

**Town of Rolesville North Carolina
Fire Service Unification Initiative
Session #1 Working Notes**

May 6, 2021 - 3pm-5pm - via Zoom

Attendance:

- Mayor Ronnie Currin, Town of Rolesville
- Commissioner Jacky Wilson, Town of Rolesville
- Commissioner April Sneed, Town of Rolesville
- Town Manager Kelly Arnold, Town of Rolesville
- Finance Director Amy Stevens, Town of Rolesville
- President Spence Jones, Rolesville Rural Fire Department (RRFD)
- Frank Pearce, Jr., RRFD Board Secretary/Treasurer
- Herbert Holden, RRFD Board
- Chief Rodney Privette, RRFD
- Assistant Chief Donnie Lawrence, RRFD
- Captain Jacob Butler, RRFD
- Captain Brian Ward, RRFD
- Greg Grayson, NC Fire Chief Consulting as facilitator only

Introductory Comments:

1. Introductions were made and opening comments from Town Manager Arnold.
2. Principal focus of this group will be over the next 45 or so days.
3. The stated purpose of this group is as follows:
 - *To develop and agree to a legally binding unified agreement between Town of Rolesville (TOR), Rolesville Rural Fire Department (RRFD) and Wake County that would completely transition the personnel, operations, finances, equipment, and infrastructure of RRFD to the TOR for a newly established TOR Fire Department.*
4. Group ground rules were reviewed by Greg Grayson. These include:
 - *Keep constant focus on the mission of service delivery.*
 - *Focus comments on issues and not individuals.*
Allow one person to speak at a time.
 - *Respect differences of opinion.*
 - *Follow up as you are requested to keep moving forward.*
5. Darrell Alford added a comment/amendment that we sought the best service delivery that we could afford.

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6. Chief Privette noted that the previous November, 2020 report laid out eight specific recommended actions for the TOR and the RRFD. The RRFD has already taken action on one of those eight by providing long term disability insurance for their employees as of March, 2021.

Unification Target Date:

- 1) Significant discussion was held on this topic. There was consensus agreement was it would be optimal for any potential merger date to coincide with the beginning of a fiscal year. Agreement was to set the target date of July 1, 2022, with a revisit of that date in December, 2021 to determine the feasibility of that date.
- 2) Within the discussion on this topic, several important issues were addressed and discussed including:
 - a. The question was raised about why there was an urgency. Response was provided that stakeholders did not want to see Rolesville lose good firefighters to other fire departments due to lack of benefits. Comments were offered that the team should proceed with caution to not miss important considerations.
 - b. Insurance and Worker's Comp costs could be a hurdle and needs to be reviewed because the career staff and 33 volunteers will need to be insured together if unified.
 - c. Concern was expressed about a recent article in the Wake Weekly related to volunteers and the potential merger. Elected officials expressed concern about misinformation getting out in the local media.
 - d. The Rolesville Fire Department has two new trucks scheduled for delivery in 2022 and that factor should be considered in the discussion related to timing. In addition, some discussion was held about the timing that may be needed to recruit, select and on-board a career fire chief.
 - i. A replacement of a 1998 Rescue Truck and a 1999 Engine is in progress at a cost of \$1.3 Million, financed with Wake Electric for 10 years at 0%, scheduled for delivery in March and July of 2022.
 - ii. The only other fire department vehicles in the short-term capital replacement plan is cars and trucks, no large fire apparatus.
 - iii. The condition of the current fire station was also noted as a capital expenditure consideration. The fire station was built in 1980 it is in need of major renovation.

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Current Service Levels:

- 1) The Town acknowledges that the Fire Department serves a large unincorporated area as well as the Town of Rolesville.
- 2) Chief Privette discussed that the greatest service level challenge was weekday staffing levels, especially in getting the second truck out. This challenge is consistent with other fire departments in Wake County and where the department is most dependent upon automatic aid.
- 3) Darrell Alford discussed Wake County's plan to conduct a travel time study for seven (7) minutes of travel time for unincorporated areas of Wake County. The County's long-range goal is to be able to assemble an effective firefighting force of 16 people within 12 minutes 90% of the time, consistent with national industry standards (NFPA 1720).
 - a. Discussion of the Wake County study's impact on Rolesville Fire Station 2's construction process and there being some question about the ETJ for Wake Forest near NC 96.

Key Agreement Points:

- 1) Organizational Responsibilities
 - a. The RRFD Board moved forward with this effort to enhance employee benefits.
 - b. Concurrence from the entire group that Rolesville desired to keep volunteer firefighters and that message needs to be clearly articulated by all, to help counter any inaccurate media reporting.
 - i. There was also concurrence to support volunteerism and also that a volunteer stipend was important and should remain regardless of any changes.
 - c. The full-time Fire Chief position was discussed. What role will the current personnel (Chief and Assistant Chief) play with the new paid municipal fire chief?
- 2) Employees
 - a. It was emphasized of the importance to the Fire Department that current full-time employees stay employed.
 - i. All persons acknowledged the goal was to retain good fire employees and also be able to recruit good fire employees in the future.
 - ii. The Town acknowledged that keeping the current full-time employees would be the plan as long as they met minimum employment requirements. After the merger, the Town would have the full responsibility of hiring new firefighters if someone left by attrition.

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- b. Discussion was noted about long-term Wake County employee Brian Ward. Darrell Alford advised that he would need to have a discussion with Wake County HR regarding that matter.
- c. All fire employees would be required to operate under the Town of Rolesville requirements once they became employees of the Town.

Key Group Decisions Made During This Session:

- 1) Agreement was to set the target date of merger/unification for July 1, 2022, with a revisit of that date in December, 2021 to determine the feasibility of that date.**
- 2) Agreement to keep volunteer firefighters and that message needs to be clearly articulated by all, to help counter any inaccurate media reporting.**
- 3) Agreement to support volunteerism and also that a volunteer stipend was important and should remain regardless of any changes.**
- 4) Agreement that the mutual goal was to retain good fire employees and also be able to recruit good fire employees in the future.**
- 5) Agreement that the current full-time fire employees would remain as Town employees if merged as long as they met the Town's minimum employment requirements.**
- 6) Agreement that after the merger, the Town would have the full responsibility of hiring new firefighters if someone left by attrition.**
- 7) Agreement that all fire employees would be required to operate under the Town of Rolesville requirements once they became employees of the Town.**