

Wake County Announces Budget

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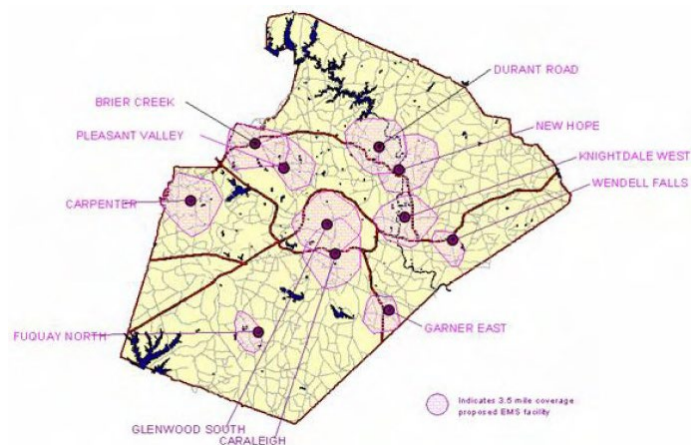
The Wake County budget for Fiscal Year 2009 has been announced. [Read the budget doc.](#) On the fire front, there's funding for up to 28 new full-time firefighter positions for rural fire stations. Plus nearly \$4 million budgeted for construction costs of facilities. This is presumably allocated for rebuilding Bay Leaf Station 1, though that project is not named in the budget doc. The East Garner station appears budgeted for FY11.

On the EMS front, the first year of the Advance Practice Paramedic (APP) proposal will deploy seven new APP units based out of Wake Forest, Wendell, and Fuquay-Varina/Holly Springs. (Staffing additional ambulances with a single paramedic assisted by an emergency medical technician.) Also, three new peak-load units will be deployed at Cary, Six Forks, and Eastern Wake.

There's also a big honkin' law enforcement training center to be built on city property on Battle Bridge Road in southeastern Wake County. The 36,844 square-foot (!) building will house administrative, classroom, and fitness space.



There's also a neat map showing future EMS facilities through FY15. Four are co-located facilities, says the document: Fuquay-Varina, Southeast Wake, Knightdale South, and Wendell Falls. Click to enlarge:



Assuming this budget is approved, what would be the projected distribution of this 28 firefighter positions to the county fire departments? Also, was there any details on the positions such as if they are entry-level or greater?

r jones - 05/20/08 - 13:08

Unbelievable, try for 88 and only get 28. Sad to say, but the county manager doesn't have a clue....

Silver - 05/20/08 - 16:17

Jeff I think they are spanning out the 88 positions over a 3 year period. I thought I heard that somewhere....

Beach ([Email](#)) - 05/20/08 - 18:40

For some reason I thought a total of 200-some over 3 years....where did I pull that from?

Silver - 05/20/08 - 23:43

Jeff is correct. The long-range business plan proposed 200+ positions over three years.

Legeros - 05/21/08 - 05:58

my bad....

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

The FF distribution (if approved) will be decided by the Fire Commission (Staffing Committee recommendation probably). I expect less than 28 unless the tax rate is increased (i.e. county manager = 8.0, Fire Commission = 9.0). The 200+ recommended from the Long Range Business Plan and is not exactly what will come to pass (\$\$\$) and is more of a "wish" demonstrating an expectation rather than a reality.

Also, I expect the new hires to be entry level as any higher approved positions will be promoted from within with the new employees hired in a the FF level.

A.Rich - 05/23/08 - 21:20

With the continuing threat of closing embedding county stations, what is the reality of those being safe from closure?

wcff - 05/24/08 - 11:50

I would submit there could be many thousands of dollars saved by closing several of the embedded stations. Those personnel affected by the closures could be transferred around the county to help with some of the lack of manning. Wake County wastes an astounding amount of money and physical resources doubling and tripling coverage that could more effectively be provided by the larger municipal department that already surrounds them, and has 24 hour coverage.

FYI - 05/25/08 - 22:03

Alas, I believe transferring personnel "around the county" is not possible, as paid personnel at "county stations" are employees of their respective employer fire departments. They are not employees of a single fire protection agency.

Legeros - 05/25/08 - 22:14

Do you really think it's just as simple as closing a fire station and letting a "larger municipal department that already surrounds them, and has 24 hour coverage" handle it? WAKE COUNTY DOES NOT HAVE A COUNTY WATER SYSTEM! How hard is that to understand? Unless all the "municipal" departments are going to start buying tankers you can't close the stations providing fire protection unless there is another one with identical resources within 5 miles, otherwise that area has class 10 fire protection (which means they have no fire protection). The great idea of closing Western Wake 2 saved a whopping 44k dollars, WOW, what a deal! With all that money we should be able to staff everyone with 4 per station easily, without increasing the tax rate.

itsnotthatsimple - 05/25/08 - 23:08

Seems like the embedded station issue could be an excellent opportunity for a large-sized non-municipal department, or perhaps one that doesn't yet exist but would result from mergers. Mind you, this line of thinking presumes that removing fire resources— redundant or otherwise — is a worthy objective. I've paid ample attention to this and remain unsure of the maximum value. But anyway, you get a large-sized department to withdraw engines and their staffing from embedded stations, but leave tankers and personnel to operate same. Water problem solved, right? What are the catches?

