

Fire Station Study Committee Meeting
Tuesday, September 2, 2014
3:00 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 Tuesday, September 2, 2014 at 3:00 pm at the Chowan County Public Safety Center. Present: Commissioners Emmett Winborne, Alex Kehayes, John Mitchener and Jeff Smith. Additional Committee members present Kevin Howard, County Manager; Craig Forlines Town Fire Chief.

Centerhill Crossroads Fire Department Chief Mike Hamilton was absent.

Clerk to the Board Susanne Stallings was also present.

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order.

Ms. Stallings noted that the minutes of the previous meeting were not forwarded with the agenda. She stated the minutes would be available for Committee approval at the next meeting. She noted that this committee consists of a quorum of Commissioners, however all the members of the committee are appointed as voting members. She noted that because a quorum of Commissioners are present, she will file these Committee minutes with the regular Commissioner meeting minutes and will also provide a copy of the minutes to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

Discussion regarding the creation of new fire districts

Mr. Howard provided the Committee with general statutes that govern changes to the fire tax and creation of fire districts. The statutes require that a petition of at least 35% of the property owners is required to create a new fire district. He noted that to create 3 new fire districts would require the signatures of 35% of the residents from each of the 3 proposed districts.

Commissioner Winborne asked what would happen if there were not enough signatures for each of the three districts.

Chief Forlines stated that the area that did not have enough signatures would not be taxed. He stated he would like an attorney's opinion on that but he felt it would not meet the requirements of the statutes if it did not have the required signatures.

Commissioner Winborne asked if the new districts would be self-funded and what would happen if the district needed more monies.

Chief Forlines stated that they would be self-funded and if additional funds were needed in a specific district they would have to request the monies from the County or borrow the funds (loan) and repay it.

Commissioner Smith asked if each district would be required to have its own fire department.

Chief Forlines stated each district would be required to have a contract for fire services.

Discussion regarding tax collections per proposed district

Mr. Howard provided the Committee with required information of property values separated out by proposed fire district. He noted the following was the estimated fire tax collection per district

Edenton	\$205,051.89
Centerhill	\$148,335.46
Belvidere	\$17,419.83
New Area	\$95,094.06
Total	\$465,891.24

Commissioner Kehayes asked what was the estimated cost to run a fire department annually.

Chief Forlines stated that the estimate varies, if you are talking about a new fire station with 20 people on the roster.

Chief Forlines discussed the 5 and 6 mile fire insurance districts and explained how the road miles must be contiguous to determine 5 and 6 mile fire insurance districts.

The committee discussed if there are any other options to generate revenue within the fire fund.

Chief Forlines explained that some insurance companies will pay for the actual fire call response and that some municipalities will bill the insurance company for the response. He noted that many do not collect the revenues from the insurance companies.

Commissioner Kehayes stated that the discussion regarding projected revenues was not necessary as the plan for the sub fire station would not benefit him or his constituents.

Chief Forlines stated that the proposed fire substation would provide area residents within the 5 miles a discount on their homeowners insurance. He noted that the proposed substation would not increase response time. He noted that the substation would not change the response map or tax map.

Commissioner Mitchener stated he would like to recommend to the full Board that the committee supports the substation.

Chief Forlines stated that the Town of Edenton has authorized him to increase his volunteer roster to 50 people.

Mr. Howard stated that \$79,000 is generated per one cent of the fire tax. He stated that one cent is currently needed to cover the difference between the fire fund expenses and revenues currently.

Chairman Smith recommended that the next committee meeting, the committee discuss what is needed in a satellite station.

Chief Forlines stated the building is required to have heat (no air conditioning), covered and enclosed bays and one office for paperwork.

Commissioner Kehayes noted the goals of the committee were to:

- Lower property insurance for residents
- Lower response time

Chairman Smith stated he felt this committee also was to consider the location and type of substation that would be recommended to the full Board.

Commissioner Winborne noted he felt the committee should also focus on how to fund the substation or committee recommendation.

Mr. Howard stated that most likely have to get LGF approval and seek financing.

Commissioner Winborne asked if the loan is paid from the fire fund.

Mr. Howard stated yes.

Commissioner Winborne stated that he felt the committee would need to consider buying enough land to support future growth at the substation. He stated he did not support the plan to create individual fire tax districts. He stated that he felt this would create a divide. He stated he felt the committee needed to look at the fire tax rates and discuss the need to raise the fire tax, not because of the new substation but to support the current fire departments.

Chief Forlines stated that there are various options with regards to the construction of a fire department. He noted that some municipalities in North Carolina have constructed fire houses that look like single family homes.

Commissioner Smith recommended that the fire chief bring back photos of some of these stations and some cost estimates.

Chief Forlines stated these estimates would be rough without a plan to have quoted from a contractor.

Commissioner Mitchener asked if the committee has agreed to move forward with a recommendation.

Chairman Smith stated he felt the committee was still in the research phase of the discussion.

Chairman Smith asked if there was any public comment.

Guy Shaneybrook, Drummonds Creek Lane asked how far Centerhill Crossroads Fire Department is from Edenton.

Chief Forlines stated it is approximately 11-12 miles.

Tom Creedle, Osprey Drive asked what the current fund balance of the fire fund was. He also asked what was the status of a potential land donation of 10 acres from a resident.

Mr. Howard stated the balance is roughly \$500,000.

Commissioner Mitchener stated this property would not qualify for the fire substation but could be considered for future expansion.

Mr. Creedle stated that he felt the fire service in his area of the County was inadequate.

Chief Forlines stated that the County conducted a fire study in 2007 and the report states that the County needs 5 fire stations.

Mr. Creedle stated that the residents in his area of the County do not have children in public schools, little to no welfare or public service recipients, little need for public safety. He stated he felt fire protection and insurance reduction should be a priority of the Board for the residents in his area.

Brian Ferriciao stated that he did not support special fire tax districts.

Commissioner Winborne stated he wanted to reiterate that all of Chowan County currently has fire protection and this discussion is about reduction of insurance rates for homeowners.

Being no further business, Commissioner Mitchener moved that the meeting be adjourned.

Chairman Smith asked for all in favor, the motion passed unanimously (6-0).