

Balsam-Willets-Ochre Hill Volunteer Fire Department, Inc.

P.O. Box 291 Balsam, NC 28707



February 8, 2023

Mr. Don Adams
Jackson County Manager
401 Grindstaff Cove Road
Sylva, NC 28779

Re: 2023/2024 Fiscal Year Budget Request

Dear Mr. Adams,

The Balsam-Willets-Ochre Hill Volunteer Fire Department would like to express our appreciation to Jackson County and especially to the Jackson County Board of Commissioners for your willingness to consider our request for an appropriation in the Jackson County 2023/2024 Fiscal Year Budget to provide the necessary local 50% match for the North Carolina Volunteer Fire Grant administered through the NC Department of Insurance.

This volunteer fire grant program is available to volunteer fire departments that meet certain state guidelines and is a great way for small rural departments to fund capital needs, purchase personal protective equipment, etc. that carry huge price tags. The maximum total amount of dollars that any one department can apply for is \$60,000. The NC Department of Insurance has created a list of items that are eligible grant expenditures. The equipment must be maintained at the fire station for which the grant was awarded and be used in helping provide fire protection to the district the department serves. The grant applications are due by March 1, 2023. The award notification will occur on May 15, 2023. Departments receiving the grant can move forward with purchases after May 15, 2023, and have until September 2023 to submit back to the NC Department of Insurance the required invoices and bank statements to show that items were purchased and received. Once having received the required documentation, the NC Department of Insurance will provide the fire department with a check for 50% of the grant expense.

Balsam Fire Department is looking to submit an application for the 2023 NC Volunteer Fire Grant in the amount of \$59,600 to upgrade our emergency radio communication equipment. Of this total grant amount, \$29,800 is the required local match that we are requesting assistance with from Jackson County.

The current UHF radio network being utilized by Balsam Fire Department is approaching the end of its useful life. Most of the radios being used today exceed 10 years in age, show signs of wear, are no longer in production by the manufacturer, and lack the most current technology options. Also, not all of the radios are the same model which creates problems when trying to swap out batteries or exchange radios with other personnel that do not have the same model. Currently, the department only has one Viper 800 MHz radio. Viper radios are the primary form of communication during declared states of emergency. We would be looking to add some additional Viper radios to our department. Currently none of the fire department radios meet the new federal P25 standards. Project 25 (P25) develops standards for interoperable land mobile radio (LMR) systems so emergency responders can exchange critical communications across agencies and jurisdictions. P25 standardizes interfaces between the various components of the LMR systems emergency responders' use.

Communication is a vital part of providing an adequate emergency response and is essential in working to achieve responder safety. Not only will these new radios be in better working condition, they come outfitted with GPS locator technology, the P25 emergency standards, and more user friendly features. Standardization of equipment will also be a big advantage. These new units are much needed and will make a big difference.

Equipment Breakdown with approximate projected costs:

Description	Quantity	Unit Price	Total Cost
UHF Base Radio for Main Station	1	\$1,000	\$1,000
Viper 800 MHz Base Radio for Main Station	1	\$3,500	\$3,500
Vehicle mounted UHF Base Radio (fire trucks only)	11	\$1,000	\$11,000
Vehicle mounted Viper 800 MHz Base Radio (fire trucks only)	3	\$2,800	\$8,400
Handheld Viper 800 MHz radios (for officers only)	5	\$2,300	\$11,500
Handheld UHF County Radios with extra battery (for firefighters)	22	\$1,100	\$24,200
Total Equipment Costs:			\$59,600
Local Match Required (<i>Jackson Co. allocates to Balsam VFD</i>)			\$29,800
NC Department of Insurance Grant Match			\$29,800

Thank you for your assistance with this request.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Thomas McMahan
Fire Chief