

## Wake County Eyes Deep Budget Cuts

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[WTVD reported yesterday](#) on possible cuts being faced by Wake County and each department therein. They posted a copy of a document listing "department reduction options" for the coming fiscal year. For fire and emergency management, the possible cuts include eliminating two positions, a Chief Deputy Fire Marshal and a Fire Captain at Stony Hill. For EMS, the options are numerous for reducing or eliminating ambulance service, and two or four positions each each.

The article talks about tougher choices this year than last, though the "long list of cuts" are those that "may" be made next year. And that's about it. Not much additional context, or information about county officials (and staff?) will make those choices. Nor is there context for the document listing "department reduction options." Are those line items exclusive of each other? Are some dependent on each other? Are some weighed more heavily than others? Etcetera. A bit of a vacuum on this one, though perhaps the reporting will raise useful awareness. [Read the entire article.](#)

Why Stony Hill?

**Buckwheat** - 04/13/10 - 12:19

Exactly! Why Stony Hill? How much cost would that cut per year? This concerns me since S.H. is my responding department. Please explain why the council would want to cut funding to an active department? I've been following the fire station closure through the news and more searching led me to this site. I don't understand why the council would choose this and keep the fire station on Falls of Neuse rd. open. From what I've read on here and in news articles that station runs very few calls and all of those calls are being ran with the city or another department. I'm also aware there are several other departments in the county that only runs calls with the city or neighboring department but not sure of the names. I hate to see people lose their jobs but sometimes common sense should prevail over not hurting someone's feelings. I plan to be at the next council meeting to question the decision on why these stations are not being closed!

**S.H. Resident and W.C. Taxpayer** - 04/13/10 - 15:52

I imagine they are talking about the Capt's spot there that used to be a county employee before Charlie went to RDU? Did Stony Hill ever fill his Monday-Friday position or is it still open?

**Mike** - 04/13/10 - 16:14

If the dollars are so short why don't they go ahead and close the stations that they've been talking about for ten years. They cut jobs at stations, not fill needs at others, and yet they keep stations open that Raleigh or Knightdale covers 99% of their first due area. Makes no sense.

**ForgetPolitics** - 04/13/10 - 16:25

Please allow me to clarify the Stony Hill position. As the Fire Chief, I could have easily cleared the miscue up before this blog was posted. The position at Stony Hill is not lost at the department/organizational level and there is no reduction of staffing. The position is now a corporate employee (not a county position). The vacancy has actually been filled and the new District Chief will start on May 3rd.

The previous position was a Wake County Fire/Rescue Captain's position assigned to us under contract (a county employee). Approx. 4 years ago, the position title was changed to District Chief due to an evolution in the employee's responsibilities; and unfortunately, the pay range/grade remained the same (as a "Captain") on the county staff listing. Additionally, this position was one of the last county contracted staff positions and the Fire/Rescue Division does not wish to continue the program. Therefore, when the vacancy occurred, the county position was physically eliminated on their "books" and it now is a Stony Hill FD corporate position.

As most government entities will attest, they will eliminate vacated positions in tough times instead of filling them with new employees. How Wake County decides to classify the vacant "Captain's" position is their call, but Stony Hill staffing remains the same. The position is fully

funded and we are moving forward with our new employee. You may contact me offline (if needed) and I will explain in more detail.

**A.C. Rich** - 04/13/10 - 18:38

Chief Rich, have you made an announcement yet on who will be your new District Chief?

**Jones** - 04/14/10 - 09:00

I have not made one officially over the Wake County Fire Chief's email distribution yet... I will do so tonight. I have posted the new candidate on our department's web page ([www.stonyhillfire.org](http://www.stonyhillfire.org)) and on our SHFD Face Book page. We are very excited about our choice and are looking forward to the new addition.

**A.C. Rich** - 04/14/10 - 21:49

Dead horse alert! The districts of the stations on the closure list has already been evaluated and the costs to pay the City of Raleigh to cover that area is MUCH HIGHER than what is currently being funded. To the tune of more than 5 times higher than current cost, it will not provide any savings. Anyway, look at the number of major incidents and fire occurring in our areas on a regular basis. Losing ANY public safety resource is NOT the way to go!

**horse** - 04/14/10 - 22:31

AC it looks like you all snagged a good one. How did you convince him to come leave Nashville?

**Mike** - 04/15/10 - 09:02

We had 5 VERY qualified final candidates and were blessed to have the opportunity to choose from these guys. Anyway, he made the decision all on his own. We are fortunate!

As for the station closures, it is indeed bad "mojo" for us to discuss; but it is not a dead horse... just a sleeping one. I feel it will arise again in about two years. Face it, Wake County is shrinking as annexations occur (and the WC budget office will confirm this fact), so it is logical for reductions to occur in due time. Exactly when is the question.

**A.C. Rich** - 04/15/10 - 15:09

AC, if station changes are inevitable due to county shrinkage AND municipal coverage is/continues to be too costly, where do you see the future headed? More mergers and pooling of resources? The county forming a fire department? What's realistic, for this area, these politics and personalities, traditions and change friendliness?

**Legeros** - 04/15/10 - 15:28

I wouldn't be surprised to see the Wake County fire department have to mirror what EMS in the county is currently doing...by merging and consolidating. Like Chief Rich said, it is just a matter of when. Until old school chiefs retire or are forced out, a county-wide fire department is probably unlikely...although that is most likely the best solution and best usage of funds.

