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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2576**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2018 Regular Session**

**By** House Local Government (originally sponsored by Representatives Griffey, Springer, and McBride)

AN ACT Relating to allowing fire protection district annexations and mergers within a reasonable geographic proximity; and amending RCW 52.04.011, 52.06.090, 52.26.030, 52.04.031, 52.26.020, 52.26.060, and 52.26.300.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 52.04.011 and 2015 c 53 s 73 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A territory ((~~adjacent~~)) located within reasonable proximity to a fire protection district and not within the boundaries of a city, town, or other fire protection district may be annexed to the fire protection district by petition of fifteen percent of the qualified registered electors residing within the territory proposed to be annexed. Such territory may be located in a county or counties other than the county or counties within which the fire protection district is located. The petition shall be filed with the fire commissioners of the fire protection district and if the fire commissioners concur in the petition they shall file the petition with the county auditor of the county within which the territory is located. If this territory is located in more than one county, the original petition shall be filed with the auditor of the county within which the largest portion of the territory is located, who shall be designated as the lead auditor, and a copy shall be filed with the auditor of each other county within which such territory is located. Within thirty days after the date of the filing of the petition the auditor shall examine the signatures on the petition and certify to the sufficiency or insufficiency of the signatures. If this territory is located in more than one county, the auditor of each other county who receives a copy of the petition shall examine the signatures and certify to the lead auditor the number of valid signatures and the number of registered voters residing in that portion of the territory that is located within the county. The lead auditor shall certify the sufficiency or insufficiency of the signatures.

After the county auditor has certified the sufficiency of the petition, the county legislative authority or authorities, or the boundary review board or boards, of the county or counties in which such territory is located shall consider the proposal under the same basis that a proposed incorporation of a fire protection district is considered, with the same authority to act on the proposal as in a proposed incorporation, as provided under chapter 52.02 RCW. If the proposed annexation is approved by the county legislative authority or boundary review board, the board of fire commissioners shall adopt a resolution requesting the county auditor to call a special election, as specified under RCW 29A.04.330, at which the ballot proposition is to be submitted. No annexation shall occur when the territory proposed to be annexed is located in more than one county unless the county legislative authority or boundary review board of each county approves the proposed annexation.

(2) The county legislative authority or authorities of the county or counties within which such territory is located have the authority and duty to determine on an equitable basis, the amount of any obligation which the territory to be annexed to the district shall assume to place the property owners of the existing district on a fair and equitable relationship with the property owners of the territory to be annexed as a result of the benefits of annexing to a district previously supported by the property owners of the existing district. If a boundary review board has had its jurisdiction invoked on the proposal and approves the proposal, the county legislative authority of the county within which such territory is located may exercise the authority granted in this subsection and require such an assumption of indebtedness. This obligation may be paid to the district in yearly benefit charge installments to be fixed by the county legislative authority. This benefit charge shall be collected with the annual tax levies against the property in the annexed territory until fully paid. The amount of the obligation and the plan of payment established by the county legislative authority shall be described in general terms in the notice of election for annexation and shall be described in the ballot proposition on the proposed annexation that is presented to the voters for their approval or rejection. Such benefit charge shall be limited to an amount not to exceed a total of fifty cents per thousand dollars of assessed valuation: PROVIDED, HOWEVER, That the special election on the proposed annexation shall be held only within the boundaries of the territory proposed to be annexed to the fire protection district.

(3) On the entry of the order of the county legislative authority incorporating the territory into the existing fire protection district, the territory shall become subject to the indebtedness, bonded or otherwise, of the existing district. If the petition is signed by sixty percent of the qualified registered electors residing within the territory proposed to be annexed, and if the board of fire commissioners concur, an election in the territory and a hearing on the petition shall be dispensed with and the county legislative authority shall enter its order incorporating the territory into the existing fire protection district.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.06.090 and 2014 c 25 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

A part of one district may be transferred and merged with ((~~an adjacent district~~)) a district located within reasonable proximity if the area can be better served by the merged district. To effect such a merger, a petition, signed by a majority of the commissioners of the merging district or signed by not less than fifteen percent of the qualified electors residing in the area to be merged, shall be filed with the commissioners of the merging district, if signed by electors, or with the commissioners of the merger district if signed by commissioners of the merging district. If the commissioners of the merging district approve the petition, the petition shall be presented to the commissioners of the merger district. If the commissioners of the merger district approve the petition, an election shall be called in the area to be merged.

In the event that either board of fire district commissioners does not approve the petition, the partial merger must not proceed.

A majority of the votes cast is necessary to approve the transfer.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.030 and 2017 c 196 s 8 are each amended to read as follows:

Regional fire protection service authority planning committees are advisory entities that are created, convened, and empowered as follows:

(1) Any two or more ((~~adjacent~~)) fire protection jurisdictions located within reasonable proximity may create a regional fire protection service authority and convene a regional fire protection service authority planning committee. No fire protection jurisdiction may participate in more than one created authority.

(2) Each governing body of the fire protection jurisdictions participating in planning under this chapter shall appoint three elected officials to the authority planning committee. Members of the planning committee may receive compensation of seventy dollars per day, or portion thereof, not to exceed seven hundred dollars per year, for attendance at planning committee meetings and for performance of other services in behalf of the authority, and may be reimbursed for travel and incidental expenses at the discretion of their respective governing body.

