Meeting on October 9th at 3:00 p.m., and later in October during a joint board meeting. Proposed revisions regarding an agreement for administrative services are too extensive to feasibly address them next week in a joint meeting as was originally planned. Updates will be posted to our website.

The next step will be to align the boundaries of the Fire District with EMS. The districts are working with the Town of Friday Harbor and some of the outer islands (Stuart, Johns, Henry, etc.) toward the possibility of annexing into the Fire District, possibly in April 2020. The following fall or in 2021, a funding vote will be held so that the Fire District can begin providing EMS service directly, while the current provider will cease collecting revenue. EMS service will then be fully provided by the Fire District. The above link has more information.

Hospital District Superintendent Pamela Hutchins said, “The best practice in emergency care today, not only in Washington but around the country is provided by integrated EMS and Fire emergency services. We know we can achieve a higher level of emergency response more efficiently throughout San Juan Island and our island communities by combining emergency resources.”

