

**Chapter 52.02 RCW  
FORMATION**

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**RCW 52.02.001 Actions subject to review by boundary review board.** Actions taken under chapter 52.02 RCW may be subject to potential review by a boundary review board under chapter 36.93 RCW. [1989 c 84 § 41.]

**RCW 52.02.020 Districts authorized—Health clinic services.** (1) Fire protection districts for the provision of fire prevention services, fire suppression services, emergency medical services, and for the protection of life and property are authorized to be established as provided in this title.

(2) In addition to other services authorized under this section, fire protection districts that share a common border with Canada and are surrounded on three sides by water or are bounded on the north by Bremerton, on the west by Mason county, on the south by Pierce county, and on the east by the Puget Sound or are in Pierce county and surrounded by Case Inlet, Drayton Passage, Pitt Passage, and Carr Inlet, may also establish or participate in the provision of health clinic services.

(3) Fire protection districts may provide training, expend resources, and enter into interlocal agreements to mitigate the injuries and reduce the level of harm and occurrence in calls they respond to. Examples of trainings are those that may directly or indirectly address worker and workplace safety, teach first aid, prevent injuries, and reduce industrial-related accidents. [2021 c 19 § 1; 2020 c 94 § 1; 2010 c 136 § 1; 2005 c 281 § 1; 2003 c 309 § 1; 1991 c 360 § 10; 1984 c 230 § 1; 1979 ex.s. c 179 § 5; 1959 c 237 § 1; 1947 c 254 § 1; 1945 c 162 § 1; 1943 c 121 § 1; 1941 c 70 § 1; 1939 c 34 § 1; Rem. Supp. 5654-101. Formerly RCW 52.04.020.]

**Construction—Severability—1939 c 34:** "The provisions of this act and proceedings thereunder shall be liberally construed with a view to effect their objects. If any section or provision of this act shall be adjudged to be invalid or unconstitutional, such adjudication shall not affect the validity of the act as a whole or any section, provision or part thereof not adjudged to be invalid or unconstitutional." [1939 c 34 § 51.]

**Validating—Saving—1939 c 34:** "Any petition heretofore drawn, signed and filed with the county auditor in compliance with the provisions of section 1 to section 6, inclusive, of the Laws of 1933, Extraordinary Session, shall be valid and the various steps required by this act for the creation of a fire-protection district may be continued, if the further steps to be taken are begun within ninety (90) days after the taking effect of this act [March 1, 1939], and it shall not be necessary to prepare, sign and file with the county auditor a new petition, and any district so created shall not be invalid by reason of the failure to draw, sign and file a new petition under the provisions of this act." [1939 c 34 § 49.]

**RCW 52.02.030 Petition—Certification.** (1) For the purpose of the formation of a fire protection district, a petition designating the boundaries of the proposed district, by metes and bounds, or by describing the lands to be included in the proposed district by United States townships, ranges and legal subdivisions, signed by not less than ten percent of the registered voters who reside within the boundaries of the proposed district who voted in the last general municipal election, and setting forth the object for the creation of the proposed district and alleging that the establishment of the proposed district will be conducive to the public safety, welfare, and convenience, and will be a benefit to the property included in the proposed district, shall be filed with the county auditor of the county in which all, or the largest portion of, the proposed district is located, accompanied by an obligation signed by two or more petitioners, agreeing to pay the cost of the publication of the notice required by this title. The organization of any fire protection district previously formed is hereby approved and confirmed as a legally organized fire protection district in the state of Washington.

(2) The county auditor shall, within thirty days from the date of filing the petition, examine the signatures and certify to the sufficiency or insufficiency of the signatures. If the proposed fire protection district is located in more than one county, the auditor of the county in which the largest portion of the proposed fire protection district is located shall be the lead auditor and shall transmit a copy of the petition to the auditor or auditors of the other county or counties within which the proposed fire protection district is located. Each of these other auditors shall certify to the lead auditor both the total number of registered voters residing in that portion of the proposed fire protection district that is located in the county and the number of valid signatures of such voters who have signed the petition. The lead auditor shall certify the sufficiency or insufficiency of the signatures. The books and records of the auditor shall be prima facie evidence of the truth of the certificate. No person having signed the petition is allowed to

withdraw his or her name after the filing of the petition with the county auditor.

