

# **Virginia Fire Services Board**

Full Board Meeting

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

2:30PM

## **MINUTES**

A rescheduled meeting of the Virginia Fire Services Board was held virtually on Microsoft Teams. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Keith Johnson and a quorum was present.

### **BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

Keith Johnson, Chairman – Virginia Fire Chief’s Association  
Abbey Johnston, Vice Chairman – Virginia State Firefighter’s Association  
James Calvert – Industry (SARA Title III/OSHA)  
Jerome Williams – Certified Fire Service Instructor  
Ernie Little – Virginia Fire Prevention 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  
Steven Sites – Virginia Municipal League  
Carla Keesee – Virginia Chapter, International Assoc. of Arson Investigators  
Bettie Reeves Nobles – General Public

### **BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT**

Donald Hart – Virginia Association of Counties  
Jess Rodzinka – Virginia Professional Fire Fighters  
Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Service Council

### **AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT**

Brad Creasy, Executive Director  
Nicholas Nanna, Deputy Director  
Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer  
Jamey Brads, Chief of Training and Operations  
Billy Hux, State Fire Marshal  
Will Merritt, Marketing and Communications Manager  
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager  
Deshaun Steele, Grants Analyst

### **GUESTS PRESENT**

Lee Williams                      Charles Paullin

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## **CHANGES IN THE AGENDA**

Board Clerk Spencer Willett recommended the 2025 Legislative Update be stricken. Without objection this was removed from the agenda.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No public comment provided.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

**Motion:** Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (December 2024)

**Motion:** Johnston **Second:** Little

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Minutes approved.

## **REPORT FROM VDFP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Executive Director Creasy reported that the agency is happy and healthy and has good momentum on several projects. He noted that VFDP is still holding a very small vacancy rate and praised the quality of leaders in each branch. Creasy was glad to have Spencer Willett back after spending three months at the Office of the Governor. He mentioned the Governor did sign 916 bills this week and the agency is awaiting the amended budget that did include the \$5 million for the purpose of firefighter safety equipment. Willett has been tasked with reaching out to the Office of the Governor to see if a ceremonial bill signing could take place at a local fire station. In those bills that the Governor signed, localities will be mandated to report to the new National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) to receive their Aid to Locality funding. The Board will adopt language creating this policy. Creasy noted that online testing is up, and he is really excited about this. VFDP has piloted over a half a dozen emergency vehicle operator classes and all is going very well. By the end of this calendar year, the agency expects to have all its accredited courses being tested online. He also added that the website redesign is underway and should be completed by December. Creasy mentioned that the agency continues to be committed to a healthy and happy cadre of adjunct instructors and physicals are being funded for those conducting live fire and strenuous type instruction. Sites are also set up throughout the Commonwealth through LifeScan. Chief Dewhirst is coordinating this and trying to make it as convenient as possible for the adjuncts to get there. The Governor's Virginia Fire Service Awards has been rescheduled for Monday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, and will be held at the Executive Mansion. The agency felt it was important to include the members of the Board, and a few key individuals from the Virginia Fire Chief's Association, in appreciation for them allowing the

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agency to conduct those awards at the opening ceremony of the Fire/Rescue Conference. Creasy mentioned that over the past 18 months, the agency has been working to centralize testing processes and will be moving to electronic certificates. He added that physical certificates will still be available upon request. He spoke about spending a couple days in Southwest Virginia with Deputy Chief Parris visiting Grayson, Patrick and Carroll Counties. Over the past three years, Creasy has been able to visit all 95 counties in Virginia. He added that it was an honor and pleasure to get out and meet with stakeholders and has enjoyed this journey.

Chair Johnson thanked Director Creasy for getting out and visiting all the counties, which to his knowledge had never been done by previous directors.

## **REPORT FROM THE FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL COMMITTEE**

Committee Chair Sites provided updates from the committee which included highlights from the report by State Fire Marshal Hux. Some highlights included developing a uniform policy, developing a fire watch policy for state owned facilities, the approval of two new positions, updates on the Virginia Fire Marshal Academy Basic Law Enforcement school currently underway, and a search for a new facilitator. Additional items that were discussed during the meeting included an update from the Codes and Standards Workgroup Chair, Andrew Milliken. Sites also mentioned that at the March 10<sup>th</sup> Board of Housing and Community Development (BHCD) Meeting that they authorized looking at 2024 codes at the start of the new code cycle. Stakeholders will also be able to submit code changes through the portal. He noted changes being made with sprinkler requirements within podium style buildings including those with commercial property on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. There will be some additional corrections to the code and language to help building officials and builders. Sites mentioned the next workgroup meeting will be on April 24<sup>th</sup> and they will start looking at the new code cycle. Lastly, he noted that the memorandum of understanding between the Board and BHCD needed to be revisited.

Chair Johnson mentioned meeting with BHCD the following day at a lobbyist event for homebuilders. He added that a motion is also coming out of the Fire Prevention and Control Committee.

**Motion:** To adopt edits to the Rules of Procedure for the agency to expend funds from the budget of the Virginia Fire Services Board to provide lodging and per diem for the Chair of the Codes and Standards Workgroup for meetings requiring their attendance.

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

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**Action:** The Rules of Procedure stand amended.

## **REPORT FROM THE LIVE FIRE TRAINING STRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

Committee Chair Calvert provided updates from the committee to include the Goochland Live Fire Structures Training Award, which was a new type of structure and commended the efforts between the VFSB, The Structures Group (TSG) and Goochland. Calvert also added that TSG did not recommend moving forward with a Prototype 4A, but the committee is going to go back and review. There were also four extension requests, and Albermarle was approved for their burn building renovation request which will need the Board's approval.

**Motion:** To approve the Albemarle County Renovation Request in the amount of \$200,000

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Renovation request approved.

Calvert mentioned that there were other requests, including one from Hopewell which did not have a representative to speak so that was tabled until the next meeting. The Town of Blackstone's request was also tabled pending the review of the most recent TSG report. He concluded with a review of the Aircraft Rescue Firefighting Simulator Trainer and if it would fit into the grant program.

## **REPORT FROM THE FIRE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE**

Interim Committee Chair Calvert provided updates from the committee. He noted that most of the information was already covered in Director Creasy's report, but some highlights included the realignment of the branch, the deployment of personnel during recent states of emergency, and that these employees should be possibly considered for the Line of Duty Death benefit should something happen. Calvert also mentioned the great work being done within the Special Operations Division. He mentioned the recent fires involving Tesla's and more information should be coming out soon from the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security's Office. Also, noted from Chief Brads report, VDFP has trained over 25,000 students in 2024. Unfortunately, he added that the National Fire Academy was shut down due to federal changes but is hopeful it will be operating soon.

## **REPORT FROM THE ADMINISTRATION, POLICY, AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Board Vice Chairman Johnston provided updates from the committee which included taking \$2,000,000 in requests for the Mini-Grant Program and determining out how to allocate the \$600,000 in funding available. Johnston and Kevin Duck served on the workgroup, along with

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VDFP staff, to create a scoring matrix and eliminated any requests not requesting funding for protective equipment or operational equipment. Finally, those that were left were only approved for 48% of their request if they requested over \$10,000. VDFP staff reached out to localities to see if they could complete their projects if they received a reduced amount. There was \$0.89 leftover, meaning nearly all funds were utilized.

Johnston also mentioned the committee was presented a review of the Patrick County Fire and EMS Study which was led by VFSB members John Miller and Steve Sites, Tim Perkins from the Office of EMS, and Ken Brown and Will Merritt from VDFP. Johnston also commended Spencer Willett for his recommendations to the committee in making the Governor's Fire Service Awards nomination process more streamlined and competitive.

Johnston suggested approving the Mini-Grant applications and finalizing the Patrick County Study as a block.

**Motion:** To approve recommendations from the committee as a block.

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Recommendations from the committee adopted as a block.

Johnston mentioned the \$5,000,000 funding coming out of the 2025 General Assembly and how the committee discussed how this would look. Some conversations coming out of committee included using the same matrix as the Mini-Grants but including scoring and priority to localities with more fiscal need. Johnston will be working with VDFP staff to work on policy language and the scoring matrix.

## **COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD**

Chair Johnson brought up the February Conference and VFSB meeting being cancelled and that although virtual does work for some, that he enjoys meeting everyone in person. He reminded the members that there are only four meetings a year and that attendance records are reported out to the Governor's Office and that it doesn't look good when some members are only attending one or two meetings a year. Johnson mentioned his upcoming retirement from Loudoun County but will be staying on the Board of Housing and Community Development, as well as the VFSB, for two more years. Johnson turned the floor over to Spencer Willett to discuss the rest of the meetings for 2025.

## **BOARD BUSINESS**

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## **a. Unfinished Business**

### **i. Report from the VFSB Board Clerk**

Willett mentioned that the Virtual Meeting Policy will need some revisions such as should cameras be on during virtual meetings, and currently only one virtual meeting is allowed per year which means the other remaining meetings will need to be in person. The June 6<sup>th</sup> meeting will be an all-day meeting consisting of the full Board and any committees that need to meet. Lodging will be provided that night for those that plan to attend the State Fire and EMS Memorial Service the next day. He noted that Donald Hart and Accomack County can no longer host the Board Retreat and that another Board Member will need to host. Some funding is available to assist with the Retreat. December 2<sup>nd</sup> was originally scheduled to be a virtual meeting but is now in person

Chair Johnson suggested possibly going to Harrisonburg for the retreat, which is where the Virginia Fire Chief's Association also hosts a retreat.

Willett concluded with the VFSB will be tasked with several things this summer that came out of the General Assembly. Fortunately, funding was approved for a full time Policy Analyst to assist. The goal is also to assign each staff member a committee or two to provide more assistance in their efforts.

## **b. New Business**

### **i. 2025 Legislative Update** *Stricken at the beginning of the meeting.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Clerk of the Committee  
Spencer Willett

Minutes completed by Tracey Frame

*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](mailto:PolicyOffice@vdfp.virginia.gov)*