

**VIRGINIA:**

A Work Session of the Lancaster County Board of Supervisors and the Volunteer Fire Departments was held on Tuesday, March 26, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. in the Board/Commission Meeting Room of the Lancaster County Administration Building in Lancaster, Virginia.

Members Present: Jason D. Bellows, Chair  
Ernest W. Palin, Vice Chair  
Jack D. Larson, Board Member  
William R. Lee, Board Member  
Robert S. Westbrook, Board Member

Staff Present: Don G. Gill, County Administrator  
Matt Smith, Chief of Emergency Services  
Crystal Whay, Clerk to the Board and Building/Land Use Assistant

Also Present: Members of the Upper Lancaster, Kilmarnock and White Stone Volunteer Fire Departments

Mr. Bellows called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Discussion Concerning the Local Volunteer Fire Departments**

The members introduced themselves as follows: Roy Hall, Jr., Chief of the Kilmarnock Department, Ryan Gordon, President of the Kilmarnock Department, C. D. Hathaway, Treasurer of the White Stone Department, Robbie Lampkin, Vice President of the White Stone Department, Dan Sanders, Chief of the White Stone Department, Danny Akers, Chief of the Upper Lancaster Department, Dale McNeal, President of the Upper Lancaster Department and Daniel Akers, Assistant Chief of the Upper Lancaster Department.

Mr. Gill stated that all fire protection services in Lancaster County are provided by the three volunteer fire departments of Kilmarnock, Upper Lancaster and White Stone. He stated that, from FY 09 through FY 13, the total county contribution for the three volunteer fire departments totaled \$225,000 each year, or \$75,000 for each volunteer fire department.

Mr. Gill stated that, in 2013, the volunteer fire departments came to the Board of Supervisors and asked for three things: 1) a \$10,000 increase per department, 2) an annual cost of living adjustment of between three and five percent and 3) the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department asked for a solution to the inequality that existed in the State Fire Programs Fund. He stated that was because each department receives a payment from the state for serving the County of Lancaster, but the Kilmarnock and White Stone Departments receive additional state payments through their incorporated towns for serving them. He stated that the Upper Lancaster Department does not receive the extra payments because their service area does not have any incorporated towns.

Mr. Gill stated that, in FY 14, the Board of Supervisors approved an \$8,000 increase for each volunteer fire department, as well as an additional \$8,000 to Upper Lancaster, which was the state payment at the time, to compensate for what they were not receiving from the state. He stated that he had included a breakdown of the last five fiscal years and the payments that have been made to the volunteer fire departments from the County, as well as the state fire programs, grants and election donations.

Mr. Gill stated that there was a good representation from all three departments and he understood that they have some information for the Board of Supervisors to consider.

Ryan Gordon, President of the Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department, thanked the Board of Supervisors for meeting with them. He stated that the reality of where they are currently is that they are beginning to operate at a zero balance when it comes to income versus expenses. He stated that they prepare an annual budget, but their problem is that their income is not increasing enough to cover their expenses. He stated that they are running out of ways to produce income. He stated that each department has its fundraisers. He stated that the biggest fundraiser for the Kilmarnock Department is the annual carnival. He stated that the carnival takes a significant amount of time leading up to, during and following the event and raises approximately \$50,000 after expenses. He stated that the raffle for the car each year is kept separate because of IRS requirements and that it nets approximately \$20,000. He stated that they also do miscellaneous events throughout the year, such as concerts at the Lancaster Middle School. He stated that they estimate about \$75,000 annually in fundraising for their department. He stated that they have some community support, but it has decreased over the years, because so many other organizations are also asking for money.

Mr. Gordon stated that the maintenance for the fire trucks has gotten very expensive and the trucks themselves are also very expensive. He stated that his department is in the process of replacing a thirty-five year old tanker and the cost is \$520,000. He stated that the trucks do not get used everyday and when they replace the tires, it is usually because they have dry rotted and not because of wear. He stated that their ladder truck has to go out of town each year to have the ladder inspected. He stated that inspection alone is \$10,000. He stated that a line item that was hard to budget for is truck maintenance. He stated that, in the past year, the maintenance total was \$65,000,

but it varies. He stated that they try to do the maintenance on the trucks themselves, when they are able to do so.

