

**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC**

Proposal for Renewal of King County Medic One/Emergency Medical Services Levy

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY****DIRECTION**

King County staff will provide an overview of the proposed Medic One/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) levy which would require property tax contributions from Bellevue property owners. The proposal would renew the existing six-year EMS levy that expires December 31, 2025. Pursuant to RCW 84.52.069, King County cannot place the renewal of the EMS levy on the ballot without the approval of the city councils of at least 75 percent of all the cities in the County whose populations exceed 50,000. King County has not yet introduced an ordinance for the EMS levy renewal ballot proposition.

City staff request direction to prepare a resolution that would support King County submitting a countywide ballot proposition for a six-year Medic One EMS levy for vote by electors in November 2025 as proposed by the EMS Advisory Task Force, and to bring back such resolution on consent agenda following introduction of ordinance by King County.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Provide direction to prepare a resolution supporting placement of proposed renewal of six-year King County Medic One EMS levy on the November 2025 ballot and bring it back for final action on City Council's consent agenda following introduction of ordinance by King County.

**BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**

The King County Medic One/EMS system is primarily funded with a countywide, voter approved EMS levy. The current EMS levy expires at the end of 2025. An EMS Advisory Task Force, consisting of elected officials from throughout King County, began meeting in February 2024, and in September 2024, the Task Force adopted final programmatic and financial recommendations which became the basis for the EMS levy proposal that will be transmitted to the King County Council by the County Executive by late February.

For the King County Council to place an EMS levy on the ballot, state law requires the legislative bodies of at least 75 percent of the cities within the County that have populations exceeding 50,000 to approve placing a countywide EMS levy proposal on the ballot. Bellevue is one of the

cities whose populations exceed 50,000. King County EMS is seeking supportive direction from the City Council in advance of ordinance for the EMS levy renewal ballot proposition.

At the City Council's February 11 meeting, Michele Plorde, Director and Helen Chatalas, Deputy Director, of the Emergency Medical Services Division, Public Health – Seattle and King County will provide an overview of the proposed Medic One/EMS levy (EMS levy).

The Medic One/EMS system serving Seattle and King County provides essential life-saving services to the residents of, and visitors to, the region. With an international reputation for innovation and excellence, it offers uniform medical care regardless of location, incident circumstances, day of the week, or time of day. The system is recognized as one of the best emergency medical services programs in the country. It serves over 2.2 million people throughout King County and provides life-saving services on average every three minutes. It is also acclaimed for its patient outcomes, including among the highest reported survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest patients across the nation.

### **Levy Rate**

Since 1979, the Medic One/EMS system has primarily been funded through a series of voter approved levies. The current six-year EMS levy expires December 31, 2025. To ensure continued emergency medical services in 2026 and beyond, a new levy must be approved by voters. The current levy 2025 rate is \$0.221 per \$1,000 of assessed value (AV). The levy rate passed by voters in 2020 was \$0.265 per \$1,000 of AV. Due to rising property values, the rate has declined over the course of the existing levy. Bellevue property owners contribute approximately \$20 million per year under the current levy expiring this year.

The proposed starting EMS levy rate is \$0.25 per \$1,000 of AV for 2026-2031, which would raise nearly \$1.5 billion over the course of the levy. In 2026, Bellevue property owners would contribute approximately \$24 million per year under the proposed new rate.

### **EMS Levy Planning Process**

The planning process for the next Medic One/EMS levy began in February 2024 with the first meeting of the EMS Advisory Task Force. The 20-member Task Force included elected officials from King County, cities, and fire districts, representing those who administer, authorize, and are served by the system. Mayor Lynne Robinson represented the City of Bellevue on the Task Force.

The Task Force created four subcommittees organized around the primary service areas of Advanced Life Support (ALS), Basic Life Support (BLS), Regional Services (RS), and Finance to conduct the bulk of the program and cost analysis for the EMS system. Each subcommittee was chaired by an EMS Advisory Task Force member, including subject matter experts from all aspects of the Medic One/EMS system, and met regularly to review system needs and priorities. Mayor Robinson served as the Finance Subcommittee Chair and Bellevue staff participated on all four subcommittees.

In September 2024, the Task Force adopted final programmatic and financial recommendations, which became the basis of the EMS levy proposal that will be transmitted to the King County Council by the County Executive by late February.

RCW 84.52.069 requires the legislative bodies of 75 percent of cities with a population over 50,000 to authorize placing a county-wide EMS levy on the ballot. In King County there are 11 cities with populations over 50,000 - Bellevue, Seattle, Kent, Renton, Federal Way, Kirkland, Auburn, Sammamish, Redmond, Shoreline, and Burien.

**Key Task Force Recommendations**

Subcommittee Recommendations	
Advanced Life Support (ALS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue using the unit allocation to fully fund ALS</li> <li>Include a placeholder for adding a potential future unit</li> <li>Continue support for ALS-based programs that benefit the entire EMS system and region</li> </ul>
Basic Life Support (BLS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase total BLS funding to help offset costs of providing EMS services</li> <li>Increase funding support for Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) that addresses community needs*</li> <li>Distribute new BLS and MIH funding and annual increases using a more equitable methodology that is more weighted toward service level and need over assessed value</li> <li>Support mental wellness and diversity, equity and inclusion efforts proposed by the King County Fire Chiefs Association</li> </ul>
Regional Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue delivering programs that provide essential support to the system</li> <li>Enhance programs to meet regional needs</li> <li>Continue and develop strategic initiatives that leverage previous investments made by the region to improve patient care and outcomes</li> </ul>
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Base the Financial Plan on financial policies that provide stability to the system by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporating sufficient reserves to mitigate unforeseen financial risk; and</li> <li>Ensure additional protection and flexibility to meet emerging needs</li> </ul> </li> <li>Adopt a financial plan that supports a six-year levy collecting nearly \$1.5 billion with a 25-cent EMS levy</li> </ul>

*\* MIH services are available through ALS and BLS calls, even though the subcommittee recommendation appears in the table above only as a BLS recommendation.*

**Tiered Medical Model**

Services provided by EMS personnel are derived from the highest standards of medical training,

practices and care, scientific evidence, and close supervision by EMS physicians. The tiered system is predicated on BLS agencies responding to every incident to stabilize the patient and secure the scene. This reserves the more limited regional resource of an ALS unit (known locally as a medic unit that is staffed by paramedics) for the serious or life-threatening injuries and illnesses.

