



Gaston County

Gaston County
Board of Commissioners
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Financial and Management Services - Finance Board Action

File #: 26-150

Commissioner Hovis - Financial and Management Services - Finance - To Approve a Certificate of Need (CON) for All VFDs in the Unified Fire District for Reimbursement of Workers Compensation and to Appropriate Unified Fire District Fund Balance (\$170,320.00)

STAFF CONTACT

Kyle Sutherland - Finance - 704-866-3130

BUDGET IMPACT

Unified Fire District Fund: Increase Fund Balance Appropriated and the associated VFD expense accounts up to \$170,320.00.

BACKGROUND

At the April 1, 2026 Fire Commission Meeting a Certificate of Need (CON) was presented on behalf of all VFDs within the Unified Fire District for reimbursement of Workers' Compensation premiums in an amount not to exceed \$170,320.00. The VFDs participate in the Volunteer Safety Workers' Compensation Program through the North Carolina State Firefighters' Association. In prior years, the North Carolina General Assembly has subsidized this program to cover premium costs; however, funding is not expected to be available this year due to budget constraints. The Fire Commission approved the Certificate of Need (CON) to fund the departments up to \$170,320.00. The VFDs will submit their Workers' Compensation invoices to the Finance Department for reimbursement. If state funding becomes available, any reimbursed amounts will be returned to the Unified Fire District Fund.

This Board Action appropriates estimated amounts into each VFD's additional subsidy account. Budget transfers may be needed to redistribute funds between VFDs when the invoices are submitted.

POLICY IMPACT

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

Budget Change Request (BCR) and Certificate of Need 2026401-54

DO NOT TYPE BELOW THIS LINE

I, Donna S. Buff, Clerk to the County Commission, do hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of action taken by the Board of Commissioners as follows:

NO.	DATE	M1	M2	JBailey	CBrown	CCloninger	AFraley	BHovis	JKeigher	SShehan	Vote
2026-127	04/28/2026	TK	BH	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	U

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Gaston County Fire Commission



CERTIFICATE OF NEED APPLICATION

Fire Department

Name

Gaston County Fire Commission

Address

615 North Highland

Address Line 1

Unit A

Address Line 2

Gastonia

City

North Carolina

State

28052

Zip Code

Chief

Brian Weyeneth

Contact Phone #

(704) 999-3435

Board President

Brian Weyeneth

Contact Phone #

(704) 999-3435

Fire Department Board Approval / Notification

Yes No

General Description of Purchase

For the Fire Commission to reimburse all County contracted fire departments for Workman's Compensation payments due before July 1, 2026

Time Line of Purchase

Immediate

List Specifics of Purchase

Prior to FY 2026, Workman's Compensation payments were being made through special funding from the NC State Firefighter's Association for every Gaston County fire department. Due to budget restraints, NCCFA is unable to make these payments for FY 2026-2027.

Estimated Cost

\$170,320.00

Financing Information

Lender

Gaston County Unified Fire District Capital Fund

Amount Financed

\$0.00

Rate

0%

Estimated Amount

\$0.00

Number of Payments

1

Down Payment Amount

\$170,320.00

Debt Ratio-Current / Post Purchase

0.00% / 0.00%

Any Re-Financing or Bundling

Yes No

If Yes, then Describe

How Will Purchase Benefit the Department (Safety/ISO/Cost Savings, etc)

As a result of the due date falling before Day 1 of the new fiscal year, none of the Contracted departments will have sufficient funding on hand to cover the cost of Workman's Comp without being in financial default of their contracts and they will be unable to cover employees and volunteers who are staffing the stations and running calls. It will create an untenable work environment until it is solved. By the Fire Commission providing the funding from Capital, we solve the immediate issue.

How Will Purchase be Funded (Long Term - NOT Just Current Year)

The Fire Commission will draw the monies from the Unified Fire District Capital Fund balance.

If Purchase is NOT Approved for Funding, Describe Department Alternatives

Each fire department budget will have to be amended to reflect the cost increase, thus possibly causing an increase to the overall UFD tax rate.

Is This a Replacement?

Yes No

If Yes, List Details (Make, Model, Years of Service, Remaining Balance, etc.)

