

Surry County Board of Commissioners  
 Meeting of April 20, 2021  
 Budget Work Session

The Surry County Board of Commissioners met at 6:00 p.m., April 20, 2021, for a budget work session. The meeting was held in the Farm Bureau Training Room, Service Center, Dobson, N.C., virtually via Zoom and YouTube.

Board members present in-person for the meeting were Chairman Mark Marion, Vice-Chairman Bill Goins, Commissioner Larry Johnson, Commissioner Van Tucker and Commissioner Eddie Harris.

Others present in-person for the meeting, at various times, were:

- Chris Knopf, County Manager
- Sandy Snow, Assistant County Manager
- Rhonda Nixon, Finance Officer
- David Speight, Interim Emergency Services Director
- Doug Jones, Fire Marshal
- Jimmy Ashburn, Fire Marshal
- Martha Brintle, MIS Director
- Jordan Wooten, Budget Analyst
- Nathan Walls, Assistant to the County Manager
- Volunteer Fire Chiefs and Department Volunteers
- Richard Young, County Rescue Squads Association President
- Corey Scarce, County Rescue Squads Association Vice President

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Chairman Marion called the meeting to order. Commissioner Goins delivered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Chairman Marion requested the Board review and approve the agenda. Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to approve the agenda.

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Richard Young, County Rescue Squads Association President, and the association's vice president, Corey Scarce, presented the association's budget request of \$291,711. The funding would cover six rescue squads.

Mr. Young said that during FY21, 62 life saves were made and 14,000-man hours were invested.

Mr. Scarce said cuts were made last fiscal year because donations were down, but all services were maintained.

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Wes Key, Ararat Volunteer Fire Department Chief, and other department representatives presented a budget request of \$140,550, with a 2-cent tax rate increase. The department has not asked for a tax rate increase since 1983.

Chief Key said that the department is having problems getting parts for vehicles, their building's roof has needs, is working towards ISO improvement and needs to address finances.

Chairman Marion requested that County Emergency Services and the Fire Marshal's Office work with the volunteer fire departments and rescue squads on getting the same radio system.

The department's debt was discussed.

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Jeff Gillette, Mountain Park Volunteer Fire Department Chief, presented a \$130,918 budget request. He said the department wants to keep their tax rate the same and it hasn't changed in 10 years.

Chief Gillette said the department is trying to build a substation. This would help all residents in the district receive improved homeowners' insurance rates. He said the district's 63.85 square miles represents the County's largest district.

The department's equipment and debt were discussed. Chief Gillette said a loan would be needed for the substation construction. He made an official request for the \$50,000 annual grant from the County for the substation.

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Mike Callaway, Assistant Chief for State Road Volunteer Fire Department, and Brad Spicer, Chief for the department, presented the department's requested budget of \$82,000.

They said the department is asking for a one cent tax increase in Surry and Wilkes counties.

The department is planning to build a substation near the Thurmond Community Building to improve homeowners' insurance rates. Land is currently being cleared for the substation.

Equipment needs, debt and fundraisers were discussed.

Finance Officer Rhonda Nixon said with the upcoming tax revaluation, and the department's tax rate staying the same, the department would get more funding than requested.

Jordan Wooten, Budget Analyst, said that it has been 14 years since State Road's tax rate has increased.

Commissioner Harris applauded the department for little to no debt. The department chiefs said they have been saving for the substation and a new truck.

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Doug Jones, Fire Marshal, updated the Board on the radio system that was discussed earlier in the meeting by Chairman Marion.

Commissioner Goins recommended that Emergency Services, the Fire Marshal's Office, volunteer fire departments, rescue squads and the Sheriff's Office partner on the same radio leasing agreement to get a good deal.

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Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Chairman Marion, the Board voted unanimously to take a five-minute break.

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The Board returned to the budget work session.

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Bruce Crigger, Four Way Volunteer Fire Department Chief, presented his department's budget request.

Chief Crigger said his department has added light rescue at no extra charge to citizens. He said the department has dropped its ISO rating to 5 in the last two years. He discussed a partnership with the City of Mount Airy that could have lowered the ISO rating to 4 had it been done sooner.

He said \$43,000 a year is owed for 25 more years on the department's building.

Chief Crigger said the department needs a revenue increase.

Discussion about a 1 penny tax rate increase, extra revenue from the revaluation and the department's tax rate history ensued. Chief Crigger said Mount Airy's past annexations of sections of Four Way's district caused his department's tax rate to be the highest of the volunteer fire departments.

