



APPROVED 10/15/2019

**MINUTES**  
**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**JOINT MEETING WITH THE ORANGE COUNTY FIRE CHIEF'S COUNCIL**  
**October 3, 2019**  
**7:00 p.m.**

The Orange County Board of Commissioners held a joint meeting with the Orange County Fire Chiefs' Council on Thursday, October 3, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. at the Whitted Building in Hillsborough, N.C.

**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:** Chair Penny Rich and Commissioners Jamezetta Bedford, Mark Dorosin, Mark Marcoplos, and Renee Price

**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:** Sally Greene, Earl McKee

**COUNTY ATTORNEYS PRESENT:** John Roberts

**COUNTY STAFF PRESENT:** County Manager Bonnie Hammersley, Deputy County Manager Travis Myren, and Deputy Clerk Sherri Ingersoll (All other staff members will be identified appropriately below.)

**FIRE CHIEFS PRESENT:**

Caldwell - Brad Allison, Fire Chief; Buddy Hartley, President, Board of Directors

Cedar Grove - Jeff Borland, Fire Chief

Efland - Pete Hallenbeck, Efland Deputy Fire Chief

Eno – Ralph McDonald, Assistant Chief; Wayne Paschall, Board of Directors

New Hope - Charles Bowden, Fire Chief; Cliff Carroll, President, Board of Directors

North Chatham - John Strowd, Fire Chief; Chuck Quinlan, President, Board of Directors

Orange Grove - Steve McCauley, Fire Chief; Bill Waddell, President, Board of Directors

Orange Rural - Jeff Cabe, Fire Chief

SORS - Matthew Mauzy, Chief, South Orange Rescue Squad (SORS)

Town of Carrboro – Brad Harvey, Interim Chief, Town of Carrboro

Town of Chapel Hill - Matt Sullivan, Fire Chief, Town of Chapel Hill

White Cross – Tony Blake, President, Board of Directors

Jason Shepherd, Orange County Fire Marshal

Dinah Jeffries, Orange County Emergency Services Director

Chair Rich called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Rich said she and Chief Sullivan met a few weeks ago, and had a good meeting about agenda items.

The group introduced themselves.

**Agenda:**

The Orange County Fire Chiefs made brief remarks that included information regarding the following topics:

- Overview of the Fire Service in Orange County
- Examples of Mutual Aid Between Departments
- Training Facility on Millhouse Road
  - Durham Tech Assistance
- Radio System





## Tonight's Discussion

"What it takes to provide Fire Protection in Orange County"

- Collaboration and Teamwork
- Our Key Priorities:
  - Training
  - Communication/Radios
  - Workforce Development and Preservation
- Training Center Update

## Examples of Collaboration

- Quarterly Mutual Aid Training
- Live Burn Training/Pre-Demolition Training
- County Wide Water Hauls
- Town of Chapel Hill July 4 and Major Events
- Tanker Task Force
- Storm Response (and beyond OC)
  
- Four Department Structure Fire Dispatch

Matt Sullivan said that mutual aid training decreases costs in the insurance area, and helps all of the systems. He said Chief Cabe has led the charge for providing this quarterly training.



- Live Burn trainings
- The need for water hauls was determined after the OWASA water shut down. He said a system has been developed when any area needs water, the dispatcher can release anyone to provide substantial amount of water to keep the hospital and other agencies operating. He said this collaboration came out of a crisis, and collaborative work is very strong, and extends to major events throughout the state.



Matt Sullivan said this slide shows Tankers at UNC Hospital and Orange High School, showing a response to two emergency events simultaneously.



- Steakhouse live burn



- Tanker haul in Chatham County



- Fourth of July and other major events



## Emergency Communications





Matt Sullivan said this is an issue requiring continued focus. He said it is a desperate need, and all appreciate the work Orange County Emergency Services has put into this. He resumed the PowerPoint situation:

### Workforce Development and Preservation

- High School Fire Academies
- Training Facility
- Health and Safety
  - Critical Incident Stress Management
  - Cancer Prevention



Matt Sullivan said the fire academies are very strong. He said Chapel Hill High School just had its first graduating class, and 16 people are currently enrolled. He said there is a waiting list at Orange High School to get into the program. He said the academies are a great opportunity to get local kids to participate. He said Durham Tech has also expressed an interest in running an Orange County fire academy, and this is a better alternative than the changeover in paid positions between areas.

Chair Rich asked if the academy graduates find jobs after graduation.

Matt Sullivan said when they graduate high school, they are two classes short of full fire certification, if they have taken all of the high school classes. He said a hazmat course and the live burn require a student to be 18, which is a challenge for high schoolers. He said the graduates can apply for, and work toward a job. He said none have applied for a position yet, but their participation in the in the academy will be a plus and the program is still new.