(3) If the petition is found to contain a sufficient number of signatures of registered voters residing within the proposed district, the county auditor shall transmit the petition, together with the auditor's certificate of sufficiency, to the county legislative authority or authorities of the county or counties in which the proposed fire protection district is located. [1990 c 259 § 12; 1989 c 63 § 1; 1984 c 230 § 2; 1963 ex.s. c 13 § 1; 1947 c 254 § 2; 1939 c 34 § 2; Rem. Supp. 1947 § 5654-102. Prior: 1933 c 60 § 2. Formerly RCW 52.04.030.]

**RCW 52.02.035 Petition—Notice of sufficiency.** The county auditor who certifies the sufficiency of the petition shall notify the person or persons who submitted the petition of its sufficiency or insufficiency within five days of when the determination of sufficiency or insufficiency is made. Notice shall be by certified mail and additionally may be made by telephone. If a boundary review board exists in the county or counties in which the proposed fire protection district is located and the petition has been certified as being sufficient, the petitioners shall file notice of the proposed incorporation with the boundary review board or boards. [1989 c 63 § 2.]

**RCW 52.02.040 Petition—Public hearing.** (1) A public hearing on the petition shall be held by the county legislative authority of the county in which the proposed fire protection district is located if: (a) No boundary review board exists in the county; (b) jurisdiction by the boundary review board over the proposal has not been invoked; or (c) the boundary review board fails to take action on the proposal over which its jurisdiction has been invoked within the time period that the board must act or a proposal is deemed to have been approved. If such a public hearing is held by the county legislative authority, the hearing shall be held not less than twenty nor more than forty days from the date of receipt of the petition with the certificate of sufficiency from the county auditor if there is no boundary review board in the county, or not more than one hundred days from when the notice of the proposal was submitted to the boundary review board if the jurisdiction of the boundary review board was not invoked, or not less than forty days after the date that the boundary review board that has had its jurisdiction invoked over the proposal must act if the proposal is deemed to have been approved. The hearing by the county legislative authority may be completed at the scheduled time or may be adjourned from time to time as may be necessary for a determination of the petition, but such adjournment or adjournments shall not extend the time for considering the petition more than twenty days from the date of the initial hearing on the petition.

(2) If the proposed fire protection district is located in more than one county, a public hearing shall be held in each of the counties by the county legislative authority or boundary review board. Joint public hearings may be held by two or more county legislative authorities, or two or more boundary review boards, on the proposal. [1989 c 63 § 3; 1984 c 230 § 3; 1939 c 34 § 3; RRS § 5654-103. Prior: 1933 c 60 § 2. Formerly RCW 52.04.040.]

**RCW 52.02.050 Public hearing—Notice—Publication and posting.**

Notice of the public hearing by the county legislative authority on such a proposal shall be published for three consecutive weeks in the official paper of the county prior to the date set for the hearing and shall be posted for not less than fifteen days prior to the date of the hearing in each of three public places within the boundaries of the proposed district. The notices shall contain the time, date, and place of the public hearing. [1989 c 63 § 4; 1984 c 230 § 4; 1939 c 34 § 4; RRS § 5654-104. Prior: 1933 c 60 § 2. Formerly RCW 52.04.050.]

**RCW 52.02.060 Hearing—Inclusion and exclusion of land.**

At the time and place of the hearing on the petition or at any adjournment thereof, the county legislative authority shall consider the petition and shall receive evidence as it deems material in favor of or opposed to the formation of the district or to the inclusion or exclusion of any lands. No lands outside of the boundaries of the proposed district as described in the petition may be included within the district without a written petition describing the land, executed by all persons having an interest of record in the lands, and filed with the proceedings on the petition. No land within the boundaries described in the petition, except that land which the county legislative authority finds will receive no benefits from the proposed district, may be excluded from the district. [1984 c 230 § 5; 1947 c 254 § 3; 1939 c 34 § 5; Rem. Supp. 1947 § 5654-105. Prior: 1933 c 60 § 3. Formerly RCW 52.04.060.]

