

**AVERY COUNTY FIRE COMMISSION  
MINUTES**

The Avery County Fire Commission met in a Regular meeting on Thursday, August 10, 2017, at 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom, Newland N.C.

Steve Carver 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. Charlie Franklin and Beth Reath attended.

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

**III. PUBLIC COMMENTS (7:01 p.m.): None**

**IV. AGENDA ITEMS (7:02 p.m.)**

**A. APPOINTMENT OF FIRE COMMISSION 5TH MEMBER**

Chairman Johnny Mathes confirmed with Charlie Franklin that Corey Hughes had applied for this position. He then requested motion for appointment of Corey Hughes as 5th Board member of Fire Commission.

**Motion made by Matt McClellan for approval of Corey Hughes as 5th member of Fire Commission. Second by Bill Beuttell. Chairman Mathes called for further discussion. Mathes called for a vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.**

Charlie noted that the position currently held by Bill Beuttell appointment would be put forth at the County Commissioner's meeting for August which is re-scheduled for Sept. 5, 2017.

**B. LINVILLE FIRE DEPT. - REQUEST FOR PAYMENT OF BUILDING REPAIR ITEMS**

Mark Taylor, Linville Fire Department Chief, explained that other Linville staff more familiar with invoices were unable to attend. Charlie stated that the repair invoices in question were for items not a part of the original work to be done on the building (as approved by the Fire Commission for payment). He noted that until the Board approved, he could not pay Linville for these. After some review and discussion, Charlie suggested that further discussions be held between him and Mark (or others) to review invoices and payments. He requested the Board to table this item until the next meeting and the Board agreed.

**C. HIRING EMPLOYEES - NEWLAND AND ELK PARK FIRE DEPARTMENTS**

Charlie explained that the Interview Committee had interviewed 6 qualified applicants. (1) The Committee recommends to the Fire Commission, Brian Ledford (Yancy County) for the fulltime position at Newland Fire Department. (2) The Committee recommends to the Fire Commission, Dustin Rupard for the fulltime position at Elk Park Fire Department.

**Motion made by Bill Beuttell, second by Matt McClellan to approve hiring of Brian Ledford and Dustin Rupard for fulltime positions as noted above. Chairman Mathes asked for**

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

**D. NEWLAND FIRE DEPT. REQUEST FOR \$60,000 GRANT FUNDS (State Portion & Department Portion - \$30,000 each)**

Newland Fire Chief, Bryan Bodford, requested advance payment of grant funds, in order to pay Newland's vendors. This request is in lieu of his department having to wait for State funds to come in. Bryan explained that waiting for these funds has caused hardship for their vendors and has created vendor and department relationship to be strained. After some discussion, it was suggested that the Fire Commission give Newland the Department share of State grant funds. It was agreed that this was a good option. [Bill noted that in fairness, if the department portion was given to Newland, then this should be in reserve for all departments]. Charlie clarified that funds would be available should this be the case, but it was expressed by other departments that this was not an issue for them. Charlie noted that so long as invoices were turned in promptly, they would pay up to the department's portion. Johnny asked for Bryan to submit Newland invoices to Charlie, so that Newland could receive its \$30,000.

No vote was necessary. **Board members agreed to pay Newland Fire Department's portion of the state grant up to \$30,000.**

**E. MEETING WITH BANNER ELK TOWN MANAGER**

Bill Beuttell explained that he and Charlie met with the Banner Elk Town Manager and the Chief of the Banner Elk Fire Department. They expressed a legitimate concern. As a part of their annual budget each year, they had been allowing for half of the salary cost for a part-time employee. They explained that since the Fire Commission was funding 4 new positions this year, they didn't think it fair that they provide this \$13,500. Bill stated this is a valid concern and that it would not be right for them to put in that money since the County was going to be funding this position. Banner Elk will put back this amount into their budget (as available funds, not as an expense). Bill explained further that years ago, Banner Elk had agreed to fund a part of the part-time position salary due to call volume and needs, but it is currently not appropriate. Charlie noted the Fire Commission would need to decide if they were going to hire that 4th position and take the money that they were putting in for workman's comp etc. - additional funds above the \$13,500 and apply it to the 4th position. Johnny clarified they were going to hire 3-1/2, but now 4 since Banner Elk pulled out. Charlie noted the Fire Commission budget would lose the \$13,500 paid by Banner Elk.

**F. FIREMAN'S ASSOCIATION REQUEST TO HAVE INPUT ON HIRING NEW EMPLOYEES, WORK SCHEDULES AND RETENTION ISSUES**

Bobby Powell, Fireman's Association President, reviewed five items of concern noted in the Fireman's Association letter to the Fire Commission dated 8/10/17.

1. The importance of good communication between the Fire Commission and the Fire Departments, so that all are "on the same page". He noted the Fireman's Association was unaware of how many employees were to be hired and what the options were for the work schedule.

*[interruption of meeting with pager alarms for Linville Fire Dept. - Mark Taylor, Levin Suddreth and other Linville staff left the meeting, but returned later when call taken care of].*

2. Request that new employees be stationed at 2 fire departments versus all fire departments (issue with work schedule causing employee to have to drive long distances to work at various departments).
3. Request for employee travel incentives to help defer travel costs driving to stations.
4. Request that Fire Chiefs have input during the hiring process of new employees.
5. Request that Fire Chiefs or their representative be on the Interview Committee for new employees.

**WORK SCHEDULE OPTIONS:** Options (printed) for 4 new "roving" employees were distributed and verbally outlined by Charlie as follows:

Options 1-3 were discussed in detail. Reviewed were work schedules, work locations, and the benefits to employees, the community and fire departments.

**FINAL DECISION (OPTION 4):** After further group discussion of all plans, Option 2 was revised to create new Option 4. Printed copies were handed out. Bill recapped revisions which consisted of partnering fire stations who were in geographic proximity as follows:

Green Valley and Frank  
Crossnore and Newland  
Banner Elk and Ladder Co.  
Fall Creek and Elk Park

**Option 4 Schedule** - Employee works at two fire stations in close proximity to one another (see above), alternating weeks between the two. No travel incentives paid.

**Option 4 Benefits:**

- less travel than options 1-3
- better familiarity with each mutual aid department
- hiring policy change to include 5 members:

Fire Commission, Fire Dept. Coordinator, Fire Chief(s) (station where job opening is), County Manager or Asst. County Manager. Fireman's Association President will be a alternate.

(Note: No Fire Commission employee stationed at a Department shall sit on the interview committee at any time.

- benefits the community
- aids in retention

**Motion made by Bill Beuttell, second by Jim Brooks to accept and approve Option 4 (new employees work at 2 neighboring fire departments (no mileage incentive paid). In addition, Fire Chiefs of departments where job openings exist will be a part of the Interview Committee during hiring process. Chairman Mathes asked for further discussions. Chairman Mathes called for vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.**

NOTE: The hiring process and steps for same were further discussed as outlined below.

**HIRING PROCESS STEPS:**

1. job openings become available
2. current employees with seniority are given first consideration
3. applicants are considered for interviews
4. applicants are interviewed

Initial - Interview Committee consists of:

1. Fire Dept. Coordinator
2. County Manager, Assistant County Manager or President of the Avery County Fireman's Assoc.
3. Fire Commission Board Member

***NOTE: The above will remain in effect until After 4 new "roving" positions are hired.***

New - Interview Committees will consist of:

1. Fire Dept. Coordinator
2. Fire Commission Board Member
3. County Manager, Assistant County Manager or President of the Avery County Fireman's Assoc.
4. Fire Chief(s) or his/her representative (where job position is open)

**V. FCD REPORT (8:00 p.m.)**

1. Charlie stated that personnel policy was finalized and distributed to chiefs and employees. Jim Brooks asked should the policy be posted on the Fireman's Association website and Charlie said he will see this is posted.
2. Charlie reminded the Board that the issue of how to pay for new employee equipment (if not associated with a specific department) needs to be addressed by the Board at a future date.
3. Josh Henson requested training on August 22, 23, 24. This would be during day time hours when he's working. There is no additional fees or comp time involved (it's at Spring Maid Mountain in Mitchell County). This is requested by policy. Dena Wright should attend this training also. Charlie confirmed this is "NC Heart" training. He asked the Board to include her on this request.

**Motion made by Jim Brooks, second by Corey Hughes to approve Josh Henson and Dena Wright for training classes in August. Chairman Mathes asked for further discussions. Chairman Mathes called for vote to approve. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.**

4. The Board set the date for meeting between Board and Fire Chiefs regarding 5 questions submitted by Mike Laws. The date was set for Thursday, August 24, 2017 at 6:00 p.m.

**VI. APPROVAL OF JULY 13, 2017 MINUTES (8:05 p.m.)**

Jim Brooks noted the following corrections: Page 2-Item C - Funding: This year, why was Linville's budget for certain line items **cut**. Page 2-Item C - Truck Replacement Plan, last sentence on page: ...given by the commissioners to buy 2 fully stocked fire trucks at **\$400,000** each. Page 3-Fire Commission 3-5 Year Plan, 3rd Paragraph, 2nd sentence ...by keeping neighboring departments **auto-aided**).

***[Secretary will make the necessary corrections] [Charlie will re-post corrections]***

**Motion made by Johnny Mathes, second by Matt McClellan to approve the minutes for July 13, 2017. Motion unanimous by those in attendance.**

**UPCOMING MEETINGS AND OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN (8:07 p.m.)**

- Fire Commission Special meeting will be August 24, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in Newland.
- Next Firemen's Association meeting will be September 7, 2017 - Banner Elk Fire Dept. at 7:00 p.m. (Chiefs meet 6:30)
- Next Fire Commission Regular meeting will be September 14, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. in Newland.

**VII. CLOSED SESSION - Personnel Issue - Statute G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (6).**

**(8:08 p.m. to 8:26 p.m.)**

**Motion made by Bill Beuttell that Board go into Closed Session with Statute G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (6). Second by Matt McClellan. Motion approved by those in attendance.**

See closed session minutes dated August 10, 2017.

-----  
**RETURN TO OPEN SESSION (8:26 p.m.)**

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

**VIII. Adjourn (8:28 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:** \_\_\_\_\_