

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF AVERY**

The Avery County Board of Commissioners met in a Special Meeting on Tuesday, February 28, 2012 at 4:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC with the Avery Fire Commission for the purpose of discussing fire service issues.

Members Present: Kenny Poteat, Chairman; Phyllis Forbes, Vice-Chair (via telephone); Scott Heath; Martha Hicks; Glenn Johnson

Members Absent: None

Call To Order

Chairman Poteat called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.
Chairman Poteat led prayer.

Avery Fire Commission

Members from the Avery Fire Commission present at this meeting were Daryl Smith, Chairman; Joe Perry; Wayne Miller; and Shane Garland.

Rescue from Fire Tax

Daryl Smith stated that he had sent some questions to the Institute of Government. The first question that was asked was "do the county commissioners have the authority to levy a fire tax in the county of up to 10 cents; it is currently 4 cents? It is my understanding that it will be possible to include, for example, a 1 cent increase in this tax and designate it for rescue in the entire county. Am I correct in interpreting GS 69-25.1 if I am correct what would be the proper procedure to follow in making changes to allow this to take place?"

The reply from Kara Millonzi, Institute of Government, says "if the fire tax district is a rural fire protection district established under G.S. 69-25.1, then the county board of commissioners is free to set a tax rate each year up to the maximum rate of \$.10 per \$100 valuation. And, the tax revenue may be used to provide fire protection services as defined in G.S. 69-25.4(b), which include emergency medical, rescue and ambulance service."

Debt on ambulance/crash truck/building

Mr. Smith stated that the debt was paid off on all the fire trucks. Last year, the county went right back in debt for a crash truck. This debt needs to be set up on a three year pay plan so that we can get these debts eliminated also. We are not gaining anything by going in debt for rescue equipment. Shane Garland stated that Linville Central ambulance debt is approximately \$80,000, the crash truck chassis ordered is approximately \$166,000 and the debt on the building is approximately \$85,000.

Rescue Truck/Title

Mr. Smith advised that Linville Central wanted the rescue truck to be titled to the Avery Fire Commission and then leased back to Linville Central Rescue for a certain amount of years. He also said that in his opinion there is not a lot of difference where there is title to a fire department, rescue or fire commission to begin with but on down the road when it comes time to dispose of the equipment or something happened that a fire department became nonexistent then there would be a lot less problems getting the equipment back in service somewhere else. Mr. Smith stated he felt that this should be the case with the fire departments, too. Consensus of the Board of Commissioners to title the rescue truck to the fire commission and lease back to the rescue squad.

Comments

Scott Heath stated that he would like to make some comments on the first four issues. He said if there could be a portion of the fire tax for rescue squad that he was ok with that because there would be some accountability. The titling the rescue truck to the fire commission should be done and promote that as going forward. As far as the ambulance, crash truck, and rescue building debt, there needs to be more conversation on that issue.

Robert Wiseman, County Manager, said if there was another ½ cent raised and brought in \$200,000 there should be consideration of delineating this as rescue and segregate the two "pots" of money.

Chairman Poteat said possibly the fire tax would stay the same at 4 cents and ½ cent would come out of ad valorem tax. Mr. Smith said if it is fire and rescue related it needs to be funded by the fire tax and should not be taken out of the general fund. Glenn Johnson said he thought if this was the way we were going that Avery EMS should be included in this.

Wayne Miller, fire commission member, stated that he thought the fire tax should take care of fire and rescue both. Shane Garland and Joe Perry, fire commission members, agreed with Mr. Miller.

Volunteer Pay Per Call

Mr. Smith stated that there was no need in putting the "volunteer pay per call" in the budget if the Board of Commissioners were totally opposed to this. Mr. Garland said this was going to take a lot of planning and if the Board of Commissioners did not want to entertain this to let the fire commission know before a lot of time was spent on this. The Fire Commission is requesting \$20,000 in their budget for the "volunteer pay per call". The Board of Commissioners were not opposed to looking into the "volunteer pay per call".

Banner Elk Parking

Mr. Smith referred to an aerial photograph of the Banner Elk Fire Department property. The Fire Commission is asking that the piece of property where the playground is next to the fire department and behind the building also be designated for a parking lot but at the present time have this designated so nothing would happen to the property. The playground equipment is a serious liability. There are four parking spaces for 40 members. Mr. Wiseman suggested a lease in perpetuity; retain title to the property but lease to the fire department. Chairman Poteat said that the Board of Commissioners is willing to help with the Banner Elk property be it all or part. The Fire Commission will present this request to the Board of Commissioners at a board meeting.

Building and Property (Frank, Green Valley, Banner Elk)

Mr. Smith advised that Frank Fire Department is in the worst situation and would probably need to be relocated because of the septic system and parking. The problem at Frank is finding a piece of property in that area. Green Valley would be next on the priority list for a new fire department. Wayne Miller suggested that there should be the same specifications for each new fire department building. Chairman Poteat said the Board is not opposed to addressing the need for buildings and the fire commission having specifications for these buildings. The fire commission should proceed with working on projections for Frank and Green Valley Fire Departments.

20 year plan

The Fire Commission will begin working on a 20 year plan.

Age of Trucks

A chart showing the age of the fire trucks at each fire department was given to each Commissioner. The plans this year is to replace the first out engine at Fall Creek and the Newland tanker.

"I am Responding" (from E911 money)

Shane Garland explained that the "I am Responding" is a program that can be used at the fire department and the dispatch center. When you respond to a call, you can actually hit a number and it will send to dispatch that you are enroute to the scene which allows for accountability and it can work as a backup for the system if there is failure of audio communications. The fire departments have put this in their budgets for the upcoming year. This is a communication issue and the E911 funds should be used for this program. The total cost of this program is \$8,000 to \$9,000 per year. The County Manager stated that he would follow up on this issue with Jamey Johnson, Director of Communications.

Green Valley/Mitchell County

Green Valley Fire Department is providing service for the top of Henson Creek which is in Mitchell County. The memorandum agreement is prepared to pay Avery County to cover this for Mitchell County and Green Valley and Cane Creek Fire Departments have met regarding this issue.

ARC GIS Network Analyst

Charlie Franklin, Fire Department Coordinator, stated that the ARC GIS Network Analyst program will help to find road miles. When maps are done for the state and the state comes to do the fire ratings, we have to do all of this by hand. James Seaberg has used sample versions in the past but can only use these so long and he has not had the money in his budget. If you see this in the Mapping Department budget, this is something that will help the county and the fire departments as far as the ratings.

Adjourn

Motion by Scott Heath and second by Glenn Johnson to adjourn this meeting at 6:02 p.m. Motion unanimously approved.

**Kenny Poteat, Chairman
Avery County Board of Commissioners**

ATTEST: _____
Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk