



## Antioch Fire Department First Fire Protection District

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### PRESS RELEASE Antioch Fire Officials release their Third Friday Five (#FridayFive) 5.3

Good afternoon. We at the Antioch Fire Department/First Fire Protection District of Antioch continue to monitor social media since first announcing the proposed Fire District referendum.

To be completely transparent to voters, we will continue to do a #fridayfive (#Friday5) until the referendum takes place June 28. We feel this is the best way to get the truth out to everyone in a clear concise manner. Remember, these are your questions you placed on social media. We found them while reviewing social media across multiple outlets.

Now, we realize there were some questions after previous #FridayFive entries. We will be answering those soon. However, we are trying answer questions in the order we received them. These next five questions are from the first and second press releases, then we will circle back to your questions from last week. (Also, if you asked us questions on Absolutely Antioch or Absolutely Antioch - Unhinged – we are trying to get to those. But, because those boards are so active, the first and second releases have cycled through quickly and we are having trouble keeping up. If we have not answered your questions and you still want us to do so, you can either email it to us at [info@antiochfire.org](mailto:info@antiochfire.org) or post it on our Facebook page.

Ultimately, we want the truth out there to give the most accurate information possible before residents vote June 28. We plan to do a #FridayFive every week. If we didn't get to your question this week, we'll try to get to it next week.

Q: So – you plan on taking the ratchet strap down then?

**A: The strap was taken down two weeks ago because we received complaints from a few people who didn't seem to like being reminded of the real dangers inside that tower that was built in 1979. But, strap or no strap, those dangers still exist.**

**During our #FridayFive on Facebook last week, we released a photo of the inside of the tower of a group of cracks running from the base of the structure up. We have re-released that photo at the bottom of this #FridayFive. We have also added additional photos of the structure – more cracks inside and several outside the structure. In addition, we have released an engineer's report dating back to 2008 that clearly says the structure is dangerous. To go one step further – the report was released 14 years ago but nothing could be done to fix it since the Village of Antioch had that report completed.**

**The reason this repair wasn't made is simple: there has been a lack of funding to make major repairs to the building and the tower. Please look at the photos and read the report. The photos and reports should be enough to scare anyone who drives down the alley between the police and fire stations.**

**It was overheard last week "that tower isn't going to fall..." but the person who said it hasn't stepped foot inside the structure to see the cracks in the foundation and running up the walls. We firmly believe this tower could hit the ground should we see anything close to resembling a tornado or a microburst in downtown Antioch. We've seen tornadoes and microbursts in Antioch before, it could definitely happen again.**

**Bottom line, the cracks in this tower run deep. The cracks inside this tower have been here since 2008. The fire department didn't have the money to fix it then. The fire department doesn't have the money to fix it now. So, to go back and answer this question: Was the ratchet strap helping keep the tower together? I don't know – it sure wasn't hurting. But I can say without a doubt the strap was definitely helping to make people who have never entered the fire station to realize the very real and very dangerous structural problems taking place inside. This tower needs to be fixed. It needs to be fixed before Mother Nature "fixes" it for us. And, we all know, if she chooses to fix it, it could potentially result in serious danger to people, the fire station, or the police station next door.**

Q: This question was in response to a previous #FridayFive: Within 3 years 37 employees leave. What is the cost of putting each one through school for 3 years? What kind of contract gets signed if you train them to ensure they have a time limit of which they must be maintained by the dept and not leave? If so, do they have a payback clause should they leave before the time in the contract? Or are we just paying training and watching people get their education then walk?

**A: We do pay for classes for our recruits to be trained. EMT- B class cost the district \$500 per student. This course takes about 6 months to complete. Each student attends class twice a week, 4 hours per class. They also must complete 20 hours of hospital /ambulance time. These hours are done on the employee's time, and is not paid training. Once they are state certified, they can begin to work shifts on the Ambulance.**

**Our Firefighter recruits have several different options: they can attend our in-house Fire Academy which costs the district \$450 per student, or the student can pay the \$4000 out of their pocket to attend a full-time academy on their own time that runs 10 weeks. Our academy runs two days a week for 6 months and is similar to the EMT-B classes students are not paid to attend. Once the recruit is State Certified, they can begin paid shifts on the Engines. Then, once they attained EMT-B certification, they can move on to Paramedic training. This can cost \$3600-\$4000 depending on the Hospital they choose to take class with. The district does not pay for this class, this burden is all on the student. They also have class two days per week plus clinical time in the hospital and on the ambulance. This certification can take in upwards of 18 months.**

