

Fire Station Study Committee Meeting
Monday, October 6, 2014
4:00 pm
Chowan County Public Safety Center
305 West Freemason Street

Minutes

The Fire Station Study Committee of the Chowan County Board of Commissioners met on Monday, October 6, 2014 at 4:00 pm at the Chowan County Public Safety Center. Present: Commissioners Emmett Winborne (came in late), Alex Kehayes, John Mitchener and Jeff Smith. Additional Committee members present Kevin Howard, County Manager; Craig Forlines Town Fire Chief and Mike Hamilton, Centerhill Crossroads Fire Department Chief.

Clerk to the Board Susanne Stallings was also present.

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Mitchener moved to approve the minutes of July 30, 2014 and September 2, 2014. Chairman Smith asked for all in favor, the motion passed unanimously (6-0).

Discussion regarding the design of a fire station with a residential dwelling

Edenton Fire Chief, Craig Forlines provided the Committee with examples of residential dwellings with a fire truck bay attached as a garage. He provided examples from North Carolina fire departments and other states. He noted that based on the design of the building, the cost of construction can range from \$50 per square foot to \$125 per square foot. He also provided an example of a metal building that reduces the cost greatly.

Commissioner Kehayes stated that he would like to have a long range plan for the development of fire substations in the southern portion of the County. He stated that he felt it was important to have the first substation ready and plan for an additional substation to cover areas further south in the County.

Chief Forlines noted that he does not have the equipment or personnel to cover a second substation. He stated that he has been able to add 10 people to his roster in the past two years. He noted of those 10, only two people have become certified. He stated he hires from his volunteer roster and currently has 34. He noted that he has several that are eligible for retirement.

Chief Forlines noted that his preference would be a pole style building with a concrete floor.

Discussion on Fire Substation location

The Committee discussed the current roster for the Edenton Fire Department. Chief Forlines explained the process which requires four men to sign off on all calls.

Commissioner Kehayes stated he was in favor of creating a first substation but wanted to discuss a second when it is possible or realistic.

Chief Hamilton noted that there are areas on the central and west portions of the County that have larger populations that are also not covered within the 5-6 mile area.

Chief Forlines noted the study that was conducted in 2007 noted that 5 fire stations (in total) are needed in Chowan County and currently there are only two.

Commissioner Winborne joined the meeting.

Commissioner Mitchener stated his concern was to provide insurance relief to as many homeowners as possible, as soon as possible and then look at another substation.

Commissioner Kehayes asked if Centerhill Fire Department would be able to have a substation.

Chief Hamilton stated that he would need a truck and equipment and a building. He stated he has the manpower. He noted that a substation on the western portion of the county would benefit the largest population based on the study and the maps.

Commissioner Winborne noted that the current budget for fire, the expenditures exceed the revenue and the Board will have to look at the current fire tax just to meet the budget.

Commissioner Mitchener stated he felt the southern portion of the County has paid the fire tax and needs to be considered for insurance relief.

Commissioner Kehayes noted that only the fire tax monies are contributed to the fire fund.

Chairman Smith noted that Perquimans County has 7 fire departments that are all volunteer. He noted that each department receives the same amount of money from Perquimans County.

Commissioner Winborne noted that one cent on the fire tax generates \$79,000.

Mr. Howard noted the dilemma is the lack of volunteers in Chowan County.

Commissioner Winborne stated his concern was the public requesting a fire substation but there were not residents offering to volunteer at the departments. He stated he served as a volunteer fireman for 25 years. He stated that many fire departments generate their own revenues through fundraising.

Chief Forlines noted that he is a public servant and that was his job. He stated he is not able to fund raise as a municipal fire department like the volunteer fire departments.

Mr. Howard noted the Fire Fund has a fund balance of \$446,000 last fiscal year. He stated that \$30,000 was added back to fund balance this past fiscal year.

Commissioner Winborne stated he supported the project but wanted to benefit the most people. He asked what the selling point of the substation was.

The committee discussed the impact of the revaluation on the fire fund and the revenues it generates through the fire tax.

Chairman Smith asked the Manager to identify funding scenarios and bring them back to the Committee at a future meeting.

Chief Forlines recommended that the Committee may want to entertain discussions in closed session for property location negotiations.

Commissioner Mitchener asked if there was any public comment.

Tom Creedle, Drummonds Point Road, stated his concern was the response time and loss of property because of fire. He asked about the status of the offer of property to the County. He stated that his area of the County utilizes few public services and is in need of this substation.

Les Kersey of Connors drive stated that Chowan County is the least served County in the area for fire protection. He stated his insurance is 18-20% higher than the average resident. He stated he would like something of value for his tax dollars. He stated that EMS was current in violation regarding response times.

Commissioner Winborne stated that a substation in this area would be unmanned and would not decrease response time. He stated that he does not base his decisions based on the amount of services used by one area of the County.

The Committee asked the Board Clerk to coordinate the next meeting date.

Being no further business, Commissioner Winborne moved that the meeting be adjourned. Chairman Smith asked for all in favor, the motion passed unanimously (7-0).