

CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
FEBRUARY 16, 2010 – 4:30 PM  
117 DICK STREET, 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR, ROOM 118  
PRESENTATION OF PUBLIC SAFETY TASK FORCE

PRESENT: CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
Chairman Billy R. King  
Commissioner Jeannette Council  
Commissioner Kenneth Edge  
Commissioner Marshall Faircloth  
Commissioner Jimmy Keefe  
Commissioner Ed Melvin

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Freddy Johnson, Cumberland County Fire Chiefs Association / Stoney Point  
Volunteer FD Fire Chief  
Kenny Currie, Cumberland County Emergency Services Director  
Benny Nichols, Fayetteville FD Fire Chief  
Chuck Hodges, Hope Mills FD Fire Chief  
Robert Doberstein, Spring Lake FD Fire Chief  
Mark McLaurin, Eastover Volunteer FD Fire Chief  
Michael Hill, Wade Community FD Fire Chief  
Michael Roye, Cape Fear Valley EMS Chief

COUNTY ADMINISTRATION

James Martin, County Manager  
Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager  
Amy Cannon, Assistant County Manager  
Howard Abner, Assistant Finance Director  
Rick Moorefield, County Attorney  
Sally Shutt, Communications Manager

Cumberland County Municipal Elected Officials  
Cumberland County Fire Chiefs and Board of Director Chairs

Marie Colgan, Clerk to the Board  
Candice H. White, Deputy Clerk to the Board

Chairman King called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. Chairman King asked elected officials in attendance to introduce themselves. Chairman King advised the Public Safety Task Force report and PowerPoint presentation had been posted to the county's website. Chairman King noted the Mayors of the City of Fayetteville and Town of Spring Lake had been invited to attend a ceremony at Fort Bragg and would join the meeting if time permitted. Chairman King turned the meeting over to Freddy Johnson, Cumberland County Fire Chiefs Association/Stoney Point Volunteer FD Fire Chief.

Chief Johnson thanked the elected officials, fire chiefs and boards of directors for their attendance and stated he had served as chair of the Public Safety Task Force for the past fourteen months. Chief Johnson stated the Public Safety Task Force was formed in 2008 at the request of both county and municipal managers to conduct a comprehensive review of fire, EMS and communication services. Chief Johnson further stated the Task Force was charged with defining system deficiencies as well as making recommendations to move the public safety system forward to meet nationally established minimum standards. Chief Johnson introduced members of the Public Safety Task Force as follows:

- County: Kenny Currie, Director, Emergency Services
- City of Fayetteville: Benny Nichols, EFO, Fire Chief
- Cape Fear Valley Hospital System: Michael Roye, RN, BSN, MPH, EMT-P, Chief, CFV EMS
- Town of Hope Mills: Chuck Hodges, Fire Chief
- Eastover Fire Department: Mark McLaurin, Fire Chief
- Town of Spring Lake: Robert Doberstein, Fire Chief
- Wade Community Fire Department – Mike Hill, Fire Chief

Chief Johnson noted Sally Shutt, Communications Manager, and Candice White, Deputy Clerk to the Board, had provided administrative assistance to the Task Force.

Chief Johnson stated the Task Force represents a combined total of 222 years of public service to citizens. Chief Johnson further stated the Task Force fully understands the critical roles fire and communication services and EMS have within the public safety system and that they are codependent upon each other in order to get the job done. Chief Johnson stated members of the Task Force worked independently and objectively to make recommendations regarding funding, operations, and standards. Chief Johnson further stated the overriding objective is to provide an effective and efficient response to the community's public safety needs at a fair and reasonable cost.

Chief Johnson stated recommendations to be provided during the presentation will include:

- provide immediate relief to our financially distressed county fire departments that are struggling and need help;
- consolidate all 911 communications to one single Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) responsible for all public safety agencies;
- require the gradual implementation and attainment of nationally established standards for both career and volunteer fire service, EMS and communication systems; and
- implement a public safety sales tax as a long term funding mechanism to handle increased system demand and standards.

Chief Johnson stated the system currently costs taxpayers \$45 million and to move the system forward with nationally established "minimum" standards will cost \$60 million to \$65 million. Chief Johnson encouraged those in attendance to read the full report for details. Chief Johnson advised the presentation would proceed as follows:

- Communications: Findings and Recommendations – Chief Kenny Currie
- EMS: Findings and Recommendations – Chief Michael Roye
- Fire: Findings and Recommendations – Chief Benny Nichols
- Funding Options and Wrap-up: Chief Benny Nichols

## COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONS

Kenny Currie, Cumberland County Emergency Services Director, stated when the Task Force began, there were two primary and three secondary dispatch centers that caused inherent delays and lost calls, which continue today. Mr. Currie provided information and recommendations for consolidation of all communication centers:

- County 911 and Sheriff's Office dispatch merged October 2008;
- County 911 and Spring Lake dispatch merged November 2009;
- County 911 and Hope Mills in talks, could be completed by July 2010;
- County 911 and City 911 merger will require new facility;
- The task force is currently reviewing several models of Consolidated Centers: Johnston County, Guilford County, Charleston, S.C.; recommendation will likely lean towards Johnston County and Charleston, S.C. models;
- The state 911 board has committees working on making recommendations in changing 911 legislation to allow flexible spending within the 911 center. If this passes, grants may be available for building new consolidated 911 centers.

