



Albemarle County

Legislation Text

File #: 17-443, **Version:** 1

AGENDA DATE: 7/12/2017

TITLE:

Volunteer Fire Rescue Funding Policy

SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Staff recommends that the Board of Supervisors adopt the attached volunteer funding policy as County policy.

ITEM TYPE: Regular Action Item

STAFF CONTACT(S): Walker, Letteri, Kamptner, Eggleston, Allshouse, LaBelle, Mezzoni, Bowman,

PRESENTER (S): Dan Eggleston

LEGAL REVIEW: Yes

REVIEWED BY: Douglas C. Walker

BACKGROUND: The current Albemarle County Fire Rescue (ACFR) volunteer funding policy (Attachment A) was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in February 2006 and revised in September 2010. Under the current policy, the County provides: annual funding for basic operating costs; case-by-case consideration for funding for one-time costs; case-by-case consideration for funding for capital expenses for volunteer buildings; and the purchase of emergency response vehicles according to the approved System Fleet Plan (Attachment B) and County Capital Improvement Plan.

ACFR staff has worked with the FEMS Board over several years to make a number of changes that save costs using contract rates and to relieve volunteers the concern of budgeting for volatile costs. In FY 16 ACFR consolidated the purchase of fuel for volunteer stations through the installation of fuel tanks, saving money and time for volunteers. In FY 18, ACFR hired a fleet maintenance supervisor and consolidated the maintenance and repair of fleet, relieving volunteer agencies of an additional burden that is both financial and administrative.

During the preparation of the FY 18 budget, ACFR and OMB staff recognized the need to review and suggest possible changes to the volunteer funding policy. At its May 27 work session, the FEMS Board discussed various ideas on changes to the annual process. A memo (Attachment C) summarizing the discussions and decisions during that work session was given to FEMS on June 28.

STRATEGIC PLAN: Infrastructure Investment: Prioritize, plan, and invest in critical infrastructure that responds to past and future changes and improves the capacity to serve community needs; Quality Government Operations: Ensure County government's capacity to provide high quality service that achieves community priorities

DISCUSSION: The current process for providing funds to the volunteer fire and rescue stations is inherently different from the normal budgeting process for most County agencies. This process focuses on determining an appropriately sized donation from the County to the individual agencies based on their scope of operating

expenses as defined in the volunteer funding policy. Items considered for this discussion enhance equity between volunteer and career stations and provide one of two values to volunteer stations - financial support or time savings. It should be recognized that providing time savings to volunteers is often as valuable as the financial support provided by the County. Over the last several years, the County and volunteer agencies have successfully implemented projects, such as a turn-out gear system (a NACO award winning innovation) and consolidated fuel purchasing, that save the County and stations money and volunteers' time. There is greater desire amongst the volunteers to address other supply issues; however, the human and physical resources required for this will need be considered in future resource-planning requests.

ACFR and the FEMS Board have a number of recommendations to improve the funding policy.

- **Uniforms:** ACFR recommends that the Board of Supervisors amend the uniform policy to provide duty uniforms for all members based on a formula provided by OMB. This formula will be based on membership and the current price of uniforms. This change will have no impact on the budget, since it is simply a clarification of current practice.
- **Janitorial Services and Grounds Maintenance:** ACFR recommends that the Board of Supervisors provide funding to volunteer stations for janitorial services and grounds maintenance - which is currently prohibited under the funding policy. Based on current rates, we estimate that this will add a combined \$134,330 to the budget for all 10 volunteer stations.
- **Meals:** ACFR recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve a flat dollar amount increase to each station to provide bonus meals to volunteers who cover shifts during major holidays. The budget impact of providing this for all 10 stations will be \$5,000 annually. Additionally, ACFR recommends a contingency be established for volunteer stations to access should their spending on meals exceed their budget due to increased staffing during disasters and large-scale weather events.
- **Recruitment:** Staff also recognize the Board's desire to support volunteer agencies in their efforts to recruit new members. We suggest that the Board include a new line in the funding policy specifically dedicated to these recruitment efforts. We suggest a \$500 flat increase for recruitment for all volunteer agencies, with a total budget impact of \$5,000 annually.
- **Capital Improvements:** The FEMS Board would like to maintain the existing policy of considering capital improvement requests for volunteer-owned buildings on a case-by-case basis.
- **Building Maintenance:** In order to support the maintenance of buildings owned by volunteer organizations, the County currently provides funds to support operational maintenance for minor and preventative items. However, this allotment is often underfunded. ACFR will work with OMB and FES, and volunteer partners to clarify what operational maintenance expenses could be covered under this policy, and will develop a systemic approach to provide adequate funding to support volunteers as they maintain their buildings.

In addition to the above policy changes, ACFR, OMB, and FEMS discussed a number of process changes to the volunteer funding process that do not require a policy change, but does relieve administrative burden on volunteers, provide possible cost savings to all partners, and enhances system relationships.

- **County Contracts:** Current policy allows volunteers to join onto County contracts. Volunteer stations will be given the option to ride on County contracts, but it will not be required.
- **Contingency for successful recruitment:** Since a significant portion of donations is based on membership size, an increase in membership can have a dramatic and unnecessarily negative financial impact for agencies. ACFR will work with volunteer stations to request an appropriation mid-year if there has been a 10% or greater net increase in membership that will affect the agency's ability to provide needed resources to new volunteers. This appropriation could come from fund balance or reserve for contingencies depending on need and availability.

Finally, ACFR recognizes that the funding policy has not been reviewed and updated for seven years-a long time to go without evaluating whether the current policy meets the needs of volunteer agencies. Moving forward, the volunteer funding policy will be reviewed every three years, and the results of that review will be reported to the Board of Supervisors.

BUDGET IMPACT: This request will have no impact on the FY 18 operating budget. Additionally, this request does not obligate the Board of Supervisors to appropriate funds. Instead, this will allow the Board of Supervisors to consider funding for these categories during the upcoming two-year fiscal planning process.

Based on current rates, we project that the recommended policy changes will affect the FY 19 budget as follows:

Category	Estimated Budget Impact
Janitorial Services	\$77,580
Grounds Maintenance	\$56,750
Meals (Holiday Bonus)	\$5,000
Uniforms	\$0
Recruitment	\$5,000
Total	\$144,330

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Board of Supervisors adopt the attached volunteer funding policy as County policy.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A - ACFR Volunteer Funding Policy
- B - System Fleet Plan
- C - FEMS Board Memo
- D - Most recent Audits from Volunteer Stations
- E - Volunteer Funding History