

Volunteer Fire Voluntary Assessment

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I am very fortunate to have never needed the services of the Camden-Wyoming Volunteer Fire Company. It is my hope that I never do. But I know that if there ever comes a time when they have to visit my home, they will be quick and professional.

Fire services in Kent County are mostly voluntary. When the fire whistle blows, firefighters are already responding to the firehouse. They will put their lives on the line to save others' lives, human or animal. The equipment they use is that same that has been used for dozens of years. Recently, technology has provided opportunities to advance fire fighting into the 21st Century with new equipment and training. These advances are very costly but the ability to fight fires more effectively is vastly more beneficial than the cost of the equipment and the training offered.

Not knowing the financial situation of every volunteer fire company in the county, I can only speak to the knowledge that has been shared from those that I know. In those cases, their budgets for building maintenance, fuel, equipment maintenance, and training are well into the \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 per year.

In many cases the government, whether it is Federal grants, State funding, or county funding barely covers half of these expenses. When it comes time for a major purchase, like a building or a new rescue vehicle, volunteer fire companies go deep into debt to improve the service they provide.

The funding that is not covered by government stipends is the responsibility of the company to provide. Each company hosts BINGO nights, casino nights, dinners, and building rentals to cover the cost. Each company also sends thousands of letters annually to residents in their districts, soliciting for donations.

When I receive the letter from the fire company, I make a donation that I feel I can afford at the time. I know it is never enough and I always wish I could afford more. If I could spread the donation out over a 12 month period, I would be better able to donate more.

Kent County Levy Court currently maintains 94 Street Light and 101 Trash Collection Districts. It would be a relatively easy task to implement a voluntary fire assessment for county residents, where contributions would be included in annual real estate taxes, and 100% of the contribution would go directly to the volunteer fire company district that the resident lives in.

Residents who have property taxes included in their mortgages would be able to spread a donation out over a 12 month period, increasing their escrow to cover their donation. This would be an entirely VOLUNTARY assessment. Those who would rather donate in the traditional way could continue to do so.

If current code or laws prohibit this type of voluntary assessment to be included in county tax bills, the laws need to be changed.