

Special Meeting, Monday, May 22, 2017, 10:30 a.m. Government Center, Verona, VA.

PRESENT: Tracy C. Pyles, Jr., Chairman
Terry Lee Kelley, Jr., Vice-Chairman
Gerald W. Garber
Carolyn S. Bragg
Wendell L. Coleman
Marshall W. Pattie
Michael L. Shull
Timmy Fitzgerald, County Administrator
Jennifer M. Whetzel, Deputy County Administrator
James Benkahla, County Attorney
Misty Cook, Finance Director
Carson Holloway, Fire Chief
Greg Schacht
Jeff Hurst
Minday Craun, Volunteer Coordinator

VIRGINIA: At a special meeting of the Augusta County Board of Supervisors held on Monday, May 22, 2017, at 10:30 a.m., at the Government Center, Verona, Virginia, and in the 241st year of the Commonwealth....

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Chairman Pyles called the meeting to order.

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Mr. Pyles stated that it is very difficult to make changes in Fire and Rescue because of the various parts, but there are a few things to be kept in mind; the safety of our citizen and the cost.

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Mr. Fitzgerald stated that Chief Holloway will be presenting a PowerPoint that will go through some of the phases of the Strategic Plan. There are significant changes that will be taking place and it will take some time to move and adjust. It is recommended to look at the plan in phases. The plan strives to utilize the 105 people employed. It looks at areas that there may be additional revenue to help with the offset of the SAFER Grant. There are cost associated with the plan in regards to buildings and partnerships that will need to be established. Details will be worked out as needed.

Mr. Fitzgerald also discussed the Revolving Loan Fund. The Revolving Loan Fund was rewritten and it was agreed that the County would provide \$200,000 forgivable loan to allow the purchase of a new fire engine and the County did a fire engine spec. Another stipulation to the contribution was there would be a six inch sticker of the Augusta County Seal placed on the new fire engine. Companies are having issues with this request and so do not want the County seal on the truck. It is a sense of pride with being a part of the County. There was a letter sent to each company to let them know there are certain images that cannot be placed on a County related vehicle. This along with the County Seal request makes it appear the County is telling them what they can and cannot put on their trucks. The Emergency Services Committee has looked at the request and recommends placing the seal on the new fire engines. The Emergency Officers could approve the engine spec without the seal and then it will come to the Board for a final decision. It is feared that volunteers will be lost if the County Seal is placed on the fire engine.

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Mr. Kelley stated that there are a number of organizations that will contribute money to a cause and in return that company receives recognition.

Mr. Pyles stated that this is a partnership. This can be argued both ways because it's a small matter on both sides. It's difficult to think about this because they take the County's money and career people. There are only a few companies that don't do both. Therefore, for them to say that this is where they draw the line Mr. Pyles considers this to be hypocritical on their part. The County tries to accommodate the volunteers.

Jennifer Whetzel, Deputy County Administrator, asked if only the new purchases would get the County seal sticker.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that only the new purchases. It is not necessary to go back and put the seals on each one unless they want to.

Ms. Bragg ask about where the money comes from for the revolving loan.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that it is insurance money that comes to the County that has to be used for Fire and Rescue. The County can decide how the money dispersed.

Minday Craun, Emergency Services Volunteer Coordinator, stated that in 1988 this fund was started due to the cost of new apparatus. This is also the reason that 40% of the loan amount is non-repayable.

Mr. Shull stated that in Rockbridge County when they receive the money it is divided equally between the companies. It's not the County's money because it comes from another source. He recommends suggesting to the companies that it is preferred to have the County seal placed on the new vehicles, but it is not a requirement. As time passes the companies will realize that having the seal on the trucks is not a big deal. Mr. Shull doesn't agree with stirring up controversy at this time.

Mr. Pyles feels that the letter that went out to the companies should have been better prepared. The background of the reason behind the request should have been better explained. This was not meant to stir controversy. If the companies aren't comfortable with it then it doesn't have to be done.

Mr. Coleman is concerned about upcoming situations if this is such an issue that is difficult to resolve.

Mr. Pyles stated that the number of career people have not been increased because the County wants to spend money. The goal is to keep the volunteers engaged as much as possible, but if the volunteers do not make the calls and the OMD. says he can't certify them then the County has to step up and make a change.

Mr. Fitzgerald explained the letter that went out and will address it at the Emergency Services meeting on Tuesday.

Mr. Garber stated that there are a few companies that are 100% volunteer and they are proud of that. There is a struggle sometimes about whether the fire truck is public or private and that is why there is a small problem with the seal.

