



NOVEMBER 2026 ELECTION

District Brief

A Factual Overview — 2026 Ballot Measures (Arapahoe, Adams Counties)

This brief answers common questions about Bennett-Watkins Fire Rescue, the two funding measures before voters this November, and what each outcome would likely mean for the community. It is intended as factual information. Arguments for or against either measure are intentionally excluded. Bennett-Watkins Fire Rescue (BWFR) is the operating name of Bennett Fire Protection District No. 7, the legal name that will appear on the ballot itself, along with certified ballot questions.

A Combination Department, A Growing Service Area

Bennett Community Volunteer Fire Department was established in 1951. The department merged with the Bennett Rescue Squad in 1986 to form Bennett Fire Protection District, and hired its first career Fire Chief in 1991. Today BWFR operates as a combination department covering a wide region that includes Bennett and Watkins municipalities as well as unincorporated Arapahoe and Adams Counties. Of 46 full-time personnel, 33 are cross-trained firefighters/paramedics. Fire and EMT-specific roles include the fire chief, assistant chief, four battalion chiefs, as well as lieutenants, career firefighter/paramedics and EMTs, the fire marshal's office, and fleet and administrative staff. Built on a volunteer model, BWFR continues to add response capacity with 12 certified volunteer firefighters/paramedics. The structure allows consistent staffed response enhanced by trained community volunteers.

In 2026, the District added a deputy fire marshal and fire inspector to manage a growing workload. Staffing investments aim to keep pace with the District's increasing growth and training needs.

Bennett-Watkins Fire Rescue at a Glance

- Founded 1951 as an all-volunteer department; combination career + volunteer since 1991
- Serves about 9,000 residents; nearly 365-square-miles of Adams and Arapahoe Counties; includes Colorado Air and Space Port; requires wildland and urban incident response
- Responds to approximately 1,600 calls annually, from four stations
- Includes 46 full-time personnel (33 fire-specific, cross-trained with EMS) plus 12 volunteer firefighters/EMTs/paramedics

A Large, Multi-County Area With Complex Emergencies

BWFR covers roughly 365 square miles of Adams and Arapahoe Counties, including the Colorado Air and Space Port, with a growing population of about 9,000 residents from four stations. The District responds to nearly 1,600 calls annually, including structure fires, wildland and brush fires along the wildland-urban interface, medical emergencies, vehicle collisions and extrications, hazardous materials incidents, and technical rescues. The District's territory includes a stretch of Interstate 70, where high travel speeds, commercial and tanker traffic, and long distances between exits add complexity to responses. Firefighters encounter multi-vehicle collisions, hazardous material incidents, and vehicle extrications uncommon in comparably sized Colorado rural districts without a major interstate corridor.

Call volume has grown notably over the past five to ten years, driven largely by an increase in medical calls, while fire call volume has remained comparatively stable.

Mutual Aid Extends Capacity

Like most rural Colorado fire districts, BWFR participates in mutual aid agreements with neighboring departments. This includes Byers, Strasburg, Deer Trail and the Sable Altura communities. Mutual aid is a standard, cost-effective way for rural districts to extend capacity and safety for communities, but the agreements rely on each partner department maintaining adequate staffing and apparatus of its own.

A Changing Landscape

The District's service area has grown to include new development, residential neighborhoods in particular. This is most evident with the Sky Ranch neighborhood, where growth prompted BWFR to establish a temporary Station 93. Apparatus is housed in a temporary converted structure, but increasing population and structure count warrant a future facility that can meet both the District's operational needs and resident response needs.

Aging Apparatus and Gear Alongside Growth

BWFR's fleet includes a mix of front-line and reserve apparatus of varying ages, some approaching or exceeding their typical service life.

Current Apparatus Roster

- 1 aerial ladder truck (75-foot quint)
- 3 front-line engines, plus 2 reserve engines
- 5 ambulance/medic units, with 1 additional unit on order (*expected late 2026–early 2027*)
- 5 wildland/brush engines (Type 3 and Type 6)
- 2 water tenders
- 1 hazardous-materials response unit
- 3 support trailers (hazmat and ATV equipment)
- 10–11 command and support vehicles (various model ages 1986–2026, including a command vehicle added to the fleet in 2026)

Apparatus is typically due for replacement on roughly a five-year cycle, and equipment costs have risen sharply across the nation: a fire engine that cost approximately \$819,161 in 2021 costs roughly \$2,000,000 today; a new ambulance/medic unit runs just over \$405,000; and outfitting a single firefighter/paramedic with gear and required training costs approximately \$48,000. Medical and safety equipment such as self-contained breathing apparatus and cascade air systems also requires ongoing investment as it ages.

