

# FIRE WATCH



## CAPITAL FACILITIES PLAN UPDATE

In our last edition of Fire Watch, we promised to share updates on progress toward costing our adopted 2021-2027 Capital Facilities Plan [CFP]. Before we do, here is a reminder of the plan’s four priorities and the goal of the ongoing planning process:

- **Priority 1:** build an additional station in the northern part of our service area
- **Priority 2:** relocate and rebuild Station 38 in Pacific
- **Priority 3:** remodel or replace Station 31
- **Priority 4:** find a permanent location for Support Services

The goal of this ongoing planning process, facilitated by the architectural firm TCA, is to determine costs for these four priorities.

Now for the updates...

**Priority 1.** Design work is ongoing for the planned new station at 30th and I Street Northeast in Auburn. After consulting a variety of workgroups within our organization, TCA has completed a conceptual design on a nearly 14,000-square-foot fire station. When built, “Station 36” will be staffed around the clock by three firefighters.

**Priority 2.** Like Station 36, TCA has completed design work for a similarly sized and relocated

Station 38. Although the final location of this station is still in the works – we are completing feasibility work at a two-acre site along the Ellingson corridor in Pacific – the size and general design elements of this building provide a basis to determine project costs. A new location for Station 38 will allow the station’s three firefighters to better serve our communities, particularly Algona and Pacific, and provide a more contemporary, healthy, and resilient building.

**Priority 3.** After careful review, we have asked TCA to develop concepts for a new building on the existing Station 31 site that would act as a response fire station and a headquarters for most of VRFA’s administrative staff. Today, these staff members work out of two buildings: the current Station 31 and Station 35, a non-response facility on the old GSA property on C Street Southwest. When complete, the new Station 31 will continue to house a minimum of six firefighters 24/7 and approximately 30 support and administrative personnel, including our Fire Marshal’s Office, public education staff, and CARES team.

**Priority 4.** We’re continuing to work with TCA to evaluate locations for Support Services. Because this workgroup has unique needs, including



**Station 38, built in 1979,** was designed to house Pacific’s police and fire departments, a condition that remains in place today.

warehouse and vehicle maintenance spaces, finding the right location is challenging. As this work continues, however, TCA is designing building concepts to support these essential services.

This preliminary design work will determine the costs for these four priorities. These costs will, in turn, allow our Board of Governance to determine the best option and timeline for funding these crucial projects. When eventually completed, the projects described here will enhance the VRFA’s ability to serve our growing communities and provide healthier and more resilient buildings for our first responders.

## SOUND THE ALARM, SAVE A LIFE



On April 22, VRFA staff joined the American Red Cross and several local organizations to canvas four neighborhoods as part of their “Sound the Alarm, Save a Life” smoke alarm campaign. The day was a great success with over 300

smoke alarms installed in approximately 140 homes. Along with smoke alarm checks, residents received information on fire safety and evacuation planning, as well as earthquake preparedness.



SELFLESS SERVICE

INTEGRITY

GRIT

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# SHARING FIRE SAFETY AND INJURY PREVENTION WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

This past spring, VRFA staff visited 15 public and four private elementary schools, sharing fire safety and injury prevention messages with children in Algona, Auburn, and Pacific.

Since the early 1990s, the then Auburn Fire Department and now VRFA have visited elementary school classrooms. This year staff reached 142 classrooms and 4,260 students with important safety information.

The VRFA elementary school curriculum focuses on fire prevention, fire escape, and injury prevention for kindergarten, first, and second graders. Kindergarten classes learn that matches and lighters are tools for grown-ups and not toys for kids, and the sound of a smoke alarm means they should exit their homes quickly, plus how and when they should crawl low under smoke. They also have a chance to see, hear, and touch a firefighter in full gear.

We build upon what was taught in kindergarten when visiting first-grade students. They learn to plan and practice an escape route from their home so they can react quickly if a fire occurs. Kids love participating in the role-play fire escape scenario each year. They test a smoke alarm, check doors for heat, crawl low under smoke, escape to their family meeting place, and practice calling 9-1-1.

Our second-grade curriculum focuses on preventing four of the top ten most likely injuries to affect young



children: motor vehicle crashes, bicycle/pedestrian, drowning, and fire/burns. Through a pretend trip to “Camp No-Owie,” students discover that many of them need to ride in a booster seat for the seatbelt to fit them correctly and protect them in a crash. They also learn how to wear their bike helmet and life jacket correctly. Instructors also go over bicycle and water safety. Lastly, we remind them to make safe choices if faced with the temptation of fire experimentation or peer pressure.

The VRFA is grateful to school administration and staff for their partnership in this important mission to reduce fires and injuries involving youth, provide positive role modeling, and teach behaviors that will stay with students into their adult years.



