



Dear Mayor Knudson and Eugene City Council Members,

We appreciate the difficult decisions before you and the efforts of the City Manager and staff in addressing Eugene's budget challenges. We also recognize the engagement with stakeholders, including Chamber members, throughout this process.

However, we oppose the proposed Eugene Fire Service Fee and urge the Council to **refer this decision to voters if new revenue is necessary**. Doing so is the most responsible course of action, ensuring the measure is on the ballot in a timely manner and providing the city with clarity before finalizing its budget. If Council does not take this step, we understand a citizen-led referral effort is highly likely, which would require significant time, resources, and goodwill. A citizen referral would also push the decision to a costly June special election, leaving the city with little certainty as it approaches key budgeting deadlines.

Concerns About Transparency and Public Perception

One of our primary concerns is the expectation created by this fee. The public will reasonably assume that \$10 million in new investment is being made into Eugene's Fire Department. In reality, \$8 million of this revenue will be redirected into the general fund to cover existing budget deficiencies. This risks eroding trust between the city and the community, as residents and businesses will not see the full impact of what they believe they are paying for.

The Need for a Voter-Driven Approach

Essential services like fire protection should be funded through the city's general budget. We are deeply concerned that moving forward without voter input could jeopardize public confidence and impact future funding measures, including the Community Safety Payroll Tax renewal.

A Call for Sustainable Budgeting

Rather than implementing a fee that offers only a temporary fix, we urge the Council to engage in a comprehensive, priority-based budgeting process to bring city services back in alignment with available resources. This approach would provide a more transparent and sustainable path forward while restoring community confidence in the city's fiscal management.

We greatly appreciate your consideration and stand ready to collaborate on a solution that ensures the long-term health of our city.

Sincerely,

The Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors

and the following businesses & committee members

Dave Bakke

John Barofsky, Chair Eugene Chamber Board of Directors

Jenny Bennett, President, Summit Bank

Chris Boone

Liz Cawood, Owner, CAWOOD

Tom Connors

Mike Coughlin

John Doty

Greg Erwin, CEO, Sapien Private Wealth Management

Jeff Hansen, President, Mid-Valley Glass & Millwork

Paula Lafferty, CEO, SnoTemp

Anne Marie Levis, President, Funk/Levis & Associates

Erik Parrish

Darcy Phillips, Executive Director, Cornerstone Community Housing

James Ralph, Executive Director, The John G. Shedd Institute for the Arts

Rusty Rexus, President, Rexus

Brandon Rogers, CEO, PakTech

Casey Roscoe, Operator, Gerking Ranch LCC

Sherry Schaefers, Sherry Schaefers Insurance Agency Inc.

Carol Schirmer, Owner, Schirmer Consulting

Betsy Schultz, Owner, PNW Strategies

Dayne Sorensen

Darren Sparks, Owner, Rosen Aviation

Denise Thomas

Jenny Ulum

Gary Wildish

Steve Wildish

For Immediate Release

Friday, February 21, 2025

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**Eugene Area
Chamber of
Commerce**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement from the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce on Filing for a Referendum on the Fire Service Fee

February 21, 2025

Eugene, OR - Today, paperwork was filed to begin collecting signatures for a referendum on the City of Eugene's newly approved Fire Service Fee. The Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce is supporting this effort because we believe voters should have a voice in decisions that create permanent fees for core government services—especially when there are no built-in limits on future increases.

Our primary concern with the fee is not the amount, although we do believe it is regressive and know it will only grow over time, but that it does not solve the underlying structural budget issue, which is that the city is spending more than it brings in year after year. That issue cannot be solved through temporary fixes or new fees that postpone difficult decisions. Cuts will have to be made with or without the fee. We must create a sustainable financial plan that prioritizes core services while ensuring the city lives within its means.

Our position is also not about opposing funding for public safety. It is very much the opposite. We believe the community needs to prioritize core services expected to be provided by our local government and ensure those things are funded fully. If services are at risk after funding public safety, and the community wishes to maintain those services, then the community should have a chance to do so by voting on funding clearly tied to those services.

The Chamber has a long and consistent history of supporting services in our community, including past ballot measures for libraries, parks, schools, and public safety. That commitment has not changed.

We encouraged the City Council to refer this measure to voters, but the majority opted not to do so. We are simply taking steps to ensure the community has the opportunity to weigh in. While moving forward with this process, we remain open to discussions about alternative solutions and urge city leaders to engage with businesses and residents to find a path forward that addresses the issue long-term.

We value our partnership with the city and know that we can accomplish a lot of good work together. As a business community, we pledge to work side by side with the city to build stability for essential services while balancing the financial impact on local businesses and families.

About the Eugene Chamber

The Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce is a catalytic leader in creating a vibrant and diverse economy that drives economic opportunity and well-being in our region. Our membership includes nearly 1200 businesses and organizations across the greater Eugene/ Springfield region. The Chamber works with partners in business, government, and non-profit sectors to create an environment that improves the economic prosperity of our region. For more information, call 541-484-1314 or visit www.eugenechamber.com.

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Dear Volunteers-

Thank you for stepping up to help refer the Fire Services Fee to the ballot. Below are the guidelines to help you, as a circulator, successfully gather signatures while complying with state election laws.

What is this referendum about?

On February 10th the Eugene City Council passed a new "Fire Service Fee" that will be applied to all properties in Eugene, based on square footage. The median single-family home will pay \$10 per month, median commercial customer will pay \$38 per month and larger properties will pay up to \$1750 per month.

The fee is intended to raise \$10million per year. \$2 million per year will be used for new fire services, while the other \$8 million will be redistributed to fill an existing budget gap in the general fund and pay for other current services beyond just fire. With or without this fee, the city will still have to make budget cuts this year and in years to come as this does not fix the underlying budget issues.

The fee is permanent, regardless of the city's financial situation, and it can be increased by any amount at any time without a vote of the public.

The council opted to pass this fee without a vote of the public. **We simply believe the citizens should have the opportunity to vote on such a significant new fee that they will be responsible for paying.**

Instructions for collecting signatures:

Use Only Official Signature Sheets

- Only the attached, approved signature sheets may be used. Do not alter or modify them in any way.

Who Can Sign?

- Only registered voters in the City of Eugene may sign the petition.
- Each signer must provide their **full name, City of Eugene residence address, and signature** exactly as they are registered to vote. No PO Boxes please.

Provide the Ordinance

- A copy of the ordinance must accompany the signature sheets at all times and be presented if requested by the signee.

Signing as a Circulator

- Each signature sheet must be signed and dated by you, the circulator, at the bottom before submitting it and after signatures have been collected. Do **NOT** fill in the sheet number.
- You must witness all signatures and cannot sign as a circulator for any sheet that you did not personally witness.

Returning Completed Sheets

- Please return completed signature sheets as soon as possible but no later than **Friday, March 7th at 5pm** to the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce at 1401 Willamette Street, Eugene, Oregon.

If you have any questions or need additional sheets, please contact us at ambero@eugenechamber.com or (541-484-1314).