Mr. Gordon stated that it was expensive to operate a fire department and they needed extra help to keep going for the long-term. He stated that fire fighter safety has to be considered as well and they will not cut corners there. He stated that he did not know how much more fundraising they could do and still run at least 150 calls a year. He stated that the average volunteer puts between 15 and 20 hours a week into the department and for the officers, the number is even greater. He stated that about ten percent of the time, they are actually fighting fires and the rest of the time, they are fundraising and running the department. He stated that this is also affecting membership retention. He stated that he does not consider the department a non-governmental organization. He stated that they are privately owned, but they do provide a service to the County.

Dr. Westbrook asked if it was possible for each department to project expenses for the next five years, so the Board of Supervisors would know what is coming in the next few years.

Mr. Gordon replied that would be possible.

Mr. Bellows stated that it was critical that they maintain strong and healthy volunteer fire departments in the County. He stated that recruitment also needs to be a priority, so that the organizations can be maintained. He stated that if they stop and think about what it would cost for a fully paid fire department, it would be extremely expensive for the County.

Mr. Lee stated that there were about ten organizations in the County that ask the same people for donations. He stated that most people have a certain amount of money that they can budget for donations. He stated that the fire departments get included in these groups, but the fire departments are actually on a different level.

Dale McNeal, President of the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department, stated that they have a new truck on order that will cost \$600,000. He stated that they have two older trucks that need work and they try to work on the equipment themselves to save money. He stated that his department has two stations, one at Lively and one at Ottoman. He stated that they have three big fundraisers a year, but feel like they have to do more. He stated that they will be spending more time fund raising than they will fire fighting. He stated that they also help with rescue squad calls quite a bit.

Mr. Lee asked about the training expenses.

Mr. McNeal replied that they conduct training every Monday night.

Mr. Hathaway stated that the White Stone Department has trainings every month and a lot of it is done in-house.

Mr. McNeal stated that sometimes the members have to go out of town for training and that is another expense.

Mr. Hathaway stated that there were state-funded trainings that his department tries to do as well. He stated that it was \$18,000 to put on a Firefighter One class, so they take advantage of any state training.

Mr. Hathaway stated that apparently there are two different categories for County funding which are governmental agencies and non-governmental agencies. He stated that he wanted to thank Dr. Westbrook for helping to get the volunteer fire departments together with the Board because he felt like the fire departments were a hybrid of the two categories. He stated that they become a governmental agency when disasters strike. He stated that what the other organizations, such as the Mary Ball Museum, do is different from what they do. He referred to the state fire programs fund and stated that there were no guarantees that it will be funded every year. He stated that they would not be able to keep their doors open without the funding from the County.

Mr. Hathaway stated that, in the summer months, the population that they serve swells to approximately 40,000 people who, because they come from more urban areas with fully paid fire departments, are oblivious to the fact that the local departments have to raise funds each year.

Mr. Bellows stated that the White Stone Department recently built a new firehouse and asked about the other two departments' plans.

Mr. McNeal replied that they built their fire station in Lively nine years ago, so that building was fine.

Mr. Gordon stated that the Kilmarnock station was built in the 1970's. He stated that they are currently trying to replace the original HVAC units in the building. He stated that they are also having some plumbing issues, but they go on the back burner because they have to maintain the trucks and equipment to do the job that is needed.

Mr. Bellows asked about their vision for the future concerning capital costs.

Mr. Gordon replied that they had really not discussed it because their biggest issue recently was replacing the thirty-five year old tanker truck. He stated that they were doing light renovations to the building as they can.

Mr. Palin asked Mr. McNeal about the bingo fund raiser that his department used to have.

Mr. McNeal replied that the bingo attendance became very low and they discontinued it. He stated that they needed to come up with some other ideas.

Mr. Larson stated the departments had thanked the Board of Supervisors for holding this meeting, but he did not think they could thank the volunteer fire departments enough for all that they do for the County. He stated that they have made good points about fund raising and the fact that there were a lot of worthy organizations looking for donations. He stated that, in his opinion, people needed to recognize what an important service the volunteer fire departments provide and what the alternative would be if those departments did not provide those services. He stated they should be scared of the alternative in terms of the costs. He stated that other considerations would be the cost of insurance without a good fire program in the County. He stated that people should set priorities on their donations.

Mr. Larson stated that the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department sends out a very nice letter every year as part of their fund drive and it explains what they do for the community. He stated that he thought it was something that people should really be ready to open up their pocketbooks for. He asked if the Kilmarnock Department sent out a mailing for fund raising.