Legeros - 05/26/08 - 07:55

Second thought on water supply. What's the cost on installing hydrants county-wide? Is there no comparison, when the figures are laid out side-by-side? Hydrants versus tankers? Okay, that one's probably a... pipe dream.

Legeros - 05/26/08 - 08:00

If I were to live in an area that was being closed, I'd hope that what ever FD is now coming to my house is able to use the trucks including the tankers that my tax dollars paid for. Then they'd have the same water supply that is coming today. The FD doesn't own those trucks, the taxpayers do. They don't care who is driving them.

Itsverysimple - 05/26/08 - 21:11

That is a entirely relevant point. The county owns a considerable chunk of the front-line apparatus at "county stations". My musings on "remove the engines, leave the tankers" are thus rendered mostly moot.

Legeros - 05/26/08 - 21:15

The county can take their P.O.S trucks back for all I care nothing but problems with em, but what do you expect...low bid trucks..

roger - 05/26/08 - 22:46

Wake County would not be a good place to have a county wide watering system, such as Johnston County. Think about it. Wake County has MULTIPLE growing municipalities. If you went tomorrow and installed fire hydrants county wide, towns would be fighting each other over annexing. You want to be like Atlanta then go right ahead.

Those of you who want to close fire stations just need to shut up. I have been watching this talk for months. You want to cut you own throats, keep that as your business and not the taxpayers whom, by the way, PAY OUR PAYCHECKS. So why would you want to take away a fire station from them. Whats more important saving a few dollars or saving lives and property? Don't tell me on this blog, tell them! I'm sure they are dying to know.....

Beach ([Email](#)) - 05/27/08 - 00:54

I have sat back and watched all this for a while now and have only one question. Why is it ok to have fire stations of different incorporations inside different cities i.e. Eastern Wake inside Knightdale, Wake New Hope inside Raleigh or surrounded by Raleigh, and several other fire stations in Wake County? That is a complete waste of taxpayer money. You want to whine and moan and groan about its not fair because you may lose your job? If you had supported the county fire department supplementing incorporated fire departments with staffing this wouldn't be a problem. You could just be shifted to another station. But no, you had to have your own fire district and can't realign districts because this has always been your sand box and you can't share. A county-wide hydrant system, how's that a bad thing? You're already on county water, right? So how about instead of griping about the problem, jump on board or better yet, get the guys on your shift together. (Oh wait for most that's one other guy that's really going to help you out in the time of a call. I'm really shocked that there are not more plaques on the wall in Wake County because of the do more with less attitude.) And think about what could be better in Wake County and present it to the fire council. You talk about saving the taxpayer's money. What's really going to save them money ten, fifteen, twenty years from now? The system as it functions right now, or more of a county based system? But that's right, you worried more about your paycheck and complaining that people want to shut your firehouse down because it's just really not needed anymore. For everyone to better understand, this would be called duplication of services. But that's right, the way it is right now is saving the taxpayers money. Mike, I apologize for this rant, but it just gets old seeing everyone bicker back and forth on a blog about how this isn't fair and how that isn't right. Instead of banding together, as we all are brothers and sisters and finding a better solution.

Adam Brown - 05/27/08 - 01:48

County-wide water and hydrants and annexations would be less of a problem, I believe, because nearly all municipalities utilize Raleigh's water system. Cary has their own system. Is there a third, fourth, etc. water system in Wake? Okay, maybe I am missing the point. Perhaps it is less about "availability of water" as it is "claiming the water that is available" ???

Legeros - 05/27/08 - 07:25

As far a "claiming the water avail" you drop some water lines,somebody is going to claim it. I understand your question Mike, but hey, whether we like it or not that's just the way it is. I think about 80%(or more) of the current water used in Wake County is on Raleigh's system. I'm not bashing a county wide water system, it's just a little to late for that here in Wake Co. Mike can you find a map that shows the layout of the water lines? Does one even exist?

