
Special Meeting, Monday, April 11, 2011, at 7:00 p.m. Government Center, Verona, VA.

PRESENT: Jeremy L. Shifflett, Chairman
Wendell L. Coleman, Vice-Chairman
David R. Beyeler
Gerald W. Garber
Larry C. Howdyshell
Tracy C. Pyles, Jr.
Nancy Taylor Sorrells
Patrick J. Morgan, County Attorney
John C. McGehee, Assistant County Administrator
Patrick J. Coffield, County Administrator
Rita R. Austin, CMC, Executive Secretary

VIRGINIA: At a Special Meeting of the Augusta County Board of Supervisors held on Monday, April 11, 2011, at 7:00 p.m., at the Government Center, Verona, Virginia, and in the 235th year of the Commonwealth....

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VIRGINIA FIRE SERVICES BOARD – AUGUSTA COUNTY FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES STUDY REPORT

- Introductions
- Study Presentation
- Questions

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Fire Chief Carson Holloway introduced Mike Armstrong, the Committee Chairman for the Fire Study Team appointed by the Virginia Fire Services Board.

Mr. Armstrong introduced the Study Team: Division Chief Tim Estes, from Fire Programs; Mike Berg, from the Office of Emergency Medical Services; Rodger Moyers, from the Forestry Department; Melvin Byrne, from Fire Programs; and Matthew Smith, Policy and Communications Analyst from the Department of Fire Programs. William Kyger, Vice-Chair, could not be present tonight.

Mr. Armstrong works in the City of Roanoke Fire Department. He stated that several requests are received yearly and a team of personnel from the Fire Board and Fire Programs Personnel, the Office of the Emergency Medical Services, and Department of Forestry is assembled to attempt to address any issues presented in conducting the study.

A PowerPoint presentation was given with the following highlights:

Study Committee consisted of the following members:

Virginia Fire Services Board

James Armstrong Virginia Chapter of International Society of Fire Service Instructors
William Kyger Virginia Association of Counties

Office of Emergency Medical Services, Virginia Department of Health

Michael Berg Regulations and Compliance Manager

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Virginia Department of Forestry

Rodger Moyers Area Forestry Representative

Virginia Department of Fire Programs

Melvin Byrne Division Chief
Tim Estes Division Chief
Matthew Smith Policy and Communications Analyst

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) would like to extend thanks to the following organizations for their contributions to this report:

- Augusta County Fire-Rescue Department
- Augusta County Volunteer Fire Department
- Craigsville-Augusta Springs First Aid Crew
- Craigsville Volunteer Fire Department
- Churchville Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department
- Deerfield Valley Fire and Rescue
- Doods Volunteer Fire Company
- Middlebrook Volunteer Fire Department
- Mt. Solon Volunteer Fire and Rescue
- New Hope Volunteer Fire Department
- Preston L. Yancey Volunteer Fire Company
- Riverheads Volunteer Fire Department
- Stuarts Draft Rescue Squad
- Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Company
- Swoope Volunteer Fire Company
- Verona Volunteer Fire Company
- Weyers Cave Volunteer Fire Company
- Wilson Volunteer Fire Department
- Staunton-Augusta Rescue Squad
- Waynesboro First Aid Crew
- Augusta County Administration and Board of Supervisors
- Augusta County Emergency Communication Center

Mr. Armstrong noted that meetings were held with the above-referenced agencies from Wednesday through Saturday in February.

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METHODOLOGY

- Initiation of Study (made by Augusta County)
- Obtain Stakeholder Input (first conference call was held with major stakeholders: Fire Board Members; Fire Programs; John C. McGehee, Assistant County Administrator; Patrick J. Coffield, County Administrator; and others)
- Prepare Analyses and Develop Core Strategies
- Prepare and Present Final Report

Mr. Armstrong expressed that this Study “is not to be construed as legal advice or as a binding recommendation”. He expressed that their purpose was to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the Augusta County Fire and Rescue system and determine what was working well and determine what areas that could be improved and provide recommendations.

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REQUESTED STUDY REVIEW AREAS

- The County requested that the study team review
 - Personnel – Career and Volunteer
 - Organizational Development
 - Fire Rescue Operations
 - Central Purchasing

In interviewing with the agencies, input was requested from each agency to provide a final document focusing on four working themes.

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WORKING THEMES

- Theme 1: Organizational Development
- Theme 2: Training
- Theme 3: Fire Rescue Operations
- Theme 4: Administration, Policy and Finance

Mr. Armstrong noted that recommendations were based on the National Fire Protection Association recommendations, which is a national consensus standard that covers everything from firefighters, fire trucks, and training. One specific standard considered was NFPA 1710 – the standard for organization, development of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations for career fire departments. NFPA 1720 is the same standard for volunteer organizations.

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THEME 1: ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Unified Coordination**
 - Designate career Chief of Fire Rescue as Supervision and Authority (Augusta County should embrace and codify the career Chief of Fire Rescue as the central position responsible for the supervision and authority for all fire and rescue issues.)
 - Fire Rescue Oversight Committee
 - Geographically organize into three battalions

Mr. Armstrong noted that it was suggested to organize three battalions; from each battalion, two people from each group (fire, rescue) should be chosen and rotation should occur every year. Every group would have representation on that committee at all times.

