

# KENWOOD FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

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## **Kenwood Fire Protection District Frequently Asked Questions - Measure E**

The Kenwood Fire Protection District has been providing fire services since 1945. Kenwood Fire covers an area over 40 square miles. Due to a host of operational challenges, the District Board of Directors has placed Measure E on the November 2021 ballot. Measure E is a parcel tax that would be dedicated to funding fire and emergency services locally. Listed below are commonly asked questions regarding Measure E.

### **What is the Kenwood Fire Protection District, and what territory does it cover?**

Kenwood Fire Protection District covers roughly 4,000 residents and 40 square miles. Situated in the Northern portion of the Sonoma Valley, sixty miles north of San Francisco, in one of the premiere grape growing regions in the world, Kenwood is home to many world class wineries.

Kenwood Fire Protection District employs 2 full time Fire Captains, 2 full time Engineers and a full time Fire Chief. We are also supported by 2 Assistant Fire Chiefs, Fire Captains, Engineers, part time Firefighters and Firefighters who serve on a Paid/On Call basis. All have graduated from fire academy and train and drill constantly.

Kenwood Fire provides mutual aid and automatic aid when our neighboring fire departments need help and vice-versa, especially with Sonoma Valley Fire District, Sonoma County Fire District, and Santa Rosa City Fire with whom we share borders.

### **What is Measure E?**

The Kenwood Fire Protection District Board of Directors have placed Measure E on the November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021 ballot. Measure E is only to be used to enhance fire and emergency services, therefore it requires a 2/3 majority of voters to pass. Measure E will establish a tax on all parcels within the Kenwood Fire Protection District boundaries, to be used solely for fire and emergency services.

### **Why is Measure E on the Ballot in the Fall of 2021?**

Kenwood Fire has been considering options for maintaining and enhancing our services and budgetary gap for several years. Additionally, the increased risk of fire due to climate change has forced our hand. We are unable to rely as we once did on volunteer firefighters not at work and near the fire station to respond to fires, thus we have moved to a paid and volunteer response hybrid department. Thus, the Kenwood Fire Board decided to move forward with a well thought out plan for voters to consider. Funding is needed as soon as possible to ensure coverage for fires, traffic collisions, medical emergencies, disaster events, etc.

### **What will Measure E cost homeowners?**

Residential parcel rates are set at \$0.12 (12 cents) per square foot, per year. So a 1,500 sq. ft. home would pay \$180.00/year.

**What will Measure E cost commercial businesses?**

Commercial parcel rates are also set at \$0.12 (12 cents) per square foot, per year, with no additional flat fee required. A 2,000 square foot business would pay \$240/year.

**Will Measure E charge my agricultural or timberland property by the acre?**

A modest fee of \$16/acre has been proposed for agricultural lands, capping at a total possible rate of \$4,800.00. The District brought the per acre cost down from an original proposal, based on input from agricultural interests in the district. There is no proposed square footage fee on agriculturally zoned land.

**What is the Square Footage used to determine the tax rate?**

The square footage that the County of Sonoma has on file in the assessor's office is what will be utilized to determine the tax rate, in addition to the parcel land use code (Ag, Residential, Commercial, Vacant Land, etc).

**Will my garden shed's square footage on my property be counted toward the tax rate?**

Only livable space for residential parcels is listed by the County of Sonoma. Non-permitted buildings, buildings of no consequence, non-commercial garages, etc are generally not included in the residential square footage of a residence. If the garage is a commercial structure that was permitted by the County of Sonoma, it may be included in the taxable square footage.

**How does the proposed parcel tax compare to other fire departments?**

It is generally consistent with other local departments. Most fire departments charge between \$180-\$560 for residential parcels and \$300-400 per parcel, plus a range of fees for square footage for commercial properties.

**Are Kenwood Firefighters currently paid as staff?**

Partially. Kenwood Fire currently has 2.0 staffing, meaning that two paid staff are on duty 24/7, and the Fire Chief is working a captain/engineer shift to make this work. Our staff are currently one of the lowest paid in the region, and this has led to significant turnover of firefighters and has contributed to the deficit spending of the District. Kenwood also relies on a volunteer program to fill critical needs of the District.