Mr. Currie provided an overview of the following based on a study completed in 2008 that showed the State Viper 800 System provided better coverage for Cumberland County:

- City 800 versus State Viper 800;
- Motorola completed County Survey in October 2008 that showed State Viper System had better countywide coverage;
- October 2009 County ordered equipment to move to State Viper by June 30, 2010;
- Hope Mills Police currently on State Viper 800;
- Spring Lake will be moving to State Viper 800 along with County;
- City of Fayetteville is migrating to Viper when the system is digital compliant;
- County fire service needs \$150,000 to upgrade 395 radios to digital.

Mr. Currie provided information and recommendations regarding current boundaries and jurisdiction issues that cause delays in response to emergencies:

- Blind dispatch; never know the exact location of all units in Cumberland County;
- Automatic Vehicle Locators (AVL) should be placed in all public safety vehicles so closest public safety unit can be sent to emergencies, regardless of responder's home jurisdiction;
- Cape Fear Valley EMS division installed AVLs and will be activated with new computer-aided dispatch system;
- Closest public safety agency should always be sent to stabilize emergencies.

Mr. Currie provided an overview of recommendations for standard dispatch protocols and training guidelines between communication centers:

- Each protocol has a quality performance measurement tool;
- National Academy of Emergency Dispatch;
- Emergency medical dispatch protocol: Follow State Office of Emergency Medical Services regarding emergency medical dispatch guidelines;
- Police dispatch protocol: Follow Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agency Inc. (CALEA);

- Fire dispatch protocol: Meet National Fire Protection Association 1221 Standards which give criteria to meet Fire Dispatch standards;
- Follow Association of Public Safety Communications Officials training and staffing requirements.

Mr. Currie also shared information and recommendations relative to outdated computer aided dispatch systems as follows:

- Unable to share data from these systems;
- All agencies in process of switching to OSSI SunGard Dispatch and record management software;
- Tentative date to go online is March 2010;
- County and City will be able to flash calls from center to center therefore 911 callers will not be transferred. This is a temporary fix until we consolidate centers;
- We can save 2 ½ minutes in processing calls if we handle a call one time.

## EMS SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONS

Michael Roye, Cape Fear Valley EMS Chief, stated the merging of PSAPs is not only critical to the mission and recommended by the Task Force, it is also deserved by citizens. Chief Roye further stated as the work of the Task Force evolved and achievable system changes were identified, they were effectuated immediately with the goal to decrease response times and ensure the citizens of Cumberland County got the service they deserved.

Chief Roye outlined the following findings:

EMS System requires additional resources to meet current system demands:

- Ambulance to population ratio is excessive (1 ambulance per 50,872 citizens for 24/7 to include minimum staffing at night; 1 ambulance per 25,432 citizens for peak time between 11:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.; ratios are unsafe);
- 16 minute response time exceeds the state average for urban areas by 4 minutes.

Current funding source not able to support current system demand:

- Currently no municipality, township or citizen in Cumberland County pays for advanced life support availability;
- Users only pay for treatment provided.

Chief Roye outlined the following recommendations:

- New model that is data driven and contracted for performance;
- Seek and obtain accreditation;
- Increase unit availability and decrease response times;
- Contracted Response Standards: All stakeholders must expect a National Standard (NFPA);
- Migration Plan/Timeframe: Use a five-year plan that will allow for the building of infrastructure, the growth of paramedics and EMS, and continued collaboration between fire services and EMS;
- Find and establish funding sources to sustain availability;
- Cost on current projected data- \$8.2 million annually;

Chief Roye stated the EMS process is one of continuing performance improvement and recommendations are to continue to evaluate, review and makes changes as follows:

- Reduce system insufficiencies: Ongoing;
- Communications standardization: Nearly complete.

Chief Roye emphasized all of the public safety system components have to be addressed in a collaborative effort with a standardized timeframe and sustainable plan rather than as single components. Chief Roye reviewed the following additional recommendations:

- Implement contracting negotiations for response criteria and performance indicators based on agreed upon national standards;
- Required subsidy - \$8.2 million.

