

New Hanover Fire Departments Could Consolidate

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[FireNews](#) finds this [WWAY article](#) about a proposed restructuring of fire departments in New Hanover County. That is, presumably the rural or non-municipal departments. The Star-News is also [reporting on same](#). The plan would consolidate the county's volunteer fire departments, and place them under control of New Hanover County Fire Services. It would also consolidate the fire districts from five to two.

Volunteer opportunities would remain, as either a firefighter or a member of a Fire Corps. Essentially, notes the *Star-News* article, the change would follow what happened with Ogden Fire Department last year. OFD retained its non-profit status, but moved its financial and administrative operations to the county. Their volunteers became volunteers of New Hanover County FD.

Looking at this [list of fire stations](#), it appears such a consolidation would consist of Castle Hayne, Federal Point, Kure Beach, Myrtle Grove, New Hanover County, Ogden, and Wrightsboro fire departments. Is that right?

County officials says the change will mean more consistent service levels, more training opportunities for volunteer firefighters, and a better insurance rating for residents. On the downside, say volunteers, they could be moved from their current stations, and no longer be able to serve their communities. They also not meet the physical and service-hour requirements set by the county. Next Monday, the recommendation will be made to county commissioners.

The obvious discussion topic for the day is Wake County. Could such a consolidation work here? Would it even be desirable? There are some obvious apples and oranges, such as the absence of a county-operated suppression force already in existence. As well as municipal departments that protect rural districts. What might the fiscal benefits look like? How would service levels be impacted? What sort of operational and command structure would result? Discuss or debate as desired.

So, the independent departments in Wake County are Bay Leaf, Durham Highway, Eastern Wake, Fairview, Falls, Garner, Hopkins, New Hope, Rolesville, Stony Hill, Swift Creek, Wake Forest (part-municipal, too?), Wendell, Western Wake.

And the municipal departments with rural districts are: Apex, Fuquay-Varina, Holly Springs, Morrisville, Wake Forest, Zebulon. (What's wrong/missing?)

Wonder how many engines, ladders, rescues, and such, the raw physical assets translate to? Ditto for paid personnel, officers, and chiefs.

Another apple to orange to the New Hanover County situation is that they've experienced more department closings than we have in recent years, with Wilmington FD expanding into volunteer districts.

Legeros - 05/11/10 - 10:53

I dont think Kure Beach would be involved. I think it is within it's own municipality much like Wrightsville and Carolina Beach's respectively. Might be Federal Point, Myrtle Grove, Castle Hayne, Wrightsboro, and New Hanover County. Ogden is already under that umbrella, and New Hanover County already provides firefighters for all of those stations.

Ryan - 05/11/10 - 14:19

oops, should have said the New Hanover County provides (some) firefighters...

Ryan - 05/11/10 - 14:20

"consistent service levels, more training opportunities for volunteer firefighters, and a better insurance ratings for residents" Why shouldn't the board in Wake County evaluate these same benefits of consolidation? Seems this is their direction for EMS already

Dave - 05/12/10 - 18:06

This prospect in Wake County should scare everyone. The moves in that direction with EMS in Wake County appear to lots of folks, including me, to nothing more than a power & takeover move. The thought that they might try the same with area Fire Depts is really frightening. Bigger is not necessarily better. Bigger only means they have more power.

TimB ([Email](#)) - 05/12/10 - 20:33

Whew... the writing is definitely on the wall (and I feel it is just around the corner here in Wake). I too am concerned because the decisions may be made in haste(?) or without sufficient research/feedback. ...maybe centered around savings and not service. We all agree that some of our recent history is not too outstanding and often demonstrated is the ineffectiveness to tackle and solve issues that should be easily handled. In contrast, there are significant advances and milestones that have been reached by the WC fire services. I guess it all boils down to how the current non-profits "demonstrate themselves" through their management, controls, and sheer economy of services; not to mention who will perform the "measuring" for performance adequacy. The question is... "who will define what is best" and what will the "measure of quality" be? We already have studies that tell the most of the tale.

A.C. Rich - 05/12/10 - 21:16

TimB, you need to get some facts. The county didn't "take over" Garner EMS. Garner EMS spent beyond its checkbook, then ASKED the county to take over its responsibilities when they couldn't pay their bills. Who is this big, bad "they" you're afraid of?

Pops - 05/15/10 - 08:07

Pops, who said anything about Garner EMS. This has been a constant discussion for several years in the EMS world of Wake County. Apex going to the town, Rolesville going to Eastern Wake and Holly Springs and Garner lately. It will be a county system when all is said and done. You can bet the same will start to occur on the fire side soon. The County Commissioners will be looking for cost saving solutions. Add up all the rural Fire Chief salaries now, that would save hundreds of thousands a year!

Moms - 05/15/10 - 15:33

How much do WC chiefs make thesedays?

So - 05/15/10 - 16:19

Pops ... My only point is that I don't see takeovers/mergers/etc as necessarily a good thing, whether we're talking about corporations, business, municipalities, county entities, whatever. In this case the "they" is Wake County Fire-Rescue {and WC EMS}. And that's not intended as a dig against WC – only the result of what consolidation would mean. In the business world, everyone knows that competition is good for business – if a large concern takes over/merges into other smaller concerns, that competition is gone. In a manner of WC fire services, think of all of the above listed FD's who would lose their identities, their history, and certainly many of the folks who had been part of those histories ... Even in the name of cost savings, this is not a good thing, no matter how one looks at it. It may be inevitable, but I see it as a negative.

