

FAQ's: Frequently Asked Questions on the Proposed Fire and Rescue Ordinance

<p>Why is the County passing an ordinance?</p>	<p>An ordinance is a law enacted by a local governing body. Localities often pass ordinances in order to establish fire/rescue departments and combined systems and define the system's governing structure.</p>
<p>What's the purpose of the ordinance?</p>	<p>The ordinance will create a coordinated fire and rescue system with defined responsibilities for all members: career chief, volunteer chiefs, volunteer agencies, advisory board, executive committee and other advisory board committees. The system will ensure that all fire/rescue calls in the County receive consistent, predictable, high-quality responses by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating system-wide coordination, accountability and oversight; • Collaboratively developing policies for the system; and • Making the Fire and Rescue Chief accountable to the Board of Supervisors and its goals.
<p>The County is considering important issues in this ordinance. What opportunities have volunteers and staff had to consider these issues?</p>	<p>Initial discussion on the need to create a coordinated system began in April 2007; efforts to define a coordinated system through volunteer/career joint strategic planning began in April 2008; and work on the ordinance began in October 2008. The ordinance committee included volunteer and career staff, met 8 times over 6 months, produced roughly 80 pages of detailed minutes, and created 5 drafts of the ordinance.</p>
<p>How was the larger ACFRAB membership involved in the ordinance development process?</p>	<p>Before working on the initial draft of the ordinance, the volunteer and County committee members presented to the full committee written statements of concerns they had collected from volunteer and career staff. The 12/1/08 statement provided by the volunteer chiefs, called "Albemarle County Volunteer Constituent Concerns," contains six pages of concerns, all or most of which were addressed in the ordinance. See http://sites.google.com/site/albemarlevolunteers/ In addition, the committee updated the advisory board at three of its meetings (February, March and April, 2009), answered questions, and made changes based on board comments.</p>
<p>How does this ordinance address the concern that the fire chief will have too much authority?</p>	<p>Just as volunteer chiefs currently have the power to make good and bad decisions for their individual agencies, so will the chief of the coordinated system. And just as volunteer chiefs have the checks and balances of their constituents, peers, and respective boards, the Fire and Rescue Chief will have accountability to the County Executive's Office and Board of Supervisors, and be restricted by the checks and balances written into the ordinance.</p>
<p>What are some of those checks and balances built into the ordinance?</p>	<p>The ordinance creates safeguards for volunteers by regulating the primary way in which the chief oversees the system—policymaking. Specifically, the ordinance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits the chief to making <u>system-level</u> policies that are "essential to the effective and

	<p>equitable provision of high-quality, countywide fire and rescue services.” This prevents the chief from making trivial policies or selectively targeted policies (§6-104(1)(b)).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires the chief to <u>collaborate</u> closely with the advisory board and executive committee to develop, review and revise policies (§§6-104(1)(b) & 6-109). • Gives the advisory board the power to <u>veto</u> policies proposed by the chief (§6-109(d)); & • Gives the advisory board an effective route of <u>appeal</u> to the County Executive and Board of Supervisors, which can reverse or modify the chief’s actions (§6-109(e), (f)).
<p>In a strong chief model, don’t the volunteers lose their ability to govern themselves?</p>	<p>This ordinance does not create a true “strong chief” system. In addition, the ordinance keeps intact individual agency autonomy and self-management. Unlike the Hanover and Stafford ordinances, the proposed ordinance contains multiple sections that identify and support the agencies’ rights to self-govern (§§6-105, 106, 107, 108, 109). Each agency would function much like a school within a school division—each would have a strong principal, unique identity, and local rules and management, but still operate under the coordination of one superintendent.</p>
<p>Does the fire chief have the authority to decide who can be a volunteer?</p>	<p>No. Volunteer agencies will keep the authority to select, promote, manage, discipline and train volunteers. However, the advisory board, together with the fire rescue chief, would develop policies setting minimum standards for all system personnel. Such policies could not set unnecessarily high standards because all proposed policies must be essential to a high-quality system.</p>
<p>Can this ordinance be amended after it is adopted if it doesn’t produce the desired results?</p>	<p>Yes. Ordinances are brought forward and amended at almost every meeting of the Board of Supervisors. This ordinance also requires that at least once a year the ACFRAB submit a report to the Board about the health of the volunteer system. At anytime, moreover, a volunteer agency or community member may request that the Board review the ordinance.</p>
<p>What’s wrong with the current system? Why make a change?</p>	<p>Over the last several years and particularly during last year’s advisory board’s strategic planning process, both the volunteer and career members of the system have expressed concern about the lack of clarity and Board direction regarding their roles and responsibilities within the system. Without a clear governing structure, neither the advisory board nor the career chief has been able to develop system-wide policies, procedures, and standards that can be implemented effectively across all agencies. The fire and rescue system cannot evolve productively without a clear statement by the Board about its intent for how the system should be governed.</p>