

April 27, 2015

Town of Weddington

Re: Response to Fire Suppression Agreement, dated July 1, 2012 and Request for Assurances from Anthony Fox

Safety has been and continues to be the number one focus for Providence Volunteer Fire Department (PVFD). This includes the protection of residents in and around the fire district as well as protecting the members of PVFD as they provide the essential services that have been contracted for in the Fire Suppression Agreement. Fire Service is not a moneymaking business, nor a "for-profit" industry. However, it IS a fundamental part of a strong community.

PVFD was founded 60 years ago by many residents that lived in what is now called Weddington. Local farmers and other residents pooled together their resources for mutual protection and incorporated PVFD. At that time the apparatus consisted of one engine, one small tanker, one tractor-trailer tanker and a military surplus truck that served as a brush unit. Today our inventory of apparatus has expanded to meet the needs of continued residential growth. PVFD was established as a community organization and dedicates its services to the residents of this community.

In 2012 the Town of Weddington created the Municipal Fire District to more effectively manage fire services at a local level and enhance the level of service for citizens while directly managing the cost of service. PVFD was designated as the Primary Fire Department for Weddington with contracted assistance from neighboring departments to insure that residents would receive the fastest response AND have access to 4 qualified firefighters and EMTs, with 24/7/365 in-station response from Hemby Rd. This enhanced level of service is what the citizens of Weddington, in conjunction with previous Councils, have indicated they desired.

Since December 2009 PVFD has had 24/7/365 in-station staffing to provide the best around the clock emergency services to the citizens of Weddington. In order to maintain this level of service and grow as a department, we have repeatedly requested additional funding from Weddington. The Town has chosen to not provide sufficient funding to cover this level of service, requiring PVFD to fund operations from its reserves. In fact the Town is on record requesting that PVFD reduce its reserves below historically maintained levels and the Town "would be there as a fallback" (see council minutes dated January 9, 2012, page 15). While the Town has the ability to raise taxes to support itself, PVFD relies on Weddington as its major source of revenue.

The Town clearly sees value in around the clock staffing as it paid to fund renovation of the station to bring it up to building code so personnel could stay at the station 24/7/365. In return PVFD was required to sell the land and building to

the Town at less than appraised value. As part of this arrangement the Town and PVFD signed a 10 year Fire Suppression Agreement (FSA). The Town now seeks to break this agreement despite the fact that PVFD has met and in many cases far exceeded the requirements of the FSA.

PVFD and Weddington citizens expect 24/7/365 in station response, with 4 highly qualified firefighters and EMTs. The revised 2015-16 Operating Plan maintains this level of staffing. The Plan includes \$76,000 of non-personnel related adjustments, providing for a continuing level of enhanced service to residents in the fire district. With these adjustments in place PVFD will close the 2015-16 fiscal year in the black and be financially solvent and able to provide fire suppression and first response medical at the existing enhanced level of service.

Weddington is the third most affluent town in the State of North Carolina and the second most affluent town in Union County, yet, the tax burden to the residents is proportionally one of the lowest for fire service in the State. Please note the supporting third-party letter and documentation from Councilwoman Pam Hadley.

PVFD has had to manage significant expense increases and revenue reductions outside of our direct control. Our funding from Mecklenburg County has been reduced by nearly \$39,500 since 2011. Our insurance costs, including Workers' Compensation, have increased nearly \$14,000 during that same period. Even through lean budget years PVFD has improved its efficiencies and capabilities to be awarded with an ISO rating of 4 in the Town of Weddington and a 4/9E in the unincorporated parts of Union and Mecklenburg counties. We are currently the only volunteer department in Union County with this superior designation and rank in the top 8% in the State.

We are providing the revised 2015-16 Operating Plan along with additional documentation to assure the Town that we will remain in full compliance with all FSA requirements. By maintaining the current personnel and operations model, there will be no change to the ISO rating or the department's ability to perform all services currently provided (including emergency medical services) well above the standards required in the FSA.

Sincerely,

Jack Parks
President of the Board of Directors at Providence VFD

Cc: Robert E. Henderson, attorney for Providence VFD