

New Castle County Fire Service Strategic Planning Committee
Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at 2:00pm
Location: Government Center – Executive Conference Room
87 Reads Way, New Castle, DE 19720

MEETING MINUTES

Present Voting Members (In-Person or Virtual): Co-Chairman Kenny Dunn, Co-Chairman Dennis Godek, Dave Del Grande, Bruce Pinkett, Joe Day, Councilman Brandon Toole, Councilman Kevin Caneco, Kevin Cowperthwait, Gordon Edwards, Fran Williams, Dan Burris, Lynn Wells and John Adams.

Non-Voting Members present: Staff Person Stephanie Warren, County Solicitor Karen Sullivan, and members of the public.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

- a. The meeting was called to order at 2:02pm by Co-Chair Kenny Dunn.

2. Approval of Minutes

- a. Meeting Minutes from January 28, 2026, were reviewed and discussed.
- b. Joe Day requested a correction on Page #2, Item #5(a) to “with credit for existing square footage”
- c. **Motion:** To approve the minutes, with stated correction, of the January 28, 2026, meeting:
 - i. Moved by: John Adams
 - ii. Second by: Kevin Cowperthwait
 - iii. Vote: In favor – Unanimous, Opposed – None.
 - iv. Motion carried

3. Review and Prioritization of FACETS Recommendations

- a. The Committee reviewed and formally prioritized recommendations from the FACETS report. Items were grouped, combined where appropriate, and ranked.

4. High Priority #1 – Comprehensive Deployment and Resource Analysis

- a. The Committee determined that a countywide operational and deployment study is foundational to all other decisions.
- b. This study should determine:
 - i. Appropriate number and type of emergency resources.
 - ii. Station locations and potential consolidations.
 - iii. Whether additional stations are needed.
 - iv. Staffing needs.
 - v. Specialized unit placement.

- vi. Ownership considerations of future BLS and fire resources.
 - vii. Shared reserve apparatus utilization.
 - c. The Committee acknowledged that the deployment study may generate difficult discussions, including potential consolidation or resizing of companies. Members emphasized:
 - i. Recommendations will be carefully reviewed.
 - ii. No automatic implementation of study outcomes is assumed.
 - iii. Final decisions will require further deliberation and likely legislative action.

5. High Priority #2 – Sustainable Funding Structure (Including House Bill 127 Authority)

- a. The Committee discussed long-term, permanent, and adequate funding for fire and EMS services, including possible implementation of authority granted under House Bill 127.
- b. Key Discussion and Consideration Points:
 - i. Current fire service funding comes from the County's General Operating Budget.
 - ii. If moved to a dedicated fire fee line item, funding would begin at least at current levels.
 - iii. The recommendation is not to reduce or replace existing funding.
 - iv. Implementation by July 2027 may not be feasible due to ordinance, budget cycle, and administrative constraints.
 - v. The Committee will not delay necessary funding reform solely because implementation timing is complex.
 - vi. Municipal contributions, exemptions, and credit structures must be evaluated.
 - vii. State funding formulas impacting mergers must be reviewed.
 - viii. Capital expenditure oversight may require governance changes and was incorporated into this funding discussion.
- c. Members acknowledged that significant policy, ordinance, and possibly State legislative action may be required.
- d. FACETS recommended movement toward standardized equipment purchasing (example: SCBA brands). Discussion included:
 - i. Currently, multiple brands of SCBA are in use, as well as various other equipment including hose, turnout gear, ladders, etc.
 - ii. Equipment incompatibility exists.
 - iii. Standardization could reduce long-term costs.
 - iv. Transition timing is complex due to staggered replacement cycles and transition planning would be required.

- v. Enforcement mechanisms would likely be tied to funding eligibility.
- vi. Governance implications were discussed, including oversight authority.

6. High Priority #3 – Centralized Ambulance Billing & Vendor Standards

- a. The Committee combined multiple related recommendations concerning:
 - i. Centralized ambulance billing.
 - ii. Vendor performance standards.
 - iii. Minimum collection periods (365 days).
 - iv. Five-notification billing requirement.
 - v. Standardized financial transparency.
 - vi. Vendor bad debt approval processes.
- b. Members agreed standardization could improve efficiency, reduce costs, and improve reporting consistency.

