

Kathy Matlin, President
LWV Kittitas Valley
KittitasLeague.org
Guest Editorial [Column]
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Democracy Depends on You

Local elections matter. Local governmental bodies manage many different services and decisions made at the local level will directly affect your life. In fact, local governments can impact nearly every aspect of your life - so who is elected, what decisions are made, and how services will be delivered should matter to you. Your vote is your voice in these arenas.

Local elections impact:

- public schools, including curriculum, school year, school design, and more
- policing and public safety, including holding police accountable
- public transit
- public utilities
- garbage collection & disposal
- affordable housing and rent
- first responders, fire fighting
- access to water, cost of water, water use restrictions
- hospital services, including types of available care, hours of operation, and more
- taxes that fund all of these, and
- much more

This fall in Kittitas County, there will be elections to the boards of Hospital Districts, Fire Districts, Water Districts, Public Utility Districts, School Districts and to various City, County, and State government positions. In order to make an informed vote for each of these positions, you should understand the function of each body and the role your elected official will fill.

Your vote will shape the policies and services of all of these municipal corporations. Be a thoughtful and informed voter. It will impact your life. It matters.

This is the first of a series of League of Women Voter guest editorials [columns] to review the function and structure of municipal governments such as Hospital Districts, Water Districts, Fire Districts, School Districts, Public Utility Districts, as well as City, County, and State governments. We hope they help you better understand the local governments that impact you and your quality of life.

Not registered? Go to VoteWA.org to register online.

Vote. It matters.

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September 30, 2019

Hospital & Fire Districts Can Save You

What exactly is Hospital District or a Fire District and why are you asked to vote for its commissioners?

Hospital District

Public Hospital Districts are considered municipal governments under Washington state law (RCW 70.44) and as such, are governed by a board of commissioners who are elected to the position and serve a 6 year term, according to the Public Hospital District Commissioner Guide (published by the Association of Washington Public Hospital Districts).

There are two hospital districts in Kittitas County and each has 5 commissioners. These commissioners are nonpartisan and elected 'at large' in that they represent the entire district and not a particular area within the district's boundaries.

Hospital District #1 (HD1) covers lower county and provides care as Kittitas Valley Healthcare. It also operates KVH hospital. Hospital District #2 (HD2) covers upper county and provides care as Medic One ambulance service as well as some limited urgent care to upper county residents. Only voters in upper county can vote for commissioners to HD2 while only lower county voters can elect commissioners to HD1.

The Board of Commissioners sets hospital district policy and operational organization, including the delivery of quality care. The Board's role is to adopt general policies and to delegate day-to-day operations to the district administrator.

How are Hospital Districts funded?

A Hospital Board of Commissioners can raise money through property tax levies and bonds as well as through patient fees for healthcare services. To fund its services, HD1 relies mostly on patient revenues generated from medical treatment at Kittitas Valley Hospital and its clinics, while HD2 relies on property taxes paid by upper county property owners.

Your vote for hospital district commissioner will help determine what healthcare services are available to you, service location, potential tax burden, and more. Make your vote count. Go to VoteWA.org to discover which Hospital District you reside within.

Vote. It matters.

This November, candidates for **Hospital District #1** are:

Commissioner #1

Liahna Armstrong, incumbent

Terry Clark

Commissioner #2

Robert Davis, incumbent

Commissioner #4

Roy Savoian, incumbent

Jon Ward

Candidates for **Hospital District #2** are:

Commissioner #2

Hartwig Vatheuer, incumbent

Commissioner #4

Floyd Rogalski, incumbent

Commissioner #5

Melissa Becker, appointed

Fire District

What is the difference between a Fire District and a Fire Department? A Fire District is considered a municipal government under RCW 52.02.020 and is independent of a county or city government whereas a Fire Department is generally a subdivision of a city or county and under the control of that government.

Fire Districts can and do work closely with Fire Departments as their functions are often the same: fire prevention, fire suppression, emergency medical services, protection of life and property. Though there are 7 Fire Districts spread across Kittitas County, they do not cover all of it.

Fire Districts are overseen by a Board of Commissioners of 3 or 5 nonpartisan elected individuals who typically serve 6 year terms. As with Hospital Districts, the Fire Districts in our County elect their commissioners 'at large' which means they represent the entire Fire District.

The Board is usually responsible for determining levels of service and service goals, how the district will be funded, tax levies, budget approval, strategic planning, establishing policies and approving operational procedures, employing key personnel and supervising the fire chief. The Fire Chief is the CEO of the District and responsible for day-to-day operations.

To meet District goals and operational needs, the Board of Commissioners can:

- ~ acquire, purchase, manage, and sell real and personal property
- ~ enter into contracts
- ~ appoint and employ necessary personnel
- ~ levy and enforce collection of taxes
- ~ carry out lawful acts that fulfill the purpose of RCW 52.

Only the voters within a Fire District boundary are eligible to vote for commissioners of that District. For example, a resident living inside Fire District 3 cannot vote for Fire District 7 commissioners. Some rural areas of Kittitas County are outside any Fire District's boundaries.

Fire Districts are funded principally through property taxes of property owners within the district's boundaries. RCW 84.52.069 (with some restrictions) gives Fire Districts the authority

to level additional property taxes to provide emergency medical services, according to the Fire Commissioner Handbook (published by Washington Fire Commissioners Association).

Fire Districts can also raise funds through fees for Emergency Medical Services (EMS), recover the costs of unauthorized burns from property owner, contracting District's services to other uncovered areas, issuance of bonds (with voter approval) and more.

If you live inside a Fire District, its decisions about where and when to fight fire; whether to recover costs from you as a property owner, how much you may have to pay as a user of EMS care, all of this and more could impact you.

Therefore, you should carefully assess candidates for Fire District Commissioner because your vote will have immediate consequences. Do you know if you live inside or outside a Fire District? To find out, go to VoteWA.org and discover what Fire District - if any - has the duty to protect you and your property from fire.

Vote. It Matters.

This November, candidates for County Fire Districts are:

Fire District #1 (Thorp), Commissioner 2

Craig George, incumbent

Fire District #2 (greater Ellensburg), Commissioner 1

Ross Ogan

Fire District #3 (Easton), Commissioner 2

Terri Campbell

Fire District #4 (Vantage), Commissioner 1

Barbara Nichols

Fire District #6 (Ronald), Commissioner 2

Gordon Scholl

Fire District #7 (greater Cle Elum), Commissioner 1

Robert Cernick, incumbent

Russ Hobbs

Fire District 51 (Snoqualmie Pass), Commissioner 1

Morris B. Hanan, incumbent