



**REPORT
REGARDING THE PROPOSAL
TO ESTABLISH NEW FIRE PROTECTION
SERVICE DISTRICT**

**Prepared
February 26, 2024
by
Ryan Parker, Fire Marshal**

**REPORT REGARDING THE PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH NEW FIRE
PROTECTION SERVICE DISTRICTS**

On the 19th day of February, 2024, the Johnston County Board of Commissioners, decided, by general consensus, to proceed with a proposal to abolish existing fire protection service districts within the County of Johnston and to create a new single county fire protection service district that comprises the entire unincorporated territory of County of Johnston. Territory lying within the corporate limits of the Town of Wilson's Mills is currently included in the existing Wilson's Mills Fire Service District and may be included in the new single county fire protection service district upon receipt of a resolution from the Town of Wilson's Mills agreeing to be included in the new single county fire protection service district. The Johnston County Emergency Services Director, the Johnston County Fire Marshal, and other appropriate representatives and employees of the County of Johnston were authorized to take such steps as might be required or necessary to pursue the statutory and administrative processes relative to the proposal to abolish existing fire protection service districts and create a new single, county fire protection service district.

County of Johnston has a total area of 791 square miles and has seen tremendous population growth over the years. County of Johnston is currently divided into 26 fire protection service districts created pursuant to North Carolina General Statute §153A-301, et. seq. Johnston County currently provides fire protection services through 28 contracted fire departments with staffing ranges from fully career paid staff department to 100% volunteer departments. Services provided by departments include fire protection, emergency medical response, technical rescue, and hazardous materials response. There are approximately 900 fire service personnel serving Johnston County and in 2023 Johnston County fire departments responded to 23,382 calls for service. In 2022, Johnston County began working toward a more effective way of providing fire protection services to its citizens. In the 2023-2024 budget, the Johnston County Board of Commissioners provided supplemental funding for fire protection services through an approved fire protection services funding matrix. In cooperation with fire service leaders, a goal was set to establish a single county fire protection service district that enabled county and fire service leaders to better the future of the fire service throughout Johnston County while implementing standards to ensure that citizens are receiving a reasonably equal level of service. Given the geographic size of Johnston County, the tremendous growth in population in the unincorporated areas of Johnston County, and the number of municipalities located within Johnston County, it is impractical and prohibitive under the existing circumstances to provide fire protection services on a countywide basis. This proposal recommends that the Johnston County Board of Commissioners (i) abolish the existing fire protection service districts, and (ii) create a new fire protection service district (the "Johnston County Fire Protection Service District") to fund the full cost of fire protection service, delivered on an equitable basis to all residents of the service district, with the cost burden carried equitably by all service district property owners through the service district tax.

North Carolina General Statute §153A-306 provides that the Board of Commissioners may, by resolution, abolish a particular service district upon finding that there is no longer a need for a particular service district and that there are no outstanding bonds or notes issued to finance projects in the district. The existing fire protection service districts proposed to be abolished are as follows: Banner and Benson Fire Service District, Bentonville Fire Service District, Beulah and Kenly Fire Service District, Blackman's Crossroads Fire Service District, Boon Hill and Princeton Fire Service District, Brogden Fire Service District, Claytex and Clayton Fire Service District, Corinth-Holder Fire Service District, Elevation Fire Service District, 50-210 Fire Service District, McLemore Fire Service District, Meadow Fire Service District, Micro Fire Service District, Nahunta Fire Service District, Newton Grove Fire Service District, North Side Fire Service District, O'Neal Fire Service District, Oakland Fire Service District, Pi-Le and Pine Level Fire Service District, Selma and Selma Rural Fire Service District, Shoe Heel Fire Service District, Smithfield and Smithfield Rural Fire Service District, Strickland Crossroads Fire Service District, West Johnston Fire Service District, Wilson's Mills Fire Service District, and Wynn and Four Oaks Fire Service District. The current service districts, as they exist today, would no longer be needed should the Board of Commissioners create the new fire protection service district proposed to be established to fund the full cost of fire protection service, delivered on an equitable basis to all residents of the service district, with the cost burden carried equitably by all service district property owners through the service district tax. County of Johnston has no outstanding bonds or notes issued to finance fire protection projects in the existing fire districts which are proposed to be abolished.

