

AVERY COUNTY FIRE COMMISSION MINUTES

The Avery County Fire Commission met in a Regular meeting on Thursday, July 13, 2017, at 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom, Newland N.C.

Remington Austin led prayer.

I. CALL TO ORDER (7:00 p.m.)

Chairman Mathes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. All Board members were present with exception of Corey Hughes. Charlie Franklin and Beth Reath attended.

II. ADDITIONS / DELETIONS TO AGENDA (7:01 p.m.) None

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS (7:02 p.m.):

Bill Beuttell - Praise of Emergency Personnel for Educating Children about 911

Bill expressed his thanks to the service done in the County by Emergency personnel in the training of children to learn 911. He wants to encourage building on this training. "Cub" explained his involvement with this training at last year's fair and how successful it was. He is excited for future training of the kids and hopes for better planning and involvement by other Fire and County departments.

Mike Laws addressed the Fire Commission: Mike questioned: How do we arrange a meeting between Employees, Chiefs and the Fire Commission? Jim Brooks noted that the Board is here every month. If you put an item on the Agenda, it will be discussed. Mike questioned: Why have Epi's (Epi-pens) not been bought for the fire departments in over a year? Response: Charlie stated that these were ordered every July. Johnny Mathes directed Charlie to be sure every department had current Epi pens by the end of this month at the latest.

IV. AGENDA ITEMS (7:10 p.m.)

A. BUDGET AMENDMENTS

Bill Beuttell read the Amendments to the 2017-2018 budget as follows:

1. Increase the debit reduction in the amount of \$20,000 from fund balance for two QRVs.
2. Pay Beech Mountain \$21,000 to increase their budget amount from fund balance (1/4 of their budget).
3. Pay Seven Devils \$5,300 to increase their budget amount from fund balance (1/4 of their budget).
4. Pay Linville additional \$3,152.38 for salaries from fund balance. (to add amount back to the same as last year's budget amount).

Matt clarified that Item No. 1 number for QRV was \$20,000 and not \$200,000 as shown on Agenda 'A'. Charlie confirmed this was a typo and the number was \$20,000.

Motion made by Matt McClellan for approval of Items 1. through 4. above. Second by Jim Brooks. Chairman Mathes called for further discussion. Mathes called for a vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.

B. TRUCK COMMITTEE REPORT (7:14 p.m.)

Matt McClellan stated the following: **1. Fall Creek Pumper Tanker specs** were approved by the Truck Committee. The Committee recommends that the Fire Commission vote and approve putting this spec. out to bid.

Motion made by Jim Brooks, second by Bill Beuttell to approve putting Fall Creek QRV spec. out for bid as recommended by the Truck Committee. Chairman Mathes asked for further discussions. Mathes called for vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance. Mathes directed Charlie to put this QRV out for bid.

Matt McClellan stated the following: **2. Green Valley QRV specs** were approved by the Truck Committee. The Committee recommends that the Fire Commission vote and approve this purchase (NOTE: this item is not put out to bid, but goes through State contract system).

Motion made by Bill Beuttell, second by Jim Brooks to approve Green Valley QRV purchase as recommended by the Truck Committee. Chairman Mathes asked for further discussions. Mathes called for vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.

Matt McClellan stated the following: **3. Green Valley Pumper Tanker and Pumper Tanker specs** were approved by the Truck Committee. The Committee recommends that the Fire Commission vote and approve putting this spec out for bid.

Motion made by Bill Beuttell, second by Jim Brooks to approve putting Green Valley Pumper Tanker and Pumper Tanker specs out for bid as recommended by the Truck Committee. Chairman Mathes asked for further discussions. Mathes called for vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance. Mathes directed Charlie to put this QRV out for bid.

C. LINVILLE FIRE DEPT. QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS - Outlined in Joe Hawkins' email to Fire Commission dated 7/10/17 - (7:19 p.m.)

Joe Hawkins, Linville Fire Department spoke to the Board.

Funding: This year, why was Linville's budget for certain line items? (see Budget Process explanation by Beuttell under Truck Replacement Plan below).