(3) A regional fire protection service authority planning committee may receive state funding, as appropriated by the legislature, or county funding provided by the affected counties for start-up funding to pay for salaries, expenses, overhead, supplies, and similar expenses ordinarily and necessarily incurred. Upon creation of a regional fire protection service authority, the authority shall within one year reimburse the state or county for any sums advanced for these start-up costs from the state or county.

(4) The planning committee shall conduct its affairs and formulate a regional fire protection service authority plan as provided under RCW 52.26.040.

(5) At its first meeting, a regional fire protection service authority planning committee may elect officers and provide for the adoption of rules and other operating procedures.

(6) The planning committee may dissolve itself at any time by a majority vote of the total membership of the planning committee. Any participating fire protection jurisdiction may withdraw upon thirty calendar days' written notice to the other jurisdictions.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.04.031 and 1999 c 105 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

A petition for annexation of an area ((~~adjacent~~)) located within reasonable proximity to a fire district shall be in writing, addressed to and filed with the board of fire commissioners of the district to which annexation is desired. Such territory may be located in a county or counties other than the county or counties within which the fire protection district is located. It must be signed by the owners, according to the records of the county auditor or auditors, of not less than sixty percent of the area of land included in the annexation petition, shall set forth a legal description of the property and shall be accompanied by a plat which outlines the boundaries of the property to be annexed. The petition shall state the financial obligation, if any, to be assumed by the area to be annexed.

For the purposes of this section, "reasonable proximity" has the same meaning as in RCW 52.26.020.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.020 and 2017 c 196 s 7 are each amended to read as follows:

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Board" means the governing body of a regional fire protection service authority.

(2) "Elected official" means an elected official of a participating fire protection jurisdiction or a regional fire protection district commissioner created under RCW 52.26.080.

(3) "Fire protection jurisdiction" means a fire district, regional fire protection service authority, city, town, port district, municipal airport, or Indian tribe.

(4) "Participating fire protection jurisdiction" means a fire protection jurisdiction participating in the formation or operation of a regional fire protection service authority.

(5) "Reasonable proximity" means geographical areas near enough to each other so that governance, management, and services can be delivered effectively.

(6) "Regional fire protection service authority" or "authority" means a municipal corporation, an independent taxing authority within the meaning of Article VII, section 1 of the state Constitution, and a taxing district within the meaning of Article VII, section 2 of the state Constitution, whose boundaries are coextensive with two or more ((~~adjacent~~)) fire protection jurisdictions located within reasonable proximity and that has been created by a vote of the people under this chapter to implement a regional fire protection service authority plan.

((~~(6)~~)) (7) "Regional fire protection service authority plan" or "plan" means a plan to develop and finance a regional fire protection service authority project or projects including, but not limited to, specific capital projects, fire operations and emergency service operations pursuant to RCW 52.26.040(3)(b), and preservation and maintenance of existing or future facilities.

((~~(7)~~)) (8) "Regional fire protection service authority planning committee" or "planning committee" means the advisory committee created under RCW 52.26.030 to create and propose to fire protection jurisdictions a regional fire protection service authority plan to design, finance, and develop fire protection and emergency service projects.

((~~(8)~~)) (9) "Regular property taxes" has the same meaning as in RCW 84.04.140.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.060 and 2006 c 200 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

The governing bodies of two or more ((~~adjacent~~)) fire protection jurisdictions located within reasonable proximity, upon receipt of the regional fire protection service authority plan under RCW 52.26.040, may certify the plan to the ballot, including identification of the revenue options specified to fund the plan. The governing bodies of the fire protection jurisdictions may draft a ballot title, give notice as required by law for ballot measures, and perform other duties as required to put the plan before the voters of the proposed authority for their approval or rejection as a single ballot measure that both approves formation of the authority and approves the plan. Authorities may negotiate interlocal agreements necessary to implement the plan. The electorate is the voters voting within the boundaries of the proposed regional fire protection service authority. A simple majority of the total persons voting on the single ballot measure to approve the plan and establish the authority is required for approval. However, if the plan authorizes the authority to impose benefit charges or sixty percent voter approved taxes, then the percentage of total persons voting on the single ballot measure to approve the plan and establish the authority is the same as in RCW 52.26.050. The authority must act in accordance with the general election laws of the state. The authority is liable for its proportionate share of the costs when the elections are held under RCW 29A.04.321 and 29A.04.330.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.300 and 2011 c 271 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A fire protection jurisdiction that is ((~~adjacent~~)) located within reasonable proximity to the boundary of a regional fire protection service authority is eligible for annexation by the authority.

(2) An annexation is initiated by the adoption of a resolution by the governing body of a fire protection jurisdiction requesting the annexation. The resolution requesting annexation must then be filed with the governing board of the authority that is requested to annex the fire protection jurisdiction.

(3) Except as otherwise provided in the regional fire protection service authority plan, on receipt of the resolution requesting annexation, the governing board of the authority may adopt a resolution amending its plan to establish terms and conditions of the requested annexation and submit the resolution and plan amendment to the fire protection jurisdiction requesting annexation. An election to authorize the annexation may be held only if the governing body of the fire protection jurisdiction seeking annexation adopts a resolution approving both the annexation and the related plan amendment.

(4)(a) An annexation is authorized if the voters in the fire protection jurisdiction proposed to be annexed approve by a simple majority vote a single ballot measure approving the annexation and related plan amendment.

(b) An annexation is effective on the date specified in the ballot measure. In the event the ballot measure does not specify an effective date, the effective date is on the subsequent January 1st or July 1st, whichever occurs first.

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