What Will Become of Old Apparatus / Equipment?

Submit your last three 5-Year Capital Improvement Plans:

5-year Plan

Proposed 5 Year Vision Statement
for Fire Commission.pdf

5-year Plan #2 (optional)

5-year Plan #3 (optional)

Account Balances:

Checking	CD	Savings	Relief Fund	UFD Capital	Other
\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,500,000.00	\$0.00

Name of Fund	Name of Fund
UFD Capital	Other

STAFF ONLY

Received By (OEMFS Director):

Date:

Fire Commission Meeting Date:

APPROVED NOT
APPROVED

Gaston County BOC Meeting Date:

APPROVED NOT
APPROVED

Certificate Number
2026401-54



Gaston County Fire Commission Five-Year Plan

2025–2030 | Unified Fire Districts

Vision Statement for the Fire Commission

To ensure unified staffing, stable and sustainable funding, and capable delivery of fire & emergency services to all residents and visitors in Gaston County.

Year 1: FY 2025/2026 – Baseline

Focus: Understand the problem, gather data, and build the consensus.

Staffing

- Conduct a countywide staffing assessment of all departments.
- Identify critical staffing shortages by district and time of day.
- **Design, implement and launch a Capital-funded recruitment & retention initiative.**

Funding

- Evaluate the current fire tax rate structure by district.
- Audit operational budgets of each department.
- Explore alternative funding options (grants, county match, aid-to-fire districts).

Year 2: FY 2026/2027 – Immediate Support & Pilot Programs

Focus: Begin targeted investments in staffing and funding experiments.

Staffing

- Introduce **paid part-time coverage models** in the most understaffed districts.
- Pilot a **countywide volunteer stipend program** (\$ per call/shift).
- Launch cadet and high school fire academy programs.

Funding

- Recommend adjustments to fire tax districts (rate harmonization or restructuring).
- Apply for SAFER and AFG grants for staffing and equipment needs.
- Start a centralized **grant writing and finance support office** under the Fire Commission.



Gaston County Fire Commission Five-Year Plan

2025–2030 | Unified Fire Districts

Year 3: FY 2027/2028 – System Stabilization

Focus: Institutionalize successful staffing models and set up long-term funding structure.

Staffing

- Expand shift-based part-time staffing across all departments.
- Implement a **county firefighter benefits package** (retirement support, insurance subsidies).
- Develop career pathways (volunteer → part-time → full-time).

Funding

- Approve a long-term **countywide funding formula** based on call volume, risk level, and service area.
- Begin phased increase or reallocation of fire tax revenues based on service level agreements.
- Establish capital reserve funds for staffing and apparatus replacement.

Year 4: FY 2028/2029 – Growth & Retention

Focus: Encourage careers in the fire service in Gaston County.

Staffing

- Launch **Firefighter Apprenticeship Program** with Gaston College or local high schools.
- Provide tuition assistance, scholarships and sign-on bonuses tied to onboarding in local departments.
- Add PEER support programs for first responders.

Funding

- Evaluate performance metrics and cost-per-call across districts.
- Create a **long-term capital investment schedule** based on fire department needs.
- Begin planning for shared facilities or service consolidation where feasible.



Gaston County Fire Commission Five-Year Plan

2025–2030 | Unified Fire Districts

Year 5: FY 2029/2030 – Accountability & Long-Term Planning

Focus: Ensure progress is measured, sustainable, and community supported.

Staffing

- Conduct full staffing audit vs. Year 1 baseline.
- Retool staffing models as needed for growth or regional shifts.
- Publish annual recruitment and retention scorecards.

Funding

- Finalize and adopt a **10-Year Fire Services Master Plan (2030–2040)**.
- Present a full public report on fire service funding impact and utilizing social media platforms.
- Explore options for short and long-term revenue bonds or public-private partnerships.

Performance Metrics (Staffing & Funding-Focused)

Area	Target by 2030
Minimum Staffing	3 firefighters per apparatus (NFPA compliant)
Volunteer Retention	Increase annual retention by 30%
Full-Time Coverage	24/7 coverage in all priority zones
Funding Stability	Annual budgets fully funded, with 15% reserve
Grant Acquisition	\$1M+ per year in competitive grant funding