

Automatic Mutual Aid Plan Ready

An agreement calling for the Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro fire departments to automatically be dispatched to assist each other with “working” structure fires is ready to be approved by the elected governing bodies of each town.

The latest draft of the agreement is on the agendas for the Wilkesboro Town Council meeting at 7 p.m. Monday and the North Wilkesboro Board of Commissioners meeting at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Wednesday morning, North Wilkesboro Town Manager Larry South and Wilkesboro Town Manager Ken Noland met with members of both fire departments to finalize and prepare the agreement for the two elected governing bodies.

Currently, the Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro fire departments assist each other under unwritten agreements that don’t call for aid to automatically be dispatched. Instead, one fire department tells the Wilkes Communications Center by radio that it needs the other department to be dispatched to assist.

Last year, a consultant hired by the two towns recommended enactment of an agreement calling for one department to automatically respond to assist when the other is dispatched.

Earlier draft versions of an automatic mutual aid agreement were already presented to the North Wilkesboro Board of Commissioners and Wilkesboro Town Council.

The agreement authorizes the Wilkes Communications Center to automatically dispatch both fire departments to all “working” business or residential structure fires in specifically defined mutual aid areas of the two towns, which are described in the agreement.

The document states that the Wilkesboro Fire Department will respond to the following areas within North Wilkesboro:

“All businesses and structures on D Street from 11th Street (where the Central Fire District border ends). To include, starting at 101 Sixth Street to the intersection of Sixth and D Streets to the intersection of Eighth and D Streets to the Intersection of Eighth and C Streets and Kensington Avenue, also the portions of West D Street where the Central Fire District ends, north on U.S. 421 to 1611 West D Street (presently Four Brothers Food Store). This agreement will also include the properties of 401 Sixth Street (presently North Wilkesboro Methodist Church, 510 D Street (presently North Wilkesboro First Baptist Church) and 300 D Street (presently Benton Hall).”

The document also states that the North Wilkesboro Fire Department will respond to the following areas within Wilkesboro:

“From Myers Tire (400 E Main Street) and all business and structures on Main Street to Tyson Foods (115 Factory Street). All businesses and structures from Tyson Foods to Curtis Bridge Road to include businesses and structures on Curtis Bridge Road, to Two Rivers Cinema. Also the following businesses: Two Rivers Cinema, Lowe’s Corporate Offices, Holiday Inn Express and all business in Mall Square (Papa John’s, Chile Verde, etc).”

Officials said there are plans to establish similar agreements with other surrounding fire departments to provide automatic mutual aid in other areas of the towns and in the county.

In addition to describing the physical mutual aid area, the agreement outlines guidelines for the departments for operating under automatic mutual aid.

They include:

- if either the North Wilkesboro or Wilkesboro fire department is already committed on another call when the Wilkes Communications Center dispatches one of them to an automatic mutual aid area, it’s agreed that the responding fire department (department with a fire in its district) must page another department for

assistance since the department already on call won't break away from its initial call to respond to a new one.

- each party is responsible for costs of salaries, wages, bonuses and other compensation for its own personnel that respond for duty under the terms of the agreement, and shall also assume all costs for its own equipment and tools used in response and shall make no charge to the party requesting assistance unless special extinguishing agents are used by the responding party from its own supply, which shall be paid for by the party requesting the aid;
- each department will operate under their own established standard operating guidelines based on National Fire Protection Association standards when operating within the other municipality's jurisdictional limits;
- the two fire departments will attempt to meet at least four times a year for periods of not less than three hours each to perform joint department training.