

Shenandoah Farms Volunteer Fire Department Responds to Audit

October 3, 2011 by [Michael Dowling \(Edit\)](#)

Saturday afternoon the Board of Directors for the Shenandoah Farms Volunteer Fire Department (SFVFD) convened a press conference to address the recently completed audit of their department. The group was subjected to an outside audit of their finances in April of this year and have been under very close scrutiny ever since. The board called the press conference to address information that was being disseminated and to reassure the community of the dedication and trustworthiness of the organization.

President of the Board of Directors of the SFVFD, Donald Hoover headed up the meeting and was disturbed by the way the department was being portrayed in the press, particularly given the fact that his department has never received any information on the findings of the audit. SFVFD representatives said they have never received a copy of the audit, never received a copy of the Clarke County Commonwealth Attorney's press release regarding the results, and were not contacted by Warren or Clarke County's Board of Supervisors at any point during or after the process. Donald Hoover added, "In all this uproar, investigation, whatever... I have yet to be called, interviewed, interrogated or questioned by anyone including the auditor, State Police, whomever. It just would seem to me that the chief administrative officer would have a little bit of knowledge to put into an investigation."



Board members speak to the press regarding the recent audit findings - Photo Mike Dowling

The rural department is operated by Warren County but serves and is partially funded by Clarke County as well. Their service area encompasses the state's 2nd largest subdivision as well as some of the most treacherous terrain in both counties. The station has a long history of service that has spanned many years and many personalities. Some of those years have been less than memorable and current members drew a very clear line in that history saying that in January of 2010 significant changes were made. In fact, most of the board of directors and three of the four officers in the organization were replaced. That line is the point at which the department wants to make sure the press and the public judges them by.

Donald Hoover said, "There were problems in the past we all know and agree that there were. I have no problem with the county pursuing the audit. That is their responsibility. They have a responsibility to see to it that public funds are spent wisely."

Judy Moriarty, bookkeeper for the department, said they believed the audit period that was being conducted spanned from 2005 through 2009. That period represents a very different picture than the department that exists today. Several members admitted that accounting during the 2005-2009 period had been sloppy but said that is why there was a sweeping change in leadership in January of 2010. Since that time many improvements have been enacted and Ms Moriarty said, "Even the auditor said our books are squeaky clean since January of 2010."

But the picture seen in the local press has been far different. The board referenced several printed articles where the entire audit history appeared to be lumped in with current operations. Several articles referenced a press release from Clarke County Commonwealth's Attorney, Suzanne Mackall Perka who delineated some of the ongoing concerns saying:

"Some of the concerns outlined in the audit were as follows: at one time there were approximately 14 debit cards in use and shared; alterations made to the SFVFD 'Quickbooks;' there were estimated to be 12 to 14 master keys; checks written for 'Cash;' and receipts were missing.

The SFVFD is a volunteer organization and as such does not have a professional staff maintaining its books."

The board believes these issues are pre-2010 and needed clarification. Donald Hoover pointed out several areas. For example The Commonwealth's Attorney in Clarke County Suzanne Perka said that "there were approximately 14 debit cards in use and shared." by the department. Hooper said, "When you say the shared use of 14 debit cards, that's a little misleading." The department currently has 1 debit card that is controlled by the treasurer. Last year they had two. He said that the number used by Perka could only be considered accurate if you counted every debit card that had ever been issued from 2005 to the present day. "It's a much different picture if you say someone has 14 debit cards in use."

Also the department's current bookkeeper has extensive experience and has been employed as a bookkeeper for Meadows Farm Nursery for the past 23 years.

Other issue listed in the release had been addressed as well, many prior to the audit. Hoover said he believes much of the controversy could have been avoided had someone simply contacted the department. Because communication with government officials is so poor, the department does not know if county officials are aware of the changes that have been made since 2010. In that communications void an audit was initiated based on what the department believes was a single complaint. That audit, which was estimated to have cost twenty-four thousand dollars, was conducted and concluded with no charges being filed.

However the audit has had serious implications to the department. Judy Moriarty said, "We are running off fumes." While basic needs for fuel and equipment are being paid directly by Warren County other costs typically handled by the department are taking longer to deal with. On top of that the public's confidence in the department has been impacted. The board made it clear that the current department since January of 2010 is a far different department than the one portrayed in the audit results they have seen in the press.

Hoover added, "I don't want to turn this into something adversarial between us and the county administration. I want to work with the county through a process where we can have our funds restored to us and we can be in charge of them. That is the end result I would like to see."