The Board discussed with Chief Crigger the impacts of ISO ratings.

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Tony Tilley, South Surry Volunteer Fire Department Chief, presented his department's budget request of \$329,630. He asked the Board if a decision had been made about going revenue neutral or raising taxes, related to the revaluation. The Board said they haven't decided.

Chief Tilley discussed the need to replace trucks. Commissioner Harris responded that the department has over \$213,000 in the bank. Chief Tilley went into further detail about his department's expenses.

ISO ratings, fire response and the department's debt were discussed.

Ms. Nixon said that even with the revaluation, the additional revenue would be \$67,000 short of the budget request.

After discussion of South Surry's two recent tax rate increases, Chief Tilley said he would like a one cent tax rate increase.

He said South Surry has the second largest coverage area in Surry County.

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Jonathan Sutphin, Westfield Volunteer Fire Department Chief, presented his department's budget request of \$128,626.52.

He said his department is working on three large projects right now: Placing a QRV in Westfield, adding light rescue to the department budget and purchasing a mini-pumper truck.

Chief Sutphin said the Stokes County area of Westfield's district uses a QRV, but not the Surry County side. David Speight, Interim Emergency Services Director, said a mutual aid agreement with Stokes County would be needed for a QRV to cross over into Surry County.

Chief Sutphin said the tax rate in Stokes County is the same as in Surry County.

He said a mini-pumper truck would reduce the department's need for assistance and help achieve an ISO 4 rating.

He said the department is not asking for a tax rate increase and that he wants to capture extra revenue from the revaluation. Commissioner Johnson said that would bring over \$34,000 more in revenue.

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The Board took a five-minute break.

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Matthew Hall and a colleague presented the Central Surry Volunteer Fire Department's budget request of \$310,906. A 2-cent increase is being requested.

Ms. Nixon said that a 1-cent increase would generate over \$31,000 in revenues.

Part of the reason for the request is to add 10 part-time paid staff members, which would cost \$50,462 a year.

The department volunteers said they have had incidents where they've not had enough fire fighters on scene.

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Michael Fulk, Scott Bishop and Chris Moore, of the Pine Ridge Volunteer Fire Department, presented their department's budget request of \$205,000. No tax increase is being requested.

Commissioner Johnson discussed with the department the growth in the Pine Ridge district that will benefit the department, including the addition of Bottomley Enterprises.

The department's ISO rating is a 6.

The department's debt was discussed. The volunteers said they have eight to 10 months more to pay on a truck and that they do well with the budget they have.

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Bubba Kilgore, Shoals Volunteer Fire Department Chief, and Max Livengood, Chairman of the department's board, presented their department's budget request of \$160,864.

They would like to spend funding on equipment and efforts to improve their ISO rating, which is currently a 9. The Board discussed the ISO improvement efforts with the department.

Mutual aid agreements to improve coverage, the department obtaining additional water sources and department debt were discussed.

After discussion with Finance and the Board, the department determined they would submit a revised recommended budget by the end of April.

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Johnny Hiatt, Franklin Volunteer Fire Department Chief, presented his department's budget request of \$366,100. He said no tax rate increase is needed.

Chief Hiatt said the department has ordered a new engine to replace a 1992 International truck. He said building debt is down to \$1.1 million.

Chief Hiatt said the 10 paid staff members are working well and detailed their efforts.

The department is focusing on improving their ISO rating, which is a 5.

Chief Hiatt said next fiscal year, the department will need more funding for a truck and paid staff.

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Brian Lowe, Skull Camp Volunteer Fire Department Chief, presented his department's budget request of \$238,260. He did not request a tax rate increase.

Chief Lowe said the department's ISO rating is a 5 and the department is grant heavy.

The Board discussed mutual aid agreements and maintaining three stations with Chief Lowe.

Discussion ensued about the extra revenue that the revaluation would generate. The revaluation would net the department more than they requested.

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Garth Badgett and Eddie Jordan, of White Plains Volunteer Fire Department, presented their department's budget request of \$174,870. No tax rate increase was requested.

The department said their building and trucks are in good shape. Their ISO rating is a 9.

The Board discussed the department's debt.

The department said they have recovered their 501 c (3) after establishing the status to obtain sales tax revenue.

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Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:45 p.m.

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Nathan Walls  
Clerk to the Board