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FIRE AND RESCUE STRATEGIC PLAN

Carson Holloway, Fire Chief, showed a PowerPoint presentation on the Fire and Rescue Strategic Plan. The plan was first created in 2000 and has been updated multiple times since then. Nationwide there is potentially a shortage of volunteers for churches, community events and anything that requires a volunteer. Fire and Rescue as a whole is going through a lot of ups and downs. In 2011 the first ambulance was purchased and now the County has 13 ambulances. The State of Virginia fire services are vastly changing. There was a direction given last year to revisit the Fire Plan and look to the future. Chief Holloway aims to focus on the future needs. Augusta County is fortunate to have a strong core of volunteers. Fire and Rescue's goal is to be proud of the past, be good today, learn from the past mistakes and be better tomorrow. The County continues to see the volunteer numbers decline. In 2006 there were 38 career personnel and in 2016 there were 105. A tremendous amount of time is spent on bringing new people on board and getting them trained simply to maintain the 105. Chief Holloway showed a flow chart of where the 105 career staff are placed in the Fire and Rescue Department. There are career staff in 13 of the 17 fire stations throughout the County. Stuarts Draft, Wilson, Swoope and Craigsville Fire Departments are 100% volunteer. There are no career staff at these stations. Chief Holloway wants the Board to be aware of the fact that Deerfield is a challenge due to the travel distance from that station to the hospital. Therefore, the 2 ambulances at Deerfield will be transferred to Augusta County. Volunteers may join in and assist. Stuarts Draft Fire and Wilson do not run first response. Stuarts Draft ran over 1000 calls last year. The decision had to be made whether to hire career staff. They didn't want to add career staff so the decision was made to drop the EMS license. They are supported by Fishersville and Riverheads, however that pulls resources from other busy areas. There are four County owned stations, Craigsville, Riverheads, Company 10 and Fishersville. There are four 100% volunteer agencies along with Riverheads and Weyers Cave being partially volunteer.

Chief Holloway discussed Phase One of the Strategic Plan. Phase one recommends keeping staffing the same at Weyers Cave, Dooms, New Hope, Preston L. Yancey, and Stuarts Draft Rescue. Company 10 has been a question for several years in regards to equity compared to services provided with the City of Staunton. There have been several meetings in the past with the City to come to a partnership agreement. These meetings have been unsuccessful. Phase one recommends liquidating assets for Company 10 and moving personnel to Verona. That would give Verona twelve 24/7 personnel for 4 per shift and an ALS person. Estimated EMS calls for Verona would be 936. This is comparable with Weyers Cave and Weyers Cave is generating a little over \$100,000 in Revenue Recovery per year. Verona would be approximately the same if an ambulance is placed there and have a 75/25 split to help offset expenses.

The Riverheads area is also a concern. About 6% of calls are not being answered. It is recommended to pull the remaining three people from Company 10 and three people from Middlebrook and place them at the Riverheads station. This will help to eliminate the approximately 73 calls there were missed, plus it would increase the revenue by approximately \$20,000. This would also provide a backup crew for Stuarts Draft. There was not a rescue service in the Riverheads area for a long time. With the additional crew, there would be two 24/7 ambulances which would also support the ladder truck and help pick up calls on the interstate that was covered by Company 10. The additional calls for the interstate will be co-shared by Verona, Fishersville and Riverheads.

Mr. Pyles stated that there is additional money in closing Company 10. There is approximately \$100,000 of operational costs and contributions that go out each year.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that Verona is receptive to the plan changes. Verona approached the County previously and wanted a rescue squad. There is also additional fire apparatus being placed in Verona.

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FIRE AND RESCUE STRATEGIC PLAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Coleman pointed out that people within the County that are being impacted have been involved. Mr. Coleman has concerns about the number of calls that will be lost in regards to Staunton City. He wants to make sure that everyone being impacted is well aware of the plan.

Mr. Pyles commented by saying that Staunton City Council contacted their Fire chief and delayed meeting with Augusta County so that he could be aware of the plan. We have first response responsibility in Staunton, however the City of Staunton has no first response responsibility in Augusta County and sometimes Staunton is responsive as they wish.

The area around Company 10 continues to grow so therefore the call volume will increase.

Mr. Shull would like to see Augusta County and the City of Staunton meet and renegotiate what is happening today. There needs to be discussions taking place and try to come to an agreement with all of the Companies within the County not just the City of Staunton. Mr. Shull also recommends that surrounding counties should be supported as well. The surrounding counties are helping Augusta County citizens too and they should be compensated for it.

Chief Holloway stated that Augusta County does compensate the surrounding counties, but they don't give Augusta County anything in return.

