

Fire Commission Meeting Highlights

05/10/08 642 W - + 16 - 11

Some highlights from Thursday's meeting of the Wake County Fire Commission. Corrections and clarifications are welcome.

The Long Range Business Plan will be presented to the County Commissioners on [Tuesday, May 12](#). An accompanying PowerPoint presentation was shown to the Fire Commission and includes background on the Business Plan document, an overview of fire growth and its impact on firefighter safety, findings and recommendations for staffing and facilities, and the Fire Commission's privatization of all elements of the business plan.

The Budget Committee presented the FY09 Fire Tax Budget Recommendation. For apparatus, it includes 5 engines or pumper/tankers, 3 service/rescue trucks, 6 small vehicles, and 5 tankers. For facilities, it includes both land acquisitions for East Garner Station and Wendell Falls Station, and a replacement station for Bay Leaf. It was also noted that the Fire Commission had placed ALL building projects on hold, until facility owner issues were resolved and the Long-Range Business Plan was completed.

For capital equipment, the budget includes air bottles (\$10K), defibrillators and thermal imaging cameras (\$89K), pagers infrastructure (\$377K), PPE (\$100K), and small capital (\$150K). For staffing, it includes 88 paid positions. The 88 paid positions, the first of three staffing phases that continue in FY10 and FY11, are for Bay Leaf (8), Durham Highway (3), Fairview (12), Falls (12), Hopkins (6), Rolesville (6), Stony Hill (6), Swift Creek (12), Wake-New Hope (8), Western Wake (12), and Zebulon (3).

The budget committee also received 38 individual expansion requests from 13 departments, none of which were recommended for inclusion. Another 25 individual small capital requests were received from 7 departments. None were specifically included. Rather, the small capital sum (\$150K) will be distributed evenly to 19 departments for small capital items.

The presentation's debt appropriates slide included some figures on the Western Wake Station 2 closure. The estimated cost savings was \$93,000, and the actual savings approximates \$102,000. However, there was an accompanying loss of fire tax revenues totaling \$57,000, which drops the actual savings to \$44,500.

The County Manager was present during the business plan and budget portions of the meeting, and offered some budget comments and funding suggestions including (a.) looking at administrative staffing salaries and (b.) think about consolidating departments.

Those were the big items of the evening. Lots of discussion. Lots of numbers.

Other notes...

An ad hoc committee recently appointed to review the Rules of Procedure for fire commission committee membership offered recommendations on improving the equity of committee representation.

The Facilities Committee provided an update on facilities projects. Land is being looked at for both the Southeastern Wake County Fire Station (off Raynor Road) and Wendell Falls Fire Station. The committee is also taking no further action on fire station closures. They were requested to rank the list of stations evaluated for closure. They have done this and will take no further action on this matter. The Fire-Rescue office is proceeding with station closure work, notably talking to Raleigh regarding their interest in suburban fire protection contracts.

Along those lines, a draft of the fire protection agreement with the town of Cary, for coverage of Western Wake Station #2 territory, was presented. The document is still being finished.

The apparatus committee spoke on the subject of service/rescue trucks. In FY09, three such trucks will be purchased by Zebulon (50% funded), Holly Springs (23.4% funded), and Garner (45.3% funded). As each department seeks a different size truck, the committee proposed a cap on these types: small F-550 type (\$150K), medium commercial type (\$250K), and large custom type (\$320K). It was noted that two rescues will be purchased in FY11, and both departments are requesting small types. In FY12, one will be purchased, and it is currently a large type. The committee also felt that it was more cost-effective for each department to bid their own truck.

As usual, minutes will be posted at a later date to <http://www.wakegov.com/emergency/fire/commission/minutes/>. Maybe the audio recordings will be streamed someday, too.

So is the staffing plan for the upcoming year or the year after?

4447 - 05/11/08 - 10:22

Mike,

I think the 57,000 is the cost of the actual contact with Cary FD. I think the Wake will still collect tax on that property. Can anyone in the know clarify?

Correction ? - 05/11/08 - 13:23

So these 88 positions, how's it all going to work? I see Swift Creek is getting 12 people, is that for one 4-man engine company staffed 24/365?

Silver - 05/12/08 - 11:55

Silver,

That is the plan. It will be a change and transition for us if the staffing comes through. There will be a lot of work involved with getting career staff going, but we can adjust if the money comes.