Matt Sullivan said cancer prevention is difficult, and is a major concern. He said the Council is taking a very active role with this issue, and with mental health, and is looking into a peer support team after a critical event. He resumed the PowerPoint presentation:

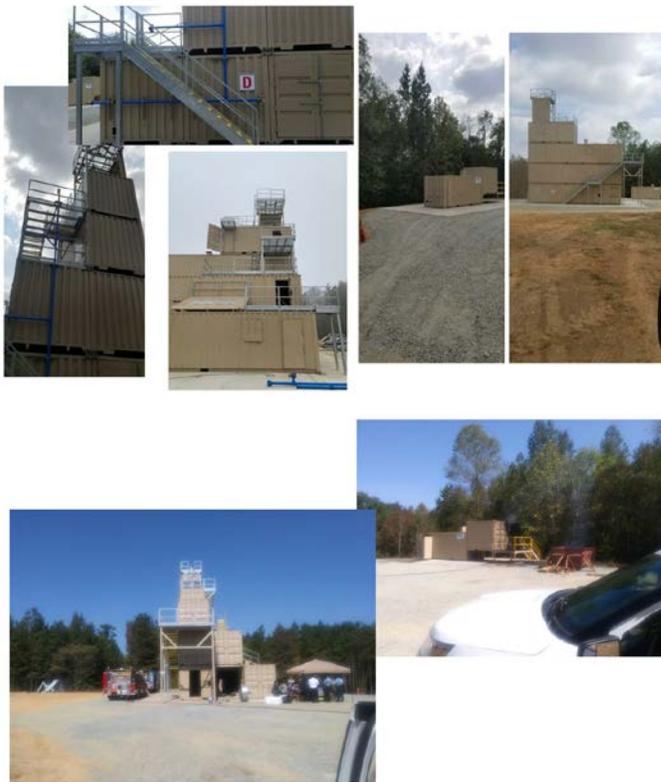
### Training Center Update



Matt Sullivan said there is good news, but not the best news. He said Chief Nassar has been the key in this process, and found a grant for \$350,000, and there is now 10 acres of Town of Chapel Hill property on Millhouse Road. He said funding is coming from various governments; Durham Tech, the Sherriff's Department and other agencies have helped. He said the training site was just tested today. He said this training facility belongs to the Orange County Chiefs, not the County or Durham Tech, which results in the Chiefs having a personal interest in making it last a long time. He said other agencies have not been able to sustain these types of props, but the Council is working hard toward making this one last.



Matt Sullivan said the tower structure was installed last week, and includes two areas that can be burned. He said the small structure is a flash over simulator, which creates conditions for flashovers, which is a leading killer of firefighters. He resumed the PowerPoint presentation:



Matt Sullivan said this is a picture from today's burn training. He said one other piece that is important is a stormwater retention basin to keep the water clean. He said a pond was created to simulate rafting conditions, which also works to get water out to protect the resource. He said there is still interest in getting water onsite. He said this site is great for those in the southern part of the County, but it is not as helpful to those in the northern part, as it is a long haul. He said this is step one, and all of the departments will continue to look at the total need for this type of training throughout the County. He said another prop, or a more centrally located training facility, is needed. He said he is encouraged that Durham Tech stepped up and assisted with some money.



Jeff Cabe, Orange Rural Fire Chief, reiterated that this would not have happened without White Cross taking the lead, putting a lot of money into it, and made great efforts to get funding, and provide support with food and drinks at the training.

Commissioner Dorosin asked if there are ongoing operating costs that will need to be covered.

Jeff Cabe said each department pays \$2,000 a year in maintenance fees, and that will keep gravel and future props going, and hopefully add on to it. He said hopefully these funds will not have to be used to replace props. He said there are other potential opportunities in the area including a natural gas line to consider going forward.

Matt Sullivan thanked the BOCC for its time and ongoing support to keep things moving forward.

Commissioner Marcoplos said he is glad the Chiefs value these meetings with the BOCC. He asked if more information could be given about the rise in cancer risks with firefighting, and if needs or solutions have been identified to help.

Jeff Cabe said cancer amongst firefighters has been a problem for some time, but has come to the forefront recently. He said it is a serious issue, and is killing firefighters. He said it has hindered people for retention, and from coming into the business. He said all are working very hard to do an extensive decon process, to clean up the fire gear fully and quickly, and a lot of it is training and awareness. He said for some in this room tonight, it is too late, and the risk is understood for the professional firefighters. He said protecting volunteers is a bigger problem, and there is a great effort to reduce the risk of exposure in firefighting gear. He said buying additional equipment, such as structural gear, helps in some situations, but it gets smoke contained in certain types of fires. He said the solution is extensive decon, and having portable showers at the sites and treating situations like hazmat, but Orange County does not have enough resources to do this.

Tony Blake, President, Board of Directors for White Cross said it would be good to be able to provide a baseline medical check each year for the volunteers, which is being looked into. He said it would also be good to provide health insurance for the volunteers, but there is an IRS ruling that prohibits governments to provide health insurance to nonprofits without being a government agency. He said the BOCC may be able to help on the legislative side to create some solutions.

Pete Hallenback, Efland Fire Chief said his department has had 4 firefighters develop cancer in their early 40's and 50's, all of which were typical cancers developed by firefighters. He said this problem is very real.