- **Personnel**
 - Fill Vacant Positions
 - Three battalions with Operations Captains alignment
 - Deputy Chief of Operations (currently vacant)
 - Deputy Chief of Administration, Code Enforcement and Training (new)
 - Refocus Volunteer Coordinator (Volunteer coordination and retention issues only)
- **Fire Prevention Activities**
 - Adopt the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (allow fee structure which would enable Augusta County to generate revenue to support the Fire Marshal position and activities)
 - Employ a Fire Marshal (responsible for inspections, investigations, public education, etc.)
- **Strategic Planning**
 - Develop Fire Rescue System Strategic Plan (beneficial to have a uniformed plan to move forward)
 - Develop a Unified Vision and Mission Statement (operate under a single vision)
 - Establish a System of Measurable Goals (lay out the ground work as to what it will take to establish)

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THEME 2: TRAINING

- **Coordinated Training Program**
 - Fill Training Positions (divide training groups in different parts of the County to allow accessibility)
 - Training Groups
 - Instructor Pool (benefit to develop instructors throughout the County so that you would not be as reliant on the career training staff. Training could be based on the local needs.)
 - Annual ISO-related training
 - Records management
- **Training Standards and Cross Training**
 - Position-specific minimum training standards
- **Continuity of Leadership and Succession Planning**
 - Focus on leadership and interpersonal skills
 - Grow leadership within System (focus on growing new leadership within the System)

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THEME 3: FIRE RESCUE OPERATIONS

- **Operations and Chain of Command**
 - Designate career Chief of Fire Rescue as Supervision and Authority
 - Countywide Incident Management System policy and accountability system
 - Continuously evaluate System (to ensure that it meets the needs)
- **Communications and Emergency Management**
 - Career Chief of Fire Rescue intermediary with Emergency Communications Center
 - Informational meetings to communicate roles and expectations of all personnel during large-scale disasters

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THEME 4: ADMINISTRATION, POLICY AND FINANCE

- **Standardization and Central Purchasing**
 - Equipment Commonalities List
 - System Specifications and Contracts (to develop specifications and contracts for future apparatus and equipment purchasing to leverage bulk pricing)
 - Central Purchasing Areas
- **County Funding and Accountability Practices**
 - Yearly Needs Assessment and “needs-based” funding
 - Accountability plan and communication to stakeholders
 - Fire Tax or Fire District Tax (Augusta County could consider a Fire Tax or Fire District Tax to assist specific districts.)
- **Standard Operating and Administrative Guidelines**
 - Countywide Standard Operating and Administrative Guidelines (Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should develop a single set of Countywide Standard Operating and Administrative Guidelines to maintain consistency from one station to another)
 - Publication to fire rescue personnel (publish information to current and future fire rescue personnel)

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QUESTIONS

Mr. Coleman:

1. Where is the nearest county comparable to Augusta County that is currently implementing similar recommendations such as organizational structure?

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Response: Roanoke County – They do group purchasing; streamline the equipment and apparatus; train together.

2. How many fire departments are in Roanoke County?

Response: 12 different fire/rescue stations within the one organization.

3. Are they organized somewhat consistent with what is recommended here?

Response: Yes

4. The Fire Chief and whole side of operation is answerable to the County Fire Chief?

Response: Yes. Each one of those individual stations, of the 12 stations, they have their own chain of command. They have their own Station Chief/Captains/Lieutenants. That Volunteer Chief works with the County career Chief. The County Career Chief has final authority. The County Chief has authority to step in and make changes if need be. They try to work with the Volunteer Chief on a one-to-one basis in an advisory capacity. There are times when they have to step in and take action which may override the Volunteer Chief. That is fairly rare when that happens. Usually, they have a good working relationship. The Volunteer Chief runs their station as they see fit as they need to answer their calls, but they get guidance from the Career Chief.

5. The recommendations, in particular, was saying a set of standard operating procedures countywide. As you were describing in the County, I trust, in our County, they all develop their own?

Response: I think we saw different examples such as training standards. Augusta County had a training standard for firefighters, officers, and chiefs on what level of training recommended that they should have. Some individual stations had higher standards, or different standards completely.

6. If a fire department did not agree with the Fire Chief of Roanoke County, the Fire Chief has the final say? The Volunteer Chief would have to comply? That person would be accountable to the Fire Chief of the County?

Response: Yes.

Comment made by Melvin Byrne: We had just completed a study in Louisa County which had six different EMS agencies and seven or eight different volunteer fire departments, plus a career department. They had a paid Chief, a career staff was covering most of the calls during the day and the evening and they have been working years to try to come up with a solution. After the fire study was completed, one of the recommendations was to have the strong Chief model for that system. That county accepted the study, passed an ordinance which covered 50 of the 55 recommendations made by the Study Committee. A few of the members of the volunteer organizations had some issues with that, but that dust has settled. In fact,

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it was so successful that they took the Fire Chief and made him the County Administrator.