## EMS SPOTLIGHT EMERGENCY CALLS

### How long does an emergency call take?



Emergency call volume continues to trend upwards in the VRFA service area. In 2022, we responded to 15,876, a nearly five percent increase from 2021. The aid car at Station 31 continues to be our busiest unit with 3,634 calls in 2022, or an average of 9.9 calls

a day. When you think about a 24-hour shift, this may not seem like a lot, but when you factor in how much time each call takes, this upward trend requires us to carefully manage our resources to ensure that we can continue to respond rapidly to every emergency call.

In general, most calls take between forty-five to ninety minutes. Some fires and technical rescues can take much longer.

### Medical Aid Calls:

Every medical aid call requires a specific approach to address a patient’s needs. Due to this, the length of a medical aid call can vary greatly.

The response is the shortest segment, as we are firmly committed to responding to all emergent calls for service within seven minutes and 34 seconds for EMS calls and seven minutes and 49 seconds for fire calls from the time the 911 call is received until we arrive at a scene.

Our time on-scene can vary greatly. VRFA crews train to quickly assess severe trauma cases to initiate speedy transport, as the best treatment for those patients is in the hospital setting. Alternatively, there are calls where a patient is unsure of why they are feeling ill, so firefighters will invest more time in understanding the situation. These calls often require a focused examination of a patient’s medical history,

thoroughly collected vital signs, and a discussion of available treatment options. Sometimes during their evaluation, our EMTs will come across Advanced Life Support (ALS) indicators. These are vital signs or examination results that, per protocol, require King County Paramedics trained to provide a higher level of care to the patient. When King County Paramedics arrive, we stay until they conduct their patient exam and determine the next steps.



Transportation from the scene to our local hospital, Multicare Auburn Medical Center, usually takes ten minutes or less. Transporting patients to hospitals outside our jurisdiction will take longer. Occasionally there can be a delay for patients to get a room assignment in the emergency room. VRFA firefighters do not leave their patient until someone at the facility is there and ready to provide care. In some rare cases, when the hospital is busy, this can take up to an hour to complete.

### Fires:

Fires generally take longer than any other call. As with aid calls, the response time is rapid. When crews arrive at a fire, the officer in charge quickly evaluates the situation to determine the best firefighting approach, reduce safety risks to firefighters, and communicate instructions to additional incoming firefighting units. Every fire is different, and the time it takes to extinguish each fire varies. After the fire is under control, much work is left to do. If not already

**In general, most calls take between 45 to 90 minutes.**

done, crews must complete two thorough searches of the building and check the entire structure for any signs of remaining heat sources. Additionally, units will remain on-scene to collect their equipment, watch for possible rekindling, and wait for the fire investigator to arrive. Considering this, unless minor, most fires take one or more apparatus out of service for several hours.

### Car Crashes:

Operating on any roadway is some of the most dangerous work a firefighter can do. As such, the VRFA aims to reduce risk to its crews and the individuals involved by resolving the incident as quickly as possible. However, these types of incidents also sometimes cause significant injuries to occupants, and a careful, methodical process is required to ensure their injuries are not made worse. Every motor vehicle accident (MVA) requires at least two units to respond to the scene. Once there, a fire engine will position itself in the best position to protect first responders and patients. While additional steps are taken to redirect traffic, the remaining first responders will begin immediately assessing injuries. If a patient is trapped in their car, our crews quickly use hydraulic extrication tools to access the passenger compartment. From there, it is a delicate process to ensure the patient is carefully placed on a backboard with a neck collar to protect them from further injury. The patient either receive additional treatment from medics on the scene or are rapidly transported to a trauma center.

Calls are not complete once crews return to the station; they must clean equipment and apparatus to prepare for the next emergency call and finalize required reports.

# FIRE CHIEF’S MESSAGE



BRAD THOMPSON

I am immensely proud of the dedicated men and women who make up our staff, and I hope that my previous Chief’s Messages in VRFA’s Fire Watch have conveyed this sentiment. These wonderful people consistently provide our community with exceptional emergency, preparedness, and prevention services. Within this issue of Fire Watch, you will see examples of their contributions to a healthy and vibrant community. I’m particularly impressed by our firefighters who participate in the annual Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Firefighter Stairclimb. Led by Firefighter Ryan Simpson, the VRFA stair climb team members excel in fundraising, participation, and team building. In this issue, you will also meet the recipients of the VRFA’s 2022 Firefighter, Fire Officer, and Selfless Service awards. It is a great honor to be

The dedicated men and women who make up our staff consistently provide our community with exceptional emergency, preparedness, and prevention services.