Griggs - 05/12/08 - 14:55

As posted on the Watch Desk, the staffing issue has hit the news: <http://www.wral.com/news/local/story/287..>

Legeros - 05/12/08 - 19:41

I dunno... they are closing a station to save a few thousand dollars, but they can ask to spend over \$7 million in the same breath? Pipe dreams I think.

CFP 7021 ([Email](#)) - 05/12/08 - 21:48

N&O coverage now: <http://www.newsobserver.com/print/tuesda..>

Legeros - 05/13/08 - 06:28

Sounds like the County Manager is finally going to get involved in trying to straighten this debacle known as the Wake County Fire Service. Strap on your seatbelts guys, this is going to be a bumpy ride!

Wayne - 05/13/08 - 07:25

Oh boy, it's never a good day when firefighters become budget numbers, and somebody with no clue what we really need starts looking at the numbers to figure out what they think needs to happen. I feel for you guys, sorta glad I moved now...

Barrett - 05/13/08 - 09:46

Is that John Barrett, from FDNY via Durham FD?

The County Manager needs to be educated that every pumper, rescue and ladder DOES need to be staffed with crews of four. If this thing goes down, and he only grants 3 people per shift/per house, with vacation and sick time figured in, they'll be riding 2 on pupmpers and a bigger mess will be created.

Mr. Cooke, please staff each unit with atleast four people, so we can make advancements in this counties' fire service. If you let 2 people ride on a pumper/ladder/rescue, you're setting yourself up for disaster.

Silver - 05/13/08 - 10:10

It definitely seems like this is going to happen which is good but in turn it also means that a few stations has definitely been pushed closer to the closure status. I hate to see them close but I can definitely understand the money issue and that it will save thousands.

RescueRanger - 05/13/08 - 10:35

Why doesnt the County Mgr just start hiring the firefighters himself instead of giving money to each station? The FFs will be in the govt

retirement system & have good benefits. They might be career jobs if you were working for a govt, but as long as you are working for a Chief who answers to a BOD, who gets elected every year, who knows what type of job security you'll have – esp if you have to worry about your employer getting annexed out of the fire service before you retire.

Dashlight - 05/13/08 - 11:15

It sounds like in the N&O the county manager may push some Fire Chiefs out and try to push merger talks on departments. I agree 4 to a pumper is what is needed. By the chiefs asking for this it may lead to some chiefs and departments becoming nonexistent. Hope it all works out.

Batt Chief 13 - 05/13/08 - 12:39

“Is that John Barrett, from FDNY via Durham FD?”

No, it is not.

As for other comments made, well it hasn't passed through the budget process yet, who knows if it will or not.

CFP 7021 ([Email](#)) - 05/13/08 - 15:37

Ok, thanks Shev....didn't think so but had to ask.

Silver - 05/13/08 - 16:11

With Ol' Johnny boy leaving and some of the comments made by the County Manager about not needing full time fire chiefs at all of these depts, it would appear that NOW is the prime time for the creation of a TRUE Wake County Fire Rescue. Imagine the money that would be saved by only have one set of command staff and cheaper cost of benefits with a larger pool of employees. I guess we shall see!

Wayne - 05/13/08 - 22:00

Wave the magic wand and endow Wake County Fire Rescue with an operations division that assumes control of all non-municipally operated fire stations. What would that look like? Fire Chief, say three Deputy Chiefs (Ops, Training, Fire Marshall), say four Battalion Chiefs (northwest, northeast, southwest, southeast). Say 17 stations, not counting those targeted for closure (BL1, BL2, DH, SH1, SH2, R, H, NH2, W1, W2, EW1, G1, G2, G3, F1, F2, SC). So 17 four-person engine companies, plus perhaps a couple others covering areas that don't need a station, but would be quartered at municipal stations? Say 20 four-person engine companies. Ladders, rescues, tankers? Say 4 four-person ladders, 4 four-person (!) rescues, and 4 two-person (?) tankers. Special apparatus? Two air trucks, one person each. North and south. $28 \times 4 + 4 \times 2 + 2 \times 1 = 122$ people riding rigs. Plus 4 bat chiefs. How much support staff, for admin, training, services duties? Let's add 10 more folks for the fun of it. So 144 people on the operations front? Now what would it cost? Someone else can imagine part 2.

