



SMITHS STATION FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Fire Fee Faq's

Q: When was the current (50\$) fire fee established?

A: 2012

Q: Has there been any increase of the fire fee since 2012?

A: No

Q: Doesn't my property taxes pay for fire/ems protection?

A: No, the only funds county departments receive is from fire fee's

Q: Does Alabama Law authorize a Fire Protection District to charge fee's and/or rates?

A: Yes, § 11-89-7

(a) The district shall have the following powers...:

(b) (10) To furnish and provide fire protection service in the service area or in any part thereof upon such reasonable terms and for such reasonable rates and consideration as the board may prescribe;

Q: Who sets the rates and/or fees for the Fire Protection District? Does the public get to vote on the rates?

A: Much like water/sewer rates, building permit fees, trash fees, etc the rates are set by the governing board and not subject to public vote.

Q: Does Alabama law spell out any specific requirements related to the amount Fire Protection Districts should charge as fees & rates?

A: Yes. Code of Alabama § 11-89-12 states:

Rates, fees, and charges for fire protection service rendered by the district from any of its fire protection facilities shall be so fixed and from time to time revised as at all times to provide funds at least sufficient to:

(1) Pay the cost of operating, maintaining, repairing, replacing, extending, and improving the systems and facilities or either from which such services are rendered;

(2) Pay the principal of and the interest on all bonds issued and obligations assumed by the district that are payable out of the revenues derived from operation of those systems and facilities as the said principal and interest become due and payable;

(3) Create and maintain such reserve for the foregoing purposes or any of them as may be provided in any mortgage and deed of trust or trust indenture executed by the

district under this chapter or in any resolutions of the board authorizing the issuance of bonds, the assumption of any obligation or the acquisition of any such system or facility;

Q: Are there any other fire protection districts in our area?

A: Yes: Beulah Fire & East Alabama Fire are both organized under the same section of Alabama Code as the Smiths Station Fire Protection District

Q: How did you come up with the rates that are being charged by the Smiths Station Fire Protection District?

A: The new rates are exactly the same as the rates being charged by Beulah Fire District

Q: When will the new rates go into effect?

A: October 1, 2022

Q: How will I receive my bill from the Smiths Station Fire Protection District?

A: Your bill will arrive in the mail

Q: How can I pay my bill?

A: you will be able to mail a check, use your bank's bill pay features, or pay online using a credit/debit card

Q: How often will I be billed?

A: Initially everyone will be billed on a monthly basis. If you prefer you can request to be billed annually.

Q: I am renter, who is responsible for the fire fee?

A: Just like the existing fire fee and trash fees, etc the property OWNER is responsible. If you're a renter and get a bill please notify our office so that we can correct the error in our system.

Q: What about the old fire fee?

A: You will see a prorated credit on your bill each month for the current fire fee until it expires.

Q: Why don't you add the new fire fee to our water bill like other departments do?

A: This was discussed. However, there was two main issues with doing this. First, we are a separate entity from the water companies that we serve. Second, our coverage area has two different water companies, and this would have presented an unnecessary complication.

Q: I thought everyone paid a flat 50\$ per year under the old fire fee, how come your presentation shows an average of 40\$ was paid per household?

A: This is a common misconception. The old fire fee was based primarily on "roof tops" of buildings (including sheds, barns, etc) that were larger than a certain minimum square footage.

As a result, a single-family homeowner would pay 50\$ per year. If that single-family homeowner also had a large shed or barn, they would be charged 100\$ or more per year under the old system depending on how many outbuildings they had.

However, a duplex that contains 2 separate "living units" would only pay 50\$ per year under the old system. Likewise, an apartment building with 24 separate "living units" under a single roof would also only pay 50\$ per year under the old system.

This is why the new system of billing is based on "living units" and not "roof tops". Using our example from above of a duplex they were only paying 25\$ per "living unit" per year under the old system and in our example apartment building they were only paying \$2.08 per "living unit" per year under the old system.

Q: What about hardship cases?

A: A process similar to the one in place at Beulah Fire is being developed and more information will be available soon.

Q: Is this taxation without representation?

A: No. The Board of Directors for the Fire Protection district are nominated and approved by your elected officials. This is the same process used by the water board and many other government functions.

Q: Why didn't we get to vote on this?

A: Fire Fees are no different than any other fee's, think electricity, garbage, water, business licenses, fines, building permit fees, copy fee's, police and sheriff budgets, etc. If government had to hold a vote on every fee charged government would be unable to function.

Q: Why wasn't this communicated in advance?

A: It was. Mailers went out in September 2022 to every address in the district and were delivered by USPS. A town hall meeting was held and streamed online. A playback of that meeting is available online. This was on the City Council agenda and was posted as a public notice in 3 places in the city. The city council meeting was broadcast on CTV Beam Ch 9. This was on the County Commission agenda, which is broadcast on their website and available for play back. It was on every news station and every newspaper. It was posted to all the Facebook groups. It was on our website.

Q: Why didn't you just add this to our property tax instead of sending a separate bill?

A: We agree that this would have been a much easier transition, however it was not an option.

Q: Should I get a bill for vacant land?

A: No. The fire fee is based on living units. If you inadvertently received a bill for vacant land, please send an email to help@fire.smithsstational.gov with the details and we will get it fixed for you.

Q: I have a Phenix City or Salem mailing address; do I live in Smiths Station Fire & Rescue's coverage area?

A: Maybe. Your mailing address has more to do with which post office services your house. We have lots of Phenix City and Salem addresses in our coverage area. Please check the boundaries map on www.ssfr.link/faq or send us an email with your specific address to help@fire.smithsstational.gov and we will look it up for you

Q: How did you decide who and where to send bills?

A: We received a report from the county that listed every parcel of land with an assigned address, that was charged the 2012 fire fee for Smiths Station Fire & Rescue. This report contained over 15,000 individual addresses. With limited volunteer labor we made an attempt to verify as many as possible. We understand that some bills may contain errors, with limited volunteer labor we had to make the decision to deal with the errors as they arise.

Q: Why don't I have a fire hydrant near my home? How do I get a fire hydrant installed near my home?

A: Fire Hydrants are installed and maintained by Water Utilities. Please contact which ever water utility you purchase water from for more information about hydrants.