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When Fire Stations Sit Empty, Something Is Broken. The Greater Treasure Valley Deserves Better Tools.

by the Mayors and County Commissioners of the Treasure Valley Partnership

For nearly 30 years, the Treasure Valley Partnership (TVP) has united the mayors and county commissioners from across Ada and Canyon Counties to address the shared challenges of a rapidly growing region. As southeastern Idaho expanded, so did TVP's membership to include the leaders from neighboring Elmore and Owyhee Counties. But now, all our communities are facing a moment we can no longer meet quietly: growth is no longer paying for growth, significantly impacting our ability to keep residents safe, connected, and supported.

Every mayor and commissioner in this partnership has seen it firsthand. Neighborhoods are expanding, while tax revenue from those new homes is decreasing due to legislative changes. Roads and water systems are absorbing new users as costs continue to rise. And sometimes families moving into a new community have no idea that the services they rely on — 911 response, clean water, functioning roads, local parks — are struggling to be provided due to a lack of funding.

This stretch can be seen very clearly in Star and Middleton right now. These two communities built brand-new fire stations because growth demands it, yet they sit dark and unused due to legislative changes that no longer provide the funding needed to hire additional firefighters. To try and overcome this issue, the Star–Middleton Fire District's levy has now failed **four** times, most recently a \$2.2 million request in November of 2025. Those stations can't open without staff, and staffing cannot happen without funding — even as emergency call volumes continue to rise.

This story repeats itself across the Treasure Valley. The cost of a single fire tanker has climbed above \$1.2 million. A fully trained police officer costs roughly \$130,000 per year. Idaho hasn't built a new state prison in 25 years, forcing counties to house more criminals for longer stretches and driving up early releases. And, in many of our communities, housing development outpaces road capacity by years, fueling traffic congestion and slowing emergency response.

In order to address these challenges impacting every community in and surrounding the Treasure Valley, we are raising our collective voice as the Mayors and County Commissioners of the greater TVP.

We believe the path forward for Idaho must begin with three truths.

First, quality of life is an essential service. Parks, libraries, trails, and community spaces are not luxuries; they are the very reasons people choose to build their lives here.

Second, public safety is non-negotiable. A thriving region can't function with unstaffed fire stations, aging police fleets, or overcrowded jails.

Third, growth must pay for growth. Today, state law caps local property tax budget increases at 3% per year, with only limited revenue from new construction or annexation — a combined maximum of 8%. Meanwhile, the actual cost of police, fire protection, roads, and utilities continues to rise much faster.

Local governments want to partner with the Idaho Legislature to build a strong and sustainable future for Idaho. This must begin with a focus on modernizing funding tools, creating flexibility to allow cities and counties to meet local needs, and the ability to keep pace with the growth that is transforming our region.

After almost 30 years of working together behind the scenes, we as a coalition are stepping forward — united — to say clearly what residents are already feeling: Idaho's fastest-growing region needs a flexible system that keeps up with growth. Our communities, our economy, and our families deserve nothing less.