

**TOWN OF WEDDINGTON
SPECIAL PUBLIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2010 – 7:00 P.M.
MINUTES**

The Public Safety Advisory Committee of the Town of Weddington, North Carolina, met in a Special Session in the Town Hall Council Chambers, 1924 Weddington Road, Weddington, NC 28104 on October 26, 2010 at 7:00 p.m., with Chairman Walker Davidson presiding.

Present: Chairman Walker Davidson, Vice-Chairman Jerry McKee, Werner Thomisser, Michael Carver, Lorri Elliott, John Houston, Town Attorney Anthony Fox and Town Administrator/Clerk Amy S. McCollum

Absent: Mary Ann DeSimone

Visitors: Ken Evans, Jack Parks, Steve Cloutier, Dennis Green, Jim Weiland, Wayne Tarkenton and Daniel Tarkenton

Item No. 1. Open the Meeting. Mr. Jerry McKee called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. Everyone on the committee introduced themselves.

Item No. 2. Determination of Quorum. There was a quorum.

Item No. 3. Administering Oaths of Office. The Oaths of Office were administered prior to the opening of the meeting.

Item No. 4. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Mr. Werner Thomisser nominated Mr. Walker Davidson to serve as Chairman. Mr. John Houston moved to close the nominations. All were in favor, with votes recorded as follows:

AYES: Houston, Elliott, Carver, McKee, Thomisser and Davidson

NAYS: None

Mr. Michael Carver moved to elect Mr. Walker Davidson as Chairman of the Public Safety Advisory Committee. All were in favor, with votes recorded as follows:

AYES: Houston, Elliott, Carver, McKee, Thomisser and Davidson

NAYS: None

Mr. Thomisser nominated Mr. Jerry McKee to serve as Vice-Chairman of the Committee. Mr. Carver moved to close the nominations. All were in favor, with votes recorded as follows:

AYES: Houston, Elliott, Carver, McKee, Thomisser and Chairman Davidson

NAYS: None

Mr. Thomisser moved to elect Mr. McKee as Vice-Chairman of the Committee. All were in favor, with votes recorded as follows:

AYES: Houston, Elliott, Carver, McKee, Thomisser and Chairman Davidson

NAYS: None

Item No. 5. Development of Mission Statement. Chairman Davidson shared the following Mission Statement that he drafted with the Committee for their consideration:

The Public Safety Advisory Committee serves to consider public safety issues concerning Weddington citizens. These issues include but are not limited to fire protection, law enforcement, EMS and transportation. The committee may make recommendations to the Town Council. The committee will also act to improve communications regarding public safety issues.

Mr. Thomisser moved to adopt the Mission Statement. All were in favor, with votes recorded as follows:

AYES: Houston, Elliott, Carver, Thomisser, Vice-Chairman McKee and Chairman Davidson
NAYS: None

Item No. 6. Development of Rules of Procedure. The Committee took the Downtown Development Committee Rules of Procedure and amended it to the needs of the Public Safety Advisory Committee.

The committee recommended staggered four-year terms and the following terms for committee members:

Walker Davidson	2013
Lorri Elliott	2013
Michael Carver	2014
John Houston	2014
Mary Ann DeSimone	2014
Werner Thomisser	2013 (Same as term on Town Council)
Jerry McKee	2011 (Same as term on Town Council)

Vice-Chairman McKee moved to approve the Rules of Procedure contingent upon editing by the Town Attorney as recommended during the discussion. All were in favor, with votes recorded as follows:

AYES: Houston, Elliott, Carver, Thomisser, Vice-Chairman McKee and Chairman Davidson
NAYS: None

Item No. 7. Public Comment. Chairman Davidson advised that the committee had received a letter from Ms. Heather Perryman and she had requested that the letter be read aloud during the meeting. The committee agreed to allow the letter to be made part of the record. The letter is as follows:

Re: Public Safety Committee:

What is the purpose of establishing this committee? Why do we need a Public Safety Committee if we already have contracts with several agencies that provide law enforcement and fire and rescue services inside the Town limits? Departments responsible for Public Safety to the Town of Weddington are listed on the Town of Weddington Public Safety Information home page, with links to each department. Emergency Medical Services provided by Union County EMS, Union County Sheriff's Department for police matters, Wesley Chapel Volunteer Fire Department, Providence Volunteer Fire Department, Stallings Volunteer Fire Department. Also, I saw no reference to other departments that assist in mutual aid when needed. What are the requirements to be members of this committee? Do they all have a background in emergency services (Medical, Fire, Police)? Who are the nine candidates and do the citizens have a vote on these candidates? Do all candidates reside in Weddington? What are the goals and objectives of the Public Safety Committee? How is this being funded? What expenditures are being anticipated for this Committee?

