

The Board of: Riceville Volunteer Fire Department
Met at: 6:30PM
On: Monday, March 16, 2026
For: Regular Board Meeting
Moderator: Dan Little (Chairperson)
Members Present: Lee Barrett, Kent Creasman, Merel Johnson,
Butch Laughter, Carla McLendon, Mark Siler
and Steve Wickham
Not Present: Lisa McCallister (III)
Guest(s):

1. **Call the Meeting to Order:** Dan Little called the meeting to order at 6:43PM and determined a quorum was present.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer:** Dan Little opened the meeting in prayer and then asked everyone to stand if able and join him in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

3. **Approval of Minutes:** Draft minutes for the February 16 Regular and Executive Session meetings were emailed to the Board on March 10. Lee Barrett made a motion to accept the meeting minutes as written. Kent Creasman seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

4. **Treasurer's Report:**

A. February Financials - Financial reports for the month ending February 2026 were emailed to the Board on March 13. Buncombe County paid us twice for our December sales tax, so the overage received in January (\$55,304.90) was deducted from our February payment, leaving a balance of \$450.42. We are eight months into the budget year and remain on track financially. Kent Creasman made a motion to accept the February financials. Lee Barrett seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

B. Draft Budget - Board Members were given a copy of the proposed budget for 2026-2027, and Katie Payne gave an overview of the document, outlining recommended changes (Income and Expense Notes). The base budget allocation projected by the County (\$2,759,382) was used to formulate the budget. However, there is no guarantee this is the amount the Department will receive. The proposed budget includes a column for needs with the new County standards (two additional firefighters) and a column for needs without the standards (one additional firefighter). Katie also gave an overview of the Department's forecast expenses and income for the remainder of this fiscal year.

Katie Payne will follow up on questions from Board Members about the possible need to increase the budget for Line Items 52502 (Travel & Meals), 5503 (Radio Equipment & Maintenance) and 5505 (PPE).

The proposed budget is due to the County prior to the next Regular Meeting of the Board (April 20), necessitating a Special Meeting of the Board for the purpose of

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approving the budget. It was agreed this meeting would take place on Monday, April 6, at 6:30PM. Lee Barrett, Lisa McCallister and Carla McLendon will meet with Katie Payne on March 30 at 6:30PM to review the proposed budget prior to Board vote.

5. Fire Chief's Report: The Fire Chief's and Training Reports were emailed to the Board on March 15. Division Chief McEntire gave an overview of the Training Report, which included 491.5 total training hours for January 1 through March 10, 2026. Flashover training was rescheduled until April 13 and 14. Two members are attending McDowell Fire and Rescue College March 19-22. Work continues on in-service training with forestry equipment (i.e., portable pump, new hose). The Driver/Operator EVD Program starts in April; Pump Program starts in early May (one member already pre-registered); and Aerials Program starts the end of May. A burn date for the Training House has not yet been determined. Technical Rescue introduction starts in March; Fire/Rescue Instructor classes are scheduled at Upper Hominy, with a few members rotating through this program; and ICS 300 & 400 classes are set monthly at the Training Center.

Chief Kelly provided an overview of his report, noting Total Calls were up slightly (142 in February; 120 in January). Overlapping Calls were down at 24/17%. There were 76 calls in-district; 66 calls out-of-district. There was one structure fire that was a total loss (\$67,000). The five part-time applications received over the past month resulted in two hires. The U.S. Forest Service relays restoration of Shope Creek trails to pre-Helene conditions is expected to be a three-year project.

6. Old Business:

A. Administrative Policies Review Committee – Tabled until next month.

B. Building Repairs Update – The Board discussed the three quotes received for installation of a sewage pump system, which is recommended to resolve the septic backup issue being experienced occasionally. All About Plumbing & Septic provided two quotes (one for installation of the pump and a second for the associated electrical work), for a total of \$18,200. The quote from Haynes Plumbing (\$21,264.60) does not include electrical work, but Dan Little relayed they indicated a dedicated circuit would be needed. The quote from T.P. Howard's Plumbing (\$11,309.90) does not include electrical work either, but Dan relayed they said they could use an existing outlet. After much discussion, Lee Barrett made a motion to proceed with T.P. Howard's Plumbing. Merel Johnson seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Dan Little relayed it was learned the commode in the foyer bathroom does not have evidence of a flange. The commode was removed and that bathroom placed out of service.

C. Department Vehicles – In conducting voltage tests on TAC 11, Dan Little found the body is not grounded. A test from battery terminal to terminal results in 12.67 volts; a test from body to battery results in 7.6 volts. He will conduct more testing, looking for grounds, as soon as his schedule will allow.

D. UTV/ATV (Draft Policy) – Tabled until next month.

E. Conflict of Interest Statement Policy – Tabled until next month.

7. New Business:

A. Donated Training Truck - Lee Barrett relayed he has been asked by several individuals about the truck sitting in the parking lot. (This is a vehicle that was donated to the Department for training purposes.) Division Chief McEntire said he will have it relocated elsewhere on the property.

B. Community Center Use - Lee Barrett relayed he has been approached by Gary Parris, Candidate for Sheriff, about holding a “meet and greet the public” in the Community Center. The Board will revisit this request after the issues with the foyer bathroom have been resolved. As a reminder, the pavilion is available for outside events.

C. Buncombe County Flat Tax Proposal – Board Members were given a copy of a report prepared by the office of Kevin Tipton, Buncombe County Fire Marshal. The subject of this report is “Unified Service Tax District for Fire Protection under N.C. General Statute 153A-304.” Mr. Tipton will be presenting this report to the Board of Commissioners tomorrow (March 17). The report concludes, “The proposed consolidation meets all statutory requirements under NCGS §153A-304.” It further notes consolidation will eliminate inequities in service levels and tax rates; improve firefighters and community safety; and strengthen financial and operational sustainability.

8. Announcements: Dan Little announced the next Regular Meeting of the Board will be held on Monday, April 20, 2026 at 6:30PM.

There will be a Craft Fair and Chili Lunch fundraiser benefiting Boy Scouts Troop 17 and the Department’s Auxiliary on Saturday, April 18, from 8AM to 2PM. This event will take place outside at the Fire Department.

9. Public Comment: There was no public comment.

10. Executive Session: Merel Johnson made a motion to move to Executive Session for multiple matters at 7:53PM. Kent Creasman seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. The Board returned from Executive Session at 9:21PM.

11. Executive Session Discussion: Merel Johnson made a motion to approve the issue discussed and agreed upon by the Board during Executive Session. Mark Siler seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

12. Adjournment: Lee Barrett made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:22PM. Merel Johnson seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Note: Chairman Dan Little only votes in the event of a tie.