nominated for these awards, but even more so to be selected. The fact that peers make the nominations, and the Awards Committee has the challenging task of selecting the final recipients, makes this honor even more special. This year’s nominees were exceptional, and the award recipients genuinely deserve recognition for their efforts. While we have an exceptional staff, it’s important to recognize the increasingly challenging nature of a firefighter’s job. In my 25 years in the fire service, the demands for service have changed dramatically. Our firefighters have worked through extreme stress during the pandemic, dealing with unknowns every shift and returning home to quarantined families. Today’s steady increase in call volume, coupled with responses to scenes of violence and drug use, can adversely affect their mental well being. To address the changing demands of the job, we are partnering with neighboring fire agencies to

establish a behavioral health unit focused on the mental well-being of our first responders. Deputy Chief Tim Day is also leading our efforts to provide facilities that promote all our staff’s physical and mental well-being while meeting the increasing demand for emergency incident call volume. Summer is a wonderful time with longer days, warmer temperatures, and more outdoor activities. As we enjoy this season, it’s important to remember that the wildfire threat is already in full effect. The VRFA has highly trained firefighters to help mitigate any threat, but you can also take steps to protect your home. Visit [www.dnr.wa.gov/firewise](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/firewise) for more information on actions you can take. Finally, I want to remind everyone to take care and be safe. Chief Brad Thompson

# 2022 ANNUAL EMPLOYEE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Each year the Valley Regional Fire Authority celebrates employee achievements by recognizing a Firefighter and Fire Officer of the Year, plus awarding a member who exemplifies one of the organization’s core values: selfless service, integrity, and grit. Chosen by their coworkers, the 2022 award recipients include Firefighter of the Year, Drew Mattheis; Fire Officer of the Year, Battalion Chief Matt Kinnee; and the VRFA Selfless Service Award winner, Systems Analyst Thomas Downs.



FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR  
DREW MATTHEIS  
FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR

Firefighter of the Year Drew Mattheis is a 10-year veteran of the VRFA. He is deeply dedicated to the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC) and has spent many hours helping improve the program’s efficiencies. Drew was also instrumental in successfully implementing the new Tractor Drawn Aerial ladder truck. He provided insight during the design process and delivered driving training as an instructor. “Drew is an exceptional firefighter; you would be fortunate to have him show up for your emergency. He holds himself to a high standard. His dedication to passing knowledge to apprentice firefighters ensures that future generations will have the skill sets required to mitigate any emergency,” says Battalion Chief Steve Zehnder.



FIRE OFFICER OF THE YEAR  
MATT KINNEE  
BATTALION CHIEF

Battalion Chief Matt Kinnee was selected as Fire Officer of the Year for his creativity and commitment. BC Kinnee is a 16-year veteran of the VRFA. He was instrumental in designing and implementing the VRFA’s first “Post Academy,” where probationary firefighters spend an intensive week learning more about the organization and its operations before reporting to 24-hour shift duty. His goal is to develop firefighters to perform at their best to improve service to the communities we serve. “BC Kinnee is humble, remembers his roots, and relies on experiences and knowledge while enthusiastically adapting to new challenges,” says a coworker. He serves as the VRFA Honor Guard Commander and spends countless hours assisting with memorials and other events nationwide. “I couldn’t be prouder of Matt. This recognition is well-deserved for his time, commitment, and passion for constantly improving the Valley Regional Fire Authority and the entire fire service. Matt looks for ways to build relationships with everyone he makes contact with. He truly embodies our Mission, Vision, and Values. His leadership makes our department and community a spectacular place to work and live,” says Deputy Chief Rick Olson.

Selfless Service is a core value of the VRFA and is defined as giving without expectations of receiving. It requires putting aside one’s own self-interests to commit to what is needed for the team to achieve its mission. Systems Analyst Thomas Downs received the 2022 VRFA Selfless Service Award.



SELFLESS SERVICE AWARD  
THOMAS DOWNS  
SYSTEMS ANALYST

Thomas has been with the VRFA for five years and has proven to be essential to the VRFA’s success. He is described as professional, approachable, and reliable, with a way of making technical computer topics fun and accessible. He always seeks to help others with kindness and patience, even when pulled in multiple directions. “Asking for help with IT issues is always humbling. Thomas provides this help in a thoughtful, patient, and incredibly effective way. I always feel more informed and empowered after working with him. He is an invaluable team member, and I am grateful for his service,” says Chief Brad Thompson. Congratulations to the 2022 award recipients!



DAVE GRUBB  
LOGISTICS ASSISTANT

# THE VRFA WELCOMES DAVE GRUBB

The VRFA welcomed Dave Grubb to the team in January. Dave works in Support Services as a Logistics Assistant. He comes to the VRFA with an extended warehouse management, transportation, and logistics career. Dave was born and raised

in the South and the Midwest. He moved to Washington after four years in the Air Force and has a degree from Eastern Washington University.



