

Sonoma County Fire Prevention & Response Measure

Frequently Asked Questions

What is this ballot measure?

The Sonoma County Fire Prevention & Response Measure was written by local firefighters and fire chiefs, who believe the measure addresses a critical public safety need facing Sonoma County. Below is the ballot question that will appear on the March 2024 ballot:

IMPROVED AND ENHANCED LOCAL FIRE PROTECTION, PARAMEDIC SERVICES, AND DISASTER RESPONSE INITIATIVE AND SALES TAX PETITION

To improve and enhance local fire prevention, protection, emergency paramedic services and disaster response throughout Sonoma County by: improving vegetation management to prevent wildfire spread; attracting and retaining qualified, local firefighters; improving response times; and updating firefighting facilities and equipment, shall Sonoma County establish a ½ cent sales tax until ended by voters, providing approximately \$60,000,000 annually, with annual audits and citizen oversight, and increase its annual appropriations limit to allow expenditure of the proceeds?

What is the goal of the measure?

To provide for more efficient, effective, and sustainable fire response, paramedic services, and wildfire prevention and response capabilities that protect the health and safety of Sonoma County residents, business owners, and visitors.

Why does Sonoma County need additional resources for fire prevention and preparedness?

Like many counties in California, Sonoma County has faced major challenges in recent years when it comes to the critical funding needs facing fire services as we all prepare for future wildfire and the impacts of winter storms. The annual threat of both is now a reality that isn't going away, and the Fire Chiefs are concerned that the current County-wide fire service delivery structure, funding, and system structure isn't enough.

While our county grows and public safety demands increase, the public we serve needs and expects prompt, efficient and effective emergency service everywhere at any time. Our specific concerns include that the system is not meeting National Fire Protection Agency standards in all parts of the county.

Several service gaps exist, especially in the more rural areas where there are currently extended response times to critical medical emergencies and vehicle accident victims. There are also significant delays in getting an effective fire fighting force on scene to keep small fires from becoming major incidents.

How would Sonoma County residents benefit from this measure?

Under the recommendation of Sonoma County's Fire Chiefs, the measure will focus on creating a regional plan based on population density, call volumes, station coverage, current service gaps, and special hazards to advance a comprehensive long-term strategy covering all jurisdictions.

It will also:

- Improve emergency response times
- Increase wildfire prevention, preparedness, and response
- Expand paramedic services
- Staff up red flag and winter storm services
- Provide staffing to rural and underserved communities
- Support an improved local 911 dispatch center
- Enhance vegetation management and fuels reduction by funding a dedicated fuel reduction crew, 12 fire inspectors across the region and an executive director position at Fire Safe Sonoma.
- Improve infrastructure
- Provide collaborative technology platforms

When will this measure appear on the ballot?

Thanks to more than 21,000 signatures from Sonoma County residents, the measure will appear on the March 2024 ballot. Based on current law, at least 51% of Sonoma County voters casting ballots in this election must vote "yes" on the measure.

How much money would be generated from the measure? What would be the revenue source?

If approved by voters, the measure would provide approximately \$60 million annually for fire prevention and preparedness efforts countywide – specifically, more than 200 additional full-time fire personnel would be funded as would be 30 improved or new fire stations. The funds would be levied through a ½-cent tax on sales tax-applicable purchases countywide.

What fiscal accountability features will be in place to ensure funds are spent as promised?

- By law and in accordance with the expenditure plan, all funds raised by this measure will be spent in Sonoma County fire agencies to provide fire protection and emergency response services. The fixed allocation of funds cannot be reallocated.
- Funds cannot be taken by the State and the measure includes a clear system of accountability and formation of an expenditure oversight committee that includes representation from Fire Districts Association, Fire Chiefs Association, Taxpayers

Association, Board of Supervisors Nominees, Mayors and Councilmembers Association Nominees, Citizen at Large, and Labor. This committee provides oversight of expenditures only and is not a decision-making body.