Mr. Shull commented by saying it's not about making money. It's about providing a service to the public. Money will not be made through Revenue Recovery.

Mr. Pyles stated that the main objective is to provide a service to the citizens. The door has been opened up to allow for communication from City of Staunton and they have not been interested. All the County is asking from the City is a fair deal. How many times do you reach out and get the same response. Sometimes it takes acting on something to get a response.

Mr. Fitzgerald followed up on Mr. Coleman's question regarding Staunton and Staunton Augusta Rescue. There have been discussions with Staunton. Their concern was Augusta County doing away with Mutual Aide. That is not the plan. Staunton-Augusta Rescue is completely different. There have been visits to Staunton and the plan was kept in house until it could be reviewed by the Board. There has not been a meeting with Staunton-Augusta to let them know they will be losing calls.

Mr. Kelley stated that when phase one was looked at he did not realize that Middlebrook was still part of it. You're taking 12 personnel to Verona and six for an ambulance which is two per shift.

Chief Holloway stated that Verona will be a busy station with taking on the additional calls. Verona is the best option for a paramedic that runs 24/7. Verona is a more centralized location.

Greg Schacht pointed out there are approximately 900 calls projected in the Verona area. However they are not just Staunton-Augusta calls. Adding that service takes away some from the Weyers Cave, Fishersville, and New Hope. Verona had five calls on a weekend and they did not respond, so Verona is having trouble on fire response.

Chief Holloway is aware that this is going to effect the entire county. It is important for everyone to work together and come to an agreeance.

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FIRE AND RESCUE STRATEGIC PLAN (CONT'D)

Chief Holloway stated that with phase two it has to be assumed that all of the recommendations in phase one were completed. Weyers Cave would remain the same with six career staff. It is recommended to take three career staff from Dooms and six from New Hope and make a new combined station or possibly a leased structure located in the Crimora area. Preston L. Yancey and Stuarts Draft would stay the same minus a floater. Verona would stay the same at 16 and Mount Solon with four. Churchville and Riverheads would stay the same. Middlebrook would still be in the County system and totally volunteer and supported in the Riverheads area. Craigsville Rescue and Deerfield would stay the same. Stuarts Draft, Wilson, Swoope, Craigsville and Middlebrook would all be total volunteer and Station 10 would be closed. Chief Holloway showed a map of the newly added station and the Fire and Rescue Districts. New Hope can most likely survive as a fire department, but Chief Holloway isn't certain they can maintain their rescue status. Their rescue status has been up and down. Chief Holloway showed a map of the projected call volume.

Mr. Shull asked how many miles were between the Dooms and Grottoes stations.

Chief Holloway stated that there is approximately 13 to 14 miles. The dividing line is at Country Estates.

Mr. Shull asked how many miles were between Sonny's Exxon and New Hope.

Chief Holloway responded by saying it was approximately five miles to the intersection and close to seven miles to the station.

Mr. Shull asked the following questions; what is the anticipated cost to complete this whole project?

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that the projected cost as stated in the plan was \$1 to \$1.5 million to build a new station. We could also look at a partnership and do a lease if that becomes an option.

Chief Holloway reiterated that the plan would be to utilize the existing apparatus. Future replacement would be an expense, but there is enough at this point to cover Company 10 if it were to redeploy. The new station would be 8000 square foot. It's not huge, but it's approximately the size of the Riverheads station. The cost would be between \$1.2 and \$1.5 million and there is also a lease option. There are a number of variables that can be looked at.

Mr. Garber pointed out that there needs to be good leadership to get anywhere.

Mr. Coleman stated that the strategic direction is that we end up over time, being less dependent on the small verses the more strategic and we can count on people being there when the call comes in. That is the beauty of the work that has been done and has been talked about. It's not suggested that it will be easy, but we will get there.

Mr. Pyles stated that Preston Yancey, Verona, Churchville and Riverheads surround the perimeter around Staunton. Company 10 used to be central for everyone. Each of these stations have a certain amount of proximity to a certain area within the county.

Mr. Coleman stated that this has been beneficial to some of us that haven't been closely involved. There is a lot of trust and confidence in those who have been close to this issue as to what needs to be done. Is everyone in agreeance with what needs to be done? If the ones involved feel this is what needs to be done then we need to accept that. Everyone has ideas and thoughts, but if the powers that be that are closer to the situation feel like this is what needs to be done then

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that's what needs to be done.

Greg Schacht stated that in regards to the ISO, the County as a whole is a 5/8B. As long as mutual aid agreements stay in place and as long as we continue to provide the service even through volunteers agencies the ISO rating will not change.

