

# Preliminary Mutual Aid Agreement Shared Thursday

North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Jimmy Martin presented a preliminary mutual aid agreement between the towns of North Wilkesboro and Wilkesboro to North Wilkesboro commissioners during a board work session Tuesday.

"It's not up for approval yet," Martin said. "This is something I wanted to bring to the board's attention. Once we get together with Wilkesboro and finalize something, we'll bring it back to the board."

At the work session, the board gave Martin approval to move forward with the Wilkesboro Fire Department in developing a final mutual aid agreement. The departments have been working on draft versions independently.

The North Wilkesboro Fire Department's draft agreement states that the Wilkesboro Fire Department will be automatically dispatched when the Wilkes Communications Center dispatches the North Wilkesboro department to a working structure fire (defined as flames present at a business or residential location) inside the Town of North Wilkesboro's Central Fire District.

If either fire department is already on a call, the agreement says the other department will need to page an additional fire department for assistance, as the department already on call won't be able to break away to assist the other department.

Also in the agreement, the two fire departments will meet twice a year to perform joint department training and fire planning on structures within the defined mutual aid area. Each department will work under their own standard operating guidelines when operating in the other's defined mutual aid area.

Martin said when a final mutual aid agreement is drawn up, it can be a model for other fire departments in Wilkes. "This is also something we can show to surrounding fire departments," he said. "I've talked with Cricket, Knotville and Broadway."

North Wilkesboro board member Bart Hayes expressed his support for the work being done by the fire departments. "I think politicians need to get out of the way and let them do what they excel in," he said.

Speaking to Martin about cooperation between the fire departments, Hayes added, "I think the only thing you all needed to hear from us is that it was OK for you all to work closely with one another. I have supreme faith this will be a great thing for the community."