Mr. Gordon replied that they have in the past, but they do not do it every year. He referred to Mr. Larson's comment concerning insurance premiums and stated that his department sent out a mailing about five years ago that let the community know what the significance of the local emergency services and equipment meant to the ISO rating on their homeowner's insurance. He stated that the letter explained that the more up to date the equipment is and the more trained the firemen are, the better shape they would be in as far as their homeowners' insurance.

Mr. Larson stated that he hoped the departments would never have a shortage of funds to properly provide for safety of their firemen, but if it became the case, he hoped that the departments would come to the Board of Supervisors to ask for help.

Mr. Gordon stated that, to be frank, that was why they were coming to them now. He stated that safety was always going to be paramount, but they were reaching the point where the cost of being safe was becoming unaffordable.

Mr. Hathaway stated that his department was already exceeding the recommendation from the National Fire Protection Association for turn-out gear. He stated that the recommendation, not a mandate, is ten years. He stated that they made their decisions on the fact that their department does not see the large numbers of fires that a larger locality does. He stated that they try to be good stewards of the money that they are given.

Mr. Larson stated that there was no issue there whatsoever.

Mr. Larson referred to the letters that the Upper Lancaster Department sends out and stated that the financial report shows that they collected approximately \$30,000. He referred to the Kilmarnock Department and stated that for the same category, it only showed \$2500.

Mr. Gordon stated that there were a lot of charitable organizations in Kilmarnock that compete with the fire department for donations. He stated that the second point was that a lot of citizens plan their donations around the carnival and they figure if they are patronizing the carnival, then that is their donation to the fire department.

Mr. Larson stated that he also thought the amount of \$30,000 coming from the Town of Kilmarnock should be higher.

Mr. Gordon stated that they have been arguing that fact with them.

Mr. Larson stated that one of the things that impresses him the most is that whatever fire department function he attends, he sees members from all departments working together.

Mr. Lee referred to the radios that they saw in the Capital Improvement Budget at last week's Planning Commission meeting and asked if they were included in the fire department's statements.

Mr. Gill stated that Chief Smith was present. He asked him if the radios in the Capital Improvement Budget were filling the Kilmarnock Department's rotation.

Chief Smith replied yes.

Mr. Lee stated that he was looking at White Stone's statement.

Mr. Hathaway stated that their pagers were \$450 a piece. He stated that the difference was that the field officers have radios, whereas every member has a pager that just receives the calls. He stated that Chief Smith was trying to rotate the radios for the three departments.

Mr. Lee asked about grants.

Chief Smith replied that he has applied for grants, but there are no guarantees.

Dan Sanders, Chief of the White Stone Fire Department, stated that they have applied for many grants and most of the time they do not even get a phone call. He stated that they are finding out that the larger urban areas seem to be getting the grant money.

Dr. Westbrook stated that, it would seem to him, that if Lancaster County has this issue, there are other counties in the Northern Neck with the same issues. He suggested that they ask the Northern Neck Planning District Commission about possibly writing some grants on the behalf of the local fire departments.

Mr. Larson stated that he would bring that issue up at the next Northern Neck Planning District Commission meeting. He stated that their next quarterly meeting was in April.

Danny Akers, Chief of the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department, stated that a lot of the people from urban areas do not realize that the firemen are volunteers. He stated that he has spoken with many people that believe the fire departments are fully funded by the County.

Mr. Palin suggested a resolution for a week to honor the volunteer firefighters, so that more citizens are aware of the many things they provide.

Mr. Gill stated that Fire Prevention Week is in October and they could do something then.

Dr. Westbrook stated that the departments needed to think about what they need, not only for this budget cycle, but for succeeding cycles as well, when it comes to capital items.

Mr. Lee agreed with Dr. Westbrook, but stated that he thought the Board needed something that they could consider for this budget cycle as soon as possible.

Mr. Larson stated that given the level of cooperation that they have between them, it would be good for the departments to submit something as a whole. He stated that anybody that funds the departments, whether it is the towns or the County, will have to prioritize and it will be helpful to have the departments' information. He stated that the volunteer fire departments are considered public safety and should be a top priority and the towns need to think the same way.

Mr. Gill stated that there was a 1.5 percent cost of living adjustment made to the fire departments in 2013, which the Board approved. He stated that he believed that Mr. Beauchamp made the motion for 1.5 percent each year, so that is what he put into this year's draft budget.

Mr. Larson suggested that the fire departments come back with a number to give to the Board.