Cost Sharing Methodology: What is the Fire Commission's formula for distributing the funds to fire departments? (see Budget Process explanation by Beuttell under Truck Replacement Plan below).

Volunteers. What have you done for the volunteers? Joe stated that last year in simple fund-raising activity alone, he volunteered over 72 hours. This didn't count training, daily treasury work, etc. that goes on.

Budget Time: Joe is frustrated. He stated that the Fire Commission did not look at justifications. Matt McClellan reminded that this subject had been brought up previously. He noted that the Board looks at every line-item justification. (see Budget Process explanation by Beuttell under Truck Replacement Plan below).

Truck Replacement Plan: Joe questioned: What is your plan for cutting one (large fire truck)? Bill stated that the Commission was not going to have enough money under the current budget given by the Commissioners to buy 2 fully stocked fire trucks at \$720,000-\$750,000 each. He

noted that they had talked about trying to refurbish some of these that were still in good shape to help save money.

Budget Process Explanation by Bill Beuttell: When you go through the budget process every year, you look at each of the line items (whether it's fuel, electricity, etc.). We ask each department to submit what they feel they need. We look at it and we may say we think this high or is low. On some line items, we have a standard we give for equipment maintenance based on big, medium or QRV truck size. It would be nice if we had the money coming in to grant each department everything that they would like to have, but we just don't have it. We have to look at everyone's budget including Linville's with some constructive criticism and say we don't think they need all this, so we appropriate what we think they can get by on.

Bill stated that in looking at Linville's budget at the last meeting, we found that you actually had about a \$15,000 extra in their account at end year-end from the year before. In one breath, you state we weren't funding you enough, but when we looked at the budget it showed an excess from last year.

Joe said personally, he hates doing it (processing invoices) and waits until the last minute. He noted that the way the budget cycles run, sometimes there may be some items that don't get put in this year and the checks get written after the year-ending date. He took the time to go and sit down with her (bookkeeper) in her office to be sure everything was sent. Bill told Joe that the Board did not have that information when looking at Linville's budget. When we look at it, we see the actual expenditure to date versus the money appropriated. Joe said he understands that, but much of their expenses don't come until the end of the budget cycle, so it looks like they're sitting on all this money, but in reality, it's not there. It's not spent until May or June.

Fire Commission - 3-5 Year Plan: Joe stated that in looking through all of the minutes, he did not see a 3-5 Year Plan. Bill noted that since he's been on the Commission, the formula is as follows: Age and condition of the trucks in each department is considered. We've been replacing 2 per year.

This year we just didn't have the funds to do this and take care of daily operations of each department. The Commissioners have been very good to us, but they're between a rock and a hard place and even though they bumped up the fire tax this year, we don't have enough to buy all the equipment that each department needs when they need it and still have money in the bank for rainy days should things break down. [e.g. \$52,000 for Plymovent system for Linville]. Bill said the Fire Commission was glad to be able to give what they need when they need it, as long as they have the financial capability to do this.

Jim stressed importance of Avery County's good insurance ratings and how this is accomplished (by keeping neighboring departments). Funds have to be shared with these, as there is no way to keep them operating if based solely on property values. Joe asked how does he explain to that resident? Jim said to tell them that there is such disparity in this County's fire districts that this is the way we're able to keep their rating and insurance low. We have all areas of the County covered.

Charlie presented Joe with a copy of truck replacement plan (does not reflect very latest numbers).

Employees: Joe's question: Why add new employees to day time shift instead of 3-11 shift?

Johnny Mathes confirmed that new employees would be added for day time while other volunteers/responders have to be at work. He noted that years ago, these responders who worked could leave their job to go to a fire. Now you can't just leave the job to run and help and then go back to work. He noted that at Frank, they had to call on 4 other departments during the daytime (for assistance). The Board concluded we had more people after 5 o'clock to come help volunteers than we did during daytime hours. That's why we're putting more on during the day. Matt stated that the Fire Commission also considered safety issues. They wanted to have 2 people at each station, so whenever they went on a fire call, someone would be there to back

them up. Also, anything can happen with one person being by themselves when working on a truck, etc.