**RCW 52.02.070 Action on petition—Resolution—Election—District name when located in more than one county.**

The county legislative authority has the authority to consider the petition and, if it finds that the lands or any portion of the lands described in the petition, and any lands added thereto by petition of those interested, will be benefited and that the formation of the district will be conducive to the public safety, welfare, and convenience, it shall make a finding by resolution; otherwise it shall deny the petition. The county legislative authority shall consider only those areas located within the county when considering the petition. If the county legislative authority approves the petition, it shall designate the name and number of the district, fix the boundaries of the district that are located within the county, and direct that an election be held within the proposed district for the purpose of determining whether the district shall be organized under this title and for the purpose of the election of its first fire commissioners.

Where a proposed fire protection district is located in more than a single county, the fire protection district shall be identified by the name of each county in which the proposed fire protection district is located, listed alphabetically, followed by a number that is the next highest number available for a fire protection district in the one of these counties that has the greatest number of fire protection districts. An election on a proposed fire protection district that is located in more than one county shall not be held unless the proposed district has been approved by the county legislative authorities, or boundary review boards, of each county within which the proposed district is located. [1989 c 63 § 5; 1984 c 230 § 6; 1939 c 34 § 6; RRS § 5654-106. Prior: 1933 c 60 § 3. Formerly RCW 52.04.070.]

**RCW 52.02.080 Election.** The election on the formation of the district and to elect the initial fire commissioners shall be conducted by the election officials of the county or counties in which the proposed district is located in accordance with the general election laws of the state. This election shall be held at the next general election date according to RCW 29A.04.321 and 29A.04.330, that occurs after the date of the action by the boundary review board, or county legislative authority or authorities, approving the proposal. [2006 c 344 § 32; 1989 c 63 § 6; 1984 c 230 § 7; 1939 c 34 § 7; RRS § 5654-107. Formerly RCW 52.04.080.]

**Effective date—2006 c 344 §§ 1-16 and 18-40:** See note following RCW 29A.04.311.

*Elections: Title 29A RCW.*

**RCW 52.02.110 Declaration of election results—Resolution.** If three-fifths of all the votes cast at the election were cast in favor of the ballot proposition to create the proposed fire protection district, the county legislative authority of the county in which all, or the largest portion of, the proposed district is located shall by resolution declare the territory organized as a fire protection district under the name designated and shall declare the candidate for each fire commissioner position who receives the highest number of votes for that position to be an initial fire commissioner of the district. [1989 c 63 § 7; 1984 c 230 § 10; 1941 c 70 § 2; 1939 c 34 § 10; Rem. Supp. 1941 § 5654-110. Formerly RCW 52.04.110.]

**RCW 52.02.140 Appeal.** Any person or entity having a substantial interest and feeling aggrieved by any finding, determination, or resolution of the county legislative authority in the proceedings for the organization of a fire protection district under this title, may appeal within five days after the action of the county legislative authority to the superior court of the county, in the same manner as provided by law for appeals from the orders and determinations of the county legislative authority. [1984 c 230 § 13; 1939 c 34 § 13; RRS § 5654-113. Formerly RCW 52.04.140.]

*Appeal from board's action: RCW 36.32.330.*

**RCW 52.02.150 Organization conclusive.** After the expiration of five days from the approval of the resolution of the county legislative authority declaring the district to be organized, and the filing of the certified copies of the resolution of the county legislative authority with the county auditor and the county assessor, the creation of the district is complete and its legal existence cannot thereafter be questioned by any person by reason of a defect in the proceedings for the organization of the district. [1984 c 230 § 14; 1939 c 34 § 14; RRS § 5654-114. Formerly RCW 52.04.150.]

**RCW 52.02.160 Petition alternative, resolution—Adoption requirements—Public hearing—Voter approval—General fund reduction.**

(1) As an alternative to the petition method of formation for fire protection districts provided in this chapter, the legislative authority of a city or town may by resolution, subject to the approval of the voters, establish a fire protection district with boundaries that are the same as the corporate boundaries of the city or town for the provision of fire prevention services, fire suppression services, and emergency medical services, and for the protection of life and property within the city or town.

(a) Any resolution adopted by a city or town under this section to establish a fire protection district must, at a minimum:

(i) Contain a financing plan for the fire protection district. As part of the financing plan, the city or town may propose the imposition of revenue sources authorized by this title for fire protection districts, such as property taxes, as provided in chapter 52.16 RCW, or benefit charges, as provided in chapter 52.18 RCW; and

(ii) Set a date for a public hearing on the resolution.

