

MINUTES OF THE
May 4, 2026
MEETING OF THE FORSYTH COUNTY
FIRE COMMISSION

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The Fire Commission met in regular session at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, May 4, 2026, in the meeting room at Forsyth County Fire Division Station 9, 3000 Aviation Drive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

PRESENT:

Walt Beroth, Chair
Eddie Bottoms, Member
Fred Franklin, Member
Richard Linville, Member
Don Martin, Member
Shane Moore, Member
Steven Roberson, Member
Gary Styers, Member
Brian Tuttle, Member
Carl Walker, Member
David Williamson, Member

ABSENT:

Andrew Gray, Vice Chair

The Deputy County Manager, Fire Services Director, and Assistant Fire Chief of Operations were also present.

Chair Beroth called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance.

Commissioner Moore led the invocation and Chair Beroth led the pledge of allegiance.

1. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Minutes from the April 13, 2026 meeting of the Fire Commission were presented. There were no corrections or additions. Commissioner Williamson moved that the minutes be accepted as presented. Commissioner Bottoms seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is invited to make comments regarding the business of the Fire Commission. Speakers are given three minutes to make their comments, and the public comment portion of the meeting is to last no longer than 30-minutes.

There were five speakers signed up to make public comments to the Fire Commission.

- Zach Smith: Chief, Town of Rural Hall Fire Department
- Brad Johnson: Chief, Union Cross Fire Department
- Tanner Boyles: Chair of the Board of Directors, Union Cross Fire Department (yielded time to Chief Johnson)
- Luke Weavil: Firefighter, Union Cross Fire Department (declined to speak)
- Brian Smith: Chief, Belews Creek Fire Department

3. FY27 CONTRACT EXTENSION DISCUSSION

Deputy Manager Haney gave a brief update on the progress of the contract for service for FY27. The contract will be for one year and there will be minimal changes from the FY26 contract to reflect any actions of the Fire Commission and Board of Commissioners during the budget process. The Fire Commission will work toward a more thorough contract agreement during FY27 for adoption for FY28 and beyond.

4. FY27 FIRE COMMISSION PRIORITIES DISCUSSION

Commissioners continued their discussion regarding the priorities that need to be addressed during FY27 and ranked the importance of their priorities. The priorities to be discussed are:

- Determine the minimum level of expected service provided by the contracted fire departments.
- Look at mergers, where appropriate, and system efficiencies to strengthen the County's fire service.
- Look at creating consistency in staffing, pay, and benefits.
- Engage other communities to compare and contrast what they are doing to provide fire services.

5. NEW BUSINESS

Deputy Manager Haney provided an update on the budget process for FY27. He discussed recommended increases across the contracted fire departments and Forsyth County Fire Division. Deputy Manager Haney also presented updates regarding the funding model recommendation from the Fire Commission. The Fire Commission recommended adoption of Funding Model 2 which would pay for capital and personnel out of the service district. This model adoption was based on assumptions from FY26 and would see tax rates increase in 15 tax districts and decrease in 10 tax districts. If FY27 requests were utilized to evaluate the funding model, Funding Model 4 would see tax rates decrease in 16 tax districts and increase in 9 tax districts. Capital recommendations would also have an impact on the tax rate that will be adopted by the Board of Commissioners. The County Manager's recommended budget will be presented publicly on May 7, 2026.

An update regarding the continued streaming of Fire Commission meetings was presented by Chief Brock Smith. Station 9 has internet speed issues that are difficult to address to reliably provide the quality of streaming necessary. Research has also discovered that there is a higher standard for public meetings and their requirements, namely dealing with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The requirements of ADA far exceed the capabilities of what can be provided by Fire Division staff or through the software utilized for streaming.

Chief Brock Smith also informed the Fire Commission that the Fire Division web page has been updated to provide a section for the Fire Commission. This section will be updated regularly regarding the business of the Fire Commission.

The Fire Commission also discussed the cancellation of the June meeting. There was consensus among the Commission to cancel the June meeting and continue with the regularly scheduled meeting in July.

The next scheduled meeting of the Forsyth County Fire Commission will be July 6, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. in the meeting room at Forsyth County Fire Division Station 9, 3000 Aviation Drive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

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There being no further business to come before the Commission,
Commissioner Franklin moved for adjournment. Vice Chair Gray
seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Signed by:

Walt Beroth

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F. Walter Beroth, Chair
Forsyth County Fire Commission

Signed by:

Philip C. Vogler

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Philip C. Vogler, Assistant Fire Chief
Interim Secretary to the Forsyth County Fire Commission

Brad Johnson

Union Cross Fire Chief

bjohnson@unioncrossfd.com

Good morning members of the Forsyth County Fire Commission, for those who do not know me, I am Brad Johnson, Chief of Union Cross Fire Rescue.