## FIRE SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONS

Benny Nichols, Fayetteville FD Fire Chief, stated while carrying out their charge, members of the Task Force did not always agree, frequently entered into debate and implemented countywide changes as they could. Chief Nichols further stated national standards were used to develop the process. Chief Nichols emphasized issues have to be addressed collectively because EMS, fire and communication services are interrelated and interdependent, and recommendations made throughout the report are based on the three services comprehensively.

Chief Nichols stated fire services in Cumberland County are supported by property owners and based on a funding model initiated in the 1950s. Chief Nichols further stated the current funding model is antiquated and fails to provide adequate funding to meet the service demands of the future. Chief Nichols pointed out Cumberland County fire services provide the best possible protection against many very challenging and occasionally life threatening risks. Chief Nichols stated it is time to examine Cumberland County fire service and the funding sources. Chief Nichols further stated the Task Force recognizes the overall fire system is in many cases deficient and low-wealth departments are underfunded. Chief Nichols also stated system changes and adoption of best practices are feasible only with an aggressive fundamental system modification that will enable fire services to meet future demands in the years to come.

Chief Nichols stated system changes include the provision of fire service by the closest unit, which would result in the same service for all citizens throughout the county without boundaries or jurisdictions. Chief Nichols further stated system changes would provide the most efficient and effective fire service at a fair cost and reasonable response times for all citizens, and increased funding for low-wealth departments. Chief Nichols stated additional system changes would be to adhere to best practice standards within the NFPA national fire protection standards and develop a uniform countywide standard of operating procedures.

Chief Nichols outlined findings and current issues relative to disparate service delivery:

- Presence of inconsistent levels of service throughout County;
- Station location; travel distances too great to provide good level of service;
- Population density;

- Inadequate staffing/limited volunteers especially during the daytime;
- Jurisdictional boundaries prohibit closest unit dispatch.

Chief Nichols provided an overview of limited accountability of services in current county fire service contracts as follows:

- No standard minimum personnel qualifications established;
- No standard minimum training levels established;
- Fire departments function with different operational guidelines;
- No performance benchmarks established;
- Limited accountability of expenditures/funds allocation.

Chief Nichols stated external burdens negatively affecting the provision of county fire services include:

- Communications – call transfer delays;
- EMS Calls – nearly 80 percent of call demand;
- Unfunded governmental mandates;
- Inadequate funding;
- Not funded by majority of system users.

Chief Nichols advised the Insurance Service Office (ISO) is in the process of making dramatic changes to the way fire departments are rated as follows and interest is to start preparing immediately:

- Based on NFPA standards;
- Require more services to be provided (prevention, public education);
- Performance based evaluation;
- Effects on insurance ratings;
- Accreditation – process defines a credible fire agency.

Chief Nichols outlined the impact of BRAC on fire departments in Cumberland County:

- Increased population;
- Increased traffic;
- Increased development;
- Increased call volumes/service demands.

Chief Nichols reviewed recommendations for fire services in Cumberland County as follows:

- Immediately increase low-wealth departments' funding to a minimum of \$250,000;
- Consolidation of all communications centers (PSAPs);
- Establish Public Safety Commission
  - Oversee funding allocations
  - Verify performance benchmarks are achieved
  - Ensures accountability of established service delivery;
- Initiate closest unit dispatch protocol regardless of jurisdictional boundaries;
- Establish minimum service level objectives;
- Establish minimum performance criteria based on NFPA standards;
- Establish minimum qualifications for personnel;

- Use Fire House RMS/Report to NFIRS;
- Establish minimum standard operating guidelines countywide;
- Eliminate duplicated efforts (EMS, communications, code enforcement, emergency management)
- Establish new funding mechanism.

Chief Nichols outlined short term, long term and public safety sales tax model funding options as follows:

Short Term – Immediate relief for low-wealth departments

- Increase Special Fire District Tax by .75 cent (from .50 cent to 1.25 cents)
  - personnel, MDTs, AVLs
  - 800 MHz upgrades, Fire house upgrades;
- Fund from general fund;
- Increase Fire Tax District Rate to 15 cents per \$100 valuation (not recommended);
- Assist departments with SAFER grants.

Long Term

- Increase current Fire Tax rate from 10 cents to 35 cents;
- Establish alternate funding mechanism.

Public Safety Sales Tax Model

- Becomes a systems-users tax;
- Will generate enough to fund fire, communications, EMS;
- Should provide significant relief for County and municipal property owners;
- Current expenses for all three services - \$45 million;
- To meet recommended goals - \$65 million;
- Best method to get there – a Public Safety Sales Tax.

