

**AVERY COUNTY FIRE COMMISSION
MINUTES
Employees, Chiefs, and Fire Commission**

The Avery County Fire Commission, Chiefs and Employees met in a **Special** meeting on May 9, 2019, at 6:00 p.m. in the new Avery County Agricultural Extension Building, located at 661 Vale Rd., Newland N.C.

- I. **CONVENE MEETING** - Bob Garland led prayer.
- II. **CALL TO ORDER (6:00 p.m.)** - Fire Commission Board members present: Bill Beuttell, Shane Garland, Jim Brooks, and Rob Hancock. Absent: Matt McClellan (working). Charlie Franklin and Beth Reath also present.

General Comments by Chairman Beuttell: Beuttell explained that the fire service's final budget was submitted to the County Commissioners. This year's budget included an across the board 10% salary increase for all paid employees. In addition, an extra 5% will be given to employees with 5 years of service. Those with 10 years would've gotten another 5%, but due to budget constraints, this will be implemented next year. We believe the budget is approved. We were able to stay within \$61,000 of last year's budget. County Commissioners did question workman's comp issue of employees who work at several stations being charged for at each station. The budget is to take effect July 1st and raises will be effective then. A special thanks to Shane Garland who performed the study of pay scales in other counties in order that we might bring ours up to where they should be. Attendees noted their appreciation and thanked the Board members for their efforts.

AGENDA

- A. Fire Commission Employee Policy Enhancements** - see comments section.
- B. Outlined job duties for personnel (Permanent Stationed vs. Rover)**
- Fair and equal employee standards.
 - Rovers to equally alternate between assigned stations.
 - Outlined, fair call-in requirements for time of County implemented "State of Emergency". Revised compensated time outline (external classes, call-back, response before 7:00 am)
- C. Employee Salary Enhancements**
- Salaries to be based on the job performed (i.e. reports, FD administration, training, grants, budgets, etc.)
 - Annual or regular raises based on years of service (every two years employee shall receive "x" amount pay increase)
 - Performance based pay raises: annual evaluation for employee accountability.
- D. Restructure Employee Pay Based on Certifications**
1. Revised outline of pay increments for acquired certifications including revisions for State changes and levels of certifications.
 2. Pay increments based on merit of certification. (instructor 1 vs. instructor 2, Fire Officer 1 vs. FO 2, specialty certifications, etc.)

Comments - Topics were discussed out of order:

1. Mike Laws expressed his concern that grants were cut to allow for salary increases for paid staff. He is concerned about perception of volunteers - some feel paid personnel are not needed. Chairman Beuttell explained the tight budget constraints placed upon the Board in its budgeting. Phillip Barrier told him that the Fire Commission had to get this year's budget to the same amount as last year. Budget meetings are open to anyone.

All are invited and encouraged to attend these in order to understand how decisions are made.

2. Mike asked if new hires were hired by a hiring committee. Beuttell and Charlie Franklin confirmed that interview committees were used in hiring and that department chiefs are present on the committee when position is for their station.
3. Josh Henson asked if replacements would be made for jobs vacated in the last 6-8 months. Charlie answered yes, that a person will be hired to fill the vacated position. Beuttell explained that Commissioners are aware that more paid staff are needed.
4. Dean Gibbs noted that he would like to see Charlie given more authority regarding disciplinary action of employees. Shane Garland explained that Charlie is following the current policy. Josh said the policy he has states that Co-Ordinator can supersede a Chief's decision. Beuttell noted Charlie can intercede for blatant misconduct such as drug use. Dean suggested that before new people are hired, the policy should be revised. Shane noted that general job descriptions are to be developed. This would include weekly, monthly and yearly duties and could be tailored to each station's needs (this would clarify responsibilities of an employee). Dean asked about a special meeting to adopt policy change - resolve this issue and it was agreed that this would be done at a Chief's meeting. Beuttell says Chiefs should outline how they want Charlie to intercede. They need to write up employees.
5. Mike Laws suggested that a standard yearly physical fitness test be implemented. In addition, a driver operational standard might be put in place. Hiring standards should be higher. Dean said this is where good job descriptions are needed.
6. Chairman Beuttell asked for Chief's input on Rovers, as it is very difficult for Charlie to keep stations staffed. Shane noted that Chiefs had been asked to provide feedback and none had been received. Regarding the need for 2 people being on duty at any given time, Mike noted the dangers of responding to certain areas of Avery County that have major drug problems. Other issues include responder being accused by females of inappropriate behavior. Josh added that its helpful when a week in advance he can know a 2nd person is scheduled, as there are certain tasks that require 2 people. Shane noted that it needs to be known that just because we have paid people, it doesn't mean we can do it all. Volunteers are relied upon heavily to provide that 2nd person. Beuttell noted that Steve (Frank) had suggested a time may come where responders may have to "carry".

Recap by Chairman Beuttell - Front burner items are: Hiring Standards for new employees, increased authorization for Fire Dept. Co-Ordinator on employees matters, move to having 2 paid persons per station. In addition, once per year fitness testing, basic job descriptions and ideas for rover scheduling.

7. Kacey Hughes asked about certification raises. Shane mentioned that most beneficial certifications must be determined. These would be most beneficial certifications to the fire service and citizens of Avery County. Water rescue is an example. The existing list and salary reward need to be updated. Charlie will provide the list to Kacey. Jim noted that if there are certification ideas, to please share them and not wait for the quarterly meeting.
8. Beuttell noted the cost of new trucks and expressed his appreciation for departments being willing to purchase used trucks and to keep current trucks well serviced.
9. Mike asked what number employee raises would be based on. Beuttell noted they would be based upon employee's base salary. Shane reminded about the 3% retirement match which would be further enhanced by raises.

10. Teddy Thomas asked about the \$200 boot allowance provided every other year. It was noted by several people that this is not enough. The boots wear out and they are having to purchase them out of their own pockets. Beuttell said this issue will be reviewed and resolved.
11. Mike asked about new hire starting pay. Shane explained that starting pay had been \$27,000 and is now increased to \$30,000. This should help to bring in better quality of applicants.
12. Josh asked about pants replacement. Charlie explained that these had been ordered, but the distributors who make these (in navy) were very slow. Only two companies, Work Right and Crew Boss offer this color.
13. Josh asked where will new employees be? Josh noted he has spent considerable time training a new employee (who is working out well). Training people is not in his job description and he doesn't want to see his trained person moved. Beuttell noted the stress that Charlie is put under trying to move people around for coverage.
14. Jeremy Hayes praised the work of rovers at his station. Their workload is too heavy.
15. Mike noted how much more administrative work there is now for paid personnel.
16. Computer crash at Fall Creek caused a large amount of work and was very stressful.

Beuttell suggested that any and all issues be handled before they become big issues and he encouraged everyone to bring their ideas to these meetings, or to call him or other Board members anytime. He thanked everyone for the great job they do.

Charlie noted that the **next quarterly meeting will be August 8, 2019**. [Mike noted that his station's rating inspection may conflict with this. Beuttell noted that meeting could be re-scheduled].

ADJOURN (6:55 p.m.):

Motion made by the Jim Brooks, second by Shane Garland to adjourn the meeting. Chairman Beuttell asked for further discussion. The Motion was approved unanimously.



Bill Beuttell, Chairman
Avery County Fire Commission

Attest: 
