

The Board of: Riceville Volunteer Fire Department
Met at: 6:30PM
On: Monday, December 15, 2025
For: Regular Board Meeting
Moderator: Dan Little (Chairperson)
Members Present: Lee Barrett, Kent Creasman, Merel Johnson,
Butch Laughter, Lisa McCallister, Carla McLendon,
Mark Siler and Steve Wickham
Not Present:
Guest(s):

1. Call the Meeting to Order: Dan Little called the meeting to order at 6:31PM and determined a quorum was present.

2. Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer: Mark Siler opened the meeting in prayer, and Dan Little 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 November 17 Regular and Executive Session meetings were emailed to the Board on November 19. Draft minutes for the November 24 and December 1 Emergency Board meetings were emailed to the Board on December 15. Steve Wickham made a motion to accept all the meeting minutes as written. Butch Laughter seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

4. Treasurer's Report: Financial reports for the month ending November 2025 were emailed to the Board on December 12. Katie Payne relayed income and expenses reflect activity associated with two grants (Line Item 5502-25 OSFM Wildland grant received in September and Line Item 55064 Firehouse Subs grant received on November 12). We are 42% through the budget year and remain on track financially.

Katie also relayed we have not yet received a final draft copy of the audit which was voted on last month and a copy of which is due to the County by the last business day of December. She has been in contact with the Auditors about the need to receive this document. Kent Creasman made a motion to accept the November financials. Merel Johnson seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

5. Fire Chief's Report: The Chief's and Training Reports were emailed to the Board on December 10. Division Chief McEntire gave an overview of the Training Report, which included 5,196.5 total training hours for January 1 through December 9; and EMS, Fire/Rescue and Annual Equipment Testing training opportunities and status for Members. The Training House Burn scheduled for December 6 was postponed. The Board will be informed once the new date is determined.

Chief Kelly provided the FLSE report, relaying the recent "Santa in Riceville" event was a success. At a count of 75, far more children were reached than last year. The Board discussed outreach events that could possibly take place next year and will revisit this topic in July/August of next year.

Chief Kelly provided an overview of his report, noting Total Calls were up from the previous month (112 in November; 97 in October), as were Over-Lapping Incidents (26/23% in November; 16/17% in October). The annual review of rosters resulted in three volunteers being removed; two for inactivity, a third who moved out of state. In response to a question, Chief Kelly relayed Elora Allen is hoping to return to duty within the next 6 to 8 weeks; Veronica Hanks relays she is doing well.

6. Old Business:

A. Administrative Policies Review Committee – Nothing to report; tabled until next month.

B. 1110 Review Committee – Ambulance 1110 continues to work well following repair of the lift system. The Review Committee will remain in place for the time being; however, there is no need to continue to list this topic as an agenda item.

C. Building Repairs Update – Doors are still needed between the foyer and the Community Center. Chief Kelly relayed FEMA Representative Mark Dominguez recommended a specialty door for the entrance to the gear room as well as the administrative area, allocating \$126,000 for this project. The recommended doors are to help waterproof the areas. Lisa McCallister has the name of a company that works in specialized doors and will forward that information to Chief Kelly.

D. Acoustics in Community Center – Lisa McCallister has measurements and recommendations from when this issue was previously researched. Both she and Merel Johnson have called a few companies/organizations but have not received a return call.

E. Department Vehicles – Tabled until next month.

F. UTV/ATV (Draft Policy) – Dan Little has discussed his concerns with the draft policy with Chief Kelly (i.e., helmets). Chief Kelly was asked to ensure all Board recommendations had been incorporated into the draft and then resend it to the Board for their review. While the final review conference has taken place with OSHA, Dan will follow up to see if/when a copy of the report will be public.

G. Buncombe County Flat Tax Proposal – The Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons of the local Fire Department Boards will meet with Chief Anthony Penland at the Swannanoa Fire Department on Thursday, December 18. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure all are being presented with the same information/message as it relates to the County's proposal for a flat tax rate. Dan Little and Kent Creasman will be attending for Riceville, and Dan has asked Katie Payne to attend as well. The Board discussed the matter at length, to include the need for local news involvement/reporting; the need for legal counsel (Katie was asked to follow up with Keith Bost, Management Solutions for Emergency Services); and the need to inquire of the NC Attorney General's Office as to the legality of this action. (Per Chief Kelly, Departments are not being given an option to participate. They are only being given the option to choose between two plans.)

H. Solar Backup – Mark Siler has printed some information, which he will leave with Chief Kelly for his review and further guidance.

I. Sewer Line Issue – Dan Little relayed the system seems to be working fine since Brian Johnson replaced the pipe from the clean out to the tank on November 19. The issue will continue to be monitored, but no further action is required at this time.

J. Conflict of Interest Statement Policy – Katie Payne was asked to contact Keith Bost, Management Solutions for Emergency Services, to see if an updated policy already exists. If one does not, Dan Little asked the policy be emailed to the Board again for their review and any recommended changes.

K. Asheville Roofing Property Request – Lisa McCallister spoke with Ray Whitson, owner of Asheville Roofing, regarding his request that consideration be given to selling him a portion of the Department's property behind his business. He explained he planned to add two levels on to the back of his existing building, with the lower being used for storage. He also wants space for parking of company vehicles other than in front of the building. While Mr. Whitson had a survey conducted prior to purchasing the current building, he did not record it with the County. Lisa provided the Board with a copy of the "Plat of Boundary Survey for Asheville Roofing, 2231 Riceville Road." The Board discussed the matter at length, to include leasing the property; other persons interested in the property (none at this time); and the usability of the property in question. Lisa will follow up with Mr. Whitson to see if he has spoken with the County and received approval for the expansions he is considering. She will also ask him to provide the Board with a specific list of his requests/plans.

7. New Business:

A. Critical Illness and Life Insurance Member Coverage – Dan Little, Chief Kelly and Katie Payne have been discussing the subject coverage. Katie was asked to present an overview to the Board. The current Vision coverage provided by the Department for Members is not really used, as it is not accepted by Optical Departments in the area and is cumbersome for Members to file their own claims. For the past two years, the Department's budget has included a line item for moving to a Critical Illness coverage policy, to include dropping the unused Vision plan.

The Code 3 Insurance is for Fire Departments only and is underwritten by Colonial Life. This plan includes coverage for Part-Time Employees, Volunteers and Board Members. Coverage with a face amount of \$20,000 would cost \$278.40 per year, per Employee or Member. Individuals can only be added/removed once per year, rather than throughout the year. Coverage is portable, so an Employee/Member can continue their coverage if they change jobs or retire.

The second policy presented is for Fulltime Employees only at the same face amount and cost per Member as listed above. Individuals can be added or removed as needed throughout the year. The insured can add family members at their own cost.

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Katie presented a life insurance policy for Fulltime Employees only with a face amount of \$25,000. It would cost the Department \$1,500 per year to pay for all Fulltime Employees. The insured can add family members at their own cost.

Katie explained that there is an existing life insurance policy for all Members (\$50,000 for Fulltime and \$10,000 for all others) through VFIS. She and Chief Kelly have spoken with Keith Bost, Management Solutions for Emergency Services, to see if Board Members could be added to this policy without their immunity being compromised. He responded that as long as the coverage was for all Members – not just Board Members – immunity would not be compromised. Katie and Chief Kelly requested to add Board Members to the VFIS policy as well as the Critical Illness insurance policy, at a cost of \$2,600 for the latter for nine individuals per year.

Katie was asked what impact this would have on any pending or future Department expenses. Both she and Chief Kelly reiterated the cost was already in the budget and had been for the last two years.

Katie was asked how the employees would feel about losing the Vision coverage. She responded that all employees are covered by Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and she could not find anyone who uses the Vision plan.

The Board discussed public perception of being included in the insurance coverage/ plans. Lee Barrett made a motion to proceed with the insurance plans as presented. Kent Creasman seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Katie clarified that the motion included the \$25,000 life insurance policy for Fulltime Employees. She also said an effective date of January 1, 2026, is the target. However, it will most likely be February 1, 2026.

B. Employee Recognition – Chief Kelly relayed Paul Gilliam recognized a patron was choking while at lunch last week and cleared the individual's airway using the Heimlich maneuver. Chief Kelly will present him with a Chief's Commendation at the Annual Awards Banquet next month.

C. Annual Banquet – The Department's Annual Awards Banquet is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, January 15, at the Twisted Laurel downtown Asheville. A message will be sent out when plans have been finalized.

D. Holiday Social – Chief Kelly announced an informal drop in will be held at the Department next Monday from 6:00PM to 8:00PM for Members, Board Members and their families.

E. Shope Creek Community Meeting – A U.S. Forest Service sponsored Shope Creek Community Meeting will be held at the Fire Department tomorrow night (December 16) from 6:00PM to 8:00PM.

F. NCDMV Moratorium – The NCDMV has issued a moratorium on driver license expirations effective July 1, 2025, through December 31, 2027. The moratorium applies

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to Class C licenses only. Expired licenses will only be good for driving privileges and may not be recognized by other states.

8. Announcements: Dan Little announced the next Regular Meeting of the Board will be held on Monday, January 19, 2026 at 6:30PM. He thanked everyone for all the time they dedicated to the Department this year, wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

9. Public Comment: There was no public comment.

10. Adjournment: Kent Creasman made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:11PM. Steve Wickham seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

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