North Carolina General Statute 153A-302(b) has been followed, and this report is divided into sections as follows:

- (a) N.C.G.S. §153A-302(b)(1) – “THE MAP”
- (b) N.C.G.S. §153A-302(b)(2) – “STATEMENT REGARDING STANDARDS”
- (c) N.C.G.S. §153A-302(b)(3) – “THE PLAN”

THE MAP

North Carolina General Statute §153A-302(b)(1) provides that the Board of Commissioners shall cause to be prepared a report containing a map of the proposed district, showing its proposed boundaries.

The boundaries of the proposed Johnston County Fire Protection Service District are set forth on the map entitled “Proposed Johnston County Fire Protection Service District” which is attached hereto as Exhibit 1 and incorporated herein by reference.

Based on the foregoing, and as more fully set forth on Exhibit 1, the proposed map for the Johnston County Fire Protection Service District satisfies the requirements of subsection (b)(1) of North Carolina General Statute §153A-302.

STATEMENT REGARDING STANDARDS

North Carolina General Statute §153A-302(b) provides in part that: “the board of commissioners shall cause to be prepared a report containing:...(2) A statement showing that the proposed district meets the standards set out in subsection (a);...”

North Carolina General Statute §153A-302(a) provides:

“(a) Standards. - - In determining whether to establish a proposed service district, the board of commissioners shall consider all of the following:

- (1) The resident or seasonal population and population density of the proposed district.
- (2) The appraised value of property subject to taxation in the proposed district.
- (3) The present tax rates of the county and any cities or special districts in which the district or any portion thereof is located.
- (4) The ability of the proposed district to sustain the additional taxes necessary to provide the services planned for the district.
- (5) If it is proposed to furnish water, sewer, or solid waste collection services in the district, the probable net revenues of the projects to be financed and the extent to which the services will be self-supporting.
- (6) Any other matters that the commissioners believe to have a bearing on whether the district should be established.

(a1) Findings. - - The board of commissioners may establish a service district if, upon the information and evidence it receives, the board finds that all of the following apply:

- (1) There is a demonstrable need for providing in the district one or more of the services listed in G.S. 153A-301.
- (2) It is impossible or impracticable to provide those services on a countywide basis.
- (3) It is economically feasible to provide the proposed services in the district without unreasonable or burdensome annual tax levies.
- (4) There is demonstrable demand for the proposed services by persons residing in the district.

Territory lying within the corporate limits of a city or sanitary district may not be included unless the governing body of the city or sanitary district agrees by resolution to such inclusion.

Pursuant to the direction by the Johnston County Board of Commissioners and the foregoing law, a thorough inquiry was conducted in connection with the proposed establishment of the Johnston County Fire Protection Service District. Such inquiry included input from the Johnston County Fire Matrix workgroup, five community meetings hosted by the Johnston County Fire Marshal at various Johnston County high schools, numerous citizens in the areas which would be included in the service district, fire departments which would service the service district, independent inquiry by

members of the Board of Commissioners, and the comments of citizens received by the Board of Commissioners and county staff.

Based on the foregoing, the following FINDINGS and CONCLUSIONS are presented for consideration by the Board of Commissioners for the proposed fire protection service districts:

