

Fire/Rescue Commission

December 16, 2019
(amended January 7, 2020)
1830hrs.
County Administration Main
Conference Room

The following Commission members were present:

Tim Duffer, Burt Sellers, Brian Fox, Ben Meeks, Brian Garrett, Keith Scruggs, Ron Scearce, Billy Talbott.

Commission member Chuck Angier was not in attendance due to another meeting.

Public Safety Director Slemph was unable to attend due to an illness.

Others in attendance were:

County Administrator Smitherman, County Attorney Hunt, Deputy Public Safety Director Lee and Dean Fowler who was representing the Fire/Rescue Association.

The first meeting of the newly formed Fire/Rescue Commission meeting was opened by County Administrator Smitherman at 1834hrs.

Mr. Smitherman welcomed and thanked the Commission members for their willingness to serve and explained that by Virginia State Code, County and local governments are responsible to provide fire and EMS services to their citizens. It was further explained that Pittsylvania County has mainly contracted emergency services to volunteer fire and EMS agencies within Pittsylvania County.

In recent years, some of the volunteer agencies that are currently providing emergency service response under County contract are falling short. In light of the sometimes-inadequate service by volunteer agencies, the County has contracted with a private emergency medical service to provide advanced life support to the citizens of Pittsylvania County.

Mr. Smitherman explained that it would be the Commission's task to make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors as to ways to improve emergency services provided to the citizens of Pittsylvania County.

Mr. Scearce noted that while volunteerism has declined and that staff will be necessary, he hopes we can keep volunteers around for as long as possible and continue to support a volunteer system (addition by Mr. Scearce at the Commission meeting of 01).

Mr. Hunt reviewed and explained the Commission By-Laws that are currently in draft form and suggested that the By-Laws should be ratified by the Commission at their next scheduled Commission meeting. Mr. Hunt also recommended that a Chair and Vice Chair be elected at the next Commission meeting.

Mr. Hunt explained the need for staggered terms by Commissioners and that the members would draw terms from a hat.

Nine pieces of paper were placed in a hat by Mr. Lee and witnessed by Mr. Hunt. Three pieces of paper indicated "1 yr", three pieces of paper indicated "2 yr" and three pieces of paper indicated "4 yr".

The following results of the Term draw were as indicated below:

Tim Duffer-1 year

Brian Garrett-1 year

Chuck Angier-1 year (In absence, Mr. Angier received the last draw which was for 1 year)

Burt Sellers-2 years

Keith Scruggs-2 years

Supervisor Scarce-2 years

Billy Talbott-4 years

Brian Fox-4 years

Ben Meeks-4 years

Mr. Sellers commented that he felt that the Commission should focus on the County as a whole and that although he is from the Ringgold area, Ringgold Fire/Rescue would not benefit from him being on the Commission any more than another agency. The other Commission members agreed with Mr. Sellers.

Mr. Lee was asked by Mr. Smitherman to give a synopsis of concerns facing emergency services in Pittsylvania County. Mr. Lee stated that in his opinion Pittsylvania County emergency services are in a crisis. Mr. Lee further explained that there are fire and EMS calls going unanswered by some agencies. Mr. Lee also explained that even though some agencies are falling short, many agencies are doing a very good job.

Mr. Smitherman followed up by saying that Callands Fire/Rescue, Chatham Rescue and 640 Community Rescue are currently at an unacceptable rate of response.

Mr. Lee mentioned the Fire/EMS study that was performed by the Virginia Fire Services Board, which each member was provided at the start of this meeting.

Mr. Smitherman indicated that there is a possibility that staff may need to be added in the near future to facilitate adequate emergency response to our citizens calls for assistance. Because the County is presently working on the formulation of the 2020-2021 budget, Mr. Smitherman would like the Commission to get up to speed on budgetary needs of the emergency service providers as quick as possible so that they are able to make recommendations to him and the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Sellers asked about the Counties surrounding Pittsylvania and what they are doing to provide emergency services. It was discussed by many of the Board members Franklin, Bedford, Henry and Campbell counties all have paid fire/ems staff. Mr. Smitherman further stated that Franklin County was likely 10 years ahead of Pittsylvania County as far as their County staffed Public Safety program.

Mr. Garrett suggested that the Commission take lessons learned from the surrounding counties and apply the positive aspects to a Pittsylvania County plan.

Mr. Scruggs asked what in the study has been done and why hasn't there been more done since 2015.

A discussion of opinion of Commission members pursued in response to Mr. Scruggs' question. The consensus of opinions seemed to revolve around previous administrations not providing focus on the issues, the unwillingness of some fire/ems departments to cooperate and the lack of financial resources on the County's part.

Mr. Smitherman and Mr. Scarce implied that the Board of Supervisors were interested if not committed to improving emergency services in Pittsylvania County.

Mr. Smitherman related to the Commission that Mr. Slempp's priority is for the Commission to develop a Strategic Plan for the improvement of emergency services in Pittsylvania County.

Mr. Duffer mentioned that he would like to see the Commission consider cost saving plans, such as the purchasing of gear and equipment for all departments under one contract. This may also be a way of standardizing equipment (SCBA's in particular) throughout the County.

Mr. Scruggs asked who received the money through EMS billing. Mr. Scruggs was advised that the transporting department received the funds, minus a collection fee which the billing company receives.

Although the By-Laws draft indicates that the Commission meet every other month, Mr. Vaden suggested that the Commission meet monthly in order to get up to speed.

Mr. Smitherman suggested that with the work that needs to be done with the upcoming budget preparation, he would suggest that the Commission meet twice a month initially.

It was decided that the Commission would meet on January 7th and January 28th at 1830hrs in the County Administration main conference room.

Mr. Fowler stated that the Fire/Rescue Association would like a representative from the Commission provide updates to the Association.

Mr. Fowler also suggested that some type of financial incentive from the County to volunteers may improve participation. Mr. Garrett agreed.

Mr. Scarce suggested that the Commission members receive a stipend of \$150.00 per meeting. Several members suggested they didn't expect a stipend for their services. However, it was left up to Mr. Scarce if he felt that he should ask the Board of Supervisors to provide a stipend to the Commission members.

The meeting was concluded at 1935hrs.