

At a Regular Meeting of the Board of Supervisors of Warren County held in the Warren County Government Center on March 3rd, 2026, at 1:00 PM

Present – Warren County Board of Supervisors and County Staff: Cheryl L. Cullers, (South River District); Tony F. Carter (Happy Creek District); John W. Stanmeyer, (Shenandoah District) Hugh B. Henry, (Fork); Richard A. Jamieson, (North River District); also, Jane E. Meadows, Deputy County Administrator; Jason Ham, County Attorney; Jane Meadows, Deputy County Administrator; James Bonzano, Fire Chief; Gerry Maiatico, Assistant Fire Chief; and Zach Henderson, Deputy Clerk to the Board of Supervisors.

Call to Order:

Ms. Cullers called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM with an opening Prayer from Pastor Butch Hammond.

Adoption of Agenda:

On a motion by Mr. Stanmeyer, seconded by Mr. Carter, and the following vote, the Board approved the agenda as presented.

Mr. Henry was not present for the adoption of the agenda and would arrive at 1:57 PM.

Dr. Jamieson, Aye; Ms. Cullers, Aye; Mr. Carter, Aye; Mr. Stanmeyer, Aye

Presentation - Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT):

Mr. Carter stated that in terms of maintenance, there is continued cleanup and debris removal from large snowstorm; Performed tree trimming and brush cutting on routes 611, Long Meadow Rd.; 624, Morgan Ford Rd., 604, Harmony Hollow Rd., using VDOT and contract forces. They plan to continue routes 55E John Marshall Hwy, 638, Freezeland Rd, 658 Rockland Rd., and 661 Fairgrounds Rd. this month. Performed pothole repairs on various routes including 340, Stonewall Jackson Hwy., 624 Morgan Ford Rd., and 627 Reliance Rd. and will be conducting shoulder repairs on Rt. 340 Stonewall Jackson Hwy, as well as other routes identified during the snow cleanup.

Regarding Board issues, Mr. Carter stated that the extension of the south-bound ramp of Rt.340/522 onto west bound I 66 is now under construction. This was a Smart Scale project submitted by the Board and approved in 2020. Additionally, they have received the final environmental documents and will restart the Rocky Hollow Road project as soon as the weather permits. The design is beginning on the Smart Scale project for High Knob on Rt, 55E and is scheduled to go into construction in 2028. They have also met with property owners to secure entry right of way to begin drilling operations for geological data. Lastly, they are requesting to meet with the Board of Supervisors in March or early April at the latest to discuss the Secondary Six Year Plan.

Presentation - Virginia Extension Office:

Ms. Elizabeth Baldwin, an Associate Agricultural Natural Resources Extension Agent, highlighted the work that her and her colleagues have been doing over the past year in addressing invasive species such as the spotted lantern flies and spongy moths. They have partnered with the Virginia Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services, Master Gardeners, as well as local governments and have trained approximately 1,200 residents in identifying these species, reporting, and management tools. Additionally, they have done a lot of work with Pesticide Safety Education and emphasized that people who want to apply restricted use pesticides in Virginia have to be certified applicators and their office provides education, certification, and re-certification classes. They have addressed barriers in adopting managed grazing practices, leading a multi-state slug feeding and soybean study, beef quality assurance training etc. She then introduced new staff such as Cynthia Fairbanks, Candace DeLong, and Liz Roar.

Public Comment Period:

1. **Katie Tennant** – voiced her support for Chester Gap VFD and their EMS services and emphasized the importance of having emergency responders close by given her residency in Lake Front Royal and being the executive director of the 4-H Center and the all the children that are on site weekly.

2. **Denise Stoner** – voiced her support for Chester Gap VFD and their EMS services and emphasized that the public has yet to see any data from the Fire Service in Warren County from the consultant and the need for the public to review the data themselves and see what needs to transpire and further expressed her worry about decreased services in Chester Gap.
3. **Alan Fox** – voiced her support for Chester Gap VFD and emphasized that if it were not for the Chester Gap Volunteer Fire Department, he would not be standing here today and urged for their continued funding and partnership.
4. **Johnathan Oaks** – spoke to the Board regarding the Percy D. Miller Water Plant that is located in Warren County and supplies all of the water to Winchester City, and Frederick Water when they need to pull extra. He then stated that he has documents that show that in 2024 their total revenue was over \$24 Million from water being pulled out of the North Fork in Warren County. Under State Law, localities are allowed to charge other localities fees for pulling their water but can't find any agreements regarding them being charged.

