



San Juan County Public Hospital District No. 1  
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### **Integration of EMS and Fire Suspended**

This week in a Special Board Meeting the hospital district, in a unanimous vote, suspended the integration of San Juan Island EMS and San Juan Island Fire and Rescue. This project was initiated in 2018 with a Citizen’s Advisory Group, making this action a significant change for the district.

All interagency discussion, planning, or steering committee work of integration between SJIEMS and San Juan Island Fire and Rescue are suspended immediately, until “such time as the governing bodies of both organizations agree to resume discussions.”

The Board’s resolution cited many reasons. At the top of the list was the postponement of the annexation of the Town of Friday Harbor into the Fire District, previously scheduled for the April 2020 election. A successful vote for annexation would have helped align the boundaries of the two districts and ensured continued coverage of the Town for both Fire and EMS services. Additionally, it would have given town residents direct representation on the Fire District Board.

The April election change, like many things right now, was a product of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis that has affected the plans of many institutions in ways that are still uncertain. The Board’s resolution states, “the financial impact of the COVID-19 emergency will not be known for some months and perhaps years, and financial forecasts and a comprehensive management plan are not currently available as the situation requires.” The Board’s resolution further states, “stable leadership and management of SJIEMS is essential to successful delivery of emergency medical health care services within its district.”

The Board also withdrew its offer of an Interlocal Agreement with the Fire District, which it had previously offered in November of 2019.

One positive product of this process has been the licensing of San Juan Island Fire and Rescue as a Basic Life Support – Aid agency (non-transport). We appreciate their ability to assist on EMS calls and anticipate long term benefits from this collaboration.

Board Chair Anna Lisa Lindstrum said, “We appreciate the hard work of everyone through this process. Combining one agency with another is a major project that creates uncertainty and stress even in the best of times, and even in a best-case scenario. It also takes a significant amount of time and resources. We cannot afford either right now. We hope that this project can continue later, but for the moment we decided that it was important to ensure our ability to deal with the immediate crisis and to provide stability to our staff and volunteers during an uncertain time.”