Re: Power Point Presentation, “Town of Weddington Alternate Fire coverage Proposal”, by Lorri Elliot:

I am a member of the Board of Directors for Providence VFD. The slide presentation I am referencing is the same one presented on September 13, 2010 by Lorri Elliot entitled, “Town of Weddington Alternate Fire Coverage Proposal”. As a member of the Providence VFD Board of Directors I cannot comment on Slides 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10, and 17. However, as a citizen and taxpayer of Weddington I am commenting on slides 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16.

Slide 5: Volunteers should not be paid. Volunteers and members should serve a certain number of hours to the fire department which is funding the gear, training, certifications, workers comp. insurance, background checks, drug screening, etc... The education and certifications volunteers and members receive they can take with them, which will leave the fire department and taxpayers funding new member qualification training.

Slide 11:

Who drew the “newly proposed” district lines? How will they be drawn? How much money will this cost? Who pays for this? If the insurance district adjourns another insurance district, no changes can be made at this location without agreement of the adjoining department(s). Is Wesley Chapel going to give up part of its district? Or are there any other departments that are in this “new” district outline? I do not see in this presentation what would need to be listed to even have a district drawn. It is more involved than you think.

Slide 12:

Why should a Chief be paid as a part-time employee? Revenue estimates? How would the volunteer numbers increase? Why would they increase? On what data are you basing your information?

Slide 13, 14 and 15:

How about operating costs? Fuel, utilities, communication equipment, fire prevention education to the public, staffing, administration, occupational safety and health programs, liability insurance, death benefits, disability insurance, injuries (workers comp.), retirement benefits, replacement of apparatus, initial costs, recurring costs. Tanker cost \$350,000.00, Pumper engine cost \$400,000.00, Rescue engine cost \$425,000.00, Aerial (if needed) cost \$750,000.00, Heavy rescue cost \$600,000.00, Brush Truck cost \$140,000.00, two small vehicles cost \$150,000.00. All are estimated. (Current Fire Study estimates). Where is the outline on what it will take to establish a “Weddington Fire Department”? What is the population for the increased “new” district? How many trucks and types would be needed to cover “new” district? Where are the water supplies? Location of fire hydrants? Lakes and ponds? What average for EMS calls in the “new” district? EMS (Emergency Medical Services) transportation stationed close by for quicker response times of Advance Life Support Personnel? This should be an issue since majority of the calls in Weddington are EMS calls. How much commercial property? Any Hazardous Material Storage? Many departments have specialized training for different incidents such as: Haz-Mat Teams (Hazardous Materials), Confined Space Rescue, Elevator or light entrapment rescues, trench rescue, swift water rescue, structural collapse, water rescue, vehicle extrication, silos and other farm equipment specialty and many more not mentioned here. Total Expenses are deceiving: Where are the numbers for apparatus, maintenance, repair, replacements of trucks and turnout gear, training, fans, saws, ladders, pike poles, etc... Training cost per person? Cost for each level FFI (Fire Fighter Level I, II and III), FFII, FFIII, etc...? EMT-B (Emergency Medical Technician-Basic)? EMT-P (Emergency Medical Technician-Paramedic)? NREMT-Basic? (NR refers to National Registry) NREMT-Paramedic? Etc...

Slide 16:

Why would Weddington Town Council have little input? How does the level of training for Fire Fighters decrease? There are qualifications of departments regarding the type of staff a department must have to operate. How do response times increase?

Overall, I found this presentation to be lacking important content and I wanted to share my views of this presentation, because as citizens and taxpayers we need to see the whole picture. There are a lot of unanswered questions in regards to the Public Safety Committee and with the power point presentation, "Town of Weddington Alternate Fire Coverage Proposal."

I would like to thank the members of the Weddington Town Council for their time and consideration of my concerns.

Respectfully,
Heather Perryman
Weddington, NC

Chairman Davidson moved to allow further public comment at this time.

Vice-Chairman McKee – I do not mind public comment but I do not feel like the committee has done anything yet to warrant public comment.

Mr. Thomisser made a substitute motion to not accept public comment at this time.

Mr. Carver – I do not know why anything would need to be addressed tonight.

Chairman Davidson – I would like to have public comment at the end so that we can have some initial feedback from our first meeting.

The vote on Mr. Thomisser's motion is as follows:

AYES:	Houston, Elliott, Thomisser and Vice-Chairman McKee
NAYS:	Carver and Chairman Davidson

Item No. 8. PowerPoint Presentation by Ms. Lorri Elliott. Mr. Thomisser advised that the presentation that Ms. Elliott will provide is another look at what is available for the committee to research.

Ms. Elliott - I came up with this idea and presented it to the Town Council. This was my personal opinion and I was not representing the Providence VFD Board of Directors and they certainly do not support the presentation.

The Committee received the following PowerPoint Presentation:

**Town of Weddington Alternate
Fire Coverage Proposal**

Historical Prospective

- Providence Fire Department was established in 1954 to cover the rural areas of both Mecklenburg and Union Counties
- The Fire Service was provided by all Volunteers who responded from home or work whenever they were available

Present Day

Providence Volunteer Fire Department

- Handles 25% the service area of the Town of Weddington and a small portion of Mecklenburg County (nine streets). That should change in 2012.
- Under utilized because of present service boundaries
- Operates under the Fire Fee for the area of coverage
- Able to have 24 hour coverage secondary to subsidizing from the Town of Weddington
- Combination Paid staffing and Volunteer Department
- Training Combination/Volunteer Model

She discussed Model of the Training Volunteer/Combination Department (Providence VFD Employment Structure Model)

80% paid staff and 20% volunteer.

Providence Volunteer Fire Department Financials Today

Mecklenburg County	\$87,500
Union County	\$21,600
Weddington	\$216,300
Collected Fees Total:	\$325,400

Fire Fees:	\$98,924
Donations:	\$5,500
MEDIC:	\$12,000
Total Income:	\$456,824

Total Income:	\$456,824
Total Expenses:	\$517,367
Difference:	-\$60,543

PVFD Financials 2011

- Fire Fee is now \$82.75 per household
- This will bring the new total to: \$98,924.00 with the present district boundaries.

PVFD=WVFD

WHY Maintain your own Fire Department:

- Control of your own destiny
 - Have the Volunteer/Combination Model continue.
 - Have State Certified Firefighter Classes to recruit more Volunteers.
 - State your expectations of response times
 - Protect your community.
 - Control Cost

Weddington Volunteer Fire Department 2011

- Hire a Part-Time Chief who will maintain the present Volunteer/Combination Model
- Extend the Fire District Lines
 - Increase revenues

- Increase Calls
- Increase Volunteers
- Decrease or eliminate subsidy from Weddington

Weddington Volunteer Fire Dept 2011

- Increase District: from 25% to 75-80% of Weddington
(A map was included in the packet of this area)

Weddington Volunteer FD

- Increased Revenue:

	PVFD	WVFD
Present Day Total Income:	\$456,824	
Projected Income:		\$528,842

Weddington VFD

WVFD	75 – 80% increase in Response Area
Fire Fee - \$82.75	\$287,242
Fire Tax - \$.02	\$296,850
Fire Tax - \$.04	\$593,700

Weddington VFD

	PVFD Present	WVFD Projected
Weddington Contribution	\$216,300	\$100,000
Fire Fee	\$98,924	\$287,242
Total Income:	\$456,824	\$528,842
Total Expenses:	\$517,367	\$517,367
Difference:	-\$60,543	\$11,475

Worst case scenarios:

- Wesley-Chapel takes over Providence
 - Everyone is now on Fire Tax
 - Weddington Town Council has little input
 - Response times increase
 - Level of training for Fire Fighters decreases
 - Cost per household remains the same
- Providence Volunteer Fire Department continues:
 - Increasing costs for personnel
 - Decreased training
 - Lack of control of product received

Chairman Davidson questioned why the expenses did not go up when the coverage is being changed from 25% of the Town to 80% of the Town.

Ms. Elliott advised that the expenses were only an estimate and advised that due to the recent loss of volunteers the expenses have increased approximately \$3,000 a month.

Chairman Davidson - If you move the lines you are cutting into Wesley Chapel's District. Did the fire study talk about moving all the lines? Did it redraw lines?

Mr. Thomisser - The fire study recommended the merging of the Wesley Chapel VFD and Providence VFD. The district map that Ms. Elliott showed was based on two factors - mileage and response time.

Attorney Fox discussed the liabilities to the Town in operating a municipal fire department.

Vice-Chairman McKee - We are in the process of researching and not advocating anything at this time. This is just for discussion. We are only listening to this proposal on what if Weddington got its own fire department. How would Weddington proceed to do that?

Attorney Fox - North Carolina law allows cities and towns to provide fire service to its residents. The question is how does that fire service look? I cannot answer the question because it can be a variety of things in terms of how this fire service can be provided by the town with the extreme of the town picking up all costs to maybe a contract with an existing provider. It seems to me that to complicate this situation you have both a fire fee and fire tax by two different entities.