Legal Issues with Employee Cameras: Joe said this is a non-issue. There has never been in the State's history, a fireman charged or arrested in an incident like this. He had heard of a few charges, but they have all been with EMS and occurred in the back of an ambulance. EMS at one time had cameras in the ambulance. The courts ruled they couldn't do that because of HIPPA violations. As far as fire departments, they said fire departments could only use the cameras on helmets for training purposes and couldn't have them on their person for 911 / medical calls because if individual calls 911, there are certain expectations of privacy. It doesn't apply to a fire or a wreck. That was a court ruling last year.

Bill then noted that this means they don't have to purchase cameras and this is good. Jim mentioned that he had asked for a committee to research this.

Other Legal Issues: Joe said he could be wrong, but this is the only Fire Commission that has employees. He questioned how Fire Commission employees could be covered under insurance policies (vehicle, workman's comp) when they were not direct employees of the fire stations they may work with.

Johnny stated that on most insurances, regardless of who was driving the truck, they would pay. Charlie stated that the Fire Commission has its own insurance coverage for anything which happens during work hours including workman's comp. Joe asked about OEMS? How is the Fire Commission employee set up as far as OEMS? Is it the Fire Commission a licensed provider? Charlie replied no, that they are under County protocol.

Linville Invoices: Charlie then asked Joe about the invoices he had submitted for payment by Fire Commission. He noted these would go onto next month's agenda, so that some research could be done. He asked Joe to get this information to him before the meeting.

D. HIRING EMPLOYEE TO BE STATIONED AT LINVILLE CENTRAL RESCUE

Charlie reported that the Interview Committee met and interviewed 2 of the 3 applicants. The Interview Committee decided to hire Dena Wright.

Motion made by Bill Beuttell, second by Matt McClellan to hire Dena Wright. Chairman Mathes asked for further discussions.

Johnny then asked for confirmation from Charlie that she had all the necessary qualifications. Charlie stated that she was the most qualified, but that both had good qualifications.

Chairman Mathes called for vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.

Johnny asked when Ms. Wright would start work? Charlie said she would give a 2-week notice after he contacted her the following day, on July 14, 2017. Start date would hopefully be by the first week in August.

V. FCD REPORT (7:45 p.m.)

1. Charlie is still waiting for the Attorney (Michelle Poore) to finalize all documents. He has emailed her numerous times and is still waiting a reply.
2. Johnny put forth Charlie's request to take training classes in August.

Motion made by Johnny Mathes, second by Bill Beuttell to approve Franklin request to take training classes in August. Chairman Mathes asked for further discussions. Chairman Mathes called for vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.

Jim Brooks asked Charlie if all fire departments had signed their contracts. Charlie noted that there were still some that had not.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JUNE 8, 2017 and JUNE 14, 2017 (7:47 p.m.)

Bill Beuttell stated he would not approve the June 14, 2017 minutes. He noted that they were incorrect, as he did not make any comments regarding HIPPA (it was Jim Brooks). (see Page 1 under General Discussion - Future Funding - Body Cameras: Paragraph 1, 4th and 5th lines. Charlie stated he did not catch this in his proof-reading.

[In order to move forward with approval of the minutes, Johnny instructed the Secretary to make the necessary corrections and she stated she would do so. This would entail changing "Bill" to "Jim" with regard to HIPPA comments. Bill Beuttell agreed to approve the 6-14-17 minutes based on this correction.

Motion made by Johnny Mathes, second by Matt McClellan to approve the minutes for June 8, 2017 and June 14, 2017. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN (7:48 p.m.)

- Next Fire Commission Regular meeting will be August 10, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. in Newland.
- Next Firemen's Association meeting will be August 3, 2017 - Seven Devils Fire Dept. at 7:00 p.m.

VII. CLOSED SESSION (7:49 p.m. to 8:10 p.m.) The Board then went into closed session.

See closed session minutes dated July 13, 2017.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION (8:11 p.m.)

Upon returning to Open Session, Chairman Mathes announced that Regular session was adjourned.

VIII. Adjourn (8:12 p.m.)

Motion made by Matt McClellan, second by Bill Beuttell to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.

**Johnny Mathes, Chairman
Avery County Fire Commission**

Attest: _____