**Jack T.** - 04/15/10 - 19:55

If the future holds the revenue issues WE ALL now realize; and putting current leadership, personalities, politics, etc, etc, aside; I feel consolidation of some (rural-to-rural and municipal-to-rural fire departments) organizations will be the most economical option AND the most valid choice if we wish to maintain any semblance of "volunteerism"... and in some ways, autonomy from total county control. NOTE - I said consolidation and not merger. To me, there is a dramatic difference when a merger occurs. In a merger, some or all of one organization's identity is seemingly forever lost. Yes,... semantics... maybe, but a consolidation is where a more creative incorporation of two organizations occurs (too much to discuss here).

However, the overall question is "who will lead" the county consolidation initiative(s), which departments will consolidate, and even more, "who/what will require the consolidation(s)?" Currently, consolidation is voluntary. In contrast, if consolidation efforts fail and all comes crashing down, another option will be a county administered combination fire service where control is centralized and all aspects of function are standardized. Hopefully it would be a county department that allowed volunteer participation.

Therefore, currently Wake Co. taxpayers are spending a lot of money maintaining organizational "autonomy" and no one seems to be able to make it more efficient (or really wants to). Here once again, it all boils down to "value"..... What do the commissioners place the greatest "value" in: separate individual departments, combined departments, or a county administered department? Next, what do the taxpayers place the most value in: lower taxes, quicker response, a fire station on every corner, etc? Finally, what do WE as the fire services place the most value in.....???

**A.C. Rich** - 04/16/10 - 20:24

It's tempting (and easy enough) to crunch numbers. And to compare consolidated operational costs with any particular percentage of county departments. But would anybody care? Would you have to dangle Real Big Savings for the public notice and want to take action? (Officials would likely leap, of course.) What does the public want, as belts tighten and as well as awareness therein grows?

**Legeros** - 04/16/10 - 20:53

You know, whenever any government board begins talking of "belt tightening" many of us become wary. It seems that so many things that we feel are necessary or are "things that work" seem to be first on the chopping block, while those things that we consider as "wasteful" continue on. If times are as bad as we are told, then we will probably see a lot of things that are important to us, as the readers of this blog and with a special interest in emergency response, that come under close scrutiny for the "chopping block".

We believe we are safe because we are "the local heroes". Think again. Back in the 70s a gentleman named Howard Jarvis mobilized many people in California and firefighters and paramedics and police officers were placed on the chopping block. Can that happen here? Sure it can.

So what does the public expect of us, the heroes of the community, during these "tight times"? I call them "tight" rather than "hard" because these are in no way like the times that my father and grandmother told me about in the 30's. Well, they expect us to make the same choices they are having to make. If it is not absolutely necessary, then we need to pass on it, at least until better times.

So what does that mean? Well, I can speak of my own personal experience first. I drive a 10 year old vehicle with 240K+ miles on it. Sure, I would like a new one, but I can do without it. If push comes to shove, I'll put a new motor in it. It has to last at least 15 years, maybe 20. Some would say it is not worth it, but when I look at \$2k versus \$35k, it's an easy decision. Both of the air conditioning units for my house (nine years old each) have leaky coils. I charge them every year. Sure, you might say that is a waste of money, but I can buy a lot of Freon for the cost of two air conditioning units. If nothing else, I am buying time, hoping that things get "better".

So what does that mean to us? How does that translate to what the public expects of us, or at least what we, as stewards of the taxpayer's money, should be doing? Well, I have my opinions, and they are mine, and mine only. They are not my employer's. And I am not going to take up Mikey's space here. They'll show up on my blog in the next day or so.

But I will say this.

Before we cut employees, before we cut one response resource, we need to take every step we can to save a few dollars here and a few dollars there (and I don't think we have done this). We have to change the way we do business. These types of changes will be painful, inconvenient, and unpopular. If we expect Joe Sixpack to cut back while he pays taxes, we have to do the same.

And if it does come to having to close a fire station or cut back an ambulance shift or eliminate some police officers, then we have to be able to look in the mirror and know that we did every thing possible to keep that from happening.

**DJ** - 04/17/10 - 15:43

DJ, are times like these good times to reevaluate financial models for emergency services? Should fire departments charge for responses? Should EMS agencies stop charging? Share your wisdom...

**Legeros** - 04/17/10 - 16:02

If you want to erode (or eliminate) public support for the fire service then start charging. I remember working for an EMS service that was a volunteer service with paid-personnel support (three paramedics with volunteer back-up). When I started we were primarily donation supported. As it evolved into primarily billing revenue funding, the public support dropped off. Sure, the public still "sort of" supports EMS, but nothing like the fire service and law enforcement (another blog for another day).

Funding for EMS agencies? I firmly believe they should be tax supported only and not relying on billing at all. I know, there are people who may disagree with me, but that's it. Sure, there is a disparity in fire protection (and law enforcement) across the country, but nothing, I think, compared to the disparity in EMS offered and the capabilities of those EMS agencies. Heck, that applies across the counties within 75-100 miles of the capital city.

I think, Mike, that times like these are good times to look at the *operational* models. It's kind of like one of the one-liners found in the back of Alan Brunacini's book FIRE COMMAND, and I am paraphrasing- "If you have lot's of ideas, you have to have lot of money." Sometimes you just can't afford a lot of those good ideas, or maybe those good *ideals*.

**DJ** - 04/17/10 - 18:30

I agree DJ. But, I also believe we can do better with the fire tax funding that is now provided. No additional fees, no tax increases; just better application of fire tax funds. You see, we are actually "caught up" in the maintenance of the past and improvement of what exists. We should focus more on making necessary adjustment for the future. Now, what adjustments are made and who's in charge are at the core of the debate and the focus of my statements regarding "value."

**A.C. Rich** - 04/17/10 - 23:15

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