



Session 2: Fire Districts

Presented by the San Tan Valley Advisory Council Central Arizona College San Tan Valley Campus
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Special Guest Speaker: John Flynn, AZ Fire Advisor

John Flynn is the managing principal member of PolicyLogic, LLC, a government affairs and consulting firm. He has over 40 years' experience in fire services. He is the Executive Director at the Arizona Fire District Association.

Fire service types in Arizona

Municipal or city

Fire District Non-profit/community based Private sector

No county-based services.

The San Tan Valley area used to be serviced by a volunteer-based fire service. Now serviced by Rural Metro.

A fire district is funded through property taxes. There are 144 fire districts in Arizona, providing services to 20 cities and towns.

A fire district is generally in place before the town is incorporated and sometimes left in place after incorporation. There are currently two in this area, Eloy Fire District and Superstition Fire & Medical District.

A fire district is a political subdivision of the state, regulated by legislation. There is special taxing under ARS Title 48 Special Taxing Districts.

What services does a fire district provide?

Fire suppression and hazard mitigation Emergency medical services

Basic life support

Technical rescue

There are 11 fire districts in Pinal County. Most of them are legacy districts from when the area was mostly farming communities. The main difference in Rural Metro as the current fire service provider is funding. Rural Metro is paid from individual subscribers. Fire districts are funded by 100% participation from property owners through property taxes and are governed by a locally elected board.

Ambulance Services are regulated by the state under a certification of necessity. A change of fire services will not change ambulance services which are currently provided by Rural Metro/AMR.

What is the regulatory process to change to a Fire District?

Would need about \$1,000,000 and 1-2 years to complete
Fire District formation requirements are under ARS Section 48-261
Board of Supervisors has the final say on whether a Fire District is formed in that area.

One of the requirements is that there must be a notification send out by 1st class mail to every property owner in the proposed district. The petitioner might be required to submit a bond to cover the costs incurred by county then it will have to be paid off if the proposal fails.

The Board of Supervisors determines if the creation of a fire district will promote public health, comfort, convenience, necessity, or welfare for the area. Historically, there have been two requests to start a fire district in the San Tan Valley area that were not approved by the Board of Supervisors because they did not meet the requirements.

The threshold for the number of petition signatures required is set by the Board of Supervisors. The petitioner has one year from the date set by the Board of Supervisors to obtain the signatures. 50% + 1 of all property owners and 50% +1 of all taxable property values within the propose are required.

There are no exceptions/time extensions to the one-year requirement.

It is suggested that the goal would be to get 20% over the number of signatures required. Petitions are submitted to the Board of Supervisors for verification. If the thresholds are met the Board of Supervisors orders the Fire District.

Practical Matters:

It takes about 18 months from inception, petition circulation, to final determination. Depending on approval date, it could take anywhere from 12 to 24 months before taxes would be received. Costs begin from day one and requires a bridge funding from the County which needs to be repaid.

Large, populated areas, such as San Tan Valley, are expensive and challenging to start a fire district. From formation, final approval by the Board of Supervisors, and having fully functioning fire services can be a 12–24-month process. This can destabilize the current existing, private sector fire services.

Due to operational costs, there as been some consolidations of current fire districts in Arizona, decreasing in number from 156 to 144.

Seeking to limit the number of government agencies, the State of Arizona has authorized various regional services to deliver strategies to foster cooperation with existing service providers.

If San Tan Valley wishes to proceed with starting a fire district the recommendation would start with a smaller area. Then after approval and implementation, increase the boundaries contiguous to the original area. The same approval process would apply.

For more information about fire districts in Arizona please go to www.azfiredistrict.org