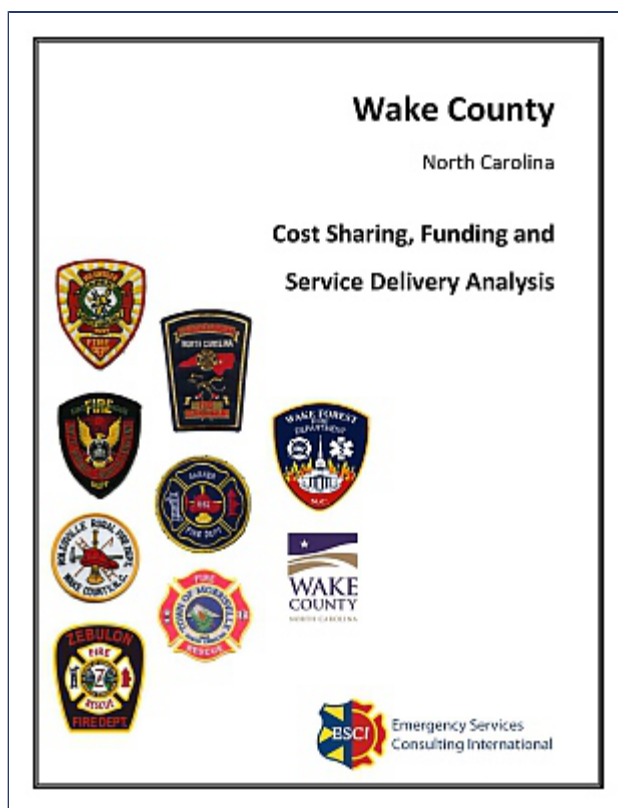


Wake County Fire Services Cost Sharing, Funding, and Service Delivery Analysis Report

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That's the hefty title of an [preliminary report](#) (PDF, 3.2M) that's been released this week for public and stakeholder input at a special Wake County Fire Commission meeting on September 25, 2014. The meeting time is 10:00 a.m. The location is the Wake County Public Safety Center, 330 S. Salisbury St. Raleigh, NC 27601. The specific location is Conference Room C-170.

The report was created by Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI), which was commissioned by the county earlier this year. They were tasked with (a.) reviewing the existing "cost share agreements" between eight fire departments that serve both incorporated and unincorporated areas of Wake County and (b.) establish a methodology for the future, to make distribution of that funding more "equitable, reasonable and defensible."



What's This All About?

Here's a bit of explanation. Everyone lives somewhere in Wake County, either within an incorporated municipality (city or town) or outside those areas, which are thus unincorporated areas. City and town dwellers pay municipal taxes that help fund fire protection. Those living "in the county" pay a special fire tax. And it's a single rate, regardless of where you live.* Those revenues fund protection in the "fire tax service district."**

How many people are talking about? Quite a few, actually. Based on 2012 U.S. Census estimates, that's 188,854 people living in unincorporated Wake County.

Nineteen fire departments are contracted by the county to protect those "rural" areas. Eight are considered "cost-share departments" as funding is shared by both the municipality and the county: Apex, Garner, Holly Springs, Fuquay-Varina, Morrisville, Rolesville, Wake Forest, and Zebulon. (Wake County also contracts with the Cary Fire Department to protect a small district east of town, but they're not considered a cost-share department.)

As an aside, you'll notice that those eight are mix of municipal and private fire departments. Apex, Holly Springs, Fuquay-Varina, Morrisville,

and Zebulon are town departments. They have municipal employees, and the Fire Chief reports to a town manager. Garner, Rolesville, and Wake Forest are private corporations also contracted by each municipality. Their chief reports to a Board of Directors.***

The study was commissioned as a result of concerns voiced to the Wake County Fire Commission****. See, the county pays a fixed percentage of each cost-share department's budget. Those amounts were determined years (decades?) ago, and using a formula that compared and weighted various data points. But that formula sorely need updating, as the departments and their districts have evolved.

The pie needs to be more fairly sliced, if you will. And with a dynamic formula for fair slicing in future years.

What Does The Study Say?

The authors have created options for funding the cost-share departments, based on variables: area served, property valuation, heated square footage, service demand, and population. Those can be "mixed and matched" as a means of computing funding distribution. (See starting on page 70 for an explanation and pro's and con's of those variables.)

Which variables will be used? How will they be weighted? That's a decision to be made after public and stakeholder input is received. The final "formula" (e.g. methodology) will be included in the final report, which comes later.

A preliminary version of the study has been released for public and stakeholder input. It's available on the [fire services web site](#). Also a special Fire Commission Meeting has been called on September 25, to receive that feedback. (They're also accepting input via e-mail, but prefer to receive at the meeting.)

After that matter, the final version of the study will be presented to the Board of Commissions on November 10. Prior that presentation, however, the [Wake County Fire Commission](#) will hold a special meeting in advance, on or by November 6. That meeting hasn't been schedule yet.

Read The Report

[View the Cost Sharing, Funding and Service Delivery Analysis Report](#) (PDF, 3.2MB) ~~as well as details on the special meeting and providing feedback.~~

*The single-rate fire tax was created on July 1, 1999. It consolidated tax rates for twenty-one rural fire districts. Before that time, the rates were different depending upon the district. [See this blog post](#) about the history of Wake County fire service governance.

**There are twenty-two tax-funded fire districts in Wake County, if my math is correct. Plus the airport, which is it's own interesting entity.

***Wait, where's Wendell? They're also a town? Correct, but their fire department is funded in a unique fashion. The county collects all fire tax monies for both the incorporated and unincorporated areas served by the department. Thus they're full funded by the county.

****What is the fire commission? [Read this blog post](#) that presents a Wake County fire service leadership overview.

Name: (real name preferred)
E-mail: (optional)
Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?
Yes
No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)