Mr. Shull stated that is not what he understood.

Mr. Schacht clarified about the ISO and stated that questions needed to be brought to him for clarification.

There was discussion between Mr. Schacht and Mr. Shull about the actualities of ISO.

Ms. Bragg asked how often we were audited.

Mr. Schacht replied with every five years. An audit can be requested at any time. Paperwork is sent at the five year mark to be filled out and sent back. If there are any major changes we will go through a major audit.

Mr. Coleman stated that we need to make sure we have the most current and best information.

Mr. Schacht stated that the difference with Fishersville is each agency was independent. Each agency did their own ISO rating.

Greg Schacht and Board members discussed the ISO rating and how it works.

Chief Holloway showed a map on the screen. Phase three looks at the east and west ends of the County. It is recommended to add or transfer 4 career staff to Rescue 6 for 2 per shift 24/7 and 2 for ALS Response at Stuarts Draft Rescue. As part of the agreement career staff would be allowed to utilize volunteer apparatus to assist other agencies as requested. A split of revenue recovery from County staffed volunteer owned ambulance would be calculated at a formula of (County 50% Stuarts Draft Rescue 50% net). There are agencies that don't agree with change. Stuarts Draft has had 23 missed calls consistently over the past months.

The other significant change would be the Churchville station going 24/7. They have the same concern as Stuarts Draft, they could use the staffing, but they prefer not to go away from the money. Churchville has a grant to build a new station. Partnership is supported in this situation. We could possibly have to hire three for Churchville and three in Stuarts Draft. We strongly need three more Captains. Right now there are two divisions and there are only 3 captains in the field. We would also need to hire three more paramedics.

Ms. Bragg reiterated that the 9 positions would be new positions.

Chief Holloway stated that if we get volunteers and the volunteers can run the ambulances we could move people that we already have to these spots.

Mr. Pyles asked how many people are employed.

Chief Holloway stated currently there are 103 career staff. We should have 105.

Mr. Pyles stated that we have talked about shadow positions. We should add three to that and have better coverage over all. We are freeing up money in one area, but

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FIRE AND RESCUE STRATEGIC PLAN (CONT'D)

spending it another. We lack efficiency in knowing what we are doing.

Mr. Fitzgerald pointed out that we have been trying to utilize the floater positions. The issue has been that we don't have the applicants to fill all of the positions.

Mr. Pyles stated that we have had significant growth. He wants the Board to think about what we need from an all-volunteer station. For Wednesday's meeting, he would like the Board to give the go ahead on the proposed change to Company 10.

Ms. Bragg asked if Staunton disagrees with the plan and Phase One do we stop the process.

Mr. Pyles stated that it depends on how much money they are willing to give us. We are asking for \$250,000.

Mr. Kelley commented by saying would Staunton reimburse us the money that would allow us to afford the two people in Verona.

Mr. Pyles stated that Staunton isn't willing to make changes on the courthouse and it is doubtful they will make any changes with this. If they give us \$250,000 that's enough for five people.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that if the City came back with an agreement and Augusta County stayed in Company 10 we would additional people to accommodate Verona with a rescue squad or Staunton will have to provide service during the day because there are only two career staff at Verona now. We don't have anyone to transfer. The additional two would need to come from Company 10.

Ms. Bragg reiterated that we are only talking about Company 10 and not SARS.

Chief Holloway stated that SARS is a totally different issue.

Mr. Shull pointed out that if Augusta County stays in Company 10 there will need to be talks with SARS as well to cover the issue.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated to keep in mind that they do cover Augusta County, but they get revenue recovery and the County pays them for the services.

Ms. Bragg asked how much time we had to implement the plan.

Mr. Pyles stated that he would like it to be in place by July 1.

Chief Holloway pointed out that the implementation could start anytime. One thing to think about was the fire boxes would need to be changed.

Ms. Bragg asked what the cost would be to complete Phase One.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that Riverheads would be approximately \$50,000 to build a two bay structure.

Mr. Shull stated that we need the most focus on employees and rescue. There is a different number of calls mentioned in the plan than what was given at budget time.

Ms. Whetzel pointed out that one number was from fiscal year and one was from calendar year.

Chief Holloway stated that the plan has been changed about three times since last July.

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It is the goal to give twelve month data from previous years. Some of it is based on calendar and some on fiscal year.

Mr. Shull questioned the number of calls reported. If it's a structure fire, how is it reported?

Minday Craun responded by saying that each agency that responded to that call gets credit for that call.

The number of calls ran were explained and the requirements for each call was discussed.