The other thing, we purposely did not go into the specific operational processes to do things. We just did an overview. One would expect that if you had that type of system in place, where you had the ultimate Fire Chief, you had the different station Chiefs, if there were something in the process that was not working, there may be an appeal process, either through the work group or through the County Administration, that those appeals could be vented. I don't think it would be just thrown the gavel down and that's the way it is going to be. There may be an appeal process available just like we do with anything else in government.

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Ms. Sorrells:

1. When you were talking about the fire prevention activities and the possibility of using as a revenue source; what specific things are you talking about? Getting a permit to burn brush?

Response:

It's a little broader than that. To get plans reviews, there should be a charge for that because the government puts a lot of time in it. As they through the fire portion of it, there could be a charge for permitting and inspections. Tents, people throw up for weddings or big family get-togethers, those tents need to be inspected to make sure that they are safe and put up right. For various inspections, an approval process, through the State Code, it is allowable to do fees. It can come pretty close to being self-sufficient or even generating income.

2. If we would accept a lot of these recommendations, how do we get from there to making it a reality? If we would create a working committee to hammer out a new organizational chart, or this new fire board, are their facilitators who could help us create those documents?

Response:

Let me go back to Louisa County. After the study, the Fire Chief, some of the volunteer leadership and County Administration sat down and threw a document out. Obviously, when we do these studies, I meet a lot of friends. One of the Rescue Chiefs and I hit it off and I got a phone call and he said, "I don't like what is being thrown out". I said, "Well, is it all bad?" "Well, I don't like what is being thrown out". I said, "But that wasn't my question." I said, "Was it all bad?" The answer was, "Well, now, there are some things that I know will cause the citizens to get better service." I said, "Well, then, tell County Administration and the Chief that you like that and sit down and negotiate the rest of it." They did not have to have an outside mediator come in because they were able to hammer it out. Again, somebody writes the policy, the procedure, the ordinance that could be adopted or whatever it takes to do it and then the leadership sits down. It is not the same document that was thrown out because I got to see that as well, but the final document still has pretty well satisfied everybody and the working relationship has really grown. Again, I can see where there may be a need for a mediator to sit down and help, but in Louisa's case, anyhow, it didn't.

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Mr. Beyeler:

1. You talked about tax districts. As you know, when you went around the County, it is a big area. There are areas in the County where we have had people basically move in here and are not interested in being volunteers. It is very difficulty for those areas to get volunteers. You have other areas, and I'm going to refer to Stuarts Draft, which is the district that I represent, we have all volunteer fire department staff—all volunteer. It has never been fair that some areas have career people, which costs us roughly \$50,000 per, but we have other areas that step up to the plate and are serving our community at no extra cost. I am in favor of a fire tax. Again, I know some areas would rather pay a little additional tax rather than have volunteer. Where is the closest area of having fire tax?

Response: Prince William County; there is a model in Frederick County, Maryland. There model is if you have career staff, you pay more taxes. They subdivided into tax districts. If you want career staff, everybody there pays a little more taxes. For example, the Town of Brunswick, Maryland, does not have any career help and their fire tax rate is lower. It is divided up that way. I do not know, exactly, how Maryland's law works with it. I do know that in Virginia you can subdivide your County into various tax districts for fire. Again, Prince William County has changed from individual tax districts around fire departments to one large tax district that supports everybody. The availability to do what is suggested is there.

Mr. Beyeler: In our case in the County, it is not necessarily the rural areas that have paid staff or vice-versa because Stuarts Draft is one of the largest areas in the County and it is all volunteer and the community needs to thank those people for their services.

2. The Emergency Services Committee is too large. Should it be based on a two-year term instead of a one-year term on a staggered basis?

Response: We were almost hesitant on even making that specific of a recommendation. We felt, from the feedback we got from talking with all the folks throughout the County, that the organization in place now had grown so large that it was ineffective. If we were going to do it right now, how could we reorganize that to make it more user-friendly and more efficient? The one-year term was just a way to get some fresh blood in there on a regular basis. I don't see anything wrong with a 24-month term at all. Again, separating the County into three battalions, if you pick two people from each area, and stagger that—somebody from fire, somebody from rescue—everybody is going to have representation. They are all going to have a seat at the table and it is going to rotate from time-to-time so you can get fresh blood in there.

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Mr. Beyeler moved, seconded by Ms. Sorrells, that the Board accept the report and authorize staff to submit a letter of thanks to the appropriate people.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Howdysshell, Sorrells, Garber, Beyeler, Shifflett, Pyles and Coleman
Nays: None

Motion carried.

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Mr. Beyeler mentioned that additional comments could be submitted to the Board for

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discussion at the Staff Briefing on April 25th.

Chairman Shifflett added that comments could be made at the April 13th and April 20th meetings. The Board added that they can be contacted individually if the citizens so desired.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business to come before the Board, Mr. Coleman moved, seconded by Ms. Sorrells, the Board adjourned subject to call of the Chairman.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Howdyshell, Sorrells, Garber, Beyeler, Shifflett, Pyles and Coleman

Nays: None

Motion carried.

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Chairman
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County Administrator