**Antioch is one of the few departments in Lake County that allows employees to work with single certifications while they continue their education. From start to finish, the recruits are with us a minimum 30-36 months. At that time, they can move on to test at departments that run full-time traditional staffing model. I think that is a fair amount of time for our \$1000 investment. So, the short answer is no, they don't sign a contract.**

**Our ultimate goal is and has been to start hiring full-time firefighters like other departments in the area. This would go a long way to making sure quality people answer the call when you are having a heart attack, or your house is on fire. However, because of the salaries employees are currently being paid in Antioch, we are unable to start a full-time department at this time.**

**So, hopefully you can see the correlation to our training and us losing 37 people in three years. It takes three full years for a recruit to become marketable to other full-time departments, and other departments snatch these trained recruits the second they are marketable and due to the shortage of quality recruits in the paramedic industry. But, if we have salaries, I believe some of these recruits we are losing won't leave for other departments the minute they complete their training.**

Q: This question is in response to a previous #FridayFive: In the regard that we do not "balance bill" residents, meaning we do not bill the difference between what insurance covers and the allowed amount. (Nonresident fees are higher and they do get balanced billed.)

\*\*\*QUESTION — In other words, you accept insurance assignment but do not bill the co-pay (which voids the insurance contract) or the client? Is it discriminating practice not to bill the same price for all?

**A: This is best answered by our billing company, which is below:**

**For Antioch residents (defined as zip 60002) our directive is to balance bill any deductible (but not co-pay) as assigned by the insurance carrier. We write off any balances the insurance does not pay and our directive is to do the same if the balance billed deductible is not paid. Antioch residents are not sent to external collections. For Antioch non-residents any unpaid balances are sent to external collections.**

**I (The billing service) am not sure which call you are dealing with so it is hard to comment on anything more, but I can say Antioch is "billing" all payors the same. Meaning your base rates and mileage are programmed into our system as per your ordinance and the clarifications made to us. All payors are all billed the same rates. It seems to be the collection practice that is an issue and I suspect that goes towards your (fire district) board's consideration of resident taxes, although I cannot be sure.**

Q: Does the Antioch FD use a billing agency to get cost recovery for services rendered?

A: Yes, we use Paramedic Billing Services. Because ambulance billing is very complicated, it takes a professional to navigate the world of corporate insurance, Medicare and Medicaid. Billing mistakes can be costly both financially and legally to a fire district already scraping for money, so we do not want to make any mistakes. The cost of this service is a 4% rate of what they capture for us. While the billing rates are the same the amount collected is dependent on the insurance carrier being bill. We will post our Collection Rate next week.

Q: Is now the right time for a tax increase?

A: The quick, short answer is: it's never a good time to ask for a tax increase. But it has reached the point where we absolutely need it.

When the Fire District/Fire Department took on the responsibility of providing ambulance service in Antioch, the Fire District Board was unsure of the cost to provide that service. Not wanting to overtax our citizens, the First Fire Protection District of Antioch Trustees asked for only half of the maximum allowed rate on the tax levy to cover the cost of ambulance service. At the time, the district board made it clear if the amount wasn't enough, they would go back to the community and ask for more.

Six years later, we were able to show data from 2017 through 2019 showing the Fire District had collected far less than the tax money coming in. So, the Fire District kept their word and went to the voters to request increasing the levy to .8 percent in the spring of 2020. The referendum failed, then failed again in 2021.

When we looked at the reasons why the voters went against it, we discovered the community wasn't being educated on the real needs from this increase. Ultimately, we felt we just did not sufficiently explain why this increase was needed. So, we regrouped and really pushed to lay out the needs of the district.

So, to answer the question – no, it's not a good time to ask for a tax increase. But, it's never a good time to ask for any governmental body to ask for a tax increase. This time, we are confident voters will take the time to understand the needs of their Ambulance and Fire Protection Service Providers, then make the educated vote.

As we have seen on some of these social media boards, there are some voters out there who are defensive about why we do not need an increase. We want it clear **WE COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND** why they may be defensive. **NONE OF US EVER WANT TO PAY MORE TAXES.** But there are times in life when you have to make the hard decision to cover the cost of something that is needed. Supplying this Fire District with decent paid firefighters, making sure our ambulances start when we push the button, covering the cost for the crumbling infrastructure like the falling tower and the sewer that's backing up: all of these things **ARE** items that are needed by residents of the Antioch Fire Department/First Fire Protection District of Antioch - including by those voicing opposition to this referendum.

If you only want to listen to one statement about this referendum, then listen to this: We need the revenue this tax levy would generate to ensure we provide you the best possible service during your most desperate time of need.



