**Kiowa Fire Protection District**

403 County Road 45, Kiowa, CO 80117

[www.kiowafire.org](http://www.kiowafire.org)

**FACTUAL SUMMARY**

**OF**

**REFERRED BALLOT ISSUE SEEKING A MILL LEVY INCREASE**

**As part of the May 3, 2016 regular District Election, the Kiowa Fire Protection District Board of Directors has referred to electors of the District, a ballot issue, seeking a 4.0 mill levy increase from the current levy of 8.689 mills to 12.689 mills, beginning in 2017. By law, the Election will be conducted by mail ballot, with a ballot mailed to each “eligible elector” of the District.**

**“Eligible electors” include all active, registered Colorado voters who either reside within the District and who or who’s spouse, own taxable, real or personal property within the District, in the name of the individual voter or spouse. (Property held in the name of a corporation, partnership or trust, may not result in voter eligibility.)**

**Rationale for Proposed Mill Levy Increase**:

Since the District’s formation in 1984, the Kiowa Fire Protection District has never secured an increase in its property tax mill levy, which is currently set at 8.689 mills.

The District was organized as a purely volunteer enterprise, using such equipment as available or as donated from local citizens or other fire departments. Over the years, the District has grown to include paid staff to provide fire prevention, fire suppression, emergency medical response and medical transport to the local community on such basis as its limited resources allowed. By State law, fire districts can only secure revenue from property taxes and charges for medical response and transport.

As a governmental entity, the District must operate on a balanced budget to be determined annually. This annual budget process, by its very nature, favors a short-term focus on expenses, rather than a longer term view of future needs. Despite this, the District Board of Directors and the Fire Chief believe the long-term sustainability of solid volunteer program, combined with paid personnel to provide full-time emergency response and transportation services to the citizens of the District, demands not only long-range planning, but an annual budget process which involves future needs.

Fire and emergency medical response equipment, including communications equipment and firefighter safety gear, is expensive to purchase and to maintain. Due to past budgetary constraints, the District’s equipment and facilities housing that equipment, are aging and in need of replacement. Yet, due to limited sources of revenue, the Board recognizes that the stress upon future budgets will be significant, such that continued capital planning for future needs, is required to focus on sustaining a reasonable level of service to the community.

The District’s average annual property tax revenues, for the years 2010 through 2015, were approximately $235,500 per year, after payment to Elbert County of administrative fees for collection of taxes, as statutorily mandated. This average level of revenue has remained relatively flat and, at times, decreased, so as to force the District to act in a fiscally-conservative manner, while maintaining a full service response agency providing emergency medical services and transport, structural and wild land firefighting capabilities, public safety education and fire code enforcement.

To supplement tax revenues, the District has been diligent and aggressive in applying for and receiving more than $197,000 in State and Federal grants for essential equipment within the last 5 years. Yet, due to increased competition for such grants, the District cannot become dependent on such awards.

**Four Significant Factors Requiring a Mill Levy Increase:**

1. Years of flat or declining property tax revenues, coupled with regularly increasing operational expenses, has left the District with insufficient funds to readily replace worn-out equipment or maintain or improve aging apparatus to more than a minimally required level necessary for safety of the community and District staff, paid and volunteer.

2. Changes in Colorado's automobile insurance laws, combined with State and Federal restrictions on Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements for services, permanently reduced the District's revenue from emergency medical and transport services, in half.

3. Increasing medical premiums for both automobile and health insurance, as well as the state of the economy, have left more people unable to afford insurance to cover emergency medical/transport services.

4. State and Federal grant monies are increasingly difficult to secure, since more fire departments are applying and lesser amounts of grant monies are available.

**District Information**

**District Summary:** The Kiowa Fire Protection District covers a 324 square mile area of north-central [Elbert](http://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/) County and encompasses the Town of Kiowa, the County seat of Elbert County, with a Courts facility, Sheriff’s Department and related County facilities, including the County Fairgrounds. The Town also contains a number of commercial properties and a mobile home park. Much of the area within the District, is agricultural and open space/wild lands. In addition to the rural residential properties, including significant rural/residential subdivisions with lots between 2.5 acres and 35 acres in extent, the District also contains typical suburban residential subdivisions centered in and around the Town of Kiowa.

The District has a current population of approximately 2,000 permanent residents with an estimated two-thirds of this population commuting for work, outside of the District and the County. It is anticipated that Elbert County will experience an annual growth rate of 3.63% or an overall growth rate of 98% from 2015-2030; expected to exceed the growth rate of neighboring Douglas County.

The District is currently operating as a Combination Department and is established as a “special district” pursuant to the Special Districts Act of the Colorado Revised Statutes §§ 32-1-1001, *et al*. It is currently run by an elected five member Board of Directors. The District provides emergency medical, fire suppression, fire prevention, Code Enforcement, public safety education, hazardous materials response (limited), and limited rescue services. The District is currently unable to provide technical rescue services beyond basic levels.

**ISO Rating:**

The Kiowa Fire Protection District currently maintains a community fire insurance rating from the Insurance Services Office (ISO) of “6” within the Town of Kiowa. Areas within the District which are within 5 travel miles of a Fire Station, maintain an ISO rating of “9” and all other areas beyond that, are rated as a “10.” E***ffective April 1, 2016, however, these ISO ratings improve to a “3” within the Town of Kiowa; while areas within the District which are within 5 travel miles of a Fire Station, improve to a “3X.” All other areas within the District, are rated as a “10.”***

**Stations:**

The District is covered by two fire stations: Station #1 is located at 403 County Road 45, in the Town of Kiowa and unmanned Station #2, which is located off of County Road 53, approximately 1.5 miles North of County Road 166. Additionally, the District maintains an auxiliary structure called the “Annex” adjacent to Hwy 86, immediately northeast of Station #1 which acts as a garage for additional apparatus.

**Staffing:**

The District currently employs a paid career Fire Chief, a paid career Captain, a paid part-time firefighter/EMT for weekdays, a paid part-time mechanic and a paid part-time bookkeeper/administrator. Additional staffing is supplied by approximately 18 volunteers who live both within and outside of the District, as well as a Department “Special Services Division” of approximately 5 persons.  All volunteers work shifts at the fire stations. Volunteers living within the District, may also respond to calls, from their homes, when available.

Volunteers often provide a substantial time commitment which goes well beyond Department requirements. For example, volunteer firefighters and EMTs donated over 26,000 hours of volunteer service in 2015.

**Call & Response Profile**:

The Kiowa Fire District responded to 360 calls for service in 2015, a 15% increase from 2014. The majority of responses are for emergency medical services (EMS) which account for 64% of all calls (in line with national statistics for the fire service). Advanced Life Support (ALS) response (accomplished by paramedics) account for approximately 51% of all EMS calls. The District responds to an average of 30 motor vehicle accidents annually, an average of 9.7 calls for structure fires, and an average 14.3 calls for wildfire/vegetation fires, with an annual average total acreage burned of 400 acres.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

1. **Why is this mill levy increase necessary?**

To continue to provide a nationally-recognized, public safety service for both fire suppression and EMS services, as well as comply with all required State and national safety regulations.

1. **What would the revenues from the proposed mill levy increase be used for?**

The tax revenues from the mill levy increase, would be used for:

* Replacement of aging emergency response vehicles and allowance for a significant capital purchase of a new pumper (replacing a 27-year-old first line Beck Engine).

(The District currently has two ***Type 1*** Engines for primary fire/rescue response capacity (E-220 and 221). Until recently, however, the District was able to only safely utilize one of these engines for emergency response, due to minimal funds for maintenance. While less frequent, there are numerous scenarios within the District which may require the deployment of multiple engines in order to meet demands of a larger fire. Such scenarios include: fires in commercial structures and large residential buildings, water shuttle operations, flammable gas impingement, and wild land structural protection. Additionally, it is important the District have the capability to quickly place a second engine in service for additional calls, for mutual aid purposes or in the event of a mechanical breakdown of the primary engine.)

* Replacement of Fire Station #1, a 43-year-old pole barn structure (the primary fire station located in the Town of Kiowa) and to address critical safety hazards needed for 24/7 coverage which is currently provided by the District’s volunteer staff.

(Over the past three years, the Fire Department has embarked on a program to provide improved on-site staffing of Station #1. This program has reduced response times, reduced the need for mutual aid, and significantly improved the overall performance of the organization. In order to achieve this objective, the District constructed a sleeping area within the confines of the main garage space of the Fire Station. While construction of this sleeping area has provided a significant benefit to area citizens, firefighters staffing the station report that they frequently work in sub-optimal conditions, often enduring temperature extremes, potential exposure to hazardous substances and cramped sleeping spaces.)

* Increase paid staffing by at least one more firefighter/paramedic.

1. **Will the mill levy increase be limited in duration?**

Very likely not, in view of the fact that the District will only continue to see increasing costs necessary to provide fire and EMS services expected by a growing local community.

1. **What happens if an increased mill levy is not approved?**

* If the increase in funding is not approved, the District Board will be forced to make difficult decisions regarding reductions in service, in a manner which minimizes the impact on its residents.
* Without a mill levy increase, the Fire Department could be faced with the inability to maintain the current level of service and faces the prospect of no future increase in the level of service.
* Without a mill levy increase, the District will not be able to improve living conditions for firefighters sufficient to ensure sufficient comfort and safety. This may lead to a recommendation that volunteers forego Fire Station staffing, and revert to a system where volunteers respond to the Station for emergency calls, training and meetings only, increasing response times and negatively impacting volunteer service.

