

CUMBERLAND COUNTY FINANCE COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 5, 2009, 8:30AM
MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Commissioner Kenneth Edge
Commissioner Jimmy Keefe
OTHERS: Commissioner Jeannette Council
Commissioner Ed Melvin
James Martin, County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager
Amy Cannon, Asst. County Manager
Grainger Barrett, County Attorney
Harvey Raynor, Deputy County Attorney
Sara VanderClute, PIO
Kenny Currie, Emergency Management Director
Freddy Johnson, President, Fire Chief's Association
Fran Gilpin, Fayetteville Observer
Marsha Fogle, Clerk

1. Election of Chairman

MOTION: Jimmy Keefe nominated Kenneth Edge as Chair.
SECOND: Kenneth Edge
VOTE: UNANIMOUS

2. Selection of Regular Meeting Date (Currently the 1st Thursday at 8:30AM)

The regular meeting date will remain as shown above.

3. Approval of Minutes: November 12, 2009

MOTION: Commissioner Edge moved to approve.
SECOND: Commissioner Keefe
VOTE: UNANIMOUS

4. Presentation/discussion of the Fire Chief's Association recommendations on sales tax funding for public safety and report from the Working Group meetings

Freddy Johnson, President of the Fire Chief's Association presented some information regarding fire service in the county. In addition, the Interim Report from the Working Group was attached.

Mr. Johnson noted that the Finance Committee of the Fire Chiefs' Association has been meeting and determined that one of the main issues that needs to be addressed is adequate manpower in all of the fire departments. Another issue that was identified was EMS

calls. He said it would cost from \$9 million to \$12 million to place paid firemen in every fire department 24-7. He suggested that a funding mechanism would be a Public Safety Sales Tax, the proceeds from which would fund all fire departments and EMS services, to include the ambulance service.

Commissioner Edge inquired if a Public Safety Sales Tax is sustainable. The Manager said he thought it would be; however, it is not clear whether the District Fire Tax could be completely eradicated. He did say that he felt Fire Departments, the County, and the City of Fayetteville would have to pledge to reduce property tax in order to sell the Public Safety Sales Tax. In addition, in response to a question regarding support of the municipalities for this sales tax, the Manager indicated support was there. The consensus of the Finance Committee was that it will be several years down the road before a public safety sales tax would/could be a reality. It first would have to be approved by the General Assembly and then a referendum would have to be held.

A Working Group has been appointed made up of public safety professionals from the Fire Chief's Association, Town of Spring Lake (representing municipalities and the County), Cape Fear Valley Health System and the County's PIO. This group is charged with making some recommendations for system design improvements for providing more efficient public safety services within the county. An interim report has been provided to the Committee. A completed report will be provided once the Public Safety Work Group has completed its task.

Mr. Johnson said the quality of service is dependent on the amount of money available to provide the service. Currently, there are five volunteer fire departments in the county which are struggling to make ends meet.

Other than the public safety sales tax, the fire districts could increase the amount of tax levied (currently 10 cents), but the increase must be voted on in each district. Another alternative would be for the Board of Commissioners to increase the special tax - could be increased up to 15 cents, to provide funding for those departments in need of assistance.

As a short-term fix, Kenny Currie, EMS Director, noted it would take about \$172,000 to provide paid part-time employees in those five departments from 8:00AM – 5:00PM Monday thru Friday. Those five departments have difficulty providing coverage during the day. Nights and weekends are not a problem as volunteers are available. Mr. Johnson suggested that another short term fix would be to bill the insurance companies for each call answered.

MOTION: Commissioner Keefe moved to accept the report provided by Freddy Johnson as information.
SECOND: Commissioner Edge
VOTE: UNANIMOUS

MEETING ADJOURNED