Mr. Shull mentioned that Middlebrook is in the process of buying land to build a facility to accommodate a rescue squad. There was also an offer from Walker's Creek to put a rescue squad there. They already have a building and Rockbridge is willing to work out a deal. Middlebrook has said that they cannot operate without career staff. If you pull up the map and look at Middlebrook, they are in the center of the proposed rescue box. It would service everyone much better than from Riverheads. Mr. Shull receives complaints now because it takes a long time to get a rescue squad in the western part of that district. If the volunteers are wanting to spend money and try to help then we should listen to them and try to help them out.

Chief Holloway responded that his goal is to maximize career staff and maximize the dollars. He understands the complaints, but everything is not comparable. He looked at the call volume and the current numbers showed that the citizens could be better served from Riverheads.

Mr. Shull stated that there was a study done before Riverheads came about in 2002 and the second ambulance was needed to correlate with Stuarts Draft. Middlebrook was the chosen location for the second ambulance because it's centrally located and it's still centrally located if you pull it up on the map. Also, have there been conversations with Fairfield and Rockbridge since they have begun career staff? Fairfield is running 24/7 with career staff. We go into Rockbridge and help out at times. Mr. Shull also discussed Company 10. We may need to threaten Staunton of closing Company 10. There has been discussion of building another building to cover the area, but if you look at the location of Company 10, the interstate is one of the biggest problems. Company 10 should be running every call along with the volunteer agencies. The interstate is a dangerous area and all the man power you can get is good. It should be automatic. Company 10 is centrally located and he is not in agreement of closing Company 10 at this point. As far as negotiating with Staunton, it can be done. He doesn't agree with building any other structure, even at Riverheads. The ladder truck can sit in Company 10. It's a little further away from Stuarts Draft, but it can still get there. It's been working for many years with the ladder truck in Company 10. Riverheads does not have the need for a ladder truck.

Ms. Bragg stated that Stuarts Draft isn't big enough to house the ladder truck. If you have Hershey, McKee or Hollister on fire you need the ladder truck housed where it can get there the quickest.

Mr. Shull stated that the cost of this plan needs to be looked at. Maybe a fire tax needs to be established and designate the fire tax strictly for fire and rescue. It stays in the fire and rescue account and no capital money is to be taken out. Also, state that half is not required to be given to the schools. As far as the employees on the money and the entire fire system, this could be sold to the public. This would be something to protect the public and if we get 2 or 3 cents this could be funded.

Mr. Kelley stated that when you look at the need in the area, over 40% of the call volume for Company 10 is run in the City of Staunton and approximately 18% of them are on the

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interstate. Over 60-70 percent of the calls do not have any value to the citizens in his district. The thing to focus on is what the best value is for the people at Company 10. There can be discussion with Staunton, but he doesn't feel that it will be beneficial. Mr. Kelley doesn't want to see Company 10 closed, but he can't see it staying open without raising taxes. When you take away the auto accidents and the calls within the City of Staunton it doesn't make sense to keep Company 10 open. Unless we are willing to raise taxes and hire more people. 8 of the 15 people at Company 10 could run a 24/7 engine/ambulance service. We need to focus on the best use for the 15 people at Company 10.

Ms. Bragg asked, the 30 people at Preston Yancey, are most of their calls going to service other areas or are they in that district?

Chief Holloway stated that he would have to look at the numbers. Preston Yancey has been consistent over the years with approximately 2100 calls.

Mr. Kelley stated that basically we need to concentrate on Middlebrook and be able to keep everyone there.

Mr. Pyles feels that the beginning of the plan is to concentrate on Company 10. He would like for the Board to think about it for Wednesday's meeting. If there is a move to raise taxes it needs to be heard. There are things in the Middlebrook area and Crimora area that are important to the Board members. If we can make the two stations stay whole, I think we should. We will get more advantage out of a second ambulance at Riverheads verses Middlebrook. The evidence is clear that Company 10 is a drag for Augusta County and should be redeployed. We will give Staunton an opportunity to discuss options. Things could be put on hold, but as far as Company 10, go ahead and close it. At the end of the day we have a million dollar hole that has to be filled.

Mr. Coleman stated that there are 3 units, Middlebrook, New Hope and Dooms, and they are losing something they have grown accustomed to. As a Board member he has to be able to say that he understands, but would like for the citizens to listen to the explanation. Waynesboro has not been mentioned.

Mr. Pyles commented that the Crimora plan has been in the works for a long time. We are only talking about Company 10 at this point.

Mr. Fitzgerald adjourned the meeting.

Chairman

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County Administrator