

Ocracoke Recovery Fund Update (aka “The Firehouse Committee”)

There has been a lot of speculation about the funds raised by the Outer Banks Community Foundation in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian. Per the request of the Foundation, a committee of Ocracoke firefighters has been formed to distribute these funds. It is our intention to be as clear about our goals and our methods as we possibly can.

Our most recent estimate on the Foundation fund is more than \$900,000. The Committee’s goal is to stretch that money as far as it can possibly go, with the focus on community members who do not have resources like insurance or state assistance to get back on their feet.

The Committee is focused on long-term recovery, with an understanding that this winter will be very difficult for many islanders, and with the hope that there will still be some money left to help those who need it after the tide of assistance begins to slacken. While there are needs that we can address immediately, and that are appropriate for our fund, we are committed to being sure that needs that we fill could not be met by another source. For instance, while we can cover expenses for building materials right now, we could also provide rent/mortgage assistance in February for someone whose savings have been expended.

There has been public concern about the methods by which the Committee is distributing funds. In response to those concerns, we have worked with the Long Term Recovery Group (now known as the Ocracoke Interfaith Relief and Recovery Team, or OIRRT) to address the issue. All applicants for funds are encouraged to go to the intake center in the trailer at the Variety Store. Those who cannot get to the trailer in person can call 919-825-2378 for assistance with the application process, or contact the Committee at ocracokerecoveryfund@gmail.com.

The intake information goes to a trained case worker, who “shops out” needs to various sources, including government and charitable sources. Only after all such resources have been exhausted does the case worker approach the Committee. That approach is made by the case worker, not by the applicant, and while the Committee is given information for context, the applicant’s identity will not be known to the Committee until after funding decisions have been made. Once the funds are approved, the Committee communicates with the case worker to distribute the funds to a vendor who can fill the specified need. Only in cases of reimbursement for money already spent, and confirmed by receipts, will applicants receive money directly from the committee.

In all cases, Committee decisions will be held in strict confidence by all members. This is a bedrock understanding of all members of the Committee.

As of this writing, the Committee has completed a first round of disbursements, focused on cases of medical need, and funds will be disbursed steadily from this time forward, as requests are vetted and presented by the caseworkers.

It is worth stating clearly that the Committee members will make all decisions regarding the Foundation money. While the Committee is working in partnership with OIRRT, and has a vote in that group’s decision making, OIRRT will not make any decisions regarding the distribution of the Foundation funds. The requests to the Committee from OIRRT will come from OIRRT’s Unmet Needs committee, which will focus on using every available resource to fill the needs of community members.

Working together, we are dedicated to filling every need that we can, for as long as we can, until the island is back up on its feet, and its residents back in their homes.