

Citizen Input Meetings Summary

Emergency Services staff and Commissioner Page Lemel held eight fire and rescue funding informational meetings throughout the county. This included one meeting in each fire response district.

The meetings began with staff and Commissioner Lemel sharing a PowerPoint presentation outlining past, current and alternative funding methods for fire and rescue services available to the Board of Commissioners. This included historical fire department budgets and fire tax rates. The presentation also included the option of establishing a countywide rate and other alternative methods for funding fire and rescue services. Staff emphasized that the Board of Commissioners were not currently considering changes to the operations of fire and/or rescue departments. This includes continuing to contract with the existing fire departments for these services.

The meetings, for the most part, were amicable. However, there were some discussions and comments that demonstrated a passion for support of the fire departments. In some cases, comments were based on false assertions or understanding of the current and/or proposed process. In those cases, staff made every attempt to share accurate information in a non-confrontational manner. Some comments demonstrated a lack of trust in government.

It became apparent during each meeting, at each location, that in large part the citizens support and are proud of their respective fire department. While there were a small number of citizens that expressed concerns about the services provided by their department, either during or following the meeting, in large part most supported and expressed support for the services provided by their respective departments. It is evident that the citizens do not want a decision that harms their department operationally.

With respect to funding methods, staff did receive comments from citizens in attendance opposing the countywide tax option. Some of those in attendance at the meetings favored no change. However, when evaluating all eight meetings, staff agrees that, in most cases, citizens understood the concern with disparity in fire tax rates, lack of funding in some districts, and concern that the current funding method presents challenges to long term sustainability. Citizens, at multiple meetings, expressed support for the Board of Commissioners implementing alternative funding methods. Some expressed that the rates in their districts were too high and they needed help supporting fire and rescue services.

In the eight meetings, comments favoring alternative methods of funding were more prevalent at Turkey Creek Church, Cedar Mountain Community Center, Williamson Creek Community Center, Dunn's Rock Community Center, Balsam Grove Community Center and Rosman Town hall.

At the Little River Community Center and Quebec Community Center the comments received were more opposed to a countywide fire tax rate. It is important to point out that the Little River Community meeting representation and comments were largely dominated

by members of the fire department and or family members of the fire department. It is also important to point out that current or prior fire department members represented a large part of those in attendance at the Quebec Community Center. Several of the most negative comments received were made by prior or current fire department members. This is not intended to diminish the comments of these citizens but provides context when evaluating input. Staff also received several comments at the Quebec Community Center related to concerns with other services in that area of the county. This included schools, solid waste, EMS, water and sewer etc. Comments concerning an inequitable percentage of taxes in the Lake Toxaway area collected as compared countywide.

In general, staff received comments from citizens both in support of alternative fire and rescue funding methods and citizens opposed to changes in the funding method. Staff present at all eight meetings agree that, in most part, citizens in the eight meetings supported some type of change to funding fire and rescue services but did not support anything that would hurt their fire department or its ability to provide fire and rescue services.

In addition to comments received during the meetings, staff made themselves available prior to and following each meeting to answer questions and listen to citizens who may not have been comfortable speaking in the public meeting setting. The assessment in this summary includes those comments and questions as well as questions or comments received via the established email or phone line for citizen comments.

3 comments received via designated phone line for input
7 comments received via designate email for input

Location Attendance Records (records of citizens that signed in)

Location	Attendance	
Little River Community Center	30	
Turkey Creek Church	15	
Cedar Mountain Community Center	8	
Dunn's Rock Community Center	12	
Williamson Creek Community Center	29	
Rosman Town Hall	12	
Balsam Grove Community Center	28	
Quebec Community Center	66	(staff counted of 100 during the meeting)