

Virginia Fire Services Board

Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

10:30AM

MINUTES

A rescheduled meeting of the Administration, Policy and Finance Committee was held virtually on Microsoft Teams. The meeting was called to order by Chair Abbey Johnston and a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Abbey Johnston, Committee Chair – Virginia State Firefighter’s Association
Keith Johnson – Virginia Fire Chief’s Association
James Calvert – Industry (SARA Title III/OSHA)
Kevin Duck – Insurance Industry
Steven Sites – Virginia Municipal League
Bettie Reeves Nobles – General Public

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Service Council
Donald Hart – Virginia Association of Counties

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Nicholas Nanna, Deputy Director
Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer
Jamey Brads, Chief of Training and Operations
Will Merritt, Marketing and Communications Manager
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager
DeShaun Steele, Grants Analyst

GUESTS PRESENT

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

No changes to the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comment provided.

CONSENT AGENDA

Virginia Fire Services Board

Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

10:30AM

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

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Duck

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes approved.

REPORT FROM VDFP ADMINISTRATION

Chief Administrative Officer Theresa Hunter presented two financial reports including the Aid-to-Localities payments report and the Live Fire Structure Budget. The agency is beginning the fourth quarter payment cycle, and third quarter payments were made earlier in the month on March 14th. There were 23 localities that received funding, which came to a total of \$1,358,000. There are currently 106 localities that have not submitted their reports which are due to the agency by May 16th and the final payment will be issued in June. The Grants Unit has contacted all outstanding localities on the list to remind them of the deadlines and the reporting requirements in May. The board members and division chiefs will also receive the list for their awareness. The report that was provided to the committee also included a list of all open funding projects and that the agency has \$5,200,000 in obligated open projects that consists of seven burn buildings, six repair projects and possibly one new impingement project after today's meeting. There are five regional fire training facility projects. Currently there is \$600,000 in unobligated funds available for new projects, and there will be two funding requests today.

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Chair Johnston commended VDFP staff for their work on the grants and being able to get the much-needed money to the localities. Johnston mentioned that there were over \$2,000,000 in Mini-Grant requests, but only about \$628,000 to give out. Johnston mentioned that there was a process put in place to score the applicants that she and Kevin Duck served on with VDFP staff. Anything not designated as personal protective equipment or equipment related was removed, along with training projects. Any requests over \$10,000 were reduced to ensure that every locality received some funding. Each locality was then asked if they could complete their project with the reduced award and all said yes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. Mini Grant Awards

Johnston provided comments on the review of grant applications. Hunter provided comments on the funding formula and total amount of funds which came to \$636,794.

Johnson commended everyone working on this new grant program.

Virginia Fire Services Board

Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

10:30AM

Motion: To recommend approval of the 2025 Mini Grant Recommendations provided by VDFP staff.

Motion: Calvert **Second:** Duck

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: 2025 Mini Grant Recommendations recommended to the Board.

b. Patrick County Fire and EMS Study

Board Clerk Spencer Willett thanked Ken Brown and Will Merritt for all their help with getting the study report prepared due to his reassignment. Acknowledgement was also given to Board Members, John Miller and Steve Sites, along with Tim Perkins from the Office of EMS for also assisting with the study.

Motion: To recommend the Patrick County Fire and EMS Study for approval.

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Calvert

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Report recommended to Board.

c. Governor's Fire Service Awards Process Updates

Johnston called on Spencer Willett to present. The major changes would include consolidating award categories, allowing for other officers to submit for the fire chief award and streamlining the process in which the nominees are submitted. Johnston questioned including the command captain under the chief officer award. Johnson echoed these comments. Calvert questioned where the Board would place lieutenants and captains. Johnston suggested anything below chief would fall under the firefighter category. Sites agreed with removing command captains under the chief officer award.

Calvert questioned requiring a letter from the chief officer. He suggested they only be notified. He felt it was hard to get letters from chiefs. Johnson explained his specific story of when one of his firefighters received the award and how he may not have approved it had he known ahead of time. Willett mentioned that it is up to the Board on how they want to handle things moving forward and that if the staff is in place that the agency will assist. Calvert added that he did not want to deter deserving candidates who may not be qualified due to lack of letters from chiefs but agrees they should be notified.

Virginia Fire Services Board

Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

10:30AM

Willett also highlighted how an application could be submitted by a union, causing question over who would be the reviewing official. Johnston stated if the task was during work, it would be the fire chief. If it was related to the union, the union president could approve if outside work hours. The committee discussed sending a notification to a chief, and if no response is received in 30 days, the application would be approved to move forward. Calvert agreed with this method. Sites stated concerns for someone being submitted for non-fire related praises such as fundraisers by the unions, and Johnston agreed that the submitter should at least be required to include the chief's email or phone number so staff can reach out. Willett mentioned those changes could be made to the online application.

Johnson brought up concerns with the notifications and confusion over the invitations that were sent out for the Awards Ceremony that was held at the Governor's Mansion. Calvert mentioned the original notifications that went out and that he loved the idea of the submitter being able to surprise the nominee with a pre-announcement. Willett mentioned that it would be looked at and the notification process would be improved moving forward.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Fire PPE and Equipment Grant Program Framework

Johnston spoke about the grant language in the budget and that the committee should provide some direction to the staff so that the grant policy can be written. \$5,000,000 has been allocated and prior to the announcement, a plan needs to be in place by July 1st. Johnston stated that the matrix from the Mini-Grant Program could be used by adding an additional column to score localities fiscal stress.

Duck and Sites spoke on what constitutes fire protection. Does a boat qualify for the safety of a firefighter when responding to all hazard calls? Johnson mentioned keeping the language broader so the committee can decide where the money is awarded but also added that while fiscally distressed localities should get priority, that other localities should be able to apply for any remaining funds.

Willett mentioned that there are currently 95 counties in the Commonwealth and 38 cities which could change each year. Hunter noted that there are 322 total localities. Johnston mentioned if a cap of \$100,000 was put in place, that 50 localities could be awarded funds. Clarification was made by Willett that a locality consists of all the fire departments within its area and the application must be submitted by the locality, not an individual

Virginia Fire Services Board

Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

10:30AM

department. Johnston mentioned there was also concern about making sure localities know about the awards and partnering with associations to help get the word out. Willett added that staff could assist with this process.

Johnson offered his assistance, along with Johnston, to help VDFP staff come up with the policy. Willett appreciated the offer, and mentioned meeting with Hunter and Director Creasy, as well as consulting with the Attorney General on possible legal issues.

b. Fire and EMS Legislation Review

Willett praised a former staff member, Will Dantini, who came to VDFP as part of the Virginia Management Fellows Program, and was instrumental in helping to keep the agency on track during the General Assembly Session. Dantini created the presentation that was submitted virtually. Willett noted that some things coming out of legislation was starting July 1, 2026, all localities will have to submit fire reports to be eligible for funding. The Board will need to create a policy on this. There were several bills including toxic exposure and cancer screenings that did not make it through this year. Selling counterfeit lighters did pass and fire marshals can now cite sellers. Other changes included fire marshal fees and the \$5,000,000 in grant funds.

Johnston thanked everyone for all their hard work during the legislation season.

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