

Gaston County Fire Commission Meeting

January 15th, 2024

The meeting was held Wednesday January 15th, at 6:00 p.m. in the Emergency Operations Center located at 615 N Highland Street, Gastonia.

I. Call to Order, Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance

Rob Smith called the meeting to order. Eric Withers made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Brian Weyeneth. The motion carried.

II. Public Comment

Chris Eason, Chairman of Crowders Mountain Fire and Rescue, addressed the Fire Commission to discuss health insurance options currently under consideration by the department. With 12 full-time equivalent employees at Stations 1 and 3, he sought feedback from the Commission on the potential plans being evaluated.

III. Business Agenda

A. Scott Zander made a motion to approve the November 19th, 2024, meeting minutes. Richard Albaugh seconded the motion. The motion carried.

B. Sub-Committee Updates

- Rescue: No new updates.
- Capital: Brian Weyeneth provided an update from the capital committee. He discussed two main items: Certificate of Need Document and Capital Fund Document (attached).
Scott Zander made a motion to approve the Certificate of Need document with a few changes outlined by the Fire Commission. Richard Albaugh seconded the motion. The motion was approved. Bob Hovis made a motion to approve the Capital Fund Document. Richard Albaugh seconded the motion. The motion was approved.
Brian Weyeneth made a motion that the Fire Commission would formally ask for the Gaston County Board of Commissioners to identify a 'Capital Reserve Fund' for the funds to support the previous documents. Todd Davis seconded the motion. The motion passed.
- Closest Department: Scott Hunter updated the Fire Commission on Alexis and North Gaston's collaboration to adjust service area boundaries. The agreement, finalized and approved, has been submitted to the Office of the State Fire Marshal.
- Apparatus Name: No update.

C. Fire Service Agreement Update: Scott Hunter discussed the upcoming fire service agreement and budget request process. He stated that the agreement and budget request forms will be sent out to the fire departments by February 1st, and they will need to be returned by March 1st. Hunter explained that this year, the fire departments will also be provided with a link to submit information for their audits. He clarified that the county has not been requiring full audits previously,

only book reviews. Going forward, the fire departments will need to select and submit the auditor they want to use, along with the cost, and the county will approve or deny the request. Hunter noted that this new audit process will mean the audits will be a year behind, but it addresses the fire chiefs' concerns about having to bring their books to the county. The departments will need to submit the audit results, along with their line-item budget and narrative, by the end of September. If they do not meet this deadline, their monthly payments will be stopped until the information is provided.

- D. Emergency Management & Fire Services Update: Scott Hunter outlined plans for a new storm dispatch protocol based on fire chiefs' input during Hurricane Helene. Challenges with the backup communication center highlighted the need for a more resilient system. The proposed plan divides the county into five geographical districts or "hubs," allowing fire departments within each hub to self-dispatch during major storms. This approach aims to improve coordination, redundancy, and response during power outages or communication failures. The association will collaborate to finalize and implement the plan.

IV. New/Old Business

- A. The Fire Commission reviewed a Certificate of Need previously submitted by Fire Chief Jackson for a Sprinkler and Fire Alarm System Installation throughout their fire station. The estimated cost per quote from TOMA Fire Protection Equipment is \$168,303.00. The department secured an AFG Grant in the amount of \$95,238.00 and is asking for overage funding to cover the remaining balance of \$73,065.00. Bob Hovis made a motion to approve \$50,000 in the current budget year with the understanding that in the next budget year, Chief Jackson will apply to reimburse Community for the balance. Justin Westbrook seconded the motion. The motion passed.
- B. With elections being missed in December due to no meeting, Brian Weyeneth made a motion to reappoint Rob Smith as Chairman of the Fire Commission. Bob Hovis seconded the motion. The motion passed. There were two motions on the floor for Vice-Chairman: Justin Westbrook (made by Eric Withers) and Brian Weyeneth (made by Richard Albaugh). Brian Weyeneth was voted Vice-Chairman by majority vote.

V. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Brian Weyeneth, seconded by Bob Hovis. The motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned.