

Board talks snow removal; designated county fire marshal

Posted by [Zach Hill](#) On 01/11/2019

La Plata, MD - With a full agenda, the Board of Charles County Commissioners sat down for their first meeting of 2019 Tuesday, Jan. 8.

Coincidentally, a piece of information that came before the commissioners was a briefing by the Department of Public Works, regarding inclement weather and snow removal policies that are in place for Charles County. It just so happens that these policies may come into effect this weekend with snow accumulation currently in the forecast for Jan. 12 and 13.

"When it snows, [the] county and contract[ed] forces concentrate on keeping primary county roads and major residential neighborhood streets passable," the Public Works Department explained. "Plowing generally begins when snow becomes 1 to 3 inches deep and the temperature indicates there will be no melting."

Public Works officials went on to explain how any decisions made surrounding inclement winter weather account for the makeup of the snow, the temperatures outside, and even the wind conditions. However, arguably the most interesting part of this presentation came when the department disclosed its 25 percent turnover rate for snow removal contractors.

"We are short of contractors right now so if they are qualified and have the equipment, we have a route and can hire them," Chief of Roads Steve Staples stated. "During every storm there is at least 10 percent of the vehicles that are either no-shows or they break down so we are always looking for more."

Another interesting point that was discussed during the meeting was an agenda item brought forth by Commissioner Bobby Rucci [D-District 4]; the possibility of bringing a designated fire marshal on the staff of Charles County.

"This is to get our business growing, to let people know we are open for business," Rucci said. "I don't want to discredit our [state] fire marshals, but I think they are spread too thin."

The concept, elaborated by Director of Planning and Growth Management Steve Kaii-Ziegler, consists of bringing on multiple "fire-trained engineers" to help expedite processing for permits, development applications, and to deal with inspections in a timely manner. Currently, there is only one fire marshal designated to the three Southern Maryland counties.

"We do have an opportunity to improve service," Kaii-Ziegler stated. "We like to work with our brother/sister state agencies and I think there is potential here for a win-win situation, where we are able to improve services in such a way that [is] cost-effective to the county."

Following their discussion on designating someone to handle the role of a fire marshal in the county, there are still two major points to be addressed. Those two points are: what are the costs associated with bringing people on board to fulfill this role and how difficult will it be to find candidates for the jobs.

"It is a very limited skill set with a very high demand," Kaii-Ziegler explained. "It isn't dissimilar to our ability to hire storm water management engineers or water and sewer engineers and its is very difficult. We are competing with everyone for [these] skill sets."

Kaii-Ziegler emphasized how in many cases, the county will spend years advertising for engineering positions to be filled with no luck. All options are going to be thoroughly evaluated and brought back to the board in a tentative 30 days for a decision.

The commissioners have their next meeting tentatively scheduled for Jan. 15.

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