Beach ([Email](#)) - 05/27/08 - 11:11

Another angle on this that I think exists is the reluctance for non-municipal areas to give up control to Raleigh or other large municipalities. When you let them come in with water lines the annexation will follow and bye-bye tax base. It seems to me that this will be ineventable, although not for quite awhile. Seems like whoever controls the water, controls the growth, and hence controls the eventual fire protection.

wcff - 05/27/08 - 12:12

I think some of you here have lost sight of the big picture. I believe it was Adam who has said it best, why are we duplicating services? Granted, if we improve the fire service COUNTY WIDE, INCLUDING RALEIGH AND CARY, then we could solve alot of the problems. Let me state for the record that, due to all of the growth and increased call volume, I DO NOT SUPPORT CLOSING ANY FIRE STATIONS! If we were to improve the FIRE SERVICE COUNTYWIDE, we wouldn't duplicate services! Think about it.... IF all stations were staffed with a min of 4 people all FFII and EMT certified with a standard set of operational guidelines, what would it matter honestly??? CAD would reccommend the CLOSEST STATION only! Do you really think John Q. Public cares? I can assure you that they don't care, what they care about is that they called 911 and someone showed up to help.

Should there be a county water system? You bet there should be, look at other counties, less populated then grand ol' Wake, they have county water systems and it works fine! Don't know how much most of you know about annexation on here, but other than some limited action by Cary, most of the annexations are at the request of DEVELOPERS and BUILDERS who are also required the put in place all of the "city services" and "tie in" into current systems. However if there were a county water system in place, it still wouldn't matter much, in fact it may actually slow down some annexations because one of the big selling points for people when they buy a home are "city services" ie Police, water/sewer, trash collection, and fire protection.

Everyone gets on here and talks about how this won't work or that won't work, I ask, HOW DO YOU KNOW IT WON'T WORK, IF YOU DON'T TRY?! Why do we still need all of these independent fire companies and "their districts"? The county is SLOWLY trying to get away from that crap (as it should). Look what the county has done over the last few years: NO MORE FIRE TAX DISTRICTS, attempt made at apparatus standardization, "quickest" station response(which should actually be changed to CLOSEST station response), and LIMITED improvements to the communications system (Not a knock to our telecommunicators on here, I know you can only work with what you're given!).

The county already supplies the money to these independent companies, so why not take it back and develop a better system and reallocate the money. With that comes reallocating resources, why have so many rescues and ladders in the county? Many departments that have them can't get them out the door and if they do, it is usually driver only and/or too late to be effective on the scene. Again, it's too easy for people to just sit back and say "it won't work". Come on folks sit down, lose the emotions involved, and think realistically about it. Then ask yourself..."What is really best for ALL of the citizens of Wake County?"

Okay, off the soapbox for now...I'm sure I have stirred more than a few emotions from some people!

Wayne - 05/27/08 - 19:26

What would a county department mean for ISO and retirement (state for some houses and not state for others currently. If made into one department, what happens to state retirement. It is locked out from what I gather)

Concerned - 05/27/08 - 23:05

In terms of the state retirement, those that are currently in the system should not see a change. Afterall, essentially all they are doing is transferring from one to another. It would be like leaving one municipality for another, it should not "lock out" the retirement. For those that are not currently in the system that will need to be worked out. It may be that there can be a one time opportunity to "buy back" a certain amount of years or something or they may just have to start new. Hopefully these independent companies already have decent retirement for these folks, which could serve as a supplement to the state retirement (most municipalities offer this as well).

In terms of ISO, well that should not be so hard either, just fix the system (or least let it operate as it is designed). I think that it is so funny when I hear people say things like "WE have to send XYZ to a structural response because ISO says so" because that is NOT true. ISO recommends a certain type of response and it is up to the AHJ to ensure that the recommended response compliment RESPONDS, FULLY STAFFED!! What I see/hear around here is the apparatus get DISPATCHED but FAIL TO RESPOND or respond without the appropriate staffing levels. ISO grading/rating also weighs heavily on: water supply,STAFFING,apparatus and equipment carried on it, and TRAINING. In my personal opinion, this is where Chief Rich (and all of his officers) and Stony Hill Fire Dept. are way out in front of everyone else here in Wake County. A structural response for them AUTOMATICALLY gets a "water supply task force" on dispatch. As many of us here are fond of saying "it is better to have it coming and turn it around if not needed, than to NOT having it coming and need it". "It" can be any resource that may be needed ladders/rescues, tankers,manpower, specialty apparatus (air truck etc), and/or ambulances. Like I said, if the county were to take over as AHJ (as it should), then things should and could be changed to fulfill the ISO requirements/recommendations. As much as this pains me to say this, I fully believe that it needs to be said to put this ISO argument into perspective: Charleston Fire Dept was/is an ISO CLASS 1 fire dept, yet over the last year, sadly we have all learned that improper methods, attitudes, tactics, equipment, staffing, and training cost them dearly! I feel that we SHOULD NOT wait to see if that will happen here before something is done to prevent it. Does anyone else want to be the next Chief Thomas, trying to explain it all away?

Flame me if you want or pissed off at me all you want, but just think about it folks.