FINDINGS FOR THE
JOHNSTON COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION SERVICE DISTRICT

1. The seasonal population in the area included in the proposed Johnston County Fire Protection Service District is minimal. The current estimated resident population of the proposed district based on U.S. Census data is approximately 163,533. The area consists of approximately 740.45 square miles. The population density is approximately 221 persons per square mile.
2. The appraised value of the property subject to taxation in the proposed District as of December 2023 is approximately \$20,393,960,441.
3. The 2023-2024 tax rate for Johnston County is sixty-nine cents (\$0.69) per One Hundred Dollar valuation. This rate is effective for all of the proposed service district. The 2023-2024 tax rate for the Town of Wilson's Mills is forty-two cents (\$0.42) per One Hundred Dollar valuation. The 2023-2024 tax rate for the Moccasin Creek Service District is three cents (\$0.03) per One Hundred Dollar valuation. The 2023-2024 tax rate for the Johnston County Research Training Zone is eight cents (\$0.08) per One Hundred Dollar valuation.
4. Based on the foregoing, it appears that the proposed District is able to sustain the additional tax which would be imposed. It should be noted in this regard that the County is well under its \$1.50 authorized maximum.
5. Other factors considered in connection with the establishment of the proposed District include:
 - a. Given the geographic size of Johnston County, the tremendous growth in population in the unincorporated areas of Johnston County, and the number of municipalities located within Johnston County providing fire protection services, it is impractical and prohibitive under the existing circumstances to provide fire protection services on a countywide basis.
 - b. Citizens residing in the area of the proposed fire protection service district have come to expect fire protection services from local fire organizations and the proposed fire protection service district will fund the full cost of fire protection service, delivered on an equitable basis to all residents of the service district, with the cost burden carried equitably by all service district property owners through the service district tax. Local fire

departments support the proposed fire protection service district. The fire protection service district will improve service delivery throughout the district.

- c. There are numerous calls each month within the area encompassed by such proposed District and the proposed District would provide fire protection in a quick and efficient manner, while making sure that the fire protection organization responding to the calls is paid for the services provided. The proposed District is an effective solution to address both immediate and long term fire protection needs, providing flexibility and funding to support population shifts and growth.
- d. The cost of providing fire protection service within the proposed District is more than can be reasonably supported by contributions, and a tax supported service district is needed. The proposed District will fund the full cost of fire protection service, delivered on an equitable basis to all residents of the service district, with the cost burden carried equitably by all service district property owners through the service district tax.
- e. There is insufficient support for county-wide fire protection services and it is impossible or impracticable to provide fire protection service on a county-wide basis. Johnston County does not have the capital, equipment, or personnel to provide fire protection services on a county-wide basis. The proposed strategy creates an effective model for supporting fire protection service and equitably allocates service costs across the entire service area.

Based on the foregoing FINDINGS, the following CONCLUSIONS are made:

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is a demonstrable need for providing fire protection service within the area of the proposed Johnston County Fire Protection Service District.
2. It is impossible or impracticable to provide those services on a county-wide basis.
3. It is economically feasible to provide the proposed fire protection service herein set forth for the proposed District without unreasonable or burdensome annual tax levies.
4. There is a demonstrable demand for the proposed services by persons residing in the district.

Based on the foregoing, the Johnston County Fire Protection Service District meets the standards set out in subsection (a) of North Carolina General Statute §153A-302 as required to be set forth pursuant to subsection (b)(2) of North Carolina General Statute §153A-302.

THE PLANS

North Carolina General Statute §153A-302(b) provides, among other things, that the Board of Commissioners shall cause to be prepared a report containing a plan for providing one or more of the services listed in North Carolina General Statute §153A-301 to the district.

North Carolina General Statute §153A-301 provides that the Board of Commissioners of any county may define any number of service districts in order to finance, provide or maintain for those districts services, facilities and functions in addition to or to a greater extent than those financed, provided or maintained for the entire county, including fire protection service.

The following plan is proposed:

PLAN FOR THE JOHNSTON COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION SERVICE DISTRICT

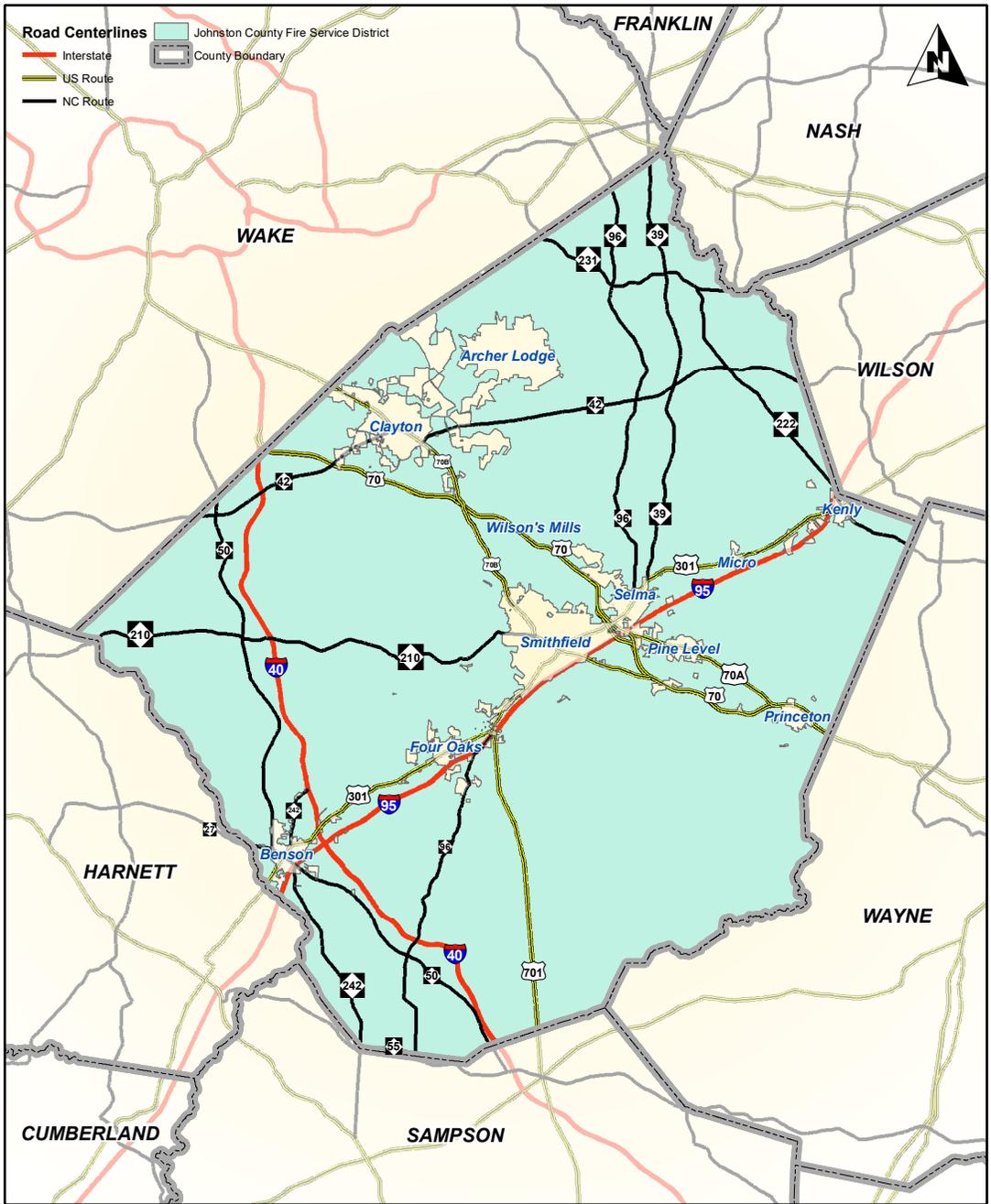
- I. Area to Be Served. The area to be served by the subject fire protection service district shall be that area of Johnston County described on the map of the proposed Johnston County Fire Protection Service District and set forth on the map entitled “Proposed Johnston County Fire Protection Service District” which is attached hereto as Exhibit 1 and incorporated herein by reference.
- II. Name of the Service District. The service district shall be known as Johnston County Fire Protection Service District.
- III. Specific Services to be Provided. The services to be provided within the above set forth District shall be limited to fire protection and related emergency services.
- IV. Projected Agency to Provide Service. The County of Johnston will contract with a qualified provider of fire protection services provided that said provider(s) agrees to provide the required services in return for that portion of taxes levied pursuant to Chapter 153A, Article 16, of the North Carolina General Statutes, and complies with all existing laws and regulations relating to such service, including those laws set forth in North Carolina General Statute 153A-250 and 160A-487, provided also that such

entity shall maintain an adequate number of personnel, amount of equipment, and amount of insurance as determined by said corporation and the Johnston County Board of Commissioners from time to time.

Based on the foregoing, the Johnston County Fire Protection Service District satisfies the requirements of subsection (b)(3) of North Carolina General Statute §153A-302.

This report is respectfully submitted by Ryan Parker, Johnston County Fire Marshal.

Exhibit 1 – The Map



Map of

Proposed Johnston County Fire Protection Service District