Mr. Thomisser - It is my understanding that the Providence VFD is run by a Board of Directors and they make all of the decisions. If they choose not to have the town take over the fire service, then where are we?

Attorney Fox - If they are not willing to explore an alternative, there is nothing that prevents the Town from operating its own fire service if it wanted to. The question is how does it achieve that goal? Does it do it all or does it set up or find an organization that it can contract with for the provision of fire services. There are a host of options.

Chairman Davidson - Have you seen other cases like this where annexation has caused this problem with reducing the number of homes in where a fire station lost its customer base?

Attorney Fox discussed the annexation law and that if a city expands to an area whereby it impacts a volunteer fire department then you have to negotiate with that fire department to pay for the service territory that it loses.

Mr. Thomisser moved to allow Matthews Deputy Chief Dennis Greene and the current Vice-Chairman of the Providence VFD Steve Cloutier to speak to the committee.

Chairman Davidson requested that Mr. Thomisser amend his motion to allow public comment at the end of the meeting. Mr. Thomisser accepted the amendment.

All were in favor, with the votes recorded as follows:

AYES:	Houston, Elliott, Carver, Thomisser, Vice-Chairman McKee and Chairman Davidson
NAYS:	None

Deputy Chief Green - I have worked in Fire and EMS for 34 years.

Mr. Thomisser - It has been my understanding that in the past several years Matthews has had a similar situation as what we are discussing. Could you elaborate on that?

Deputy Chief Green - We transitioned from a Volunteer Board – 501 (c) Corporation into a town department. A little bit different than this because that volunteer department came to the town asking for the town to take it over. The volunteer department did not want to get into hiring personnel and they realized that they could not provide the volunteers in the day time. The town assumed the costs of the personnel initially and over a period of time of five years we actually transitioned the department into a town department. We still have approximately 70 volunteers and a career staff of nine.

Mr. Thomisser - Did you notice any difference?

Deputy Chief Green - We provide initiatives for the volunteers. They could earn up to \$500 a month. The volunteers man the station from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Monday through Friday and all day Saturday and Sunday. The other staff mans the station Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. We currently operate out of two stations. There was some initial concern when the town took over from the volunteers that they would be phased out. They found out that was not true. The town was committed to the volunteers and you cannot operate without volunteers.

Mr. Thomisser - Did the cost immediately increase?

Deputy Chief Green - There is no fire tax or fire fee in Mecklenburg County. We are a municipal department. We depend on mutual aid to operate. The cost is significant. Our budget is \$1.2 million with approximately \$500,000 for personnel. We provide \$100,000 in incentives to the volunteers. The figures that I gave you do not represent any capital items such as the truck that we bought which is financed through the Town's CIP account. A fire department is going to be your most expensive department to operate, even more expensive than any police department. The population of Matthews is approximately 29,000. We are the second busiest responder in Mecklenburg County. We average about 1900 to 2000 calls a year. Before it became a municipal fire department, the volunteer department was mainly funded by the Town of Matthews. There was fundraising done that raised approximately \$90,000 a year. The town was already providing \$200,000 of debt service on the building and on two of the trucks. I report to the Town Manager. I think it was a very smooth process for us. It was a win-win for both organizations. Our training levels have really gone up. When we took over the volunteer fire department they were down to 20 volunteers and now we have over 70 volunteers at this point. We send people to school. The biggest challenge that we faced was people problems. It is getting the right mix of career staff with the volunteers. We had to build up the volunteer base and find the right volunteers. Sometimes the career staff thinks they are better than the volunteers. That does not work in a combination department. The career staff has to share a large percentage of the grunt work. You have to buy new gear for people. That is expensive. As you take more people on, it gets more expensive. Our department is now 4.5% of the tax rate in Matthews. If we were a fully paid fire department, we would be 17 cents on the tax rate for Matthews.

Attorney Fox - How did you transition from a volunteer fire department into a municipal department with the existing debt that the volunteer department had at the time. Did the town assume the debt obligations?

Deputy Chief Green - They pretty much had the debt obligations over the last 10 years. The debt service had already been assumed by the Town because the fire department did not have the revenue to buy new equipment. The last couple of engines bought were bought by the Town and the town held the note on it. There was a transfer of the titles to the Town.

Attorney Fox - How do you deal with the retirement and benefit schedule of the volunteer fire department when they came over to the town?