Legeros - 05/14/08 - 06:24

Mike – Lets check the math on this. 122 on rigs plus 4 Batts X 3 shifts = 382 folks for on scene ops. Then add in all the other chiefs and adm staff. 4 tankers??!! Not nearly enough for a large working fire in an area with no hydrants! 4 ladders and 4 rescues for the entire rural area of Wake County? I think a county department will have to be much larger than what you envision. Money, money, money...very large tax increase...voted on by politicians? On top of all this, the loss of many great and dedicated firefighters from the stations some people want to shut down.

[BE] ([Web Site](#)) - 05/14/08 - 11:14

You all have valid points, but I think that we are jumping the gun. Let's wait and see what happens in when the budget is approved before we fly off the handle.

As far as “Wake County Fire Rescue” don't hold your breath on that one.

Beach ([Email](#)) - 05/14/08 - 12:26

Nobody said you had to do the whole county at once, but what would the number be if you added all those paid today at those FDs with the 88 they are asking for? Start with all newly hired FFs and build a 5yr plan to phase out the paid company chiefs to a plan like Prince Georges and Montgo Cos use with career and volunteers together. No reason it can't work if there is as strong a volunteer motivation as BE says. They can operate tankers & 3rd due engines & other rigs

Dashlight - 05/14/08 - 18:30

Or if they're hanging out, ride first due!

Silver - 05/14/08 - 19:57

Any of several Maryland counties have the example, easily modified, if needed. Prince Georges, Montgomery, Howard, or Anne Arundel- take your pick.

DJ ([Email](#)) - 05/14/08 - 20:18

Nah, they don't want to do that! It is proof that it can work! If people would step back and see the big picture instead of their own sandbox, then maybe but I'm not holding my breath!

Wayne - 05/15/08 - 10:14

I agree 100%. Wake County Fire Rescue. The county wants standardization, right? Truck committies, staffing/pay scales, TRAINING...to name a few already in place. I've said it before on here (it probably got edited or deleted) but there are TOO MANY PEOPLE WHO CANT LET GO of the "good 'ol boy days". Until those people leave, we'll stay as we are, held back.

JBoggs ([Email](#)) - 05/15/08 - 11:51

Time for a reality check for some folks. First, if it ain't broke.....don't fix it. Second, for those who want to have Wake County Fire Rescue, you had better run for a seat on the Wake County Board of Commissioners or find Commissioners who will vote to pay for a county-wide department. It will be costly. Will there ever be a county-wide department? Probably so. Lastly, I think many of the folks who are so interested in a county-wide department know which job they think they are going to get. I have the job I want in the fire service. I am a volunteer fireman and have been for almost 35 years....and I am not a good 'ol boy.

[BE] ([Web Site](#)) - 05/15/08 - 16:44

but it is broke... as the Fire Commission is asking for \$7 million to put full time positions in each district. And that's backed with the fact that response times are up, and the number of volunteers are down. I don't think I'll get any job in the "Wake County Fire Rescue" department. But as a citizen and a taxpayer I think it's the right road to travel down.

CFP 7021 ([Email](#)) - 05/15/08 - 17:22

Question for all. Is the system broke from the perspective of Joe Six Pack? Or, changing the question around, what does a broken system look like through the eyes of Joe Six Pack? What does it take for **him** to call his commissioner, appear "en masse" at meetings, etc.

Legeros - 05/15/08 - 17:30

Its all perspective/expectations

Not sure I quite qualify as J6P but I'm not in the fire/ems service in any way. I grew up in a truly rural district in Gaston county (15+min to the next town with a paid fire service and EMS and the FD didn't run medical calls) where the firemen came (usually from town) and picked up their 20 year old trucks when the siren+pager went off. My parents still live in the middle of 2 rural districts (can hear both of the sirens from their house).

So from that perspective as long as someone shows up with a truck within 15min or so(regardless whether the house is saved), yep..fire system is working.

Now I live in Raleigh and have seen some of our RFD friends remodel one of the buildings in our complex (despite suddenly missing 1/3 of the roof the building survived and was repaired). From that perspective I expect many staffed trucks at my door pronto when I ask for them.