1. **When was the last mill levy increase for fire protection services?**

The District has never sought nor secured a mill levy increase since formed as a District in 1984.

1. **How does the current mill levy rate compare with surrounding Elbert County Fire Districts?**

At 8.689 mills, the Kiowa Fire District has one of the lowest mill levy rates compared to other Elbert County fire districts.

Agate: 8.000 (400 square miles, 600 residents)

Elbert Fire: 8.5 (168 square miles, 2500 residents)

Elizabeth: 13.752 (111 square miles, 12,600 residents)

Kiowa Fire: 8.689 (324 square miles, 2000 residents)

North Central: 18.835 (60 square miles, 900 residents)

Rattlesnake: 9.841 (66 square miles, 5000 residents)

Simla: 8.000 (500 square miles, 2500 residents)

1. **What will the additional 4 mills due to my annual residential property tax bill?**

$150,000 Residence would increase $3.98 per month (150,000 x .0796 x 4.000 mills)

$200,000 Residence would increase $5.30 per month (200,000 x .0796 x 4.000 mills)

$300,000 Residence would increase $7.96 per month (300,000 x .0796 x 4.000 mills)

$400,000 Residence would increase $10.60 per month (400,000 x .0796 x 4.000 mills)

$500,000 Residence would increase $13.30 per month (500,000 x .0796 x 4.000 mills)

(Commercial property impact: $200,000 x .29 x 4.000 mills = $19.30 per month)

1. **With the new Insurance Services Organization (ISO) re-classification of the Public Protection Class (effective April 1, 2016) for the Kiowa Fire District, will I receive a discount on my homeowner’s insurance premium, offsetting the proposed mill levy increase?**

An individual homeowner’s premium may vary significantly. The insurance company writing the policy, choice of deductible, claims history, credit rating, discounts applied to the policy, home construction material, age of the home, and optional coverage riders (PPC ratings), all affect the cost of the insurance policy.

Since the PPC ratings have less effect on property and casualty insurance rates for manufactured or mobile homes, the savings may not pertain to those structures. The PPC ratings should have an effect on policy holders who have renter’s insurance or own condominiums. Homeowners should contact their insurance providers to notify them of the change in their PPC\*. If residents are unsure what their particular PPC is, they may contact the Kiowa Fire Protection District.

*\* A current resident in the Town of Kiowa recently notified his insurance carrier of the effective April 1, 2016 PPC. His homeowner’s insurance premium decreased from $1150.00 annually to $992.00, a 13.7% savings.*

1. **How can I vote in the upcoming May 3, 2016 election?**

If you are registered to vote in the State of Colorado and you are a resident, property owner, or a spouse or civil union partner of a property owner, and the property is owned in the name of an individual (corporation, partnership or trust) within the Kiowa Fire District, **or**, if you are registered to vote in the State of Colorado and own property within Kiowa Fire District, you will receive a ballot in the mail in April. Simply fill out the ballot in accordance with the enclosed instructions and mail it or drop it off at the designated location no later than May 3, 2016, at 7:00 pm., for your vote to be counted.

1. **Do I have to vote by mail? Can I vote in person at a polling booth?**

By statute, this election is a mail ballot election only and as such, there will be no polling place to vote at on May 3, 2016. You must vote the ballot that is mailed to you.

1. **How can I register to vote in the May 3, 2016 election?**

Colorado law allows you to register to vote through Election Day, but please note that how you register to vote is important.

If you register to vote by mail or online through [www.govotecolorado.com](http://www.govotecolorado.com/) at least eight (8) days before the election, you may contact the Designated Election Official to receive a ballot

If you register to vote less than eight (8) days before the May 3, 2016 election, you must contact the District’s Designated Election Official.

If you register to vote through a voter registration drive, your application must be submitted no later than 22 days before the May 3, 2016 election.

You may register to vote by appearing in person at the Elbert County Clerk & Recorder’s Office.

1. **Where do I mail my ballot, and when does it need to be received by in order to count?**

Your ballot needs to be returned to Kiowa Fire District by 7 p.m. on Election Day, May 3, 2016. Postmarks do not count. ***Your ballot must be received by 7 p.m. on Election Day, May 3, 2016.***

1. **What are the locations and deadlines for dropping off my ballot in person?**

The Kiowa Fire Station, at 403 County Road 45, Kiowa, CO 80117, is the location to drop off your ballot no later no later than 7:00 pm on Election Day, May 3, 2016.