The tiered system conserves paramedic services for events requiring advanced skills and reduces the number of calls to which paramedics respond. Compared to systems that send paramedics on all calls, the EMS system in King County can provide excellent response and patient care with fewer paramedics. At a cost of about \$3.8 million per ALS unit, this approach results in significant cost savings. The tiered system pairs highly successful outcomes with reasonable cost controls, features that are somewhat unique to the King County system.

Services funded by the EMS Levy include:

- **ALS Services:** Paramedics provide out-of-hospital emergency medical care for critical or life-threatening injuries and illnesses. They provide physician-level invasive procedures including airway control, heart pacing, the dispensing of medicine, and other lifesaving procedures. There are 27 ALS units located throughout King County, strategically placed for optimal response times. ALS providers receive full funding from the EMS levy for providing these services. In 2025, each ALS unit costs approximately \$3.8 million. In 2026, this cost is expected to increase to approximately \$4.1 million.

Bellevue is one of five regional providers of ALS services in King County. The Bellevue Fire Department operates four paramedic units; two units are in Bellevue, one in Issaquah, and one in North Bend. In addition to providing ALS services to Bellevue residents, the Bellevue Fire Department provides ALS to other Eastside communities including Mercer Island, Medina, Clyde Hill, Beaux Arts, Hunts Point, Yarrow Point, Newcastle, Issaquah (Fire District 10), Fall City, Sammamish, North Bend, Snoqualmie, and Snoqualmie Pass (Fire District 51).

- **BLS Services:** BLS personnel are the "first responders" to an incident, providing immediate basic life support medical care that includes advanced first aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation/Automatic External Defibrillator to stabilize the patient. Staffed by firefighters trained as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), BLS units arrive at the scene in five minutes on average. BLS contributes significantly to the success of the EMS system. The EMS levy provides partial funding to local fire departments to provide these services.

The proposed BLS funding formula is based on AV and calls for service, which results in a 2025 Bellevue allocation of \$4.1 million. The additional funding Bellevue would receive each year for BLS services from the proposed levy is unknown until further forecasting is completed. Funding is not intended to supplant current funding, but to increase services.

- **Regional Support Services:** The King County EMS Division manages core regional EMS programs critical to providing the highest quality out-of-hospital emergency care available, and provision of these services have proven more effective and economical when delivered on a

regional basis. These services emphasize uniformity of medical care across jurisdictions and consistency in training. Regional Services provided by the County include paramedic and EMT training; development of medical protocols, and medical quality assurance and review.

- **Strategic Initiatives:** Strategic Initiatives are pilot programs that improve the quality of EMS services and manage the growth and cost of the system. If proven successful, they may become ongoing Regional Services programs. The Telephone Referral Program (Nurseline), BLS Training & QI, and the Community Medical Technician (the precursor to MIH) started as Strategic Initiatives that tested new approaches to improve patient care.
- **Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH):** The proposed levy also includes \$50 million over six years specifically for MIH services. MIH funding would be distributed using the same allocation method as BLS, based on AV and calls for service. The funding Bellevue is estimated to receive per year from the levy for MIH services is unknown until further forecasting is completed.

Bellevue provides MIH services through the Citizens Advocates for Referral and Education Services (CARES) program. The CARES program addresses the needs of “frequent and low acuity” 911 callers, as well as callers with social needs that are not addressed in a traditional 911 response. Without underlying needs being met, individuals’ quality of life can be negatively impacted and they often become high users of the 911 system and hospital emergency departments. CARES is staffed with professional social workers and graduate students completing their master’s degree in social work who provide crisis response and ongoing case management.

Bellevue funds the CARES program with general funds and a grant from King County Emergency Medical Services. Total funding for MIH in 2024 was \$1,167,532 which included \$282,486 in general funds and \$885,046 from King County Emergency Medical Services.

## POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

### Policy Impact

The proposed EMS levy will continue funding several core services that the City of Bellevue provides to its community members and the region, including advanced life support, basic life support, regional support, and mobile integrated healthcare, as well as pilot programs for strategic initiatives to improve the quality of EMS services and manage growth and cost of the system.

### Fiscal Impact

The current levy expires at the end of 2025. State law permits EMS levies to be approved for six years, 10 years, or on a permanent basis. EMS levies have typically been approved for six years in King County. A new rate is set each year in order to collect the amount needed for the programs.

The proposed levy rate is \$0.25 per \$1,000 of AV for 2026-2031 and would collect nearly \$1.5 billion countywide over the course of the levy. In 2026, Bellevue property owners would contribute approximately \$24 million per year under the proposed new rate. With the proposed rate of \$0.25 per \$1,000 of assessed value, a \$1,000,000 Bellevue home would pay \$250 per year for EMS

services, an increase of approximately \$30 per year over the existing levy.

### **OPTIONS**

1. Provide direction to prepare a resolution supporting placement of proposed renewal of six-year King County Medic One EMS levy on the November 2025 ballot and bring it back for final action on City Council's consent agenda following introduction of ordinance by King County.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

N/A

### **AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY**

N/A