

Unified Funding Project Questions

The following are some questions and comments about the Unified Funding Project (UFP) memorandum from Mr. Andrews dated February 4, 2009. The memo references 34 months of research and discussions and then gives broad ideas about the UFP but has very little in specifics of how the fund monies will be distributed. The most important part of deciding whether any department is for or against the UFP and flat tax is how the distribution of these funds affects ones own department.

The flat tax idea, on the surface, sounds like a fair way to deal with funding of the fire service in Lee County. When one digs a little deeper and looks at the current level of funding, one has to ask:

- How the departments are so far apart in annual operating budgets and what has the Fire Advisory Board (FAB) done to rectify these differences?
- Will distribution of funding under the UFP simply bring everyone up to the same annual operating costs? Some departments would appear to have increased their budgets and debt load substantially, and therefore raising their district's tax rate, since the inception of the FAB in order to minimize the immediate effects of the flat tax.
- Will department funding be based on the potential of life and property loss in each district, the number of annual fire calls, or some other magical formula that has yet to be determined?

The memo states: "However, there are departments who are not fortunate enough to have sufficient property values within their district. This current system of funding has created a situation of the "haves" and the "have nots."

- Who now, other than one department, is considered a "have not?" I now see all the other departments having adequate or beyond adequate equipment as well as the daytime paid staff to run calls. Have any departments had opposition to their current tax rates. I see most departments in the county now having custom cab fire apparatus with seating for a minimum of four firefighters and I would bet that only one, Station 5, puts more than one or occasionally two firefighters in a four or six man cab to respond. The FAB has allowed departments to spend \$40k more on custom cab engines that respond with empty seats on almost every call. If you go flat tax and everyone is equal, will I get a new custom cab fire engine for both of my stations? If you are going to be equal lets be equal.

Further down in the memo, "... budget submissions would be broken down into an operating budget and capital needs."

- Will the flat tax pay off the debts of all departments?

My district is now in debt for a substation and an additional pumper (I saved \$40K by not buying a custom cab design) that wasn't on my five year plan five years ago. How many years will my district pay for these debts alone, then will my taxpayers have to subsidize the other planned substations as soon as they are built because of the flat tax? You cannot fairly fund the other substation debts with the flat tax without funding my substation and reimbursing my district for previous tax increases because the county wanted us to build a substation and operate it. I say let each district tax pay off their own current debt, with

the exception of my substation, then get the operating budgets more in line and fund operating budgets through the UFP.

Why is there even a mention of portable and mobile radios being on an annual replacement program? Mobile and portable radios should last the life of an apparatus or beyond unless it somehow gets damaged and then we have insurance for that.

Most departments, if they are truthful, will admit to having discussions on some level about spending money they normally wouldn't because they believe the flat tax is coming. If you go flat tax, give enough of the funds to help the "have nots." The extra funds generated by each district should stay in that district for at least two years to help pay down debts or purchase equipment put on hold in order to keep tax rates down. For example, if my taxpayers rate goes up from .07 to .10, keep most of the revenue of that .03 extra in my old taxpayers district for a couple of years to lessen the "shock" of the transition to the flat tax. The "shock" is tax rates going up with no return for the districts that have held their tax rates in down.