

**Town of Rolesville, North Carolina
Fire Service Unification Initiative
Session #3 Working Notes**

June 23, 2021 - 3pm-5:05pm - via Zoom

Attendance:

- Mayor Ronnie Currin, Town of Rolesville ron.currin@rolesville.nc.gov
- Commissioner Jacky Wilson, Town of Rolesville jacky.wilson@rolesville.nc.gov
- Commissioner April Sneed, Town of Rolesville april.sneed@rolesville.nc.gov
- Town Manager Kelly Arnold, Town of Rolesville kelly.arnold@rolesville.nc.gov
- Finance Director Amy Stevens, Town of Rolesville amy.stevens@rolesville.nc.gov
- Pres. Spence Jones, Rolesville Rural Fire Department (RRFD) Spence@actelectricinc.com
- Frank Pearce, Jr., RRFD Board Secretary/Treasurer N/A
- Herbert Holding, RRFD Board hholding@rolesvillefire.com
- Chief Rodney Privette, RRFD chief@rolesvillefire.com
- Assistant Chief Donnie Lawrence, RRFD AsstChief@rolesvillefire.com
- Captain Jacob Butler, RRFD jbutler@rolesvillefire.com
- Captain Brian Ward, RRFD bward@rolesvillefire.com
- Darrell Alford, Wake County Fire Services Director Darrell.Alford@wakegov.com
- Greg Grayson, NC Fire Chief Consulting as facilitator only ggrayson@NCFireChief.com

Review of Working Notes from Session 2:

1. Kelly Arnold welcomed the group and asked Greg Grayson to review highlights of the working notes from Session 2. One correction had been noted to show Chief Lawrence in attendance at Session 2 and correct RRFD Board Member Holding's name and email. Otherwise, the group gave concurrence to the working notes from Session 1.

Website Review:

1. A review of the Town's pilot web site was conducted with the group. Overall, there was consensus that the format was helpful and informative for all stakeholders and that the Town web site should be used for this purpose. Several enhancements to the pilot site were requested by those in attendance:
 - a. Add the names of the unification task force to the web site.
 - b. Provide a portal for persons to submit questions on the web site so that they can have their questions responded to by the process facilitator.
 - i. If the question is a simple one, the facilitator can answer the question directly and simply report the response to the full group at the next scheduled meeting.
 - ii. If the question is more in-depth, the facilitator will bring the question back before the full group, then reply to the person asking the question after the full group next meets.

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Subcommittee Report on Budget and Cost Sharing Under Unification:

1. Reporting subcommittee members are Amy Stevens, Rodney Privette, and Darrell Alford. Additional personnel will be pulled in as needed for this effort.
2. The group held their first meeting on June 8 seeking to best understand the joint practices and the capital funding history. They met with Chief Privette and the Administrative Assistant and made a request for an additional list of information needed to establish an asset list necessary for governmental accounting purposes.
3. During this meeting there was concurrence that both Wake County and the Town of Rolesville were seeking financial information in the same manner for budgeting purposes. A follow up meeting of the group is planned for July.
4. Darrell Alford outlined Wake County's approved budget for the unincorporated areas of the county was set at \$.1017 per \$100 valuation for FY 21-22, with 84% dedicated to the operating budget and 16% for debt service and capital projects. Rolesville is slated to receive \$661,821 from Wake County for FY 21-22.
5. Chief Privette voiced concern to this group about Rolesville's funding that the career staffing levels for Rolesville had been stagnant for the past seven (7) years and that he had repeatedly requested additional career staffing. Mr. Alford noted that each fire department that was part of the county service district participated in a competitive budget process and that each department was required to submit written justification of all their requests. As an example in the upcoming fiscal year, there was an excess of \$50 million of requests made and a total expenditure approved of less than \$34 million, so many requests were not able to be funding by Wake County's unified fire tax district.

Rolesville Career Staff Questions:

- 1) As included in the Session 2 working notes, RRFD career staff submitted a list of questions and concerns, primarily related to human resource related topics. Mr. Arnold acknowledged that the Town had a new HR Director that would begin next week – Ms. Lisa Alston - and that these issues would be a priority task for her to begin working on. Mr. Arnold asked the employee group to allow him and Ms. Alston a few weeks to work through the questions and hold some dialogue. The employee representatives present were agreeable to that plan.
- 2) There was additional discussion that there was a sharp contrast in how the Town of Wake Forest and the Town of Knightdale had handled their recent mergers/unifications. The core issue was the Town recognizing or not recognizing service time with the private, non-profit fire department as service time with the Town. The Town of

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Knightdale chose to recognize the non-profit service time. The Town of Wake Forest chose not to recognize the non-profit service time. This decision may impact issues such as annual leave earning rates and other components of town benefits. Obviously, no Town decision regarding service time transfer would have any impact on the NCLGERS decisions as those are rigid and uniformly made at the state level. All persons (unless they had prior eligible service time) would begin in the NCLGERS system the day that they became a Town employee and qualified to be a part of NCLGERS. The career staff asked that matters related to the transfer of service time from private, non-profit to municipality be given close consideration.

Roles of the Town Board and Fire Department Board:

1. Mayor Currin provided a brief overview of the Council/Manager form of Government that Rolesville (and North Carolina local governments) operate under whereas all staff work through the Town Manager and the elected body hires the Town Manager and Town Attorney. The Budget is the primary decision-making tool for policy development at the elected official level and all day-to-day operations are carried out by the Town Manager.
2. For clarity, the following are excerpt summaries from the ICMA:

- a. Council Manager Form of Government

The council-manager form is the system of local government that combines the strong political leadership of elected officials in the form of a governing body, with the strong managerial experience of an appointed local government manager. The governing body, commonly known as the council, may also be referred to as the commission or the board. The council-manager form establishes a representative system where all power is concentrated in the elected council and where the council hires a professionally trained manager to oversee the delivery of public services.

In council-manager government, the mayor or chairperson of the governing body and council members are the leaders and policy makers elected to represent the community and to concentrate on policy issues that are responsive to citizens' needs and wishes. The manager is appointed by the governing body to carry out policy and ensure that the entire community is being served. If the manager is not responsive to the governing body's wishes, the governing body has the authority to terminate the manager at any time. In that sense, a manager's responsiveness is tested daily.

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b. Council (or Town Board's) Role:

The council is the legislative body; its members are the community's decision makers. Power is centralized in the elected council, which approves the budget and determines the tax rate, for example. The council also focuses on the community's goals, major projects, and such long-term considerations as community growth, land use development, capital improvement plans, capital financing, and strategic planning. The council hires a professional manager to carry out the administrative responsibilities and supervises the manager's performance.

c. Town Manager's Role:

The Town Manager is hired to serve the council and the community and to bring to the local government the benefits of training and experience in administering local government projects and programs on behalf of the governing body. The manager prepares a budget for the council's consideration; recruits, hires, and supervises the government's staff; serves as the council's chief adviser; and carries out the council's policies. Council members and citizens count on the manager to provide complete and objective information, the pros and cons of alternatives, and long-term consequences.

3. Discussion was held regarding the Fire Department Board's role post-unification. The need to continue to operate and manage the 501(c)(3) organization was discussed and the need to operate and maintain the antique fire apparatus as well as take on initiatives that the group may desire to take on such as other similar organizations do was noted. Examples include fundraisers, community events, etc. as a Foundation or similar. Chief Privette suggested that the group could retain the "Rolesville Rural Fire Department, Inc." name as it is now as the private, non-profit organization. The name could also be amended. Regardless, it was agreed upon that the remaining non-profit organization would need officers to be in compliance with state requirements.
4. Chief Privette raised the question about what would happen to the current four (4) RRFD part-time staff in the event of a merger/unification including him, Assistant Chief Lawrence, Secretary/Treasurer Frank Pearce, Jr. and the new Administrative Assistant.
5. The question was posed as to what was possible with part-time employees within the local government structure. The answer was provided that if budgeted, part-time employees were certainly permitted. However, requirements from the State of North Carolina limited part-time employees in any unit of NC local government to work no more than 1,000 hours a year without participating in the NCLGERS system as a benefitted employee.

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6. There was consensus that the future organizational structure for the fire department under the Town's leadership should be identified and agreed upon sooner rather than later so that key stakeholders could get a vision of how the structure would work and function.
 - a. Town Manager Arnold requested Greg Grayson to research several best practice models in North Carolina and develop visual models and bring back to the group for review so that everyone could see potential options and have something to react to and customize the structure that would be most ideal for Rolesville.

7. RRFD Board Member Herbert Holding spoke to the group that some members of the RRFD Board felt that the pace of the unification effort was going too fast. He stated that the reason that the Board started this mutual discussion was to take care of their firefighters. He further stated that some people in the rural area were concerned with the Town taking the fire department over. He went on to say that at the time of the Board's decision to reach out to the Town, the department was facing the chance of immediately losing five (5) employees at once to municipal fire departments. Ultimately, the department only lost two (2) employees to municipal departments in that round of hiring. It is not known if the potential of unifying with the Town of Rolesville had any bearing or not with that number of lost employees ultimately being less than five.

8. RRFD Board Member Holding went further to state that it was unfair to the current RRFD Fire Chief and other staff for the Town to hire a full-time Fire Chief before getting the working relationship where it needs to be between the Town and the Rural Fire Department Board.

9. Town Commissioner Wilson asked the RRFD Board members if they were still unified on this effort to move forward and emphasized the importance that if their heart was not in this together that the effort would not be ultimately successful at this time.
 - a. RRFD Board President Jones advised that the Board would have some further discussion and report back to the full group at the next meeting.

Next Session:

1. Agreement was to hold the next meeting of this group on August 25, 2021 at 3pm. This extended date is set to give the following key achievements to occur:
 - a. Human Resources to evaluate RRFD employee concerns.
 - b. Budget and Cost Sharing Subcommittee to complete some substantial analysis.
 - c. Facilitator to develop a few visual structural organizational model options for the group to consider.

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- d. RRFD Board to fully evaluate their current position as a Board on how they want to move forward collectively and what their position is at this time.

Key Group Decisions Made During This Session (Session #2):

3a) Agreement that the Town's web site will be the platform to house information about the potential merger/unification process to keep all stakeholders up to date.

Previous Key Group Decisions:

2a) Agreement that the Town will set up a preliminary informational page on the Town web site regarding the unification process to keep all stakeholders up to date.

2b) Agreement that under a merger, any antique trucks would remain under the ownership of the private, non-profit corporation and would not become Town assets.

2c) Agreement to establish a budget subcommittee to project potential FY 22-23 costs should the fire department be under Town Government and report back to the full group.

1a) 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.

1b) Agreement to keep volunteer firefighters and that message needs to be clearly articulated by all, to help counter any inaccurate media reporting.

1c) Agreement to support volunteerism and that a volunteer stipend was important and should remain regardless of any changes.

1d) Agreement that the mutual goal was to retain good fire employees and be able to recruit good fire employees in the future.

1e) 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.

1f) Agreement that after the merger, the Town would have the full responsibility of hiring new firefighters if someone left by attrition.

1g) Agreement that all fire employees would be required to operate under the Town of Rolesville requirements once they became employees of the Town.