

**ORIGINAL**

ANDERSON COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION COMMISSION

COMMISSION MEETING 3/28/2024 – 6:00 pm

*Minutes subject to approval by the Fire Commission*

Present for the meeting were: Tommy Keaton, Charlie Dickerson, Gerald Hanks, Mark Cole, and Randy Wilson. Also present were Chief Jimmy Sutherland and Assistant Chief Brian Moon.

Chairman Keaton opened the meeting at 5:30 pm. He explained this is a special called meeting to discuss the SAFER grant and the possibility of applying. A survey has been sent out to the stations, and Chief Moon added that there's been approximately 23 responses.

Mr. Hanks offered the invocation.

Chairman Keaton asked Chief Moon to give a background on the grant.

Chief Moon advised that the Commission was looking into the SAFER grant when it came open. Last year's grant was in the fall and he thinks they are trying to get back on their normal schedule since COVID. This grant is a 2023 SAFER grant, and they found about it quickly. There are two routes: 1) Volunteer recruitment and retention or 2) hire actual paid firefighters. We need to figure out which route we want to go. This is how we got the Recruitment and Retention Coordinator position several years back and it paid the salary for that position for four years. The priorities for hiring the firefighter's side would allow us to hire full time trained firefighters to add to our staffing. The high priority will be for volunteer fire departments with the lowest pay to firefighter ratio. Since we have no paid firefighters, we would be a shoe-in for a high-ranking department. It is designed for you to continue to grow and add to it every year. It is a 36-month grant that pays 100% (no matching). You can go off your salary base for your area. There is no limit for a cap salary. You can hire officers with that if needed. On the Recruitment side, because we already have the coordinator position in place, there are some things to do there and what we had looked at were stipends and dedicated standbys. The problem with that is, the stipends are a medium priority. The problem with this is, the grant is so competitive, if you are not in the high-priority category, there is less of a chance to get it. This takes you back to hiring the full- time firefighters.

We originally started talking about hiring one firefighter for each school district, which brought us to the question of, *what do you do when someone calls out sick?* Then you have a district that's not covered. We need a sixth person for that. Then you will need someone to supervise. So, we added 6 firefighter positions, which allows for some overlap into other districts, especially the larger districts like District 1. Then we added a supervisor position, along with an assistant supervisor (which could be an additional person in the station), and they could work as a supervisor when the main supervisor is out.

Chairman Keaton added this is not set in stone, just a plan to work from. The big concern is that we only have a couple of weeks to get the grant in. He stated that what he is hoping for is to go ahead and apply for the grant, which buys you more time to figure out the details, versus if you don't meet the deadline, you are out of it altogether. There is also a timeline lapse in here, where if you were to get the grant, you will have some build time to work out the details. Chief Moon added that from the time you are notified, you have six months from that time to do the hiring process and get everything set up. Chairman Keaton said, say if you are notified July or August time frame, you will still have until the first of the year to get everything set up and running. So, if you wait another year and apply, the same principle applies and you will be that much further out. Then we sent out the survey to let everyone know what we were talking about, and it was all over the board. What we came up with, is there's some in favor, but the main

concern is destroying the volunteer system, with the exception of district one where all seven stations are in favor of applying for the grant. So that's where we are at.

Randy Wilson asked when will 2024 open. Chief Moon advised last year it was in the fall for 2022, so he's not sure, possibly end of 2024/first of 2025. Chief Moon advised this grant, the 2023 SAFER grant, deadline to apply is April 12. Mr. Cole asked if we apply, what's the latest to retract the request. Chief Moon answers any time before funds are withdrawn, but retracting the request would put a black mark on the agency for future grants. Once you get the grant, you have six months.

Mr. Dickerson said that's one of the challenges we face about rushing to put in for the grant before April 12th. We are committing to three years, over this two-week span, and if we do less than that and break that deal, to be most favorable we need to grow the program. Chief Moon said if we need more people, we can apply for another grant in the future, but if you don't have the funds to sustain those people, then you will have to lay those firefighters off.

Mark Cole asked how the check is cut. Chief Moon advised you are reimbursed after three months. If you start January 2025, then at the end of March we submit the payroll to FEMA and within around a week you have reimbursement coming back to you. It's dollar for dollar. This is how the Recruitment position was done. You send in Quarterly reports.

Mr. Dickerson asked if we will have to buy turnout gear. Chief Moon advised we will have to buy turnout gear, however, all the benefits such as insurance and retirement are included in the grant. We would have to provide uniforms, turnout gear, and provide physicals for those personnel.

Chairman Keaton said his concern is he has one station in District 1 that's had 600 calls. He has another one that's over 500 and others that have a high volume and all have asked what can be done to get some daytime help. He understands that through the county it is not the same the need as there is for District one. The County as a whole was 9.3% growth, Williamston Pelzer area was 8%, Pendleton area was 11.7%, Powdersville/Piedmont area was 28.7%. Growth has exploded and going strong. His concern is Powdersville/Piedmont area as an example since 2018 just building lots that have been approved is over 4000. This is not counting apartments or commercial, just building lots. Wren has 509 in one development. Just in Powdersville proper, there are 8 subdivisions at a minimum that houses are valued from half a million to 1.3 million dollars. We are protecting that with one man and two from Three & Twenty that are backing him up that do not fight fire as they are drivers and pump operators. After looking at all the responses, and knowing the need I am willing to do a pilot program in District one to help the need. This way it won't push it on anyone who doesn't want it, as that is what I do not want to do. What I am asking for, there are no volunteers coming. Three years, the cost is minimal. But I would like to go on record as saying, we must get some help in District One. Mark Cole asked to define, "I need help" (i.e. truck, manpower, etc.). If the help need is someone to roll the truck we If the need is for manpower, we have at least one additional man. One man can only do so much. Unless you have someone coming to support him, it's still a pickle. Looking at it from a homeowner perspective, if we put somebody in the station the intention is to get a truck rolling and the truck will respond fairly quick. But if that's the only man that's there...And the flip side is one of the concerns in District 5 is that we are running our firefighters to death. If I was to cut your call volume in half, would it make a difference. Stations that run a lot of calls (there are two in District five that do). If I am at home and have already run three calls versus one call, I will still run this extra call. Chief Owens (Wren) advised it's not the call volume as much as the timing of the calls as well as manpower. Chairman Keaton advised several type calls could be eliminated but you still only have one guy to respond.

Mark Cole wondered if some of the incentives offered recently such as the \$20k life insurance policy would help bring some volunteers in. Tommy Brock (Pendleton) advised, not many are going to quit a job for that \$20k in insurance just to be able to run calls during the day. He said we are fortunate in Pendleton where everyone around us comes and helps. You need at least two men on a truck. He's been the only man on a truck and one man can only do so much. He's been on calls where he pulls the crosslay off and then sets the pressure but can't do anything else alone because of the pressure on the other end of the hose. We need help and it's the Commission's responsibility to help. Chairman Keaton said he's all for that.

Mr. Dickerson said he agrees it's the Commission's responsibility to meet the need, but it's also our responsibility to do it responsibly too and think it through and make sure we are making positive decisions. So, and I think that's part of this and part of what gives me a big of angst about moving forward. It was a cool idea when we've got it figured out and thought through and made a good decision. For whatever reason, the decision's become compressed into a three-week time period. In most of my professional career, when I make a push decision I have a real good possibility of making a bad decision, and I fear in this situation a bad decision could shed bad light on what could be a good program if it's done right and if it's implemented in the right ways. Another piece of it for me is this we've always known this has been an issue, but it's really come to light over the last 6-8 months and I don't know that we've had the opportunity to analyze where the root problems are and take a step and try and fix some of those problems without taking this next move or step. We've got a lot of big things that are coming to the county in a very short period of time. We are fixing to roll out one of the biggest fleet inventories that's been done in the state. We've got an operating system we know we have to change because Emergency Reporting is going away, so we will need to roll in a new operating system that's going to have a lot of features on it that we are not used to, that I would hope could help us be a more efficient fire department if it's anything. Looping fire stations together so we can actually know who's responding to calls instead of taking a guess. Trying to put a little technology to good use to see if it can help benefit us. I just want to see us do it right, whatever we do. Grants don't go away. Whatever we sign onto for three years, then in three years we need to be prepared to take that on financially. We've set some goals to make some more transitions in year five. How does this impact? We really need to take some time to look at that and think about that and try to understand how will this change our goals if we've got to compensate for this. I wish I had another 8-10 months to plan for it and try to be effective with it. I wonder if there are any stopgaps we can do in the meantime work on that, whether it be implementing the dispatch protocols to see if reducing the amount of time, the pager goes off to reduce firefighter fatigue to increase the recruiting to make sure applications get through in a timely manner. I do like the idea of growing incrementally. I realize stipends will be a lower level, but does that make it more enticing if we get denied for the stipends then go all out for the next year. That's me, being pressured or backed into a corner to make a decision.

Randy Wilson stated if we have more to offer by paying volunteers, it may help with recruitment. But that wouldn't help that immediate need in general.

Tommy Brock said they are going door to door and people don't want to volunteer in Pendleton because they think the town is providing fire protection. They say "get off my porch – I pay city taxes." We are about to be in the same boat, because the people that move here are from big cities that have all this in place already. They are not used to coming into a system where it's totally volunteer. Our farmland is about gone. You are fortunate in District 3 that there are still several farmers that can jump off a tractor and respond to a call. We may have one guy during the day or we may have four. We've been busy this week just with our station. We've had an hour-long extrication on a wreck this week. The University is close and we can call them to help us. We had surrounding stations helping but that leaves their area

unprotected. It won't hurt a volunteer that's not coming anyway. If it was 24 hours, I can see where it would hurt the volunteers, but it's just the daytime hours.

Mark Cole asked on the Recruitment & Retention, that particular grant can you pull money in for a stipend? Brian Moon said it's a medium priority. If you don't have a high priority, you are not likely to get the grant. You have to be in the high priority area.

Randy Wilson, as far as 1%, you can't pay volunteers out of that? Brian Moon said no, but so much per member can be used for retirement with the proper policies in place. It's like a true retirement. Once you draw, you have to separate for a period of time.

Chairman Keaton asked for comments from those in attendance.

Kevin Blakely (West Pelzer) said his concern was, in District One, the traveling through multiple districts when responding to help other station areas because of the lack of manpower, the increased risk of accidents due to traveling through multiple districts in populated cities. This would alleviate some manpower requirements. It would cut the call volume down for multiple departments. Maybe do a pilot program in District one for four people, three years of salary, and utilize someone already in place to oversee these positions and allow these people to have some help during the day. If the Town of Williamston is busy, we won't have much help during the day. Crossing lines to get manpower is an increased risk. This will help become a system we can operate.

Mr. Dickerson asked if we put Joey up there tomorrow, would it help? Mr. Keaton said his concern would be needing an Investigator elsewhere in the county.

Chief Campbell (Starr) said his concern is that we need all the logistics and the stats and a plan in place before we implement this, not rushing into a decision. I don't see where one man will make or break it. In our area, we've got paid personnel in for example Iva, Williford catches a call on the lake. Will he leave to help them and leave the rest of the district uncovered? Mr. Keaton answered, one may not be the number, it was just proposed. I get where one man might not make a difference, but as of right now I have one man in district one making a difference in Powdersville because he is the only one there in the daytime. Chief Campbell said there are still a lot of ifs, ands, or buts. Mr. Dickerson said we need to look into the future needs. He doesn't want anyone to think we don't want to help, but we do. Chairman Keaton said he doesn't want to do anything to hurt the fire service, but the need is there for district one.

**MOTION:** Chairman Keaton presented a motion on the floor to apply for the grant. The motion died for the lack of a second.

Chairman Keaton stated he wants dip into the part time budget because the need is still there for District One. Maybe we can dip into the staff we have and some days that personnel can report to District 1 to help for now. He asked Chief Sutherland and Chief Moon and Joey look into doing something part time. Chief Sutherland said we can send different people, so that not one person has to do it all the time. Chairman Keaton said not to let anything go here that needs to be done.

Mark Cole wanted to clarify between the recruitment & retention and the paid firefighters. Mr. Keaton said that the motion he proposed was for the paid firefighters. He asked if the recruitment & retention would be worth applying for. Chairman Keaton stated, in his opinion it would be the same – we would be rushing into that too. He asked for anything else.

He thanked everyone for coming and letting us know how you feel. We will do what we can.

**MOTION:** Following a motion by Mr. Hanks, the meeting adjourned.

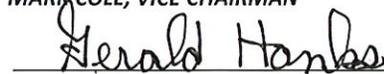
Respectfully submitted,

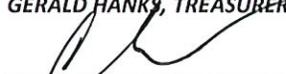
*Angie Bryant*

APPROVED BY:

  
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TOMMY KEATON, CHAIRMAN

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
MARK COLE, VICE CHAIRMAN

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
GERALD HANKS, TREASURER

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
CHARLIE DICKERSON, COMMISSIONER

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
RANDY WILSON, COMMISSIONER

**ORIGINAL**



# MEMORANDUM

## ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

**DATE:** 3/28/2024

**TO:** TOMMY KEATON

**FROM:** STEVE NEWTON

**CC:** TOMMY DUNN, COUNTY COUNCIL CHAIR  
RUSTY BURNS, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

**SUBJECT:** POPULATION GROWTH TRENDS  
Anderson County Census Divisions

Per request, we have conducted a preliminary evaluation of population growth trends in defined areas covering Anderson County. We have analyzed population changes covering a ten-year period between 2012 and 2022, using a unit of geography called a Census County Division (CCD) as defined by the US Bureau of the Census. Population numbers used are estimates created and published by the Census Bureau. All data was obtained at [www.data.densus.gov](http://www.data.densus.gov). Anderson County has nine CCDs—a map showing their general boundaries is included with this memorandum along with a summary table.

According to the Census Bureau's estimates, during the ten-year period between 2012 and 2022:

- Anderson County's total population grew by 9.3%
- The Anderson CCD (which includes the City and its surrounding area as well as Centerville, Homeland Park, and the Hwy 81 N corridor to I-85) is most heavily populated of the county's CCDs. It's 2022 population was estimated at almost 88,000 and grew by nearly 8%.
- The Powdersville-Piedmont CCD had the largest numeric population growth (7,504 persons) and largest percentage population growth (28.7%). Its ten-year growth rate was three times that of Anderson County as a whole.

**Tommy Dunn**  
Chairman, District 5

**John B. Wright, Jr.**  
Council District 1

**Greg Elgin**  
Council District 3

**Cindy Wilson**  
Council District 7

**ANDERSON COUNTY**  
SOUTH CAROLINA

**Brett Sanders**  
V. Chairman, District 4

**Glenn A. Davis**  
Council District 2

**Jimmy Davis**  
Council District 6

**Renee Watts**  
Clerk to Council

**Rusty Burns** | County Administrator  
rburns@andersoncountysc.org

- The Pendleton CCD (11.7%) was the only other area to have a ten-year growth rate greater than that observed countywide.
- Three CCDs (Belton, Honea Path, and Starr) are estimated to have experienced slight reductions in their populations.

Again—these Census Bureau numbers estimates; however, they are based on a sound statistical methodology which uses an area's official census population as its basis. Statistical margins of error for estimated numbers of people generally range from 2% for more heavily populated geographies up to 5% for geographies with smaller populations, which would in turn yield small adjustments to the percentages expressed.

Please advise if we can be of further assistance.

Census County Divisions (CCDs)	2012 Census Bureau Population Estimate	2022 Census Bureau Population Estimate	10-Year # Change	10-Year % Change
Anderson CCD	81,317	87,770	6,453	7.9%
Belton CCD	14,888	14,601	(287)	-1.9%
Honea Path CCD	8,217	7,878	(339)	-4.1%
Iva CCD	6,120	6,272	152	2.5%
Pendleton CCD	17,767	19,840	2,073	11.7%
Powdersville-Piedmont CCD	26,126	33,630	7,504	28.7%
Starr CCD	6,213	6,011	(202)	-3.3%
Townville CCD	3,885	4,089	204	5.3%
Williamston-Pelzer CCD	22,695	24,501	1,806	8.0%
<b>ANDERSON COUNTY</b>	<b>187,228</b>	<b>204,592</b>	<b>17,364</b>	<b>9.3%</b>

