

Wasatch Taxpayers Association

"The Fiscal Hawks of Wasatch County"

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News Summary:

- Wasatch County Fire District votes large tax increase.
- Voters protest with a referendum petition.
- Petition gets 50% more than required signatures.
- Residents still look for answers.

WTPA Files Referendum Petition on Fire Tax Vote

In late August the Wasatch County Fire SSD board approved a 76.6% increase in the county fire portion of the property tax. The WC Fire Board is made up *solely* of members of the County Council. Due to the lack of information, and many unanswered questions, county residents filed a referendum petition to place that decision on the 2014 ballot allowing voters to decide if that amount is really needed.

The [Wasatch Taxpayers Association](http://www.wasatchtaxpayersassociation.com) (WTPA) organized the petition drive following Utah Code which approves such action. Tracy Taylor, WTPA Chair said, "Although the district held two truth in taxation public hearings where many residents attended, and asked educated fiscal questions, little was given to really explain why the tax was being considered."

Utah code requires 15% of the voter count in the 2012 presidential election to sign the petition calling for an election. "Just under 1500 signatures were required. We were trying for about 1800 to make sure there would be enough," said Gary Oliverson, WTPA petition project director. "Our collectors found that the vast majority of voters felt that large of an increase was very high, even though a relatively small dollar amount. A total of 2,156 (22% of voters) signatures were submitted."

After the referendum was started, the Fire Board held a special meeting to set an election on the issue in 2013, but found they were not able to do so per state statute. The County Clerk will now verify that the petition did indeed have enough signatures to place the item on the ballot in 2014.

Questions have continually gone unanswered since the fall of 2012, when rumors of a possible increase first surfaced. Local radio co-host for the Impact program, Bob Wren, reported that he had been unable to find the Board meeting where specific approval for the tax increase was made, or when a 5% pay increase was discussed or approved. The pay increase was finally acknowledged in response to a direct question at the first truth in taxation hearing in December 2012. "I attended the December meeting in which some sort of fire budget was approved, but there was little discussion other than on when the Wasatch Council/fire board needed to approve it. The budget was not even available to the public at the meeting."

After the [second public hearing August 7](#), Fire Board Chair Steve Capson, and County Council Chair Jay Price both indicated the decision would be given in two weeks and the many questions would be addressed then. That *subsequent* meeting, held August 21, Capson referred the citizens to several websites for information, and basically ignored most of the questions that had been asked at the August

7th meeting. Citizen comments were not permitted at the August 21 meeting, and the board passed the increase unanimously.

WTPA has repeatedly questioned the filling of volunteer board positions with elected officials and, especially, those being paid positions. WTPA raised the issue of [Utah code 17B-1-308](#) which states “board members may not receive compensation for their service as board members in addition to compensation they receive as members of a county or municipal legislative body.”

The board overseeing the Wasatch County Fire District discontinued their compensation for serving on that Board in a recent meeting. Wasatch Taxpayer Association (WTPA) board member, Gary Oliverson reports, “As a result of members of the public inquiring about board payments for elected officials, the County Council *decided* it was appropriate to stop paying themselves. I congratulate them for doing the right thing.”

Current WTPA chair, Tracy Taylor, has posed the question, “If they stopped the practice based on state code, shouldn't the previous payments over many years be returned?” During 2011 and 2012, the Fire Board received over \$65,000 collectively as a board in payments. Taylor continued, “I wonder if this applies to the other boards the council members sit on, as well?”

These issues arose in the midst of discussions on the proposed 76.6% tax increase for the WCFD Special Service District. Many questions have arisen about the origins of the proposal that board members be compensated and whether it was actually approved in a fire board meeting.

Many Wasatch taxpayers have been questioning board appointments – and board pay for quite some time. The WTPA suggests that this elected official pay issue may be an opportune time to reconsider who is serving on the various county and municipality boards. Anissa Wardell, another WTPA board member, suggests that, “A policy should be established that any board not requiring an elected official be filled with one of our many citizens who would be willing to serve if approached and given the opportunity.”

Wasatch Taxpayer Association will continue focusing their “hawk-eyes” on local fiscal issues. The board of the WTPA consists of Tracy Taylor-Chair, Gary Oliverson, Anissa Wardell, Neil Anderton, Dennis Jensen and Chuck Zuercher.