The Board of:	Riceville Volunteer Fire Department
Met at:	6:30PM
On:	Monday, January 19, 2026
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. <u>Call the Meeting to Order:</u> Dan Little called the meeting to order at 6:34PM and determined a quorum was present.

2. <u>Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer:</u> 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. <u>Approval of Minutes:</u> Draft minutes for the December 15 Regular meeting were emailed to the Board on January 7. Lee Barrett made a motion to accept the meeting minutes as written. Butch Laughter seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

4. <u>Treasurer's Report:</u> Financial reports for the month ending December 2025 were emailed to the Board on January 18. We are 50% through the budget year and remain on track financially.

In response to a question from Lisa McCallister, Chief Kelly explained the expenditure process associated with the Wildland Grant, which is tied to mitigation issues. He provided a handout, which listed the grant items, their status (i.e., approved, ordered, shipped, delivered) and associated costs. Per Chief Kelly, the $100,000 grant has to be spent by March 1, 2026. Chief Kelly was asked to change "UTV 1" in the last entry on Page 2 of his handout to "UTV 2," as UTV 1 has been retired.

Dan Little asked why Line Items 53041 (Electric), 53042 (Water) and 53043 (Gas/Oil Heating) all reflect zero for the month of December. Katie Payne said Water is every other month. She will research the other two further, as we are on auto pay for these services and current with payment.

Kent Creasman made a motion to accept the December financials. Steve Wickham seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

5. <u>Fire Chief's Report:</u> The Chief's and Training Reports were emailed to the Board on January 14. Division Chief McEntire gave an overview of the Training Report, which included 6,856.95 total training hours for January 1 through December 31, 2025. This represents an increase of 1,570.80 hours from the calendar year 2024 total. The face-to-face EMS CE dates have been set for February; the Driver/Operator Program is tentatively set to start in April; burn date for the Training House has not yet been determined; a few members are participating in the Fire/Rescue Instructor night classes

at Upper Hominy; and weekly trainings for shifts have been assigned for January and sent to the Officers to complete.

Captain Redden provided an overview of the 2025 FLSE report, relaying there were nine events; 11 car seats installed; 45 smoke detectors installed (40 of which were installed on Smoke Alarm Saturday); and over 500 lives touched through FLSE events in the community.

Chief Kelly provided an overview of his report, noting Total Calls remain consistent (108 in December; 112 in November), as were Over-Lapping Incidents (21/19%in December; 26/23% in November). EMS and Fire response times remain well below established benchmarks. There are five applicants to be processed; three for paid staff and two for volunteers. One new Paramedic is finishing training, and a second is finishing her Paramedic class (AMT, boarded with Buncombe County and already picking up shifts).

Chief Kelly noted the Santa events went well. There were enough gift cards to provide each child in a family of seven with their own card. The family was also provided food (frozen hams), and a Member chose to purchase gifts for each of the children.

Chief Kelly will be meeting this Friday with representatives from the US and NC Divisions of Forestry, as well as some of the County Commissioners, to physically evaluate the work done on Shope Creek and in hopes of setting an opening date for the trails.

David McFee, District US Forest Ranger, will conduct a two-hour table-top exercise at the Department. Chief Kelly will invite some local partners to participate. The intent of the exercise is to utilize a Forest Service program to identify potential shortcomings, with plans to remediate any found within the next two months.

6. <u>Old Business:</u>

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

B. Building Repairs Update – Doors are still needed between the foyer and the Community Center. Lisa McCallister previously provided Chief Kelly with contact information for a company that works with specialized doors, and he will reach out to them. Per Dan Little, the septic system continues to work well and continues to be monitored.

Katie Payne relayed the fitness equipment was damaged during Hurricane Helene. Chief Kelly relayed there is a vendor in Charlotte who has quoted equipment (floor pads, free weights, kettle bells, rowing machine and stair climber) for approximately $4,300. The Department already has a treadmill. Chief Kelly has requested quotes from other vendors, with no reply from one and the Charlotte vendor offering a better price than others. Plans are for Chief Kelly and Captain Blount to pick up the equipment as they return from NEARS Training next week. This will save about $1,500 in shipping. Kent Creasman made a motion for up to $5,000 be spent on new exercise equipment. Steve Wickham seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

C. Acoustics in Community Center – Nothing to report; tabled until next month.

D. Department Vehicles – TAC 11 remains out of service. It appears something within the security system, which is the Police Package, is preventing the ignition from engaging. Neither Sunshine Chevrolet nor Cox Auto have been able to resolve the issue. Car 11, which has higher mileage, is currently being used in place of TAC 11. Dan Little will reach out to a contact familiar with the Police Package to see if there are any further tests that can be done to resolve the matter. A Committee is already working on specifications for a vehicle to replace Car 11, which may have to change to TAC 11, depending on whether or not this issue can be resolved. Dan will provide an update at next month's meeting.

E. UTV/ATV (Draft Policy) – Dan Little relayed we are still waiting on the final report from OSHA.

F. Buncombe County Flat Tax Proposal – Chief Kelly provided a handout of the Fire District Project Timeline as prepared by Buncombe County. The next meeting, to which the Chiefs and Board Chairs have been invited, is scheduled for January 29 at 6:00PM. Departments have been asked to submit their annual budgets to the County by March 31, which is in violation of the County Contract. The Project Timeline includes scheduling a Public Hearing and sending a Public Notice to all eligible property owners in March. The proposed tax rate will be submitted to the County Manager in April, which is when the Public Hearing and County Commissioners vote would also take place.

The Board discussed the matter at length again, to include the need for local news involvement/reporting; the need for legal counsel; the need to inform the community; and the impact on the Department (i.e., ability to house required number of staff; potential adverse effect on ISO rating). Katie Payne followed up with Keith Bost, Management Solutions for Emergency Services, who said the proposed action is legal. If the County Commissioners are in favor, only political pressure could potentially halt the action.

Dan Little has asked Katie Payne to attend the meeting on January 29 with Chief Kelly, Kent Creasman and himself. Katie will follow up to see if there is a way other Board members can attend or at least hear (i.e., teleconference) the meeting. Department Chiefs continue to meet with the County Representatives every other Wednesday at 10:00AM.

G. Solar Backup – Mark Siler clarified this proposal is specific to a five kilowatt battery system that would be used to power portable battery packs, as opposed to installation of solar panels. While not opposed to the idea, neither Chief Kelly nor Mark felt it worth pursuing at this time.

H. Conflict of Interest Statement Policy – This topic will be tabled until next month, as an updated policy was just received today from Keith Bost, Management Solutions for Emergency Services.

I. Asheville Roofing Property Request – Lisa McCallister spoke with Ray Whitson, owner of Asheville Roofing, and learned he is still interested in purchasing some of the Department's property but has not spoken with the County about the expansions he is considering. Lisa told Mr. Whitson the Department is looking at long-term improvement plans and does not yet know if that will involve any of the property in which he is interested. She suggested both parties "do their homework" and discuss the matter again at a later date.

7. New Business: There was no New Business to come before the Board.

8. Announcements: Dan Little announced the next Regular Meeting of the Board will be held on Monday, February 16, 2026 at 6:30PM.

9. Public Comment: There was no public comment.

10. Executive Session: Merel Johnson made a motion to move to Executive Session for legal and personnel matters at 8:05PM. Lee Barrett seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. The Board returned from Executive Session at 9:11PM.

11. Legal and Personnel Matters: Merel Johnson made a motion to accept the three proposals discussed during Executive Session. Steve Wickham seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

12. Adjournment: Lee Barrett made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:11PM. Lisa McCallister seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

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