

Virginia Fire Services Board

Full Board Meeting
Thursday, December 5, 2024
Blacksburg Fire Station #3
407 Hubbard Street, Blacksburg, Va 24060
10:00AM

MINUTES

The Virginia Fire Services Board meeting was held at Blacksburg Fire Station #3 in Blacksburg, VA. The meeting was called to order by Chair Keith Johnson and a quorum was present.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Keith Johnson, Chair – Virginia Fire Chiefs’ Association
Abbey Johnston, Vice Chair – Virginia State Firefighter’s Association
Donald Hart – Virginia Association of Counties
JM Snell II – Board of Housing and Community Development
Carla Keesee – Virginia Chapter of IAAI
Kevin Duck – Insurance Industry
Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Services Council
John Miller, on behalf of Rob Farrell – Virginia State Forester

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Billy Hanks – Local Fire Marshal
James Calvert – Industry (SARA Title III/OSHA)
Steve Sites – Virginia Municipal League
Bettie Reeves-Nobles – General Public
Jerome Williams – Certified Fire Service Instructor
Jess Rodzinka – Virginia Professional Fire Fighters
Ernest Little – Virginia Fire Prevention Association

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Brad Creasy, Executive Director
Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer
Jamey Brads, Chief of Training and Operations
Mike Yingling, Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal-Western Region
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

GUESTS PRESENT

Curtis Whitt

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

None reported.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comment provided.

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CONSENT AGENDA

Motion: To approve the minutes of the previous meeting (September 2024)

Motion: Hart, **Second:** Miller

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes approved.

REPORT FROM VDFP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Executive Director Brad Creasy presented for the agency. He spoke about the recent all hands meeting for the agency. Secretary Cole also attended the meeting. He discussed some accomplishments including the Electric Vehicle (EV) and Lithium-Ion Battery Training in which over 8,000 firefighters have taken that. A Thermal Imaging Camera class will be offered in 2025 by the agency. The Special Operations Division worked hard on HTR accreditation. Testing is becoming centralized to better serve the agency's stakeholders. Over \$40 million has been distributed by the Grants section to localities. Online testing software has been tested and over 100 iPads have been purchased and will be piloted in January 2025. The Community Risk Reduction section will be doing radio and online public service announcements. A new trailer has been delivered to show how fire alarms and sprinklers work by the State Fire Marshal's Office. That will be used by the office, through the Virginia Fire Marshal Academy, across the state. The Government Affairs section has been hard at work and utilizing a Virginia Management Fellow to assist.

Johnson highlighted the hard work of VDFP, and the direction taken by Director Creasy.

REPORT FROM THE FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL COMMITTEE

Chair Steven Sites was absent. VFSB Chair Keith Johnson called on Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal Yingling for a report from the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO).

Yingling reported on the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)1033 course which is starting in Fairfax City. He also spoke on a memorandum with the Department of General Services and staffing issues being encountered by the SFMO. State Fire Marshal Hux attended the National Association of State Fire Marshals conference. Three SFMO members were deployed to North Carolina to assist with Hurricane Helene. The office also assisted the City of Salem with Donald Trump's visit which included four staff and over 50,000 attendees. Hux is also meeting with the Acting State Fire Marshal's Office in Maryland. Hux and Will Dantini met with the Office of the Governor about issues with setting fees for the SFMO. Hux has also been involved in meetings over single stairwells and fireworks. Hux and VFMA Chief Tom Berry met with Liberty University to discuss having classes on the campus. The VFMA 2025 calendar is complete. There will be two

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14-week Basic Law Enforcement Academies, six NFPA 1031 programs, six NFPA 1033 programs and continuing education at conferences.

Johnson spoke on the memorandum between the Board of Housing and Community Development and the Virginia Fire Services Board. He asked that staff liaison Spencer Willett provide comment. Willett stated that VDFP and Department of Housing and Community Development staff had been meeting, but the discussion seemed like at an impasse. Willett stated that leadership of the two boards, the agencies, and the Office of the Attorney General would need to meet. The current memorandum was signed by Walt Bailey in 2012.

Johnson went on to speak about the Single-Staircase Workgroup and the concerns of the fire service. There was a total of fifteen on the committee but only three from the fire service. The proposal is to only require a single staircase in buildings over 4 stories tall zoned as R2. This was also a national initiative. The group ultimately determined that this should be considered during the regular code adoption process. JM Snell highlighted that a consensus was that a special workgroup should be created in the 2024 code adoption cycle.

REPORT FROM THE LIVE FIRE TRAINING STRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Chair James Calvert was absent. No report was provided from the committee.

REPORT FROM THE FIRE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Acting Chair Walt Bailey presented a report from the committee, which met the day prior. He mentioned that the Committee discussed the Virginia Five-Year Fire Education and Training Plan, and a motion was put forth.

Motion: To adopt the Virginia Five-Year Fire Education and Training Plan

Motion: Bailey

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Plan adopted.

Bailey commented on his growing concern with fires related to solar, battery storage, energy storage, and other new technologies. Brads stated in committee that training would be provided on these issues. He commended the work of the VDFP Division Chiefs.

Virginia Fire Services Board

Full Board Meeting

Thursday, December 5, 2024

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REPORT FROM THE ADMINISTRATION, POLICY, AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Chair Abbey Johnston provided the report from a meeting the day prior. Most of the meeting related to the Mini-Grant applications. The applications exceeded the funding available, so the committee discussed how to move forward deciding who would get awarded.

The committee determined that they would eliminate applications from the “other category” which were not within the intentions of the grant. Localities that applied for operational expenses would also be asked additional questions to determine their award. Johnston and Kevin Duck will be on a workgroup with VDFP staff to score the remaining grant proposals and make recommendations at the next meeting.

The goal is to have the approved proposals ready for board review in February. The committee also discussed choosing to fund the approved applications at a certain percentage.

Snell asked how grant recipients would be managed if they cannot meet the partial funding that the board may award. Johnston stated since the board did not ask about matching funds, that a locality could decline the grant application. The goal is to provide as much funding to as many localities as possible.

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Chair Johnson thanked Chief Billy Hanks for hosting the meeting and retreat.

Johnson spoke about the 2025 meeting schedule being put out quickly. The first meeting is typically at the Fire Resue Conference in February, June at VDFP in Glen Allen, then a September meeting and December meeting. Johnson recommended moving the retreat to September/October. He also proposed that the December meeting be virtual.

Johnson suggested the board retreat and meeting occur on the Eastern Shore. Donald Hart formally invited the board and staff to Accomack on the Eastern Shore for the VFSB Retreat. Hart suggested the meeting be in October. Hart would require reappointment to the Board by the Governor to host the meeting in October. Hart also made suggestions related to traveling to the Eastern Shore.

Bailey spoke about a meeting in Blacksburg from years ago when the board meeting was held on a Saturday. He suggested that meeting on a Saturday would allow more volunteer departments to be able to attend the meeting. Johnson said that board leadership and staff should meet if the board agrees with hosting the meeting in Accomack.

Johnson spoke about a meeting with Governor Glenn Youngkin and the letter approved

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by the board last meeting. Board leadership and VDFP leadership met with the Governor in late November related to fire department funding. He reviewed the content of the meeting with the Governor, including recommendations made by the board based on information from the HB2175 (2023) Report. Some highlights of the meeting included discussing grants such as the ones FEMA provides, establishing funding for capital funding, and how the cost of fire trucks exceed department fundraisers. State funding needed to be increased. There was also discussion on funding for at risk localities, recruitment and retention, and line-of-duty death benefits for certain VDFP staff.

Bailey commended the leadership for the meeting. Johnson stated the Governor told the group that there is resistance to adding new programs, although he does not agree with this. Bailey stated that the message for need from the fire service is getting out. Bailey stated he has met with several members of the General Assembly over proposed legislation. One of those would be to take up to 5% of the budget surplus for the state and provide that to local fire departments. Hart stated he could garner the support of VaCo.

FULL BOARD BUSINESS

a. Unfinished Business

- i. Report from the VFSB Board Clerk
Clerk Willett provided an update on the VDFP Strategic Plan in which every board member will receive a physical copy, travel reimbursements, participation by board members, and the Governor's Fire Service Awards process. Also, he reminded the board expenses including hotels, catering, etc., does have cancellation timelines and if members cancel at the last minute that is money the agency can't get back and reminded them to be good stewards of the tax dollars spent.

Fire Programs is sponsoring legislation this year that contains language that gives authority to the VFSB to set policy on fire reporting related to Aid to Localities.

Related to the Governor's Fire Service Awards, he provided updated numbers and the intention that staff would make alterations to the program for approval by the Board. He suggested streamlining the process or combining categories. Currently, the process is very labor intensive. Johnson discussed the difficulty in getting people to apply.

Currently, Willett has been assigned to the Secretary of Public Safety's Office, so communication from the Board may need to be channeled through his Administrative Assistant.

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b. New Business

- i. Adoption of the All-Virtual Meeting Policy
- ii. Adoption of the Remote Participation Meeting Policy

Motion: To adopt the All-Virtual Meeting Policy and the Remote Participation Meeting Policy as a block.

Motion: Bailey, **Second:** Hanks

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Policies adopted.

Billy Hanks presented a photo of the original signing of the Fire Programs Fund in 1983. Creasy graciously accepted on behalf of the agency. Creasy mentioned that it would be hung at VDFP headquarters and that the lobby was also getting refreshed with various items including plaques for Adjunct of the Year, Employee of the Year, and other items.

Chief Hanks thanked Chief Drew Smith from Blacksburg Fire Department for the hosting of the meetings and the hospitality. Bailey joked that the Board should receive tickets to the Virginia Tech football games.

Johnston commended those in Montgomery County for the hard work implementing the work of the recent fire and EMS study in the county.

ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Board
Spencer R. Willett

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