Stay safe out there guys!

Wayne - 05/28/08 - 11:49

Very well said Wayne.....

Jim - 05/28/08 - 13:27

This all sounds great to me; lots of good theories and ideas about our future. What we need to remember, however, is that none of this will happen if we let the fire commission decide how things will go. The "little kings" aren't willing to relinquish their power to the county. We will never see a true county fire department if we leave it up to the individual Chiefs to essentially write themselves out of a job. Get rid of the individual departments, their politics, their chiefs and officers(I am one); make some progress or leave it be.

I would encourage all of you that like to speak your piece from behind the keyboard to get out and do some real talking at the county level. Let's all get together and change this, seeing as we all agree that it is broken to at least some degree. Remember that nothing can be changed overnight. With intelligent letters to commissioners and the county manager offering factual information instead of rants, we can at least begin to effect change on the system.

Yes, I have left my name off of this post. No need to stir trouble at work or my vullie house. Stay safe and smart!

Your_Brother - 05/28/08 - 15:54

The Wake County Board of Commissioners received public comment on the budget on Monday, which included perspectives from fire service members on staffing and notably in the context of volunteers and combination departments. The meeting was videotaped and is available at <http://wake.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.p..>

Legeros - 06/04/08 - 06:23

Today's News & Observer notes the 8-cent fire tax may be approved, <http://www.newsobserver.com/print/tuesda..>

Legeros - 06/10/08 - 05:43

Wayne and "Your Brother" make great comments. It is true that we have extensive duplication of service and a great deal of inefficiency in the distribution of assets. Part of this is the individual fiefdoms. There is little incentive to improve the overall service level and increase efficiency because of the perceptions noted here. No one wants to lose their power base. The mere mention of "closing a firehouse" – for whatever the reason – is demonized immediately as reducing service. Never is mention of the duplication or improved service and efficiency a particular move may produce. I see little political will or willingness by the other departmental members to attempt any significant change in the current system.

FYI - 06/10/08 - 21:47

FYI and "Brother" both of you good points and thanks for the support. Now I ask this of all of us out here in Wake Co and cyberland...How do we really go about changing things and where do we start? Do we start with staffing and minimum qualifications? (career and volunteer) Do we start with apparatus standarization? or Do we start with resource allocation? How do we do it? Shall we start a petition and send it around the county to get as many names attached as possible, then forward it to the Fire Commission or even the County Commission? Many of us here agree that the system is broken but do not have the power to change the system independently, but maybe as a group we can change it. We all know that the fire service, as a whole, opposes change all of the time and I always HATE to hear "Well we have been doing it this way for XX years and it works, so we are going to keep doing this way" or "This is the way we have always done it". My normal reply is then "well fireman used to use leather buckets to fight fire and ride horse drawn pumpers to fight fire but I don't see us doing that anymore do we?" I hope everyone read the article Mike attached or better yet, watch the video of the commission meeting and you can see for yourself what the thought processes are around here. Now, I am all for company/department pride and try my best to promote it as hard and as often as I can BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF UNDERMINING THE BIGGER PICTURE!!! Like FYI said, it is the presence of the individual fiefdoms that get in the way and I ask again....What's it gonna take for people to get the point? I say it is time for the county to step up and take over as AHJ and go from there. They can set up a system similar to Roanoke Co, Va or (and I can't believe I'm gonna say this) Fairfax Co,Va where you still have volunteers and volunteer officers, including Fire Chiefs, but they ALL answer to one county chief. All of the apparatus is labeled with the county's name on and also the volunteer dept's or at least area's name on it. All operational costs are covered and managed by the county fire dept. The county already does it, so why not just keep it and manage it through themselves as opposed to giving it out to the independent fire companies and letting them do whatever with it.

One last thing, before anyone gets the idea that I am anti-volunteer (which is waaaayyyy off), I have never said that the county should go 100% career, but if the volunteers are not going to get it done then it is time to move in that direction. In a county system with MANDATORY duty crews for ALL stations, you could move people around (like a full time dept) to ensure that EVERY fire station was staffed with at least 3 QUALIFIED personnel. After all that would be providing the best possible service and that what's we all keep saying that we want to

do,....right? In my 18 years of service, I have volunteered in an all volunteer dept and a combination dept and I have worked in an all career dept and a combination dept. I have served in a VERY rural area running 300 calls a year and I have served as a VOLUNTEER in an area that ran 25,000 calls a year and have worked in a dept that ran 2000 calls a year and with one that ran over 100,000 calls a year and I have NEVER served in an area where the system was/is as messed up as Wake County's system. I have met and worked with some GREAT firefighters in this county and area but we all seem to agree that the system is broken, so again I ask....Where and how do we start?

Stay safe guys

Wayne - 06/11/08 - 10:29

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

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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.