7. High Priority #4 – Municipal Responsibility & Cost Sharing

- a. The Committee discussed municipal contributions and equitable cost sharing. Key points included:
 - i. Some municipalities receive credit against County taxes for contributions.
 - ii. Contributions vary widely.
 - iii. Long-term funding reform may require municipalities to assume greater responsibility.
 - iv. This topic intersects directly with fire tax discussions.

8. Medium Priority #1 – Group Purchasing & Professional Services

- a. Recommendations regarding:
 - i. Group agreements for accounting and HR services.
 - ii. Group contracts for vehicles, equipment, and facility maintenance.
 - iii. Grant writing support and coordination.
 - iv. Standardized financial report.
 - v. Contractual compliance and use-of-funds standards.
- b. Discussion concluded:
 - i. Many financial reporting requirements have already been strengthened.
 - ii. All 21 companies submitted required documentation.
 - iii. Further standardization may be beneficial but is largely accomplished.
 - iv. Grant writer support is currently available within County fiscal staff.

9. Medium Priority #2 – Financial Practices & Investment Strategies

- a. Recommendations regarding:
 - i. Sweep accounts
 - ii. CD strategies
 - iii. Banking optimization
 - iv. Event hall profitability
 - v. Volunteer and live-in programs
- b. The Committee determined:
 - i. These are operational decisions of independent corporations.
 - ii. They may be included as advisory recommendations.
 - iii. They remain Low Priority relative to structural funding and deployment reform.

10. Motion: to approve the prioritization list as discussed and ranked:

- i. Moved by: Kevin Cowperthwait
- ii. Seconded by: Dan Burris
- iii. Vote: In favor – Unanimous, Opposed – None.
- iv. Motion carried

11. Public Comment

- a. No public comment was offered, in person or virtual.

12. Adjournment

- a. Meeting adjourned at 3:31pm.

Action Items & Next Steps

1. HIGH PRIORITY #1 – Comprehensive Deployment & Operational Study

a. Action Items:

- i. Define scope of the countywide deployment study
 - ii. Prepare summary framework for presentation at next meeting
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2. HIGH PRIORITY #2 – Sustainable Funding Structure (HB 127 Authority)

a. Action Items:

- i. Review House Bill 127 implementation requirements
- ii. Analyze current fire service funding levels and sources
- iii. Identify potential structure for dedicated fire service fee
- iv. Evaluate municipal contribution models and credit systems
- v. Review impact on County General Operating Budget
- vi. Identify ordinance and/or legislative actions required
- vii. Develop preliminary implementation timeline (targeting post-FY27 if necessary)

b. Next Steps:

- i. Gather baseline financial data
 - ii. Determine legal review needs
 - iii. Outline phased implementation options
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3. HIGH PRIORITY #3 – Centralized Ambulance Billing & Vendor Standards

a. Action Items:

- i. Inventory current ambulance billing vendors and contract terms
- ii. Compare collection timelines and performance standards
- iii. Evaluate feasibility of centralized billing administration
- iv. Draft minimum vendor performance standards (365-day billing, five-notification policy, bad debt approval process, etc.)
- v. Identify cost savings opportunities through standardization

b. Next Steps:

- i. Request data from companies regarding billing performance
 - ii. Determine whether County-led RFP process should be explored
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4. HIGH PRIORITY #4 – Municipal Responsibility & Cost Sharing

a. Action Items:

- i. Compile a list of municipal contributions and current credit structures
- ii. Analyze disparities in municipal participation
- iii. Identify policy options for equitable cost sharing
- iv. Determine intersection with funding reform proposal

b. Next Steps:

- i. Prepare comparative municipal contribution chart
 - ii. Identify municipalities requiring engagement discussions
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5. MEDIUM PRIORITY ITEMS (To Be Incorporated Where Appropriate)

a. Equipment Standardization

- i. Inventory current equipment brands (SCBA, hose, turnout gear, ladders)
- ii. Evaluate long-term cost impact of standardization
- iii. Determine governance mechanism for enforcement (if tied to funding)

b. Group Purchasing / Professional Services

- i. Review current shared service opportunities
- ii. Identify gaps in financial reporting standardization
- iii. Evaluate potential for expanded grant writing support

c. Public Outreach & Education

- i. Develop draft countywide fire service outreach strategy
- ii. Coordinate social media messaging framework
- iii. Identify public education priorities

d. Financial Best Practices

- i. Develop optional advisory guidance on investment strategies
- ii. Review event hall profitability data (if available)
- iii. Explore volunteer/live-in program enhancement strategies