Approval of Minutes – February 17th Regular Meeting

On a motion by Mr. Carter, seconded by Mr. Stanmeyer, and the following vote, the Board approved the February 17th Regular meeting minutes as presented

Mr. Stanmeyer, Aye; Mr. Carter, Aye; Ms. Cullers, Aye; Dr. Jamieson, Aye

Consent Agenda:

1. Contract Renewal - CivicPlus, LLC Contract
2. Contract Renewal - ACOM, LLC Contract
3. Contract Renewal - Divaris Real Estate, Inc. Contract for Real Estate Broker Services
4. **Contract Renewal - Earthdiver, LLC Contract for Tourism Website (removed for discussion)**
5. Planning Commission Annual Report for 2025
6. Hangar Lease Assignment Agreement for Hangar B12

Mr. Carter pulled item #4 (Contract Renewal - Earthdiver, LLC Contract for Tourism Website) for discussion.

On a motion by Mr. Carter, seconded by Mr. Stanmeyer, and the following vote, the Board approved the Consent Agenda as amended.

Dr. Jamieson, Aye; Ms. Cullers, Aye; Mr. Carter, Aye; Mr. Stanmeyer, Aye

New Business:

Contract Renewal - Earthdiver, LLC Contract for Tourism Website

Mr. Carter stated that the County has previously solicited and awarded and contracted Earth Driver LLC for a Tourism website for the Economic Development department in December 2023 with the initial term of the contract being for 12 months ending on April 16th, 2025. This was amended to include an additional one year ending on April 16th, 2026. He then stated that with the Tourism Committee and potential joint efforts with the town, it would be better to spend money to go in with the town on a more combined effort.

Ms. Meadows stated that it would be a better idea to delay this item until the March 17th meeting since the EDA will be presenting their budget request and will have a few different options regarding tourism.

On a motion by Mr. Carter, seconded by Dr. Jamieson, and the following vote, the Board tabled this item until March 17th.

Mr. Stanmeyer, Aye; Mr. Carter, Aye; Ms. Cullers, Aye; Dr. Jamieson, Aye

Budget Action — Chester Gap Volunteer Fire Department

Ms. Cullers stated that she asked to bring this back because she had conversations with Rappahannock County to discuss options and further emphasized that she is a champion of this agreement that will cover a three-month period in the amount of \$45,000 that will give the Board time to figure this out further and determine the best path forward. She had met with Chief Brown over the weekend and at this point, moving the EMS side of Chester Gap VFF to Flint Hill which would increase the response time to Warren County. Part of the discussion moving forward would be the consideration of Chester Gap turning their EMS license over to Warren County in order to have Warren County Staffing there, and Warren County would get the Cost Recovery money.

Mr. Maiatico stated that in 2015 – 2016, Warren County administration and Fire and Rescue Administration were meeting with Chester Gap Fire Department to one look at the programs and services provided to that volunteer institution, both from a Warren County standpoint as well as a Rappahannock County standpoint, just to make sure that Chester Gap was being adequately served as a volunteer institution, but wasn't getting redundant services from both localities. Through a multitude of different conversations, it was decided by Rappahannock County's fire commission to support Chester Gap by remaining a Rappahannock County Volunteer Company and becoming an automatic aid company to Warren County. In 2016, Warren County entered into an automatic aid agreement with Chester Gap VFD and that agreement has a funding formula that will provide proportionate funding to Chester Gap to one of their other volunteer companies. In essence, if they ran 60% of their calls for service into Warren County, then Warren County would fund them at 60% of the level that their own volunteer companies, and that number would not go below \$39,500.

Mr. Maiatico then stated that in 2020, the Volunteer institution approached both Rappahannock and Warren Counties and signaled that they were facing a crisis with EMS staffing as it related to the COVID pandemic that was based off of the full-time jobs of the volunteers as well as the desire not to respond to the EMS based incidents and bring a known problem home. Then idea to hire subcontractors to staff this section 24/7 at this station with both counties being responsible for the 50/50 cost share of an agreed upon hourly rate. This later moved to a 60/40 split based off of call distribution with concerns that Chester Gap was running more call into Warren County, but Rappahannock was paying proportionate funding; this program continued all the way up to Fiscal Year 2026. During this fiscal year Warren County had entered the staffing program into the continued funding within the volunteer budget but had received a message from Rappahannock County to increase the contribution to support an hourly rate increase of the subcontractors. As a result, Contingency Planning was performed that provided data analysis determining that while a majority of Chester Gap's EMS calls for service (60%) were in Warren County, a majority of them were in the response district of Front Royal Fire Department. The plan was that if the Chester Gap funding could be shifted, then a fourth full time person at the Front Royal Station could be hired that would provide the ability to staff 24/7 365 to advanced life support units, or a total of four people at Front Royal and the response coverage within the Chester Gap district could come from the Front Royal Station and the volunteer institution as it was pre 2020. Administration at the time made the decision to continue to support the staffing program for three additional months into fiscal year 2026 until October 1st. Since then, Rappahannock made the decision that, effective October 1st through March 1st, 2026, they would fund 100% of the program. Based on the most recent communication, Rappahannock County has indicated that Warren County must act at today's meeting to determine if they are going to reappropriate \$45,300, and at the April meeting, must re-engage in a long-term agreement to continue the program. If that fails at the April meeting, then Rappahannock will move their staffing resources to Flint Hill.

Ms. Cullers stated that she will fight for this because she feels like it is the right thing to do and the ask is not unreasonable for herself and the community and emphasized that she does not want to put people at risk over a dollar.

Mr. Maiatico stated that this does not affect the annual funding of the Chester Gap Fire Department and have continued the annual allocation funding for the volunteer institution in accordance with the automatic aid agreement.

Mr. Carter stated that he can support this for the short term and would like to hear back from the Chief as far as his budget request is concerned and asked how many medical units are currently at Company #1. Mr. Maiatico stated that currently there are two medical units staffed ALS 24/7 as well as cross staffing fire-based response at all stations. Mr. Carter then asked, in regard to emails received, about response times from Chester Gap compared to Company #1 and response times. Mr. Maiatico stated that it depended on the emergency, and a WCFR Community Response Comparison utilizing center address locations was done, and that document, from a Fire Administration standpoint, showed that for an address in lake Front Royal there is an average of 13.2 minutes for a Five Company response. Chester Gap shows 7-minutes at 3.3 miles, and Front Royal is 12 minutes at 5.6 miles.

Mr. Carter then reaffirmed the correspondence from Rappahannock that if a decision is not made by the April meeting for some sort of MOU, then their resources will be moved then questioned if the \$45,300 for three months is provided, that will guarantee to keep them there for that timeframe. He emphasized that Warren County must both fund \$45,300 and make a new MOU by April. Mr. Maiatico stated that if they pull the staff from Chester Gap and don't expend the funds, then Warren County would not be liable for the full amount.

Mr. Ham stated that the motion just says, "I move that the Board of Supervisors allocate \$45,300 to Chester Gao Volunteer Fire Department." He then suggested that if that is three times the monthly amount and if the Board hasn't decided what they wanted to do in April as of now, then allocating a third of that total could be done. Mr. Carter stated that he is leaning towards that option.

Dr. Jamieson stated that there was a lot of reference to the matrix staffing study and that it was his expectation that he would rely on it if accepted by Fire and Rescue and asked about the date and timeframe for them to accept it as valid. Mr. Maiatico stated that then on March 18th, the Fire Chief's advisory staff will reconvene and vote to approve the study as well as support the recommendations. Afterwards, they will ask the Board of Supervisors to adopt a resolution to recognize the recommendations and direct the department to develop a strategic plan on how to achieve those recommendations.

Dr. Jamieson stated this was difficult given that Fire and Rescue has not accepted the study, and right now are being given a line in the sand by Rappahannock County to make a decision, but Warren County, in its own process, are going through an extended period of time and professional approach that is analytical and data driven. It is his expectation that he will rely heavily on that and the recommendation from the Chief and Assistant Chief. He then emphasized that the timing may be off, and Warren County is being asked to decide without all the necessary information and input but there is still a lot of references to the matrix staffing study. Additionally, he wondered what the expectation or likelihood is that between now and March 18th, the fire staff says they do not support the study.