Chief Nichols reviewed fire funding and the property tax impact on residents and stated the numbers reflect the opportunity for potential savings to current property tax payers if the Public Safety Sales Tax funding model is implemented:

- City of Fayetteville 16.50 cents = \$20,887,715;
- Hope Mills 16.41 cents = \$1,415,444;
- Spring Lake 20.84 cents = \$844,245;
- Cumberland County 10.5 cents = \$5,926,965;
- TOTAL - **\$29,074,369.**

Chief Nichols stated as for what's next, the Public Safety Task Force is seeking direction from elected officials to:

- Determine the future direction of the Public Safety Task Force;
- Determine the quality of service expected;
- Determine the quality of service the public expects;
- Determine the quality of service the public deserves.

Chairman King thanked the Task Force members for their report and opened the floor for questions from elected officials.

Cumberland County Commissioner Jimmy Keefe inquired regarding the involvement of law enforcement and whether law enforcement uses the Viper System for compatibility of communications. Mr. Currie responded Hope Mills can currently handle the Viper System; the Sheriff's Office has purchased Viper radios and will move to Viper in May; the Town of Spring Lake will come on board during that time; and the City of Fayetteville has purchased radios that will be Viper compliant, are working with the state to come up with a plan to move in that direction and will hopefully be on board in the next year to eighteen months.

Fayetteville City Council member Ted Mohn inquired whether recommendation was for a metro-area standard across all public safety services and whether the public safety sales tax funding option would be the same across incorporated and unincorporated areas. Chief Nichols responded the Task Force does not recommend consolidation for reasons as outlined in the report, but there are other things that can be done to improve fire services and response time. Chief Johnson responded the public safety sales tax funding option would pay for all three public safety systems and would be earmarked specifically for public safety.

Fayetteville City Council member Keith Bates requested clarification of the property tax savings to Fayetteville property owners if the public safety sales tax funding option was passed. Chief Nichols confirmed Fayetteville property owners have the potential for property tax savings in the amount of \$20,887,715 although consideration would have to be given to economic times.

Fayetteville City Council member Bill Crisp inquired what would happen were the public safety sales tax instituted and revenues were not realized; what would be the backup for funding. Chief Nichols responded finance personnel would need to become involved to work out the particulars for any stop-gap measures.

Cumberland County Commissioner Marshall Faircloth inquired regarding the current sales tax rate and whether the public safety sales tax option would require a vote of legislators. Chief Johnson responded finance personnel should be able to provide the current rate. James Martin, County Manager, stated the county is unable to impose a sales tax at this time so legislative approval would be required and there would likely be a referendum requirement for the vote of citizens. Chief Nichols stated the Task Force recognized recommendations would not happen over night and that's why a short term model, as well as a public safety sales tax model, was provided as an option for funding.

Cumberland County Commissioner Kenneth Edge inquired whether the intent was to increase funding for the small fire departments and whether paid staff was included. Chief Johnson responded in the affirmative.

Questions were posed as to whether there were plans to redraw the boundaries for volunteer fire departments and who would be responsible for dispersing funds. Chief Johnson explained boundaries would not be redrawn and the recommendation was for a Public Safety Commission that would disperse funds based on needs and budget requirements. Chief Royce stated the goal is to



elevate the level of service, dispatch the closest unit, and provide the financial infrastructure to accomplish the same; there is no mention in the report of reducing funding to any fire departments.

Cumberland County Commissioner Jeannette Council thanked the Task Force members for their report and stated there was much to be absorbed therein. Commissioner Council further stated the Commissioners would take it under consideration.

Town of Hope Mills Commissioner Tonzie Collins asked what would happen after the first five years and would it cost the Town of Hope Mills more money. Mr. Currie stated it would depend on how the process moves forward following the information provided today. Mr. Currie further stated the Task Force recommends the Johnson County or Charleston, SC models and in those models, everyone paid the same thing for the first five years after which the county assumed the cost of running communications. Commissioner Collins inquired regarding benefits to the Hope Mills fire department. Mr. Currie responded consolidation of communications would provide seamless communications with no transfer calls and relief for inherent delays. Mr. Currie stated it would only get better with the county and all municipalities on board. Chief Hodges pointed out it would also benefit all responders in the field by providing a safer atmosphere. Commissioner Collins inquired whether the Town of Hope Mills would receive funds from the public safety sales tax. Chief Nichols stated the consideration was for the public safety sales tax to fund communications, fire services and EMS throughout Cumberland County.

Commissioner Keefe stated a backup plan is needed as the referendum could get voted down and the process could easily take a long time. Commissioner Keefe further stated elected officials need to talk with each other because it will only work if all agree. Commissioner Keefe challenged elected officials to come up with a workable solution and thanked Task Force members for their work.

Chairman King commended the Task Force members for their report and stated those in positions of leadership will further discuss.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

Approved with/without revision:

Respectfully submitted,

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Candice H. White  
Deputy Clerk to the Board