

UPDATED: Future of Fire Service in the Fire Tax District

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January 18

[Documents folder](#) updated with presentation slides that were shown both at the fire commission meeting ([see agenda and more](#)), and earlier at the Board of Commissioners work session on Monday. The slides present a background of the financial issues, summaries of the fire tax district finances, expectations and assumptions for the future, and conclusions and next steps. Some of the things noted in the slides:

- Unincorporated areas are dropping in size (81% of county in 1990 to 64% of county in 2012), and thus several rural fire districts have been steadily decreasing of the years.
- Municipal departments are growing in the last ten years, adding 12 new stations since 2000, versus 3 new county stations since 2000.
- Municipal departments are often the first responding stations to many areas served by the private fire departments.
- Population is growing in Wake County, but far less in unincorporated areas.
- Cost of the fire service is far outpacing population growth.
- Looking ahead, expectations are zero revenue growth in 2014 and 2015. But expected expenditures increasing slightly.
- Savings implemented to date by consolidations/mergers, realignment of stations, shared use of resources: closing Western Wake Station 2 and contracting with Cary (\$584,389), merger of Falls into Wake Forest (\$15,000, initial)
- There are areas of the county that will probably remain unincorporated, due to watersheds: Falls Lake, Swift Creek, Little River, and Jordan Lake. Plus the RTP, due to other reasons.
- Thus, consolidations should be considered for areas such as Falls Lake, Swift Creek, and Little River/eastern Wake County.
- County staff will not consider an increase in the fire tax rate, until strategies for a financially sustainable fire service are identified and pursued.
- County staff will begin meeting with the Boards of Directors of the private fire departments to share this vision, and begin discussions about consolidations and/or other strategies for long-term financial sustainability.

[Read this information in the slides](#) (PDF).

January 17

For those attending [tonight's meeting of the Wake County Fire Commission](#) the regular agenda includes the item "Future of Fire Service in the Fire Tax District." Will await the minutes, as Mr. Blogger will be downtown at a fire department promotional ceremony. By way of historical context, the County Manager spoke on this matter to the Fire Commission in October. Here's a [summary of his comments](#) (PDF).

For tonight's meeting, here's the agenda item's description in the supporting document:

Item Title:

Future of Fire Service in the Fire Tax District

Specific Action Requested:

That the Fire Commission receives information related to the Future of Fire Service in the Fire Tax District.

Item Summary:

Wake County staff has been tasked with evaluating fire service in the Fire Tax District in an effort to develop strategies and recommendations to ensure the sustainability of fire service in the Fire Tax District.

On Monday, this subject was presented before the Wake County Board of Commissioners. Their meeting agenda provides this summary:

Future of Fire Service in the Fire Tax District - *Joe Durham, Deputy County Manager; and Demetric Potts, Fire and Emergency Services Business Officer*

Item Summary:

The purpose of this presentation is to provide information about Fire Service Delivery in the Wake County Fire Tax District. The

Fire Tax District Budget is not sustainable in its current form and the County believes that savings will be achieved through strategies such as consolidations and mergers, realignment of stations, and shared use of resources. The presentation will provide background information the Fire Tax District, historical and current financial information as well as expectations and assumptions.

The Board of Commissioners will receive the presentation and provide feedback.

Fire Commission?

What is the Wake County Fire Commission? [Here's a good overview](#) in the form of a Q&A we did on the blog. Here's the [commission's official site](#).

Fire Tax District?

For the laymen or new readers, what is the Fire Tax District? It represents all unincorporated areas of Wake County, e.g. those areas outside of municipal town or city limits. Plus the town of Wendell. Their fire protection is administered by Wake County, through fourteen contracts with not-for-profit corporations (private fire departments, like Bay Leaf FD and Hopkins FD and Wendell FD), and six contracts with municipal fire departments (Apex FD, Cary FD, Fuquay-Varina FD, etc.). And said fire protection is funded by taxing the residents (and business owners, right?) in those areas.

What's the History?

But what about mergers and consolidations? Haven't those been tried before, discussed before, proposed before, etc? Correct. Some of what's happened before...

Mergers and closures:

- 2012 - Falls FD merges with Wake Forest FD.
- 2007 - Western Wake Station 2 closes. County contracts with Cary FD for newly created suburban fire district.
- 2002 - Six Forks Fire Department merges with Bay Leaf FD.
- 1998 - Fairgrounds and Yrac fire departments merge, form Western Wake FD.
- 1982? - Wake Forest FD #2 merges with Wake Forest FD.
- 1960 - Western Boulevard FD disbands. Members organize Fairgrounds FD.

Statements and studies:

- 2011 - County Manager provides short statement to Wake County Fire Commission on fire service funding challenges and potential savings through consolidation of fire departments. [Read statement](#) (PDF).
- 2004 - *Wake County Fire/EMS Capital Facility and Equipment Study* by TriData is released. Recommends fire service improvements through changing station locations. [Read blog posting](#) and [another blog posting](#).
- 1994 - *Comprehensive Review of Wake County Fire Protection* by TriData is released. Recommends fire service improvements on many fronts. [Read blog posting](#).

Notes:

- Closure list omits the many times that fire departments relocated their stations "farther out" as municipalities annexed their original district. Like Durham Highway's original station on Highway 70, now a stone's throw from Station 17. [Read blog posting](#).
 - Merger list omits the many private rural fire departments that merged with their municipal counterparts. Such as Zebulon Rural FD, which was created to protect those people living "outside the city." [Read blog posting](#), with some of those names.
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In my opinion, the initiative is currently an "idea" and not a "vision" as many details regarding the method have not been determined. There

are many steps from the "here and now" to the (currently) unclear vision. Wake MUST determine what they wish the service to "look like." This process is much more detailed than a simple "consolidation fixes all" perspective. It is my hope joint efforts between the WC chiefs and WC county staff will achieve a desirable outcome. Change is inevitable though.

A.C. Rich - 01/18/13 - 08:51

Falls and Wake Forest would be a private merger. Wake Forest Fire Department is independent from the town. They are contracted by the town to provide their services.

FF - 01/18/13 - 20:30

Isn't Wake Forest FD a hybrid? Neither strictly private nor entirely municipal?

Yes, you are correct though, WFFD isn't a town department in the conventional sense.

Legeros - 01/18/13 - 20:40

Speaking of Wake Forest....i would bet over half that town population doesnt know that.

They got WFFD on city property in a city/tax payer building using who's money for the trucks and equipment?

So, if the Poilce and public works and parks and rec is part of the town then I wonder why the Fire Department is not.

So what is the conventional sense?

Is it that the people in the FALLS FD district that have a Raleigh address but is served by Wake Forest FD #5 even though they dont live in WF?

Curious.

Buckwheat - 01/24/13 - 14:10

It was always my understanding that after the merger of WF Town & WF Rural in the 80's that WFFD was a private fire department that contracted with the town for fire services within the town limits. Similarly, they contracted with Wake County to provide fire service to the unincorporated areas of Wake County within the designated Wakette Fire District. Essentially my take is they are a private contractor to the town with their own private BOD. No different in my opinion than if a town contracted with an outside party for say trash collection with the exception that WFFD has a representative from the town (a liaison) on their BOD since the bulk of the department's funding comes from the town. All the assets (rigs, buildings, land, etc;) are owned by WFFD, Inc; not the town.

Outsider - 01/24/13 - 15:53

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

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