Chief Bonzano asked about the Board's comfort level, and emphasized that this is not a perfect solution, but given the competing interests, it makes more sense than not, and given those competing interests and funding mechanisms, they are set to make decisions on priority with the call pressures. Ms. Cullers thanked the Chief and stated that she can't take the emotion out of this issue but emphasized that she does not make decisions based on emotions. She further stated that she understands the numbers but also looks at the human component of it and asked how much it costs to hire someone, train them, salary & benefits, and to outfit them. Chief Bonzano stated that it is approximately \$100K and the cost of losing them is even higher and emphasized the need to give staff a reason to stay and part of that is to ensure that we have safe and accountable staffing.

Ms. Cullers commented on the costs of getting the 24-hour service and that extra reassurance is worth it given the increased response times and having to pull resources from other stations should multiple calls come in.

Mr. Henry stated that he would not be opposed to supporting this for three months, then at the start of the Fiscal Year the County can fairly determine the best option(s) and emphasized the requests for staffing and what can and can't be done currently, and this can be determined once the staffing possibilities are known, and can be determined how the funding will be best spent.

Mr. Carter stated that per the memo from Rappahannock County, it specifically says that if Warren County fails to commit at a regular meeting in April, then that is the end of the agreement, and that is why he is leaning more toward just funding for one month. He would support the full three months if they had an agreement but that is not the case.

On a motion by Mr. Carter, seconded by Mr. Henry, and the following vote, the Board of supervisors allocated \$15,100 to the Chester Gap Volunteer Fire Department.

Dr. Jamieson, Aye; Mr. Henry, Aye; Ms. Cullers, Aye; Mr. Carter, Aye; Mr. Stanmeyer, Aye

Board Reports:

- Dr. Jamieson reported the following
 - Spent the week away for his 37th anniversary
- Mr. Henry reported the following
 - Congratulated Dr. Jamieson on 37 years
 - No other report other than his excitement when the budget process is over.
- Ms. Cullers reported the following
 - On February 17th – attended a budget meeting with the Board as well as a CPMT meeting.
 - On February 18th – attended a School Board meeting to discuss their needs
 - On February 19th – attended the Rotary Scholarship fundraiser with Dr. Martin.
 - On February 24th – attended a team building activity with the Tourism Committee and painted bowls for the empty bowl fundraiser for the House of Hope.
 - On February 25th – invited to Warren County Middle School by the FFA as it was being recognized as FFA week.
 - On February 25th – attended a School Board meeting and commented on the condition of the roof and repair options.
 - On February 25th – Attended a Fire Chief's meeting to discuss the staffing study.
 - On February 27th – met with Hike Kids and have been elected on their Board and discussed different opportunities for outreach in the community.
 - On February 28th – Attended a Spaghetti dinner at the Church in Browntown for local kids.
 - Announced that on March 15th, her and Dr. Pence will be having a South River Community Meeting at the Skyline High School Cafeteria from 2:00 – 4:00 PM.
- Mr. Carter reported the following
 - Commented on one of the public speakers regarding drawing water for other localities and the possibility of looking into it as far as if there are any fees that can be collected.
- Mr. Stanmeyer reported the following
 - Met with Dr. Martin for over 2-hours to go through everything upcoming and left feeling positive about the current situation and the future of the County.
- Dr. Martin reported the following
 - Stated that the schools will be presenting their budget the following day and the departments and organizations will be finishing up this Friday.
 - Reminded the Board about this upcoming Saturday's Advance at the Public Safety Building for a strategic planning session.
 - Thanked Ms. Meadows and Ms. Scott for their ongoing work on the budget.
- Mr. Ham had no report

Adjournment:

On a motion by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Carter, and the following vote, the Regular meeting adjourned at 2:48 PM.

Dr. Jamieson, Aye; Mr. Henry, Aye; Ms. Cullers, Aye; Mr. Carter, Aye; Mr. Stanmeyer, Aye