

## **Findings Report on the proposal to create a county service district for EMS and rescue services in the Ashe County EMS/Rescue District**

### **Background:**

The Ashe County Rescue Squad (ACRS), located on Mount Jefferson Road in West Jefferson, has been providing rescue services since 1962. As a non-profit organization comprised 100 percent of volunteers, they provide a variety of rescue services throughout the county as well as backup EMS service.

As the County's primary Search and Rescue contact for over 40 years, ACRS has organized and directed many searches that led to successful outcomes. In addition to being the county's only heavy rescue provider, ACRS is the only agency in the county that holds specialized certifications from the NC Association of Rescue and EMS in High Angle and Agriculture Rescue. The agency also has specialized equipment and personnel trained for trench collapse, cave rescue, structure collapse, water rescue, wilderness search, and water rescue and recovery. ACRS operates two ambulances certified through the NC Office of Emergency Medical Services at the Advanced EMT level. Each member is required to have a minimum training level of state certified medical responder and are encouraged to seek additional levels of training. Many members are at the Paramedic level.

Currently, the organization receives \$50,000 annually from the county's general fund. They utilize grants as much as possible and hold fundraisers to help cover expenses. Agency volunteers have expressed the need for additional funding to help cover replacement costs of older rescue vehicles and the ever rising cost of service. The agency's primary rescue truck is 13 years and their secondary rescue truck used to respond as well as pull equipment is 22 years old. The replacement cost is \$250,000 for just one of these vehicles. Operating costs including liability insurance, workman's compensation, auto insurance, errors and omission insurance, facility utilities, office supplies, Personnel Protective Equipment, fuel, vehicle repairs, small equipment, medical supplies and other items average a minimum of \$85,000 annually.

### **CONSIDERATIONS:**

In establishing any service district under North Carolina General Statute 153A-310, per NCGS 153A-302, the commissioners must consider several items including the following:

### **Findings:**

#### **1. Resident or seasonal population and population density:**

US Census data from July 2021 indicates that the proposed service area has a population of 23,057. According to data derived from Ashe County tax billing records, the proposed Ashe County EMS/Rescue District has an estimated seasonal population of 12,273 for a total peak population of 35,330. The estimated size of the district is 421.513 square miles.

*Note:* Seasonal populations are based on the number of tax billings for parcels in the proposed service area with households that pay solid waste fees mailed outside the county (multiplied by 2.5) and do not take into account the number of tourists in the area at any given period.

**2. Appraised value of property subject to taxation in the proposed district:**

As of the FY 2022-2023 fiscal year, the appraised value of real property subject to taxation in the Ashe County EMS/Rescue district (with the exception of motor vehicles and public utilities) is approximately \$3,269,684,449. There are 36,518 parcels of property located in the district with 17,985 of those owned by individuals who reside outside the county. Out of the 36,518 parcels, approximately 480 are commercial business properties of which there are 21 vacant lots with a tax value of \$1,439,300 and 278 parcels with improvement valued at \$53,916,900 for tax purposes.

**3. The present tax rates of the county and any cities or special districts in which the district or a portion thereof is located:**

The County tax rate is currently .51 per \$100 in property valuation. County fire service protection and fire tax districts within the proposed service area have rates ranging from .029 to .12 cents per \$100 in property valuation.

**4. The ability of the proposed district to sustain the additional taxes necessary to provide the services planned for the district:**

Following an announcement and public hearing, rural fire, county service district and ad valorem tax rates are set annually during formal adoption of the budget by the Ashe County Board of Commissioners.

Other areas of the County have proven their ability to sustain both the County's low ad valorem property tax rate of .51 per \$100 valuation and district fire tax and county service district rates that ranged from .025 to .08 cents per \$100 in property valuation in FY 2021-2022. The tax collection rate has been over 96 percent for the past three years and along with a low unemployment rate (2.9 percent in April 2022) is indicative of the consistent ability to sustain these taxes. Although the county fire service district rate range increased to .029 to .12 cents per \$100 property valuation for FY 2022-2023, we believe that, after implementation, the Ashe County EMS/Rescue Service District tax will be set at a low rate that will continue to be sustainable for property owners.

**5. Any other matters believed to have a bearing on whether the district should be established:**

The Ashe County EMS/Rescue district covers the entirety of the unincorporated areas. The area is primarily rural in nature, with rugged mountains and numerous waterways. Three primary roadways, US Hwy 221 N, NC Hwy 88 and NC Hwy 194, used to access outlying areas are curvy and winding, while most secondary roads are twisting narrow paved and gravel roads that can be difficult to traverse.

The nature of the roads and surrounding terrain contribute to accidents that the ACRS is trained and equipped for such as bus and other large vehicle accidents, tractor rollovers, cliff-side falls, boating accidents and lost person incidents.

**6. A map of the proposed service district is attached.**

**7. Plan for providing EMS/Rescue service:**

Ashe County has a standing contract with the Ashe County Rescue Squad to provide rescue service and backup EMS service to the rural unincorporated areas as outlined on the attached map. Primary EMS service is allocated from the general fund.

**Conclusion:**

County of Ashe officials find that:

There is a demonstrable need for providing EMS/Rescue service in the Ashe County EMS/Rescue Service District;

That it is impossible or impracticable to provide those services on a county-wide basis since the County does not have the authority to establish a service district within the limits of the three municipalities inside Ashe County;

That it is economically feasible to provide the proposed services in the district without unreasonable or burdensome tax levies; and

That there is a demonstrable demand for the proposed service by persons residing in the district.

**Availability of report:**

As of August 1, 2022, this report shall be available for public inspection during normal business hours in the Ashe County Administration Office located at 150 Government Circle in Jefferson. A public hearing on the issue has been scheduled for 9:05 am, September 6, 2022 on the third floor of the Ashe County Courthouse in the small courtroom.

**EMS/Rescue District includes all light colored areas (all areas not located within a municipality)**

The map displays the geographical boundaries of the EMS/Rescue District, which encompass all light-colored areas not situated within a municipality. The district's boundary is marked by a thick black line. Within this boundary, several areas are highlighted in light green, indicating the specific regions included in the EMS/Rescue District. The map also shows various roads, including Highway 1, Highway 2, and Highway 3, and several municipalities, such as Laramie, Cheyenne, and Rock Springs. The background of the map is a light tan color, representing areas not included in the district.