

# CITY OF STATESBORO

## COUNCIL

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Jonathan McCollar, Mayor  
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Leah Harden, City Clerk  
Cain Smith, City Attorney

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## INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

City Manager's Office

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Charles W. Penny, City Manager

DATE: February 10, 2025

RE: Recommendation on Fire District Agreement

Mayor McCollar and Council, the Chairman of the Bulloch County Commissioners would like a decision in reference to their proposal to serve the Fire District submitted to the City on January 30, 2025 by February 17, 2025 by the close of business. The Bulloch County Commissioners voted to cancel the Fire District Agreement effective July 1, 2025 at their December 3, 2024 Board meeting, and I was informed by the Interim County Manager on December 4, 2024. I acknowledged receipt of the letter on December 4 and advised her I would be recommending the City Council accept the decision of the Commissioners and they would be responsible for fire services in the district effective July 1, 2025. On December 5, 2024, I received a second email which the Interim Manager stated "I do not believe the intent of their vote was not to take responsibility of the fire service in the Fire District as of July 1, 2025, but to negotiate another agreement." At the Fire District Committee Meeting on January 30, 2025, the Commissioners through the Bulloch County Fire Chief laid out the terms to split the Fire District without any discussion with the Statesboro Fire Chief. My recommendation is not to accept the plan presented by the Bulloch County Fire Chief.

The City recognizes the Fire District is the responsibility of Bulloch County and we consider it an honor and a privilege to have been able to serve the citizens and businesses of the Fire District for more than 47 years as noted in the 2022-2023 Bulloch County Budget. The additional millage rate of 2.70 is to pay for the increased fire service from the City. Citizens and businesses are paying for the availability of fire service from a Class 2 fire department and not on a per call basis. It is better to have it (the service) and not need it, than to need it and not have it. As of this year, the funding from the additional millage rate is \$2.3 million. In addition to the primary response in the 5 mile Fire District, the City also responds to all fire calls in Bulloch County

outside of the Fire District as a part of the automatic aid agreement. Funding from the county equals 30 percent of the total Statesboro Fire Department budget. The Fire District is 96 square miles and the City of Statesboro is 16.1 square miles of the District. The Fire District is 83 percent of the area served by Statesboro Fire Department. Bulloch County is 689 square miles.

We are supportive of Bulloch County having an excellent Fire Department and wish them nothing but the best as they continue to grow and develop.

As we have grown and served the Fire District, we have not taken any action without consultation with Bulloch County. When the 5 year agreement was reached, it was through meetings and discussions. As we have received increased funding and added employees, Bulloch County has been informed. There is no question the City built our budget based upon receiving funding from Bulloch County for serving the 5 mile district. Statesboro has commitments to our personnel which we must and will fulfill. If we had been offered the opportunity to discuss our concerns with the Interim County Manager and the Bulloch County Fire Chief, we would have shared those details with them.

The Chairman of the Bulloch County Commission has now asked for a counter offer. I do not recommend acceptance of the proposal to split the fire district. The City is willing to serve the district for one final year under the current terms of the agreement, and since the County will be assuming responsibility of the Fire District going forward, I would recommend allowing the County to build stations within the 5 mile district. If the County accepts this offer, I would recommend the City consider automatic aid for at least one additional year to assist with the transition. If the County would like to continue with automatic aid beyond July 1, 2027 terms would need to be negotiated with the City.

I advised the Interim County Manager on Friday, January 31, 2025 the City Council would discuss this matter at our City Council retreat on March 14-15, 2025. If the County cannot wait until we have had sufficient time to evaluate the full impact of these actions, then I recommend you accept the decision of Bulloch County at the December 3, 2024 meeting to terminate Fire District Agreement effective July 1, 2025, at which time the Statesboro Fire Department will be responsible for fire protection in the City limits only, and Bulloch County will have the responsibility for the remainder of the county. The City would respond in the Fire District on a mutual aid basis only upon the termination of the Fire District Agreement.