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The Swannanoa Fire Department governing body has submitted its fiscal year 2018 budget with a tax rate request of .129. The .129 tax rate is the current tax rate for the Swannanoa Fire Department and it is .011 above the revenue neutral rate of .118. The current rate of .129 will generate the much needed revenue that will permit the Swannanoa Fire Department to budget for items that are not otherwise possible.

The following statements should be regarded as justification for the reasoning behind our request.

Like many departments throughout our county and our state there are certain standards and/or mandates that we must follow. Our department is rated by the North Carolina Department of Insurance and currently we have an insurance classification of 4. The Department of Insurance rates each department on different areas of the department to include but not limited to needed fire flow of the community. This needed fire flow will determine how many fire suppression apparatus (engines) that a department must have in order to meet the needed fire flow. The Swannanoa Fire Department has met the required pieces of fire suppression apparatus in order for the department to be rated a Class 4. But, we have two pieces of our fleet that is required by the DOI that does not meet the current standards set forth by the National Fire Protection Association.

That DOI mandate and NFPA standard leads us to our first point of emphasis about the justification. Chapter 5 of the NFPA 1911 Standard on Inspection, Maintenance, Testing and Retirement of In-Service Emergency Vehicles states that safety must be the main concern when deciding if the current vehicle meets the current standard. Some safety concerns include but are not limited to, passenger restraints, visibility of the emergency vehicle, load management of the apparatus and the list goes on and on. Annex D of that same NFPA 1911 standard gives guidelines for First-Line and Reserve Fire Apparatus. The last paragraph in section D.1 reads that apparatus that were not manufactured to the applicable NFPA fire apparatus standard or that are over 25 years old should be replaced. Currently, the Swannanoa Fire Department has two pieces of its fire suppression apparatus that are thirty years old or older. Now we have prided ourselves in the fact that we have kept both pieces of apparatus running for this long, but that is no longer the case. Not only do they not meet the current standard as far as safety they are now showing their age and are just not as reliable as they once were.

Our next point of emphasis is the need to replace our Automated External Defibrillators (AED). Currently there are only two agencies that give documentation as to when an AED should be replaced. The American Hospital Association 2004 Estimated Useful Lives of Depreciable Hospital Assets lists the life expectancy of a defibrillator at five years. The Department of the Army Technical Bulletin (TB MED 7) lists life expectancy of a defibrillator at eight years. Currently, the Swannanoa Fire Department's AEDS are fifteen years old or older. Our AEDS are no longer covered under any warranty and all repair cost are paid for by the department if we can get the parts. The manufacturer does not guarantee that parts will be available. It is time for new AEDS.

Another point of emphasis is the need to replace some of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that our firefighters are wearing. The NFPA 1971 Standard on Personal Protective Equipment recommends that firefighter PPE be replaced every ten years. In most cases waiting ten years is not feasible. The Swannanoa Fire Department has seen an increase in its call volume of nearly 24% over the last ten years, thus placing more and more uses on that firefighter PPE. In an attempt to try to replace our PPE, the fire department has applied for two, FEMA (Assistance to Firefighter Grants) in the last two years. One of those grants applications was denied and to our knowledge a decision has not been made on the second one. None the less we have firefighters who need PPE. Firefighting is a dangerous job and some of the byproducts of that job have been linked to causing cancer. There is a push across the nation to try and reduce the exposure to those cancer causing agents by having firefighter PPE washed after each incident. The only way this could happen is for each firefighter to have two sets of PPE. This is cost prohibited for small departments like ours. The current cost to outfit a firefighter in full PPE is around \$2,500.00 per firefighter. While this practice is a good idea we are not requesting an increase in our budget to do this, we just want to replace some of our gear that is past its usefulness.

As you can see, the Swannanoa Fire Department has been putting off some much needed equipment replacement purchasing because we wanted to see if growth in our community would help offset the need for a high tax rate. Unlike other areas in our county we are not seeing the growth in the Swannanoa Community that would assist us in these much needed equipment purchases. But our request of the .129 tax rate is simply not just related to equipment purchasing.

Our next point and/or points of concern are the fact that the cost of doing business has just simply gone up.

The first area of emphasis in doing business is that over the last ten years the Swannanoa Fire Department has added 12 part-time employees, to go along with our 17 full-time firefighters, to assist in offsetting the decline of the volunteer firefighter. With current standards stating that departments should be on a scene within a certain amount of time with a certain amount of people, this has placed a burden not only on our department but others as well. In order to meet the required standard, fire departments have turned to hiring more and more paid personnel and have committed to helping each other by having departments respond outside of their districts to assist the neighboring department meet the standard. This comes at a cost to the department.

Total personnel cost of the Swannanoa Fire Department has increased 72% over the last ten years. This cost includes wages, tax requirements and retirement benefits for employees. This does not take into account that employee health insurance cost increased 90% over that same ten year period. In order for us to compete in attracting that good employee we simply have to continue to provide for the benefits of our employees. Much research has gone into looking at ways to be frugal with providing those benefits and we have adjusted, but now when are to the point that we simply cannot adjust anymore if we want to be an attractive place of employment.

Another area of concern is the fluctuating fuel prices and maintenance of our apparatus. As stated earlier the Swannanoa Fire Department has seen an increase in our call volume and some of that is an increase assisting our neighboring departments to meet current NFPA response

standards. That increase in call volume leads to higher fuel cost and increases the cost to maintain our equipment. The Swannanoa Fire Department has seen an increase in fuel cost of 23% over the last ten years. The cost of maintaining an aging fleet has increased nearly 15% over the last ten years. Some might say well if you replace your two oldest pieces of apparatus then that cost should come down. While that is true we have to make sure that it is also noted, that in addition to those two thirty year old trucks, our fleet also consists of one truck that is 21 years old and two that are approaching 17 years. Until such time that we try to replace them, we are still going to see higher maintenance cost.

While the intent of the preceding justification statements was to give a background into the cost facing the Swannanoa Fire Department they should in no way be looked upon as fix all statements. There is simply no way to express all parts of our working budget. The items mentioned above do not speak of the increasing cost of maintaining buildings and utility expenses etc.

Each government entity is faced each year with balancing the need to provide the best service possible to their citizens without placing undue burden on those citizens. The Swannanoa Fire Department as well as the other departments in our county has provided the citizens of this county with some top of the line services and we have done it without that burden over the last several years. Unfortunately, for the Swannanoa Fire Department to continue to provide the service that our citizens have come accustom too, we are going to need to replace some apparatus that has passed its prime, we are going to need to replace equipment that will permit our firefighters the needed tools to provide that top of the line service. We are going to have to try and keep up with rising cost of doing business. Who knows what insurance is going to cost this year let along over the next five. In 2014 the Swannanoa Fire Department went from a Class 5/9s department to a straight Class 4 department. With not having the space in this justification to explain what that means I will simply state that the Swannanoa Fire Department saved nearly \$500,000 dollars in insurance premiums to all of those citizens who were paying Class 9 rates. In order for those savings to continue we have to continue in providing the services that we provide and we have to do it while following the current and/or future standards that are placed upon us.

Thank you for serving the citizens of Buncombe County and we thank you for your consideration in helping us to continue to serve the citizens of the Swannanoa Fire District.

Swannanoa Fire Department Board of Directors.