Martin Is North Wilkesboro Chief

Jimmy Martin was named North Wilkesboro fire chief Friday after serving as interim fire chief for the past six months.

"I think it's a good decision," North Wilkesboro Mayor Robert Johnson said. "I feel like Jimmy's done a good job for us. I'm looking forward to working with him."

Martin said he's been a member of the North Wilkesboro Fire Department for 32 years. "I feel like I've served in about every officer position," he laughed.

Martin will be serving as a part-time fire chief, despite the recommendation of a consultant hired by North Wilkesboro and Wilkesboro for a Sept. 19 joint retreat focusing on how the two fire departments could work together better.

In his report, consultant Steve Allen of Charlotte recommended that North Wilkesboro fund a full-time fire chief position.

North Wilkesboro Town Manager Larry South said the primary reason for funding Martin part-time was budgetary.

"It's not budgeted as a full-time position," he said. "That's not to say that in the future it might not need to become one." South said if the town decided to fund a full-time fire chief position, the decision would need to be made as the budget was being discussed.

"It also didn't feel necessary at this point," he added.

North Wilkesboro has always employed a fire chief on no more than a part-time basis in the past. "It seemed to have always worked for us in the past," Johnson said.

South said Martin's annual salary is between $15,000 and $16,000.

As interim fire chief, Martin was paid $116.15 every two weeks, North Wilkesboro Finance Director Connie Bauguess said.

She said he also was paid per-call. "The way the fire chief has worked in the past—they're paid per-call, and there's also a salary," she said.

Mrs. Bauguess said that between the bi-weekly salary and per-call pay, the fire chief would typically make about $15,000-$16,000 a year. So when the decision was made to hire Martin as the fire chief, it was agreed he would simply receive a set salary in that range.