TimB ([Email](#)) - 05/16/10 - 18:30

Emergency services are not a business. That was pretty well proven during the "fire mark" days of fire protection provided by private insurance and fire protection companies – and cities burned down as a result. Whether we have one or several, they are still "monopolies" in their areas. If you're unhappy with Durham Highway, you can't call Wendell. We don't have competition, we have a bunch of little private kingdoms that don't have much oversight, supervision, and such. Identities and history aren't worth much to the people who are paying inflated bills to support lots of chiefs and such.

Pops - 05/17/10 - 09:38

TimB How do you see it as a negative? Not saying you are wrong just trying to see your side of the coin. Nor is any of the rest of this an attack on you or anyone else, just the sight of one person on how it could be done under one umbrella I believe that it would be a great thing if fire service in a whole was ran by one organization. Yes there will be negatives but not enough to counter act the salaries of the current paid chiefs in Wake County (WC). Yes there are some volunteer chiefs still in WC but not many. Merging under one umbrella means several things, First of many if it's taken over by the county better retirement packages. And I don't know to many people right now that aren't worried about their retirement. Standardized training requirements, which in turn creates standardize service. With all the great instructors in WC how wouldn't the standard level of training improve? A standardized response plan can be created with in-service apparatus. As we all know there's still apparatus sitting unmanned in fire stations in-service in the cad. Duplication of service's goes away. Instead of almost every department having a rescue apparatus, the rescue apparatus' can then be dispersed adequately across the county. The same goes for aerial apparatus. Which there currently are fewer aerals then rescues. You could still have volunteer firefighters that are assigned to stations that come in and manned extra apparatus or add to staffing on engines/pumpers. Some chiefs could be moved over to battalion/district chiefs. It would just take a little bit of sitting down and handling a lot of administrative paperwork first ie: run cards, training requirements, promotional processes, etc. Other items that would change for the better (some might think for the worse) a pay scale across the board could be truly implemented. County wide insurance premiums, the more people you have on a policy the lower the rates you have which in turns means the better policies you can

afford. Apparatus insurance becomes less expensive under one umbrella. A maintenance division could be created to help reduce the cost of out of house repairs. When it comes to the losing of volunteer pride, stations could still have an assigned group of volunteers which could individualize apparatus to an extent that would give a sense of company pride.

Overall one system could and would save the tax payers several dollars every year, Along with creating a consistent and exemplary service to the citizens of WC. Which if you're a firefighter (all ranks included) your priorities should be on providing the citizens you serve (and not all of the citizens you serve are from your community) the most top notch, well trained, firefighters that can be offered in WC. The days of this is my sand box and you can't play in it are coming to end. Sorry if that upsets you.

Have a great day

Just another view point - 05/17/10 - 10:01

Hi All !! I see this thread has generated quite a bit of input. I see that as a positive. No worries, I don't take any comments as neg's towards me. I understand differing viewpoints. I used the example of "business" only as a comparison, and from the viewpoint of typically when a business takes over or merges into another, the business being taken over, or merged into, typically loses its history, its legacy, its identity, etc, {and often a trainload of personnel} and over time, everyone forgets that company ever existed. My viewpoint is only that I would hate to see that happen to any/all of the area FDs out there – and it would, over time. My side of the coin is that this would be a very sad day in Wake County history. Just Another View Point certainly brings out a load of very good, and very valid points, and most of those talking points would indeed be a "positive" for the area as a whole. I am certainly a huge proponent of all of us working together, training together, mutual aid, and playing in each others' sandboxes. We could get called to any other community or district in the county at any given moment, and serving all of the citizens of our county community is a part of what we are all about. But I generally cringe when I hear talk of one entity taking over another smaller one, or many smaller ones in the name of bigger is cheaper. I do understand – and agree with – the concept of buying power, combined services, or the example of a combined maintenance division for all of the area dept's to utilize, but to me, a more ideal concept would be creating combines of these services, all the while allowing each of an area's FDs to maintain their identities. I think it is most likely correct that the day of individual county/rural FDs is coming to an end, and we'll all deal with it, work with it, and make it work. – It's probably a ways off, but the train is coming, I'm afraid. Let's just hope that when it does happen, ways can be found to preserve the histories of what got us all to that point. Thanks all — hope all are having a great day ... Be careful out there.

TimB ([Email](#)) - 05/17/10 - 13:58

With the country taken over you can still have your individual companies. One way instead of fire trucks that say wake county fire and rescue on the door have it somewhere else and let the individual community station graphic the truck the way history dictates. of course with the approval of the powers to be. I agree on the not taken away from the pride of a fire companies. It would take a very unique individual to lead the organization in such a manner. You could still have your community events like firemans day and what not just there would no longer be a need to fundraise and worry with the countless hours thats put into a fundraiser that only makes a thousand or two dollars. All that time can be put into training and enstall an awesome sense of pride into the individual stations and companies. It is very feasible and doable just need the right person with the right out look and someone that will want to keep the individual community pride in there local fire stations. I dislike the bigger is cheaper concept, bc there have been times where bigger was more expensive. In Wake county's case merging would be better, there would be places that would safe tons of money and then places where it would cost a little bit more money. but all in all it should save the tax payers money.

view point - 05/17/10 - 15:35

The interesting thing is that many of the things that JAVP mentions could be done now (without County consolidation), if departments would work together and "demonstrate themselves" (as AC mentioned). Unfortunately though, based on history, it won't happen because few will look at a bigger picture. Sometimes, we are our worst enemies.

County FF - 05/18/10 - 07:34

Do it yourselves, and you don't have to be told to do it.

Legeros - 05/18/10 - 07:44

Heard over the weekend – a county chief assuming "command" of an incident, and issuing orders, while not even on the scene. In our current arrangement, who has the authority to hold this individual accountable?

Pops - 05/19/10 - 13:11

Pops, and the first question you'll hear is "Why is the County in my Business?" Here's ya sign.

County FF - 05/19/10 - 15:47