

Currituck eyes Fire & EMS needs

By Cindy Beamon
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CURRITUCK — A study of Currituck's volunteer fire department and emergency medical services will get under way this spring to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and offer suggestions for the future.

The three- to four-month study will examine operations within the county's five fire departments and EMS services. A team of consultants from Pennsylvania-based VFIS will be looking at staffing, response times, equipment, county growth trends, the number of fire hydrants and more before developing a future plan for services.

The study could begin this month.

EMS Chief Rob Glover said the county will take the next week or two to finalize the contract. Once the agreement is signed, the team will have 14 days to get started.

The success of the \$22,000 study will largely depend on the cooperation of volunteer fire fighters and EMS personnel, Currituck Commissioners told the Fire-EMS Advisory Board Thursday at a joint meeting.

Commissioner Vance Aydlett, the county's liaison on the Fire-EMS board, said departments need not be afraid to speak openly about existing conditions. Firefighters may feel uncomfortable talking about their department's shortcomings, but all that information is important to the process, he said.

"This is not a gotcha. That is not what it's about," Aydlett told board members and an audience that included several fire chiefs.

Aydlett said accurate answers will help consultants come up with the most helpful recommendations.

Commissioners explained they had no pre-determined reason for seeking the study other than to find out how the county can improve services. Commissioners didn't instruct the consultants on what to look for, said Commissioners' chairman Paul O'Neal.

Neither does the study signal the commissioners' desire to switch over to a paid fire fighting service, said Aydlett.

"Currituck County can't afford a paid department right now. We don't have the money to do it and we don't want to do it," Aydlett said.

Commissioners said the study will offer fire departments expert advice on questions they are already struggling to answer. For example, the study will look at what equipment each department has and needs and offer a time line for new purchases and replacements.

“We are looking forward to getting direction from experts on where we need to go,” said Commissioner Paul Martin.

One sensitive area of the study may be staffing as the county continues to grow and demand more services. County officials have said attracting firefighters, especially for daytime shifts when many volunteers work full-time jobs, has become more difficult in recent years. Consultants are expected to examine how much personnel is needed at each station and if current staffing is meeting the community’s needs.

O’Neal said the study is just another way the county can support the work firefighters are already currently doing. O’Neal said County Manager Dan Scanlon will be scheduling regular meetings with fire chiefs to encourage open communications.

“The Board of Commissioners is very committed to the fire departments,” O’Neal said.