

# **White Hall Fire Protection District formed: What that means is still up in the air**

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March 21 2018 12:04 PM



**WHITE HALL** – The White Hall Fire Department is now the White Hall Fire Protection District, but as of now, firefighters within the newly-formed district are unsure what that means for the future.

White Hall Fire Chief Gary Shepherd said an attorney is currently working with the district to see how much area it may cover. While White Hall residents voted for the volunteer fire department to be expanded into a district to cover outside areas, most of those outside areas, such as Hillview, Wilmington and unincorporated Greene County voted against the formation of the fire protection district. Shepherd said the move to create the district was more based on revenue issues than fire protection.

“If we do not go out to the surrounding areas, I'm not sure what it means to be a fire protection district,” Shepherd said. “We got to where the city cannot buy the extras needed for us to do our best work safely. The cost of fire equipment is getting high. We need to make our department safer and more effective, and spread that cost among the people we serve.”

Shepherd said the creation of the district would raise taxes for residents. He said homeowners with houses worth around \$100,000 would pay as much as \$80 in additional taxes each year. When it comes to landowners and farmers, however, the cost may have increased by as much as \$1-\$2.25 an acre each year.

Currently, the surrounding residents of White Hall have contracts with the White Hall Fire Department for fire protection and emergency response. Shepherd said those people are not in danger of losing fire protection, despite voting against the measure. He said current contracts have another year or two before expiration.

As of now, however, it is not known if the areas, which voted against the creation of the White Hall Fire Protection District will be covered under it and beholden to the increased tax burden. Shepherd said an attorney working on the issue has advised him the vote did create the White Hall Fire Protection District, adding who is covered is still up in the air at this time.

With that increase in tax revenue, however, Shepherd said his 20 volunteer firefighters will be able to purchase new self-contained breathing tanks. He said the department is in dire need of replacements for the safety of his firefighters. The cost to replace those at this time is estimated to be between \$20,000-\$25,000.

“That's one thing I need to replace, and the city does not have the funds for it.”

Shepherd said he expected the details of the newly-formed White Hall Fire Protection District to be released by the end of the week.