# THE VRFA GIVES BACK



## 2023 Firefighter Stairclimb

The tallest building in Seattle is the Columbia Center. At a height of over 900 feet, the building includes a stairwell with 69 floors, 1356 steps, and 788 feet in vertical elevation. Does that sound like a nice elevator ride for a spectacular view at the top? Probably. But to 19 VRFA Firefighters, Captains, and a Battalion Chief the building represents a challenge, a goal, a friendly competition, and a lung-busting, leg burning grind. Most importantly, though, the building represents a treasured annual event: a stair climb that serves as a fundraiser to support the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, or LLS.

For 32 years, LLS has hosted this event that has brought motivated firefighters from the VRFA and throughout the world to raise funds to support cancer research. Since the inaugural climb in 1989, the event has raised over \$24 million, including \$2.2 million in 2023 alone. This year's team of 19, the VRFA's largest contingent ever, raised a record \$20,000 in fundraising and finished with a record team time that placed them 7th out of 200 teams. VRFA Captain Jeremiah Mushen placed 19th overall.

### Why so many records this year?

The VRFA's record setting participation, fundraising, and finish reflect the deep connection the team feels to this cause. On the day of the event, many wear pictures or have mementos of those affected by Leukemia, Lymphoma, or other cancers, memorializing or honoring those fighting the disease on their helmet or gear. Our team is also motivated by the reality that blood

cancers are becoming increasingly common among firefighters at an alarming rate. The more they climb, the more likely those affected can climb out of cancer diagnosis either now or in the future.

Another reason team numbers increased this year has a lot to do with those who are event veterans. Several members have been participating in the climb for over a decade, including Battalion Chief Gary Barker, Captain Gerald Montiel, and Firefighter Ryan Simpson.

Battalion Chief Barker, who this year completed his department-leading 22nd climb, climbs for his good friend Kevin Porter who died in 2001 from Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma.

Captain Gerald Montiel has completed 13 climbs and sees no reason to stop. Team Captain Ryan Simpson completed his 11th climb this year and is already looking forward to next year. Both firefighters enjoy the physical aspect of the climb and the camaraderie that comes with a common goal of defeating cancer and helping those that can't climb.

The VRFA Stairclimb Team will be back in 2024. When you see them out in the town or on social media fundraising for this cause, stop by and say hi or drop a comment; we love the feedback! See you at the top!

### The 2022 VRFA Stairclimb team:

Gary Barker, Tiffany Carlson, Shawn Bowen, Sam Brown, Justin Erickson, Blakelee Evans, Colton Fogelberg, Matt Kinnee, Rachel Labender, Blake Laidlaw, Gerald Montiel, Jeremiah Mushen, Joe Parrish, Steve Rierson, Travis Schade, Ryan Simpson, Guy Smith, Cory Wallace, and Zach White.



## VRFA Services

The VRFA provides CPR and First Aid classes, complimentary blood pressure checks, fire station tours, custom-fit bicycle helmets, custom-fit life jackets, smoke alarms, child car seat inspections and more.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

call **253-288-5800** or  
go to **www.vrfa.org**

## VRFA Administration

- Brad Thompson**  
Fire Chief/Administrator
- Rick Olson**  
Deputy Chief of Operations
- Tim Day**  
Deputy Chief of Community Risk Reduction
- Mark Horaski**  
Chief Financial Officer
- Sarah Borden**  
Human Resources Director

## Board of Governance

- Troy Linnell**  
Chair, City of Algona Mayor
- Nancy Backus**  
Vice-Chair, City of Auburn Mayor

## Members

- Larry Brown**  
Auburn City Council
- Kerry Garberding**  
Pacific City Council
- Leanne Guier**  
City of Pacific Mayor
- Vic Kave**  
Pacific City Council
- Bill Thomas**  
Algona City Council
- Robyn Mulenga**  
Auburn City Council
- Lynda Osborn**  
Algona City Council

# FIREWORKS REGULATIONS

The VRFA serves the cities of Algona, Auburn, and Pacific. All three have local ordinances that address the purchase and discharge of fireworks within their respective city limits. The rules are very similar and easy to follow. You can find specific information in your city ordinances or on the VRFA website at [vrfa.org/community/safety-information/injury-prevention/#fireworks](http://vrfa.org/community/safety-information/injury-prevention/#fireworks).

The sale of fireworks is permitted to start at noon on June 28. Stands can operate between the hours of 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.

It is illegal to discharge any fireworks in the City of Algona. Both Auburn and Pacific limit discharge on the 4th of July from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m.



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## VRFA HEADQUARTERS

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253-288-5800  
Business Hours 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
[www.vrfa.org](http://www.vrfa.org)



The VRFA is committed to our mission:  
**WE SERVE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY**