

Virginia Fire Services Board

Thursday, September 25, 2025

Hotel Madison

710 S. Main Street, Harrisonburg, VA 22801

10:30 AM

MINUTES

A meeting of the Virginia Fire Services Board was held at the Hotel Madison in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The meeting was called to order by Chair Keith Johnson and a quorum was present.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Keith Johnson, Chairman – Virginia Fire Chiefs Association
Abbey Johnston, Vice Chairman – Virginia State Firefighters Association
John Miller – Designee, Virginia State Forester
JM Snell II – Virginia Board of Housing and Community Development
Billy Hanks – Local Fire Marshal
Kevin Duck – Insurance Industry
Carla Keesee – Virginia Chapter, International Assoc. of Arson Investigators
Charles Sterne – General Public
Jerome Williams – Certified Fire Service Instructor
Gerry Maiatico – Virginia Fire Prevention Association
Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Service Council
Todd King – Virginia Association of Counties
Steven Sites – Virginia Municipal League

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

James Calvert – Industry (SARA Title III/OSHA)
Jess Rodzinka – Virginia Professional Fire Fighters

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Brad Creasy, Executive Director
Nicholas Nanna, Deputy Director
Billy Hux, State Fire Marshal
Michael Parris, Deputy Chief, Training and Operations
Zeina Altaha, Grants Manager
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

GUESTS PRESENT

Bill Kiger	Ernie Little	Jason Johnson
Andrew Milliken	Lee Williams	

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CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

Chairman Keith Johnson moved the Presentation of Service Awards to directly after Public Comments.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Walt Bailey introduced Bill Kiger as a special guest. Kiger has been an advocate for the fire service. Kiger thanked everyone for the service they provided and spoke briefly about his time on the Fire Services Board for 17 years and the transition of the State Fire Marshals Office (SFMO) from the Department of Housing and Community Development to the Department of Fire Programs. He shared some words of wisdom about ways to continue to advocate.

PRESENTATION OF SERVICE AWARDS

Johnson called former Board Member Ernie Little to the front to present his service award. Board Clerk Spencer Willett read a biography of Little. Little shared about his past time on the board and thanked Walt Bailey and Chair Johnson for allowing him to Chair the Fire Prevention and Control Committee. He also acknowledged Andrew Milliken who Chairs the Codes and Standard Workgroup. Little spoke of his time working with Steve Sites and Gerry Maiatico. He gave the current board a challenge to keep citizens safe and to follow up on new changes to the fire code.

Johnson recognized Bettie Reeves-Nobles who previously received her outgoing board plaque and Donald Hart who could not attend the retreat. Willett read Hart's biography since he was unable to attend. The board recognized all three for their service with a round of applause.

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion: Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (June 2025).

Motion: Bailey **Second:** Johnston

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes approved.

REPORT FROM VDFP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Executive Director Creasy reported on the updated memorandum of agreement that was submitted to the Board of Housing and Community Development, and they agreed to come together to make progress, along with the Attorney General's Office. He highlighted legislative initiatives for VDFP. Budget proposals include an impact study for a water rescue training

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facility. The agency is planning to ask for additional funds for the Firefighter Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) grants to be awarded again next fiscal cycle. The seven division offices are closing due to office leases ending and lack of foot traffic. The division chiefs will be out in the field meeting with stakeholders instead of sitting in an office. Retesting will occur at regional academies and fire stations versus in an office. Computer based testing continues to roll out with success. Seven courses are currently being tested. Users can use tablets and receive test results immediately. There was a low success rate with the modular Firefighter I program, and the agency continues to work out issues. The Airport Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF) program has been having issues with training equipment set to expire. The Department of Aviation has identified a funding source for replacement equipment after Director Creasy met with them. The new National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) platform is set to open soon, and he recognized Chief Brown and his work scheduling several virtual meetings to assist users. The new platform will require less information to be gathered but be more accurate and accessible to everyone.

REPORT FROM THE FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL COMMITTEE

Steve Sites spoke on highlights from the committee meetings to include SFMO filling vacant positions and updating blaster certification platforms. The Virginia Fire Marshal Academy (VFMA) has a National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1033 class in Warren County and the basic law enforcement class in Blackstone is still ongoing. The Codes and Standards Workgroup met and reviewed the single exit staircase code change. The workgroup agreed to the new language. The workgroup was not happy about the proposed change to reduce the sizing of elevators to accommodate a stretcher in buildings with four floors or more. The end of October is the deadline to submit any code changes. He recognized the work of Andrew Milliken and his workgroup.

Sites highlighted the SFMO Fee Report and that members needed to be selected to represent the board to the Board of Housing and Community Development. Johnson asked if anyone was interested in serving. Maiatico and Sites stated they would serve.

Motion: To appoint Gerry Maiatico and Steven Sites to represent the board related to the SFMO Fees Report.

Motion: Sites **Second:** Johnston

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved

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Walt Bailey asked if there was any way the board could stage a stretcher with 200 pounds added and be brought up and down stairs to show those who are making these decisions on reducing the size of elevators the struggle. Johnson mentioned there are opportunities to address these concerns in the future, especially in front of the Board of Housing and Community Development.

REPORT FROM THE LIVE FIRE TRAINING STRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Board Chair Keith Johnson spoke for Committee Chair James Calvert who was not in attendance. Johnson mentioned that the committee reviewed and approved previous minutes, including amended minutes from the March 2025 meeting. There was also discussion on live fire structure policies and the report given by the Thermal Lining Workgroup. Workgroup members were thanked including Snell, Sites, Hux, Haynes, and Willett. A 1-year extension request was made by Halifax and was altered to an 18-month request.

Motion: To grant Halifax County a year and a half (1.5 year) extension.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved

Johnson mentioned recommendations that came out of the Thermal Lining Workgroup to include if original structural plans are not available the locality must hire a registered design professional to produce structural drawings. This would help indicate what should have thermal linings and remain compliant with board policy.

Motion: To adopt recommendation 1 of the Thermal Linings Workgroup Report.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Recommendation adopted

Johnson mentioned that he was tasked with creating a subcommittee that would look at the policy related to these live fire training structures and if they meet the training needs of Firefighter I and Firefighter II standards in compliance with NFPA 1001.

Motion: To request the Chairman form a subcommittee to work on a live fire training policy.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Subcommittee approved

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Motion: To delay action on live fire training structures for localities that received notice of a lack of compliance for thermal lining issues as a component of their 5-year inspection. Such localities should report their plan of action on other life safety issues within 90 days from the action of the board to the Department of Fire Programs. Each locality shall have 90 days to submit a letter outlining compliance after the final action of the board to adopt a recommended policy concerning thermal linings and live fire training structures.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved, VDFP to send a letter outlining this decision to affected localities.

Motion: To appoint James Calvert, J.M. Snell and Steve Sites to the subcommittee. VDFP representation to include Training and Operations, Grants, and Government Affairs staff.

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Bailey

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Subcommittee members approved

REPORT FROM THE FIRE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

No report from the committee, which did not meet.

Chief Michael Parris spoke about new programs being created and online testing. Students have been having issues logging onto the testing portals, but staff have been assisting students with that. The division office closures have had no impact on foot traffic. There will be some changes to the reaccreditation process and online testing. Heavy Technical Rescue (HTR) programs have been updated and are currently undergoing testing.

REPORT FROM THE ADMINISTRATION, POLICY, AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Johnston gave an overview of some of the items that came out of the committee.

Motion: To adopt the Halifax County Fire and EMS Study Report.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Study adopted

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Motion: Retroactively update the Firefighter Equipment and PPE Program to include the revised language as presented.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Grant changes adopted

Motion: To adopt the revised language and create the Fire Incident Reporting Grant.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Grant changes adopted

Motion: To approve the 1-year extension request for the Town of Blackstone.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Extension approved for one year

Motion: To approve the extension request for VDFP Training and Operations

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Extension approved for one year

Motion: To approve the grant application for King and Queen County at 90 percent of the project amount.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Grant application approved at 90 percent of the project amount

Motion: To approve the City of Roanoke's grant application at 75 percent of the project amount.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Grant application approved at 75 percent of the project amount

Chair Johnston discussed the Firefighter PPE and Equipment Grant application review by the committee and mentioned that over 9 million dollars in funding requests were made but only \$5 million dollars is available. James Calvert and Steve Sites have been assigned to review and score the applications.

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Motion: To approve the VFIRS FY26 applications as presented.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: VFIRS FY26 applications approved

Motion: To move \$225,000 to the Fire Incident Reporting Grant program.

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: \$225,000 moved to the Fire Incident Reporting Grant program

Bailey mentioned the increase would help localities with the new reporting system. Chair Johnson mentioned the grant would be increased from \$700 to up to \$10,000 for each locality.

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Chair Johnson commented on the work that needs to happen between now and the next meeting including coming up with policies, grant funding, etc. All board members assigned to committees and studies need to participate in order to get the work done. Johnson mentioned the new code process is back on schedule and very labor intensive. Everyone should be involved in the code process even if it's at a public hearing.

Johnson spoke on the past retreats and the importance of them. He asked everyone to think about the location for the next one. Johnston volunteered to host in Bedford and possibly partner with Lynchburg in terms of lodging. Willett asked when the retreat would be. Johnson requested to keep it in September. December will be virtual except in 2025 due to the February meeting being cancelled and March being a virtual meeting.

Johnson spoke on funding and the new legislative session. The board will ask for more funding for grants, but he encouraged everyone to get involved, especially in each member's localities and departments.

BOARD BUSINESS

a. Unfinished Business

- i. Live Fire Training Structure Policy Expansion
Johnson mentioned that no action was needed.

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ii. **Report from the VFSB Board Clerk**

Willett thanked his staff for their hard work. He noted that December 2nd will be an in-person meeting in Glen Allen. The February meetings at the Fire and Rescue Conference in Virginia Beach will be February 19th & 20th, 2026. He encouraged everyone to reach out to others to submit for the Governor's Fire Service Awards due December 1st. Events are planned across the Commonwealth to showcase fire training to legislators. Two upcoming include October 15th at the Fall Rescue Week in Hanover at the Public Safety Training Center and October 29th at the Structural Collapse School in Virginia Beach. Willett noted that this is a good opportunity for the board to interact with stakeholders and legislators. He thanked Snell for hosting this year's board retreat in Harrisonburg.

b. New Business

i. **Fire Programs Fund Interest**

Willett spoke on the additional mini grant funding that was available, but no action was needed.

Johnson reminded everyone that representatives from the board and VDFP staff would be attending the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) in February in Washington DC.

Johnson gave the floor to Kevin Duck to speak about Lobby Day at the General Assembly with the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (VFCA).

Duck mentioned there has not been a date set yet, but the plan is to ask for an increase from \$5 million to \$10 million for the Firefighter PPE and Equipment Grant and an increase in Aid-To-Localities (ATL) funding.

ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Committee
Spencer Willett

Minutes completed by Tracey Frame

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Documents related to this meeting of the Virginia Fire Services Board may be requested by contacting the Government Affairs Division by emailing PolicyOffice@vdfp.virginia.gov

