



A Lawrence Township Fire District Property Tax Levy, Issue #9, will be on the ballot this November for voters to decide whether to approve an increase in funding for the Fire Departments. The increase would generate necessary revenue to be used solely for EMS and fire operations.

**The Bolivar Fire Department is asking for your help in supporting the levy and providing information to voters about why the additional funding is needed. Below are specific questions and answers to help address citizen inquiries and concerns.**

**Q: Currently where do my property taxes go?**

**A:** It depends where in Lawrence Township you live, especially which school district; Dover, Franklin/Strasburg or Tusky Valley Local School District. Also the taxation rates are slightly different if you live in either the Village of Bolivar or Zoar. Roughly it breaks down into 66% towards the school; 15% toward local government; 13% to county government and 6% toward fire and EMS. To see the exact numbers click on this link for the actual information provided by the Tuscarawas County Auditor. (link will be added to the online version)

**Q: Why does the Fire Department need the additional levy?**

**A:** In short, the additional staffing is about keeping our community/neighborhoods safe and protecting families. Your Fire Department has experienced an annual increase in emergency runs in recent years. In the 14 years since we began staffing at the Bolivar Fire Department the run volume has increased by over 250%. When the original levy was passed 14 years ago, we began staffing two firefighter/EMS providers who worked 8 hours a day for a total of 80 payroll hours per week. During this period, as the need for our service increased, we began adding additional personnel to meet the demands of our residents. Over the next decade we increased payroll hours to over 600 hours per week, updated the ambulance fleet and EMS equipment, purchased a new fire engine/rescue. All of this and more was accomplished with the 4-mil levy in-place.

**Q: How will the additional tax revenue from the Lawrence Township Fire District Levy increase be utilized?**

**A:** The additional funds are needed to provide continued fire and EMS protection to the residents and visitors of Lawrence Township. A portion of the revenue will pay for the retention of the **SIX** Firefighter/Paramedics currently funded through the SAFER Grant. All remaining funds will go to operational and equipment needs.

**Q: What will this increase cost a homeowner in Lawrence Township?**

**A:** A homeowner with a \$150,000 home will see a tax increase of \$17.50 per month.

**Q: How does the Fire Department compare to other departments in our area in terms of staffing and budget?**

- The Bolivar Fire Department has 6 full-time Firefighter/EMS Providers and are supplemented by part-time firefighter/EMS providers;
- The Bolivar Fire Department ranks in the lowest in paid staffing levels of any department that provides fire and EMS protection in Tuscarawas County;
- Dover Fire has 19 full time employees, New Philadelphia Fire has 22 full time employees and the Twin City area has 15 full time employees;
- Your Fire Department compares operation and maintenance costs to other areas on a per-capita basis. In 2014, our levy income of \$465,256.09 was \$66 per citizen while the average for other local departments was \$206 per citizen;
- As a department with an increasing run volume and low staffing levels, and the overall increasing cost of running the fire department the current levy will not provide the needed income to meet the needs of the residents beyond 2016.

**Q: What has the fire department done to save money?**

**A:** The fire department has eliminated vacant positions, deferred pay increases, obtained grants to purchase needed equipment, conducted performance measurement to find savings, and reduced operating budgets.

**Q: What was the use of the SAFER Grant for the past two years? Why can't the SAFER Grant be renewed and why was the funding spent totally on personnel?**

**A:** The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grants (SAFER) provided funding directly to fire departments to help them increase the number of trained, “front line” Firefighters available in their communities. The goal of SAFER was to help the local fire departments’ abilities to comply with staffing, response and operational standards established by the National Fire Protection Agency. The grant funding is specific and had to be used for salary and benefits and only for a two-year period. The SAFER grant was only to be used as a bridge to temporarily hire Firefighters until permanent funding can be obtained. The Fire Department applied for the SAFER grant in August of 2012. SAFER grants are not renewable.

**Q: What additional services have come from the SAFER Grant and how will they be impacted by the passage or failure of the tax increase?**

**A:** The SAFER grant’s major impact is **SAFETY**. Inadequate staffing levels expose citizens to increased risks, drains the Fire Department limited resources, and stresses the emergency response system. There is a direct correlation between decreasing crew size and an increase in expected life, property, and economic losses for citizens. The additional Firefighters help the Bolivar Fire Department meet the minimum recognized standard of 4 Firefighters on the fire engine and increase our ability to fight fires and rescue victims. Prior to the SAFER funding, the department had 19 documented fire responses in 2011 where fewer than four Firefighters were available; 11 incidents involved two or fewer firefighters, and three incidents which resulted in no fire units available to respond and relying initially on mutual aid. This would be the reality of a failure of the levy. Since the SAFER grant began your fire department has been able to manage 100% of its run volume, this is an important fact to take in consideration, especially in relation to a medical emergency. Keep in mind that the next closest EMS provider is over 15 minutes away.

**Q: Why did the Fire Department accept a grant to hire six firefighters for only two years knowing we would need more money to keep them beyond that time?**

**A:** Solely to provide the best fire and emergency service to the community and the protection of Lawrence Township residents, businesses and visitors. The additional staffing allows for quicker response to multiple calls and calls that require additional manpower i.e. fires, motor vehicle accidents and major medical incidents.

**Q: Some communities employ part-time firefighters to be called in fire emergencies and has this been considered or should it?**

**A:** We have been using a part-time staffing model for over 14 years and will continue to use part time staff to supplement our full time staffing. The biggest issue is most part time firefighter/paramedic are full time employees elsewhere, which limits their availability to work multiple jobs. When a part time employee has obligations to their full time job, i.e. covering an overtime shift, they will choose the full time obligation over the part time job most of the time, when this happens we struggle to find a replacement.

**Q: In our current weak economy, most people have been forced to cut budgets. How has this been done by our Fire Department?**

**A:** The Bolivar Fire Department has reduced operating budgets, eliminated pay increases, absorbed additional health insurance costs, and sought grants and donations to provide operational and equipment needs. In addition, implementing user fees, reduced medic crew size, and elimination of training has taken place.

**Q: How will passing the fire levy make us safer?**

**A:** It will keep the staffing levels the same for the long term future and allow for upgrades and maintaining our equipment, thus giving the community prompt and professional fire/EMS protection.

**Q: What has the fire department done to find grants and other sources to replace the SAFER Grant?**

**A:** The Bolivar Fire Department constantly seeks grants to assist with every aspect of providing the best possible service. Since we began our staffing model in 2001, over \$2 million has been received from grants, donations, and outside revenue sources. Unfortunately, only the federal government provides grants to local governments for fire personnel.

**Q: What will happen if the levy does not pass?**

**A:** The fire department will reduce staffing after the SAFER Grant expires in July 2016. Our ability to respond with an adequate number of firefighter/paramedics will be reduced. Our ability to respond to multiple EMS runs occurring at the same time will be reduced. The ISO rating is scheduled to be re-evaluated in 2017 and the probability of a higher ISO rating will mean an increase of property insurance costs to all home and business owners.

**Q: How can I get more information?**

**A:** We encourage all residents to ask questions, you can call the Bolivar Fire Department during business hours of 9-5 Monday-Friday at 330-874-3115; send an email to [bolivarfire1@gmail.com](mailto:bolivarfire1@gmail.com); visit our website [www.bolivarfiredept.com](http://www.bolivarfiredept.com); attend our open house on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 from 6pm-9pm; stop in at the fire station 456 Water Street (across from the Bolivar Library) or attend the Lawrence Township Board of Trustees meeting the second and last Thursday of every month.