



15728 Main Street, Mill Creek, WA 98012

Administration 425-745-1891

Police 425-745-6175

All Other Departments 425-551-7254

August 12, 2025

Board of Fire Commissioners for the
South County Regional Fire Authority
Attn: Jim Kenny, Chair
12425 Meridian Ave. S.
Everett, WA 98208

Dear Chair Kenny and Members of the Board:

I am writing on behalf of the Mill Creek City Council. This letter follows up the comments I provided on behalf of the City of Mill Creek to the Board at its regular meeting on August 6th regarding the unexpected reduction in staffing at Fire Station 76 ("Station 76") that was apparently approved by the Board in June and implemented as of July 11th. This has resulted in the redeployment of two paramedics from Station 76 to Station 21.

On August 8th I was notified that the Board's Intergovernmental Affairs Committee requested a meeting with representatives from the Council. I responded that I would get direction from Council at our August 12th meeting and asked for clarification as to the topics for conversation. On Monday, August 11th it was communicated that the Committee wishes to discuss the following:

1. Our dedication to improving our communication strategy regarding the new deployment plan in the communities we serve.
2. Reasons for the staffing change at Station 76.
3. A continued discussion of our data driven approach to deployment decision(s) and commitment to regularly reviewing our plan(s).

Glaringly absent from this list is the restoration of five-person staffing at Station 76.

The Council's direction to me following our discussion last night is there is no reason to meet if restoration of staffing levels is not the first item of discussion on the agenda. If restoration of five-person staffing is the first topic of discussion, then I, along with Mayor Pro Tem Stephanie Vignal, and Councilmember Sean Paddock, are willing to represent the City Council in a meeting with your Committee.

Council already has heard South County Fire staff's presentation of proposed agenda items #2 and #3. Our concern is that South County Fire views this problem as a hiccup in communication

of its intentions. This is not merely a communication problem. Rather, the City views it as an alarming breach of South County Fire's commitment made to the voters of Mill Creek at the time of the annexation vote to maintain the five-person staffing and service levels at Station 76 and a failure by South County Fire to follow its own governance documents in implementing the staffing change.

I want to reiterate the Council's concerns and express the reasons why five-person staffing needs to be restored immediately and include one paramedic.

Integrity – The City communicated to residents that annexation to South County Fire was the best way to maintain the level and quality of emergency services for families and businesses. The City support was based on the oral and written assurances received from South County Fire that the five-person staffing level, including one paramedic, would be maintained at Station 76.

During the public education process for the annexation, the City and South County Fire developed a list of questions with mutually-agreed answers. The following question/answer is directly relevant to our present concerns:

What happens to the Mill Creek Fire Station?

A condition of the Regional Fire Authority is that annexing cities contribute emergency apparatus and stations to the agency. The City has no apparatus, but the station would become the asset of South County Fire. It would continue to be staffed 24 hours a day with the same number of firefighters, paramedics, and apparatus to respond to emergencies.

The annexation was approved by 76% of the voters in April 2022. Just three years later South County Fire's redeployment decision has downgraded staffing levels at, and the quality of service from, Station 76. The changes made at Station 76 jeopardize South County Fire's trust and integrity with the City and its residents, who were promised five-person staffing to include one paramedic.

RFA Plan Violated – South County Fire has not followed the requirements of the Amendment to the RFA Plan under which the City was annexed. As I stated last week, a majority vote of the Board is required to change the Standard of Coverage, which to our knowledge has not occurred. The Standard of Coverage called for five-person staffing at Station 76 with one of those being a paramedic. Consequently, without an amendment approved by a majority vote of the Board, the redeployment of the two medics out of Station 76 constitutes a reduction of the Standard of Coverage in violation of the Amendment to the RFA Plan.

Communication and Transparency – We learned about the reduced staffing level at Station 76 and, subsequently, reduced quality of service, through public comment by a local resident on July 7th just before our regular council meeting on July 8th. This was upsetting not only because of the subject matter, but also for the lack of communication from South County Fire.

There was no outreach to either the Council, City staff or the public about this decision. Whether deliberate or unintentional, it points to a lack of transparency. Going forward South County Fire must have a professional and robust communication strategy on issues impacting residents we both serve.

Modeling Data – The fire authority has sophisticated modeling and GIS systems to identify future operations and capital needs. At the July 29, 2025, City Council meeting, South County Fire staff admitted that Mill Creek’s growth plan adopted in December 2024 was not considered in your redeployment “road map” for the next 15 years that was the basis for the redeployment decision. It is doubtful that growth in other areas of the county in just three years since annexation would merit a change in staffing at Station 76. Moreover, prior to annexation the five-person staffing included one paramedic. But upon annexation South County Fire increased the staffing to two paramedics. Consequently, we believe flawed data was used to reduce staffing by 40% with no paramedics at Station 76 when past studies and actions were to maintain and even increase the number of paramedics at Station 76.

Staffing Levels & Service Quality – Mill Creek is the only city that has annexed to South County Fire and seen a service level reduction in both staffing and, subsequently, quality of emergency services. Immediately after annexation, Station 76 had five emergency personnel. As already noted, prior to annexation one of the five-person staffing was a paramedic but upon annexation South County Fire revised the staffing to include three firefighters/EMTs and two firefighters/paramedics. This was considered an improvement in service from our previous provider.

Indeed, Mill Creek voters in 2011 approved an EMS levy to increase the staffing at Station 76 from three to five, demonstrating the importance of the staffing level to our community. Now, we have three firefighters/EMTs, and no paramedics at Station 76.

Longer Response Times – Redeploying both paramedics from Station 76 to other stations means longer emergency response times. Regardless of how many paramedics “surround” the City, Mill Creek residents will have to wait for an ALS response from a fire station further away. Those response times will be even longer considering traffic congestion and other delays, which are frequent, along the I-5 corridor and feeder roads like 164th and 128th Streets SE. At our Council meeting on July 29th South County Fire stated that with the redeployment of the medics the response times would be eight minutes or less for emergencies. It is difficult to understand how the reduced staffing that will provide eight minute response time is an improvement for our residents who prior to the redeployment received response times of five minutes or less.

In light of these concerns and objections, it is the City’s position that South County Fire needs to immediately restore five-person staffing at Station 76 with one of those positions being a paramedic. This will restore staffing levels and the quality of emergency service as promised in 2022 when the annexation was presented to and approved by the voters. If South County Fire will commit to that baseline level of service, then the City is open to discussing the redeployment of the second paramedic that was added upon the annexation.

Please confirm that the agenda for a meeting with your Committee will include the topic of when five-person staffing at Station 76, including one paramedic, will be restored. We look forward to receiving that commitment and a list of your available meeting dates.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Holtzclaw". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Holtzclaw".

Brian Holtzclaw, Mayor

Cc: Stephanie Vignal, Mayor Pro Tem, and Mill Creek City Councilmembers
Martin Yamamoto, City Manager
Grant Degginger, Esq., City Attorney