I don't think the general public understands the volume of non-fire related calls you guys are running now nor do we understand the need for 2 in 2 out, the volume of apparatus that gets dispatched for many calls and other similar concepts. Nor do I think most give it much thought. They see the trucks in the station without regard to what it takes to actually use them effectively.

I also wouldn't say there is much sympathy for firemen getting hurt(assumed to be part of the job I supposed), one was during the fire here (steam I believe... wasn't much reported) but when a CP&L lineman was injured by a transformer accident we knew his name and what hospital he was in so we could send flowers.

Personally I would love to see a wake fire/rescue. While the closest RFD company (4) is likely to be available, the next two are in demand (15 and 9) which means the next two closest stations to me quite often are actually county stations (Bay Leaf).

Fatebringer ([Email](#)) - 05/15/08 - 18:51

Fate™, I've mentioned it before, it's called the "mirage firehouse" theory. "Joe Citizen" sees a fire truck in the firehouse with the bay door open, signifying someone's on duty so they think all is well. What they don't realize is that it's staffed with only 2 people, which is understaffed.

I'm all for "Wake Fire-Rescue", the taxpayers deserve the best level of service possible.

Silver - 05/15/08 - 21:05

BE-

Like someone else has already said...the system is broke and has been for a long time. I have no intentions of leaving my current position with my department to go to work with the county if/when it happens but I DO have to contend with county depts and lack of organization, standardization, and manpower that exists. Like it has been said before, the writing is on the wall so people should start getting prepared for it.

Mike- You ask what a broken system looks like from Joe 6 Pack's eyes, well we are all saying it. It is very frustrating to show up on a fire and your next in company shows up 2 people or worse yet, driver only! It is frustrating to have people on scene that can't even perform the basic functions because there is no county wide standard on qualifications. I could go on, but most of us already know about the problems and as TAXPAYERS and firefighters we feel that it is time for a change

Wayne - 05/16/08 - 08:40

You all keep saying how expensive it would be to have a Wake Co F/R. The answer is that it really wouldn't cost more than it does now and you may save money on some things.

Lets look at it. Using Mont. Co, MD as an example.

Mont Co used to be just like Wake Co in that there were a bunch of little kingdoms with their own paid employees. The county stepped up and said from now on there will be a Mont Co F/R and all paid ff's in the county are now county employees in the same position and rank as they already were.

Ok so we take all of the paid guys minus Cary/Raleigh and there is your paid staff and pretty much your rank structure. You use the D/C's or B/C's that depts already have as your shift chiefs. You reletter the trucks and turnout gear as it wears out. You save money on health insurance because you have so many people on one plan. It saves the employee money as well if they have to pay less for their family to be on it. If any of the ff's are already on the state retirement system then they just keep getting it. The other ff's now become part of the state retirement system.

Training. The County says from now on to be promoted here are the qualifications and testing procedures (Wake Co already has qualifications in place).

The county uses the money that it used to give to all of these kingdoms to operate its budget and then continues to contract back to the individual towns for fire protection as the vol depts do now and use that money as well. It would cost less to run 1 dept than 34 individual ones.

The question that someone would have to figure out is what to do with the paid fire chiefs. Some may want a admin position in the new dept and some may want to go back online if they are still young enough who knows.

Thats my 2 cents

Mke - 05/16/08 - 10:03

Why only take out raleigh and cary out. There are a number of munilpal departments already in the county. I do not feel the need to become a county employee when I am already a town employee. Before everyone goes down the Wake County Department path why not encourage municipalities taking over volunteer departments. Garner, Wake Forest, Wendell, Rolesville. The rest of the unincorporated areas can be contracted from wake county to the town around it. We contract with the county for the New Hill district and we have paid staff in the station. In July we will have 3 per shift plus an intern and part time day staff. There are lots of ways to fix a malfunctioning, not broken system

battchief13 - 05/16/08 - 10:26

What does a broken system look like to JSP? To answer that you have to know what the expectation is of the average, uninformed citizen. These are the people who have no idea why '2 in, 2 out' is important. These are the people that have no real idea of what we do, other than spray water on the fire. They do not understand the need to perform fire attack, search and rescue, and ventilation simultaneously. And these are the folks who are obsessed with Angelina's twins, who got sent home from American Idol, etc.

Their expectation is that when they dial 9-1-1, the appropriate response comes. If their house is on fire, they want a lot of fire trucks (because more is better, isn't it?), a bunch of firemen, and they want you to spray a lot of water.