(b) The financing plan in the resolution adopted by the city or town must contain the following information regarding property taxes that will be imposed by the fire protection district and city or town subsequent to the formation of the district:

(i) The dollar amount the fire protection district will levy in the first year in which the fire protection district imposes any of the regular property taxes in RCW 52.16.130, 52.16.140, or 52.16.160;

(ii) The city's or town's highest lawful levy for the purposes of RCW 84.55.092, reduced by the fire protection district's levy amount from (b) (i) of this subsection. This reduced highest lawful levy becomes the city's or town's highest lawful levy since 1986 for subsequent levy limit calculations under chapter 84.55 RCW; and

(iii) The estimated aggregate net dollar amount impact on property owners within the city or town based on the changes described in (b) (i) and (ii) of this subsection (1).

(c) If a city or town proposes the initial imposition of a benefit charge as a revenue source for the fire protection district under (a) of this subsection, the resolution adopted by the city or town must comply with the requirements of RCW 52.18.030.

(d) Notice of public hearing on a resolution adopted by a city or town must be published for three consecutive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation in the city or town, and must be posted for at least fifteen days prior to the date of the hearing in three public places within the boundaries of the proposed fire protection district. All notices must contain the time, date, and place of the public hearing.

(2) (a) A resolution adopted under this section is not effective unless approved by the voters of the city or town at a general election. The resolution must be approved:

(i) By a simple majority of the voters of the city or town; or

(ii) If the resolution proposes the initial imposition of a benefit charge, by sixty percent of the voters of the city or town.

(b) An election to approve or reject a resolution forming a fire protection district, including the proposed financial plan and any imposition of revenue sources for the fire protection district, must be conducted by the election officials of the county or counties in which the proposed district is located in accordance with the general election laws of the state. If a resolution forming a fire protection district provides that the fire protection district will be governed by a board of fire commissioners, as permitted under RCW 52.14.140, then the initial fire commissioners must be elected at the same

election where the resolution is submitted to the voters authorizing the creation of the fire protection district. The election must be held at the next general election date, according to RCW 29A.04.321 and 29A.04.330, occurring after the date of the public hearing on the resolution adopted by the city or town legislative authority. The ballot title must include the information regarding property taxes that is required to be in the financing plan of the resolution under subsection (1)(b) of this section.

(c) If a ballot proposition on the resolution is approved by voters, as provided in (a) of this subsection, the county legislative authority shall by resolution declare the fire protection district organized under the name designated in the ballot proposition.

(d) Nothing contained in this chapter may be construed to alter a municipal airport fire department or affect any powers authorized under \*RCW 14.08.120(2). If a question arises as to whether this chapter modifies the affairs of municipal airports in any way, the answer is no.

(3) A city or town must reduce its general fund regular property tax levy by the total combined levy of the fire protection district as proposed by the district in accordance with subsection (1)(b)(i) of this section. The reduced levy amount of the city or town must occur in the first year in which the fire protection district imposes any of the property taxes in RCW 52.16.130, 52.16.140, or 52.16.160 and must be specified in the financing plan and ballot proposition as provided in this section. If the fire protection district does not impose all three levies under RCW 52.16.130, 52.16.140, and 52.16.160 when it begins operations, the city must further reduce its general fund regular property tax levy if the district initially imposes any of the levies in subsequent years, by the amount of such levy or levies initially imposed in a subsequent year. [2017 c 328 § 1.]

**\*Reviser's note:** RCW 14.08.120 was amended by 2020 c 96 § 1, changing subsection (2) to subsection (1)(b).

**RCW 52.02.170 Ambulance service as public utility—Limitations—**

**Definition.** (1) A fire protection district may establish an ambulance service to be operated as a public utility. However, the fire protection district may not provide for the establishment of an ambulance service utility that would compete with any existing private ambulance service unless the fire protection district determines that the area served by the fire protection district, or a substantial portion of that area, is not adequately served by an existing private ambulance service.

(2) In determining the adequacy of an existing private ambulance service, the fire protection district must take into consideration objective generally accepted medical standards and reasonable levels of service, which must be published by the fire protection district. If a fire protection district makes a preliminary conclusion that an existing private ambulance service is inadequate, the fire protection district must allow a minimum of sixty days for the private ambulance service to meet the generally accepted medical standards and accepted levels of service. If the fire protection district makes a second preliminary conclusion of inadequacy within a twenty-four month period, the fire protection district may immediately issue a call for bids or establish its own ambulance service utility and is not required to afford the private ambulance service another sixty-day

period to meet the generally accepted medical standards and reasonable levels of service.

(3) A private ambulance service that is not licensed by the department of health, or has had its license denied, suspended, or revoked, is not entitled to a sixty-day period to demonstrate adequacy, and the fire protection district may immediately issue a call for bids or establish an ambulance service utility.

(4) A private ambulance service that abandons service in the area served by the fire protection district, or a substantial portion of the area served by the fire protection district, is not entitled to a sixty-day period to demonstrate adequacy, and the fire protection district may immediately issue a call for bids or establish an ambulance service utility. If a fire protection district becomes aware of an intent to abandon service at a future date, the fire protection district may immediately issue a call for bids or establish an ambulance service utility to avoid an interruption in service.

(5) For purposes of this section, "fire protection district" means a fire protection district established by the legislative authority of a city or town pursuant to RCW 52.02.160. [2017 c 328 § 2.]

**RCW 52.02.180 Transfer of fire protection and emergency services from fire department to fire protection district—Procedure. (1)**

Except as provided otherwise in the resolution adopted by the legislative authority of a city or town establishing a fire protection district under RCW 52.02.160, all powers, duties, and functions of the city or town fire department pertaining to fire protection and emergency services of the city or town are transferred to the fire protection district on its creation date.

(2)(a) The city or town fire department must transfer or deliver to the fire protection district:

(i) All reports, documents, surveys, books, records, files, papers, or written material in the possession of the city or town fire department pertaining to fire protection and emergency services powers, functions, and duties;

(ii) All real property and personal property including cabinets, furniture, office equipment, motor vehicles, and other tangible property employed by the city or town fire department in carrying out the fire protection and emergency services powers, functions, and duties; and

(iii) All funds, credits, or other assets held by the city or town fire department in connection with fire protection and emergency services powers, functions, and duties.

(b) Any appropriations made to the city or town fire department for carrying out the fire protection and emergency services powers, functions, and duties of the city or town must be transferred and credited to the fire protection district.

(c) Whenever any question arises as to the transfer of any personnel, funds, books, documents, records, papers, files, equipment, or other tangible property used or held in the exercise of the powers and the performance of the duties and functions transferred to the fire protection district, the legislative authority of the city or town must make a determination as to the proper allocation.

(3) All rules and all pending business before the city or town fire department pertaining to the fire protection and emergency



services powers, functions, and duties transferred must be continued and acted upon by the fire protection district, and all existing contracts and obligations remain in full force and must be performed by the fire protection district.

(4) The transfer of powers, duties, functions, and personnel of the city or town fire department do not affect the validity of any act performed before creation of the fire protection district.

(5) If apportionments of budgeted funds are required because of the transfers, the treasurer for the city or town fire department must certify the apportionments.

(6) (a) Subject to (c) of this subsection, all employees of the city or town fire department are transferred to the fire protection district on its creation date. Upon transfer, unless an agreement for different terms of transfer is reached between the collective bargaining representatives of the transferring employees and the fire protection district, an employee is entitled to the employee rights, benefits, and privileges to which he or she would have been entitled as an employee of the city or town fire department, including rights to:

(i) Compensation at least equal to the level at the time of transfer;

(ii) Retirement, vacation, sick leave, and any other accrued benefit;

(iii) Promotion and service time accrual; and

(iv) The length or terms of probationary periods, including no requirement for an additional probationary period if one had been completed before the transfer date.

(b) If a city or town provides for civil service in its fire department, the collective bargaining representatives of the transferring employees and the fire protection district must negotiate regarding the establishment of a civil service system within the fire protection district.

(c) Nothing contained in this section may be construed to alter any existing collective bargaining unit or the provisions of any existing collective bargaining agreement until the agreement has expired or until the bargaining unit has been modified as provided by law. [2017 c 328 § 5.]