While my time as chief at Union Cross has been relatively short, my time invested into the department and the community has not. I have volunteered to serve the Union Cross community for the last 25 years.

In 2022 Union Cross along with 3 other departments were notified that they would be receiving new engines funded by an ARPA grant from Forsyth County. Upon that notification and within the constraints of a tight budget we would now be able to plan for at least the next decade how to best utilize our funds to provide fire service to the citizens of our community and not have to worry how we would replace aging apparatus.

Throughout 2023 our department experienced aging equipment failures intensified by the long waits for parts and repairs due to COVID. In Jan 2024 we sought options on used custom trucks that we could manage within our budget that would serve as a reliable first out Engine until we received the ARPA grant truck. But to our dismay the market was scarce for a truck that would fit our immediate needs and still remain within our budget capabilities. After continued research we were able to source a 2023 Pierce Freightliner stock unit with a very quick delivery for \$476,000.00. We were granted approval to purchase the Pierce stock unit and it was in service within 7 months of order. To help facilitate the addition of the stock unit and the ARPA Grant truck slated for delivery in the Fall of 2026 we sold 2 of our older units and planned to use that funding to purchase the necessary equipment for the two new trucks.

Then on April 16th, just 2 business days prior to the last fire commission meeting and prior to the STUDY being distributed to county department chiefs, I was notified that a recommendation was to be presented to the fire commission to reallocate our promised truck along with funding the purchase of two other apparatus and a support unit to which would serve other areas of the county. This is the first opportunity that our department has had to rebut this decision since the proposal and approval of the recommendation. This is due to the fact that the public comment session of the previous meeting was prior to the presentation of the county's recommendation to the commission.

The explanation of the reallocation of the ARPA truck was presented to me as the county is looking at First Out Engines only that Piney Grove has the oldest "First Out Engine" and it is a 2002. This plan is not taking into account the entire fleet needs throughout the county as many necessary apparatus are much older than 2002. We attempted to obtain further clarification on this matter during an April 21st meeting between Deputy County Manager Kyle Haney, Chief Brock Smith and Assistant Chief Chris Vogler and Union Cross staff. While the subject of planning was discussed as well as the county fleet and proposed Capital Improvement Plan we were still not able to obtain a clear reason for the reallocation of our ARPA truck. Our department has been planning for the arrival of the ARPA truck for over three years. I would like for you all to consider how you would respond if you were in our shoes and years of planning along with hundreds of hours of preparation, discussion and research were suddenly altered as ours has been.

To clarify our understanding of the ARPA Grant truck, we have the email that was sent by then County Fire Marshal Gary Styers stating and I quote " Just to clear the air about ownership, the truck is yours period." That should not be a trust that is broken between county fire/management and individual departments. We have relied on that word and the action taken by commissioners 3 years ago when they passed a resolution specifying each of the 4 departments to receive ARPA funded trucks. Until the overlay tax entirely funds a complete Capital Improvement Plan and even then, the fire departments should have a voice in the matter of funding and planning rather than the type of notification and clarity in which this particular subject has been addressed.

While I am in agreement that the overlay tax can and should be used to provide necessary funding for equipment and even apparatus purchases going forward. I do not agree with retroactive reallocation of a unit that has been planned around both in budget and purpose for the last 3 years.

Furthermore, if indeed the county is seeking to reduce expenses and save 1.3 million as proposed, new stock units just as the one purchased by Union Cross in 2024 can be bought for \$550,000.00 per unit. That price is current as of last week from Atlantic Emergency Solutions. That fact, along with the ability of those units to be obtained and placed in service much faster than a 2-3 year wait on a custom cab engine order would seem to be an option that should be explored prior to spending 1.3 million on one truck. While these stock units do lack some of the extra features found on custom units they are still equipped and qualified to serve as First Out Engines for any department.

In closing, outside of how this study has impacted Union Cross directly. I would like to make the comment that this newly released study is filled with numerous inaccuracies. Speaking from the perspective of a certified Emergency Vehicle Technician with over 20 years of experience repairing fire apparatus the section of the Study covering the Apparatus Mechanical Review is filled with invalid reports of apparatus deficiencies. These unjustified deficiencies skew the overall Apparatus Mechanical Review and should also call to question the accuracy of the entire report. I would be happy to elaborate further on NFPA standards but my time is almost up. I would like to express my appreciation to the Chairman of the Commission for allowing these public comments and I hope that this information will not be taken lightly. Thank you!