And what happens? A lot of red fire trucks come out (they have no idea that ten trucks came from five different departments) and a lot of firemen were running around doing something (they are not going to count them, they just know there were a lot of them). They sprayed a lot of water, but the house still burned down, or was gutted, or whatever. And they know that you tried, but hey, you did your best. And the best part of all? A lot of people think we still have a mostly volunteer fire service here in Wake County.

JSP drives by the fire station and sees that big row of fire trucks (they sure are shiny!) and just thinks that there are hordes of firefighters sitting around waiting for the 'big one'. And his mother, who lives in the house he grew up in, makes cookies and stuff to take down to the volunteer fire station.

THAT'S what JSP thinks is happening right now. So what constitutes a broken system?

The trucks don't roll. The firemen don't show up.

Here's the kicker- it ain't the fire chief's main job to change it. His job is to make good with what he has and try to make changes where he can. It's his job to make sure he is following the rules with what he has. He has to pick his battles or he becomes an ex-fire chief.

As long as the citizens don't complain, the governing boards aren't going to change things. The squeaky wheel gets the grease. Right now, the squeaky wheel is schools, roads, taxes, and water.

As long as JSP thinks we have a mostly volunteer fire service, then he is going to be against changing that because there will be a bunch of people out there who will say "It will raise taxes". Think about it- how many fire stations and fire trucks out there have volunteer, VFD, or vol. in the name? Is there anything wrong with volunteers? That depends upon your point of view.

Someone said something about 'firefighters becoming budget numbers'. Guess what? You already are. We all are, whether you are a firefighter, LEO, or paramedic. That's the way it works- crunch the numbers.

If you want to change things, make the business case for it. You have to take the emotion out of it. The county manager is a reasonable person. He presides over a pie that has to go out in different directions, much of it mandated by federal law. If you can make the business case for something, you stand a better chance rather than just saying "it's the right thing to do".

And if you want to change things, YOU ALL have to get involved. You have to get together and stick together.

There, I'm done, and did not even get into the 'EMS woes' as someone put it.

Ya'll have a great weekend.

DJ

DJ ([Email](#)) - 05/16/08 - 13:21

The fate and/or the future of the Wake Fire Service is actually in the hands of the Fire Commission, its Committees, and the ever-present guidance of the Fire/Rescue Division's staff.

So, the Fire Commission in conjunction with the WCFR staff can either fix or demolish our existing systems. Therefore, given the Fire Commission's appointed representation, I suppose it's actually in the hands of the chiefs and their regions, and thus by virtue, the firefighters of Wake County themselves. Whatever happens, I guess it will be our fault or at our own hands. Look at where we are now. Our current existence is a result of our own recommendations and decisions and many of you saw it evolve since 1999. It all boils down to us to make the changes towards what we perceive as appropriate. Talk to your fire chief about the issue and project your educated and informed opinion. Hey, he is supposed to know what's happening (because he's probably making \$80,000 a year).

So, what do we want to do?? Well, be heard at the Fire Commission meetings (you get 3 minutes to speak). Be present at the sub-committee meetings (they're open meetings). Call or write your County Commissioner and let them know your opinions. As DJ illustrated, present a

business case not an emotional whine. Hey, you can even form a coalition and go forward to the Fire Commission if you want. It's still a free country (at least until the oil companies completely take over).

The Good 'ole Boy - 05/16/08 - 17:41

About the Fire Commission, its role, its composition, etc., <http://www.wakegov.com/emergency/fire/co..>

Legeros - 05/16/08 - 18:16

Well GOB, I see the problem with true progress being the Fire Commission. The last minutes talk of changing who fills the seats so someone else sees the problem too. The names you see mentioned on the other committees are also the FDs asking for 88 firefighters to clean their bays full of replaced trucks. \$80,000 or more for a brush truck and who knows what for a service truck at a rural station? I think the system is broke. The ones who should be looking out for the VFDs are instead killing a good thing. Why would they want to listen to anyone who questions them?

Dashlight - 05/17/08 - 00:07

This morning's News & Observer features a feature on the subject of staffing: <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/story/1..>

Legeros - 05/17/08 - 05:52

Name: (real name preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

[\(Register your username / Log in\)](#)

Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.