Commissioner Price referred to the equipment for cleaning suits, and asked if Durham or Wake County has it, and if collaboration is possible.

Jeff Cabe said the machine is like a commercial washer. He said there are a few machines in the County, but this involves multiple layers of cloth, and there is no way to get it all out. He said the machines cost \$8,000 - \$10,000 each, and contracting the cleaning out is very expensive, and the equipment is gone for several weeks. He said the best option would be to get rid of equipment after one use, but that is not a financially viable plan.

Commissioner Dorosin asked if recruitment could be discussed, and if understaffing is a problem.

Matt Sullivan said recruitment is actually two different questions: the escalating harm risk and salary. He said the Council is working with the Human Resources department to see what can be done. He said starting salaries are not as high as Wake County and Cary, so competition is high, but there is a local training opportunities program, which helps.

Ralph McDonald, Eno Assistant Chief, said the other issue is with the rural areas. He said volunteers who are getting out of school are going out of the County, or with their working schedules, they fail to show up. He said the new kids are looking at it as a career;



and people do not come to the volunteer departments. He said there are so many other things to do, and the interest is not there to volunteer.

Jeff Cabe said volunteers get a pager, which is 24/7 and holidays. He said the world runs on schedules, and people do not want to come at all hours of the day and night. He said those in Carrboro and Chapel Hill get a state pension, and volunteers do not often have the energy after working full time to do the work that is needed. He said it is typically the paid firefighters that show up. He said everyone is vastly understaffed.

Pete Hallenback, Efland Fire Chief, said there are also demographic and societal changes. He said when he started, employers let people take off time from work to respond. He said fewer people are working in Efland, and with longer commutes and increased call volume, employers are not willing to be flexible. He said there must be people to respond during the day, but people do not want to work somewhere full-time without a pension. He said he is worried about the cancer issue, as parents are going to start strongly deterring their children from being firefighters.

Matt Mauzy, SORS Chief, said he can recruit people at UNC to who are considering the line of work as a future career, but they are constantly cycling through. He said scheduling is a problem, and collaboratively working with other departments can create a problem, creating short staff to meet needs. He said long-term rescue positions are very difficult to fill, due to other work schedules and employers not letting people be off work to assist. He said some of the best people recruits have come from high school, which has been positive.

Commissioner Dorosin asked if there are any solutions, and is it better to have paid part-time staff versus permanent staff.

Tony Blake, White Cross Board of Directors' President, said things are moving in this direction, and he has volunteers and part-time staff.

Brad Harvey, Interim Chief Town of Carrboro, said the idea of offering insurance to volunteers would be great. He said the he lowered the hiring age to 19, because people were getting lost in the gap between ages 19-21. He said getting people when they are in high school is key.

Tony Blake said he is not asking the Board to pay for the insurance, but having a health baseline is critical.

Commissioner Marcoplos asked if the hiring age policy came from somewhere specific.

Brad Harvey, Town of Carrboro, said it was an internal policy, and he had to lower it to 19, and decided to take a chance to line people up early before they are lost.

Matt Sullivan said 18 is the minimum age, and maturity can be a problem. He said a great deal of training and mentoring is needed, but it has been positive so far.

Ralph McDonald said this has been a problem with rural areas, and if paid firefighters are employed 24/7, then volunteers are lost. He said volunteers lose interest if they cannot ride on the truck for a call.

Charles Bowden, New Hope Fire Chief, said it has changed guidelines for how far away from the station people can live. He said the average house size is now is 3,000 square feet, which is a growing risk. He said part of the fix is allowing people to stay at the fire station, but, if there is no truck, people do not show up.

Brad Allison, Caldwell Fire Chief, said Caldwell is blessed to have a lot of volunteers, but the volunteers do not want paid staff at the station. He said it is a different environment now, but he excited about the high school academies.

Chair Rich asked if there is a point at which this becomes critical, and if it will affect the safety of the residents if there are not enough people to fight the fire.



Brad Allison, Caldwell Fire Chief said there must be adequate certified personnel on the roster to even keep the doors open. He said Orange County is in good shape, but it is important to keep these folks, and not allow them to be fearful of the risks. He said it was not a concern when he was young and got involved.

Pete Hallenback said the junior program is one of the most frustrating and rewarding. He said it is hard to know exactly when the situation will become critical, but it is important for the Council to watch this carefully.

Jeff Cabe said it is difficult to run everything, and his departments offer a wide variety of response. He said it is really hard to get very qualified people to do all of the jobs. He said there are some paid people, but the volunteers drop off. He said the minimums do not tell the full story of the problem, and greater depth is needed on the bench. He said it takes everyone in this room to make it happen, and to keep the community safe.

Commissioner Dorosin asked Chief Sullivan if this is one of his last meetings.

Matt Sullivan said this is his last meeting of this type, as he is retiring.

Commissioner Dorosin expressed gratitude to Chief Sullivan for all he has done for all the community.

Chair Rich also thanked Chief Sullivan, noting he has had a long successful career, and she is grateful for having worked with him.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Penny Rich, Chair

Sherri Ingersoll  
Deputy Clerk