Mr. Hathaway stated that the departments would meet again and can either submit the paperwork or come back and meet again with the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Bellows stated that every Board member was fully behind the volunteer fire departments and knows how valuable they are.

Mr. Lee stated that this was the correct setting for the fire departments and they should not be included with the non-governmental agencies.

Roy Hall, Chief of the Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department, stated that the three departments not only work the fund raisers together, but they also fight the fires together.

Mr. Bellows stated that he thought they had ample documentation and once the departments got their numbers together, they should submit them to Mr. Gill.

It was decided that the fire departments and the Board of Supervisors would have an annual meeting concerning finances.

Mr. Hathaway asked about the deadline.

Mr. Gill replied that he would like their paperwork back within a couple of weeks.

Mr. Gill stated that he thought the Board would like to see a collective Capital Improvement Budget, but individual operating budgets.

### **Consideration of Setting Additional Budget Work Sessions and School Budget Public Hearing**

Mr. Gill stated that there were many meetings being held in the month of April and he would like to get a couple of work sessions set up for the budget and schedule the public hearing for the school budget. He stated that the school budget had to be adopted by May 15<sup>th</sup>. He suggested having budget work sessions on April 9<sup>th</sup> and April 11<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Larson suggested having a time limit on the non-governmental agencies' presentations.

Mr. Bellows agreed and stated that the limit should be no more than five minutes.

Mr. Gill suggested that the Board hold the public hearing on the School Board Budget at its regular meeting on April 25<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Westbrook asked if they had received tax information from every non-governmental agency that was making a request.

Mr. Gill replied that they had been asked to provide that information, but he had not received it from everybody.

Dr. Westbrook stated that his personal opinion was that if they had not provided the information, they should not be considered. He stated that he did not want to be unfair if the agency was not aware of it, but the information is needed.

Mr. Larson stated that he did not think it was being unfair to do that.



Mr. Lee stated that the agencies should know about the policy up front. He stated that he knows it was a requirement, but wonders if the organizations know their money might be in jeopardy.

Mr. Gill suggested that he follow up with each organization.

Mr. Lee stated that if Mr. Gill sends another email making it clear about the financial statements, then if nothing happens, they can say they reached out to them.

Mr. Gill stated that he would send out another email and suggested as the Board goes through the budget, if they find things that are needed, they can let him know.

Mr. Bellows stated that was the best way to do it and more appropriate.

The consensus was that the Board would meet on April 9<sup>th</sup> and April 11<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. for the budget work sessions. The consensus was also that the public hearing for the School Board Budget will be held at the Board of Supervisors' regular meeting on April 25<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Lee asked about the public hearing for the Capital Improvement Budget at the Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Gill replied that it was April 18<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Lee asked about the school capital figures.

Mr. Gill replied that he had heard that figure was going to decrease.

Dr. Westbrook stated that it was up to the School Board to decide what they want in the way of new schools, but when it comes to the spending part, he would like for the Board of Supervisors to have the conversation with the architects to see how they went from \$80 million to \$114 million and to see if it might be possible to decrease that number to something that is more reasonable. He stated that, if it is the School Board's responsibility to do that, then it is not theirs.

Mr. Bellows stated that he would be surprised if the number does not come down closer to \$80 million.

Mr. Gill stated that was what the Planning Commission reduced it to.

Mr. Larson asked what was the basis for it.

Mr. Lee stated that it was the Planning Commission setting the line. He stated that they were presented with the entire figure, but the Planning Commission is saying that they were not recommending it to the Board of Supervisors like that.

Mr. Larson asked what they had seen to reduce it to \$80 million.

Mr. Gill stated that they had not seen anything different from the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Palin stated that the School Board was discussing it, as he understood it.

Mr. Bellows stated that the appropriate process is for the School Board to finish its deliberations, come up with a concept and design, vote on it and send it the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Larson stated that they paid a lot of money to get a number of \$114 million dollars and even more to get what is called a schematic design on that \$114 million dollar concept, but they don't even know now what they are going to do. He stated that he would also like to hear from the architects about why the cost has gone from \$80 to \$114 million dollars.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Bellows made a motion to adjourn the meeting to Thursday, March 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

VOTE:	Jason D. Bellows	Aye
	Ernest W. Palin, Jr.	Aye
	Jack D. Larson	Aye
	William R. Lee	Aye
	Robert S. Westbrook	Aye