

**HALIFAX COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
County Administration Conference Room
1050 Mary Bethune Street
Halifax, Virginia
March 30, 2023 / 3:00 PM**

CALL TO ORDER

Committee Chairman Roller called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Committee members attending were: Committee Chairman Roller; and Chairman Short

Staff members attending were: Scott Simpson, County Administrator; Jason Johnson, Emergency Services Coordinator; and, Charlene Hendricks, Executive Administrative Assistant.

BUSINESS ITEMS

1. Status of Fire and EMS in County

Committee Chairman Roller said the first item on the Agenda is to discuss the status of Fire and EMS in the County.

Mr. Johnson said time responses seem to be going better. He stated recently there have not been as many second and third tones going out. He said North Halifax Volunteer Fire Department (NHVFD) might have changed its rotation schedule because there is an improvement in coverage. He commented that Turbeville Volunteer Fire Department (TRBVFD) is still having problems with coverage.

Supervisor Roller asked if there are any updates with Cluster Springs Volunteer Fire Department (CSVFD). Mr. Johnson stated they are still in the process of getting certified but noted the majority of calls are being covered.

2. Review of Information Discussed with Individual Agencies

Committee Chairman Roller stated the next business item is the Review of Information Discussed with the Individual Agencies. He said he had a few items to discuss from notes he made at the last Committee Meeting such as Personnel, Buildings and Equipment, Financials, and Operational Procedures.

Committee Chairman Roller said pay rates need to be equitable and consistent among the agencies to be competitive with surrounding localities and provide some standardization. He stated benefits are an issue in recruiting and retention. He commented he understood that the Halifax County Rescue Squad offers benefits to employees, and Mr. Simpson verified that is correct. Mr. Johnson pointed out the volunteers do not have any benefits. Committee Chairman Roller said there are concerns about not having enough certified volunteers and noted candidates for EMS are limited. There was some discussion about possible programs and classes that could be offered and other plans of action that would be beneficial.

Committee Chairman Roller said NHVFD has financial obligations on its buildings and needs an existing income stream to meet those obligations. He stated TRBVFD would need renovations and additions in order to provide 24 hour services. The Committee members noted presently there is a 3-year delivery on trucks and acknowledged proper equipment replacement is essential. He said the development of a Capital Improvement Plan for EMS services for the County might be appropriate.

Committee Chairman Roller stated overtime can become an issue if EMS personnel work for one entity. He said cost is an issue for training volunteers but noted some funds have already been set aside for those purposes. There was some discussion about reimbursement based on mileage and how hard billing could possibly have a negative impact on fundraising and continued local support from the community.

Committee Chairman Roller discussed some of the concerns for operational procedures. He said one of the priorities for the Rescue Squad is obtaining staff for a second unit. It was noted TRBVFD needs two employees during the day, and there also needs to be coordination for staffing and calls with the Rescue Squad. He commented the Rescue Squad needs to retain volunteers to meet the Charter for the Squad.

Mr. Johnson said he is unsure of the language in the Rescue Squad's Charter. He commented he has reached out to surrounding localities that are going through the dissolving process and one of those localities is able to keep the volunteer side. He stated you cannot volunteer for the same entity where you are employed.

Committee Chairman Roller said the idea of a Rapid Response Vehicle for advanced lifesaving seemed to be an idea that was unfavorable. Mr. Johnson commented that patient care during the handoff of the patient was most likely the main concern of the agencies.

Committee Chairman Roller said at the last meeting, there were discussions about adjustments for the coverage zones, which could possibly improve response time. Mr. Johnson discussed some of the difficulties with adjustments due to the makeup of County roads and other factors.

Mr. Simpson said when coverage zones were being discussed with the different agencies at the prior meeting, the question that came to his mind is if the coverage zone was being based on ground miles or population, and emphasized the right balance is needed.

Committee Chairman Roller stated funds are available in the Capital funds to help with needed improvements for EMS and revenue from some of the solar facilities will also begin to generate in the next few years.

Chairman Short stated he understood it would cost approximately \$2.3 million in annual salaries for 32 employees. Mr. Johnson commented that the \$2.3 million does not include any benefits. There was some additional discussion, and it was noted the actual figures will fluctuate based on several different variables. He stated most agencies are not meeting the goals set by NEMSIS. The Committee members agreed proper training and certification and a plan of action are vital moving forward.

Committee Chairman Roller asked if the County could provide a training academy for recruitment, and Mr. Johnson stated a training academy could definitely be provided. Mr. Simpson verified funds have been set aside for certified training and EMS programs.

Mr. Johnson discussed the cost of training materials and noted books are in excess of \$400, and mannequins can range from \$1,500 to \$11,000 depending on specific training.

Mr. Simpson said County staff could research pay scale evaluations and begin gathering the necessary information for the training academy. He commented buildings seem to be appropriate for right now; however, if 24 hour services are implemented, other arrangements for some of the agencies would need to be considered.

The Committee members discussed the expense of fully equipped vehicles and the availability of grant funds to assist with some of the expenses. Mr. Johnson commented the agencies are doing a good job with rotation and are currently in good shape. There was some additional discussion about hard billing and how sending out a second and third billing could be beneficial for the agencies.

Mr. Simpson stressed cost and funding needed to be determined for standardization, and then another meeting could take place with all of the agencies to get their feedback. He said he could meet with Mrs. Jackson, Director of Finance, to obtain a list of Capital Funds, which have been set aside for Public Safety, and the Committee could meet again in about four weeks before meeting with the agencies.

ADJOURN

Motion made by Chairman Short, seconded by Committee Chairman Roller, to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.