**What is the proposed staffing plan using additional funding from Measure E?**

The District goal is maintain our existing level of service, and add 2 firefighters to our station, nudging the department closer to 3.0 staffing standards. Additionally we will use the funding to invest in capital improvements for our facility, and better retain our existing staff to stop the turnover costs. The District will prioritize 3.0 person staffing on the engines, as is County and National best practice. The paid staff will enhance our District volunteer base, who will continue to provide our critical surge capacity and complement our paid firefighters. In addition our loyal volunteers will respond when there are larger incidents like traffic accidents, house and wildfires, and disaster situations like flooding, earthquakes, and major storms.

**Do I pay a parcel tax now to Kenwood Fire?**

Yes, and if Measure E is approved, the existing tax will be voided and replaced by Measure E when it goes into effect. Generally Residential parcels currently pay \$40, and have not seen an increase since 1993. The District receives some funding of the general property tax bill that comes back to the local area. Kenwood receives a low portion of all the Fire District of the local 1% in property taxes (a rate of less than 4%). The past three fiscal years, the District has been operating by spending reserves to meet budget demands. The District has been able to buy and

pay off new fire apparatus, without taking on major debt, but equipment is timing out and facility maintenance is a pressing need.

### **Are taxpayer protections built in to Measure E?**

Yes. Measure E if adopted, will replace the existing parcel tax established in 1993, then modestly increased in 1998. All taxpayers who live within the District boundaries will be able to attend regular meetings of the District Board of Directors that meets regularly on the second Tuesday of the month, starting at 4 PM. Additionally the Kenwood Fire Protection District Board will hold an annual rate setting meeting specifically on the parcel tax at the fire station in Kenwood. There will be no need to go to Santa Rosa or some other district headquarters to follow the public meeting, make a request or complaint, and engage the District Board of Directors in open public session.

### **What about the \$52 million ½ cent sales tax the County of Sonoma is considering?**

The County of Sonoma may approach voters for a ½ cent sales tax countywide next year, that will need to be adopted by ⅔ of the voters. If it is approved, then Kenwood will be well situated if Measure E is successful to be first in line to receive additional funds and staffing from the County. But there is no guarantee that the county tax will be on the ballot, nor if it will pass. Kenwood is moving forward to best serve our public with the highest level of service possible, in the most responsible way. We need to take care of our own house first, and the needs and demands of the District cannot wait for the County of Sonoma to determine our path forward.

### **What happened to the CalFire “Fire Prevention Fee” that I used to pay?**

As of July 1, 2017, Cal Fire has suspended their old ~\$135/parcel fee to rural property owners. Neither Kenwood Fire, nor the County of Sonoma, saw any of the money generated from this prior fee.

### **What happens if Measure E does not pass?**

The service level of the Kenwood Fire Department will be in jeopardy. The District will be forced to consider other funding solutions to ensure someone will respond to emergencies. One possible scenario is annexing with a neighboring district that already has a parcel tax, which would be applied to the Kenwood parcels (through a LAFCO reorganization procedure). The Board of Directors of Kenwood Fire decided that a locally-controlled parcel tax is a better option than consolidating with another fire district and imposing that tax without voter approval; thus leading to Measure E.

### **Can renters vote on Measure E, or is it just for property owners?**

All registered voters within the boundaries of the Kenwood Fire Protection District have the opportunity to vote on Measure E. To determine your status as a district resident, contact the Sonoma County Registrar of Voters at 707-565-6800.

### **How important is it to vote?**

Very! As a special election year, there is only one item on the ballot - Measure E. Please take the time to educate yourself, and cast your ballot on or before November 2nd, 2021.

### **More Questions?**

Contact Kenwood Fire Chief Daren Bellach at the fire station, at 707-833-2042. Please leave a message and he or another staff or volunteer will get back to you as soon as possible.