Facilities Impacting Operational Capacity

The Bennett station (515 Washington) is the District's top priority for replacement, estimated at \$8–15 million. Sky Ranch and a satellite station near I-70 are also needed. Both funding measures are needed to move forward with station upgrades because without both, the District cannot keep pace with growth. Put another way, construction is only feasible through bonds or loans repaid with a dedicated revenue source.

The Facilities and Apparatus Connection To Insurance Costs

The District's rating under the Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification system, which evaluates station locations, apparatus, staffing, water supply, and community risk-reduction efforts, ranges from Class 2 (*properties within five miles of a station with a reliable water source nearby*) to Class 10 (*properties more than five miles from a station without a reliable water source*). Well-equipped and strategically located stations positively affect the ISO ratings and insurance premiums residents and businesses pay.

Why the District Is Asking Voters to Decide

In 2024, the Colorado General Assembly created a new statewide cap limiting how much property tax revenue districts may retain, even where voters had already approved a tax rate. This law reduced BWFR's effective mill levy from the voter-approved 13.152 mills to about 9.0 mills. In practice, the 13.152 rate remains on the books but the revenues BWFR may retain are equal to that of 9.0 mills. That difference comes out to approximately \$4 million a year in lost District revenues — part of a combined \$100 million in lost annual property tax revenue the Colorado State Fire Chiefs reported across fire districts in our state. This is a statewide funding shift, not a result of local financial mismanagement, and it arrives as the District's call volume and complexity increases, as well as operational expenses. General Fund costs (staffing, equipment, improvements) have grown approximately 125% since 2020, while the state cap limits retained revenue growth to 5.25% each year.

What Voters Are Deciding in November

Ballot Issue 7F: 0.75% Commercial Sales Tax

This measure asks voters to approve a 0.75% sales tax (75 cents per \$100 in taxable purchases) within the District, beginning July 1, 2027. The tax on applicable purchases is estimated to generate approximately \$1.2 million in the first full fiscal year, and would fund fire protection services, emergency medical response and ambulance services, rescue, safety, and support services that address increased call volume, as well as facility improvements and replacement, maintaining staffing levels, and retaining qualified personnel.

Ballot 7F Fast Facts

- Takes effect in 2027; tax generates revenue of ~\$1.2 million within first fiscal year
- Groceries and other state-exempt items are excluded
- Dedicates funding that gives the the District the ability to:
 - Remodel/replace fire stations and facilities
 - Secure staffing levels to meet growing service area and call demand
 - Retain and attract highly qualified first responders and personnel

Ballot Issue 7G: Waive State-Imposed Revenue Growth Limit, Maintain Current Rate

In 2024, the Colorado General Assembly created a new statewide limit on how much property tax revenue a district may retain each year, even where voters have already approved a tax rate. This measure asks District voters to waive that new limit so the Bennett-Watkins Fire Rescue can retain property tax revenue already approved by voters in 2017 to support staffing, equipment and apparatus, and other operational and capital needs. This measure does not increase the District's mill levy rate.

Ballot Issue 7G Fast Facts

- Continues District's currently authorized rate of 13.152 mills (*no increase*)
- Provides full access to tax revenue funding; unlocks estimated \$4 million generated from tax revenue growth to the District's General Fund
- Funding gives the District the ability to:
 - Attract, train, and retain experienced first responders, and reduce costly turnover
 - Maintain fire apparatus and implement a scheduled replacement plan
 - Address infrastructure and deferred maintenance at fire stations

Projected Outcomes & Summary of Service Impacts

Both Measures Pass	Only One Measure Passes	Neither Measure Passes
Current staffing levels are maintained and able to grow with demand.	Staffing levels are difficult to maintain as call volume and costs continue to rise.	Reduced capacity to maintain current staffing and response levels.
Replacement of aging apparatus and equipment continues on schedule.	Replacement schedule slows; the District must prioritize its most urgent needs.	Replacement of aging apparatus and equipment is deferred indefinitely.
The District can pursue new or upgraded stations, including a station to serve growth near I-70.	Facility improvements are limited; new construction unlikely with current funding.	Construction of new stations is not possible without taking on additional debt.

**Two fire station replacements remain needed regardless of outcomes.*