Deputy Chief Green - The retirement is through the Fire and Rescue Pension fund. All they did was change the name at the state level. For volunteers it was \$10.00 a month. The career people are under the State and Local Government Retirement System.

Providence VFD Vice-Chair Steve Cloutier – I am a former Town Council member and I started in the fire service in 1967. I have been a paid firefighter and EMT for 18 years in Mecklenburg County with the Carmel Fire Department. I have served eight years as the Chief of the Department and for the past few years I have been on the Board of Directors for Providence VFD. I am a taxpayer, homeowner and resident of Weddington and have been for the past 16 years.

Mr. Thomisser - The total amount given to Providence VFD is \$216,000. One of the things that I have to deal with every day is that 80% of Weddington is served by Wesley Chapel and they are on a fire tax. We are subsidizing Providence VFD to the tune of \$216,000. I hear that people do not want to be double taxed but the way I answer that is when your house is on fire do you really care where a fire truck comes from? After listening to Ms. Elliott's presentation, I am concerned about the deficit. Does Providence VFD have any plans going forward or is the deficit going to get bigger and bigger?

Mr. Cloutier – The deficit is probably going to get bigger and bigger. We pay for the day time staff of three professional firefighters. We would like to put in a paid person at night that is fully qualified from a career standpoint. We had two candidates for chief this year and the board elected to make a change. The membership appreciates the funding from the Town. The new NFP standards require us to send two firefighters in the building and we have to have two firefighters on the ground for backup. We are short one person there. There was a needs study done recently. I am to meet with them on Friday and we will report back to the Town Council on that issue. We are confined to this very small geographical area. Through the annexations the territory has gotten smaller and smaller. We are in the hole every year. Matthews just purchased a ladder truck at the tune of \$950,000 and once they put all the equipment on there it will be a \$1,000,000 truck. As we go forward and as you think of a Weddington Fire Department, if you do not own the land you have to purchase the land, you have to build the building, stock to put in there and then you still have to pay for salaries.

Chairman Davidson - If things do not change with the number of households and your district does not get expanded, what is your solution?

Mr. Cloutier – Drain the bank account until there is no more. That is not solution. Is it a merger with Wesley Chapel? I think our board is receptive to meeting with their board. Do we come back to the Town and say it is time to give it back to you? We are a corporation. Every deed is on our name. We just cannot give it to the town unless the board makes that decision.

Chairman Davidson - What is the likelihood of getting the lines moved?

Mr. Cloutier - I think it is doable. First of all the Town has to make a decision and help start the process and then go to Union County and the State. Nobody wants to give up their territory - it is a revenue generator. If you took from Wesley Chapel, there's would shrink. Wesley Chapel would have to eat that and then they would have to come to the Town asking for money.

Chairman Davidson - Does the Providence VFD have a preference of what they would want happen?

Mr. Cloutier - We have not talked about it as a group. We want to protect the community and do what is best. There are different ideas on how to do that.

Chairman Davidson - If something happened and the Town decided not to give money what would happen?

Mr. Cloutier - We would still exist just timing would increase because people would not be at the station. Very few people that work for the department live in the town limits.

Mr. Jack Parks – I have lived in Weddington for 22 years. I was elected to the Board of Directors for Providence VFD. When I came on, it was time to elect a new chief. We went through that process. I want to commend the board. They did what they believe was truly the right thing to do based on qualifications. There was some in the department that disagreed with that and I would hope as a citizen of Weddington that if you disagree with something you still accept it and you move on and you work with who is in a position and try to make their job as easy as you possibly can. I must tell you that did not happen. There have been a lot of adversarial things that have taken place. Unnecessary things taking place with other government agencies drawn in to investigate Providence VFD. I am there to help promote that department and promote public safety for that department. There are a couple of board members that have chosen a path just totally what they want to do without the rest of the board being involved in it. Personally I think that is wrong. The board is there to support this community and we want to do the best thing. But when we have a couple of board members that want to go out and blaze their own trail then I think that is problem. I respect Ms. Elliott but she is not a citizen of Weddington. She is not a taxpayer of Weddington. She is on the Board of Directors at Providence VFD but she is acting without the consent or approval of the board. Not that the board would not support her in what needs to be done but the board was not given the benefit of being involved.

Item No. 9. Adjournment. Mr. Houston moved to adjourn the October 26, 2010 Public Safety Advisory Committee Meeting. All were in favor, with votes recorded as follows:

AYES: Houston, Elliott, Carver, Thomisser, Vice-Chairman McKee and Chairman Davidson
NAYS: None

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Walker Davidson, Chairman

Attest:

Amy S. McCollum, Town Clerk