He summarized saying, "This is not us against them. It's WE. We need to move forward."

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Comments

Tito says:

[October 3, 2011 at 1:00 pm \(Edit\)](#)

\$24,000 to perform an audit! Someone better audit that!



Zippy says:

[October 3, 2011 at 1:54 pm \(Edit\)](#)

Actually...if it's a thorough audit spanning 4 fiscal years, that's not too unreasonable a cost.



resident of SF says:

[October 3, 2011 at 3:05 pm \(Edit\)](#)

I know I personally have a problem that my tax money is paying for this audit and nothing is found. A fire dept is more then that and not once has anyone said anything about the times the firefighters and emts leave thier familys durring holidays, dinners, over nights to take care of everybody else and risk thier lives!!!! If anyone has recently read the paper you would know that many other fire departments have been audited for far more money being missing. And I personally do not agree with all the bad press and having my taxes pay for a bull crap audit instead of 24,000 going towards new gear, new equipment. It a shame how people have no support for them but wen thier house catches on fire or they get into an accident or need medical attention they think nothing of calling SFVFD but the next day go complain to papers about them. Darn shame aint it.



Zippy says:

[October 3, 2011 at 4:08 pm \(Edit\)](#)

Please...don't waste pixels trying to deflect blame. Yes, it is a noble and good thing that those volunteers do for the rest of us. However...as this investigation found...quite a few of those volunteers ALSO contributed to a serious breach of the public trust, reckless management of station funds, and other errors in judgement. This audit is a natural consequence of those poor decisions on their part. Whining about it doesn't take away the fact that an audit is ALL that is going to drop down on the heads of SFVFD. If Ms. Perka had legitimate criminal cause, I'd wager Big Mac combo meal supersized that she'd have pressed charges. This will allow the new leadership to truly know where (and, most likely, who) the fiscal mistakes occurred, and move on.



resident of SF says:

[October 3, 2011 at 5:11 pm \(Edit\)](#)

Well if you have read what was written in the other articles no criminal charges were found the investigation by the state police found nothing. I do have a question for you though the way you wrote what you did sounds like your a member and know some things so why are you so against where you volunteer??? If you are so against it maybe you should leave there because believe me when I say this if you hate your fire department so much I do not want you coming to my house to save me.



Zippy says:

[October 3, 2011 at 7:33 pm \(Edit\)](#)

Nope, not a volunteer for SFVFD or any other station. I just read the news, talk to people, try to understand the facts. But...on that note, whether or not someone "hates" their department shouldn't interfere with their ability to respond to a call (even to your house) and offer assistance, and I'd wager that you'd not say "Nay" were I to ride up on the response vehicle and you were in dire straits. Again, spare us the drama.



RBetz says:

[October 3, 2011 at 5:39 pm \(Edit\)](#)

WE?, Mr. Hoover-good luck with that concept . Sadly, I don't believe it exists in Clarke County.



josea says:

[October 3, 2011 at 10:19 pm \(Edit\)](#)

Why is Mr. Hoover so interested in having control over funds provided by the counties if the counties are using the funds to pay SFVFD bills? What's the difference as long as the bills get paid? It seems that with the counties taking on that task, fewer fire department people would have to miss dinners with their families, etc. I'd rather my taxes be raised (triple 'em if necessary!) to fund a paid fire department where employees expect oversight and understand that oversight and accountability are in their best interest as well as the public's best interest. Then perhaps \$24,000 wouldn't need to be spent on a well-deserved audit. I greatly respect volunteers, have been one myself over the years, but when volunteers start playing the "poor me" card for having to fulfill the responsibilities (like giving up family dinners, etc.) they have undertaken of their own free will, it's time to stop volunteering. The state police may lack sufficient evidence to make criminal charges, but the counties are continuing to investigate, and I for one am glad to hear it. An admitted misplacement of more than \$1,000 in bingo money is quite serious in my opinion, and not something that should be left to the department to "make right" internally. I do hope that criminal background checks are done on all individuals who want to be associated with SFVFD in the future (allegedly they haven't been). As they say, it only takes one bad apple...



htfchc says:

[October 3, 2011 at 10:24 pm \(Edit\)](#)

MY FAMILY LOVES SFVFD!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! YAY FOR GOOD NEWS!!



Richie Blick says:

[October 4, 2011 at 10:30 am \(Edit\)](#)

THANK FOR ALL THE FIRE AND RESCUE VOLUNTEERS THAT KEEP THE PUBLIC SAFE!

