

Virginia Fire Services Board

Full Board Meeting

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Virginia Department of Fire Programs

1005 Technology Park Drive, Glen Allen, VA 23059

2:00 PM

MINUTES

The Virginia Fire Services Board meeting was held at the Virginia Department of Fire Programs in Glen Allen, 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
James Calvert – Industry (SARA Title III/OSHA)
Steve Sites – Virginia Municipal League
Donald Hart – Virginia Association of Counties
JM Snell II – Board of Housing and Community Development
Dennis Linaberg – Virginia Chapter of IAAI
Ben Reedy – Insurance Industry

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Billy Hanks – Local Fire Marshal
Bettie Reeves-Nobles – General Public
Jerome Williams - Certified Fire Service Instructor
John Miller, on behalf of Rob Farrell – Virginia State Forester
Jess Rodzinka – Virginia Professional Fire Fighters
Ernest Little – Virginia Fire Prevention Association
Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Services Council

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Brad Creasy, Executive Director
Nicholas Nanna, Deputy Director
Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer
Billy Hux, State Fire Marshal
Jamey Brads, Chief of Training and Operations
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager
Will Merritt, Marketing and Communications Manager
Ken Brown, Community Risk Reduction Coordinator

GUESTS PRESENT

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

No reported changes to the agenda.

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PUBLIC COMMENTS

CONSENT AGENDA

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

Motion: Hart, **Second:** Calvert

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes approved

REPORT FROM VDFP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Executive Director Brad Creasy presented. Creasy discussed agency business over the past quarter. He thanked VDFP and Will Merritt for a successful Fallen Firefighter and EMS Memorial Service, where the Governor served as keynote speaker. VDFP hired the agency's first information security officer, Phil Napier, which was mandated for all state agencies. The information technology manager role has also been filled with Robert Steele. All adjunct instructors received a letter thanking them with a challenge coin. He highlighted meetings with Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Terry Cole with various chief's associations to improve the relationship between the fire service and state. The state's approved budget will increase the number of VDFP employees to eighty-seven and includes five new roles. A contract for online testing is weeks away with an expected 8–12-week implementation. He expects pilot programs by the end of the year. He also highlighted the redesign of the VDFP website, and the electric vehicle training course mandated by the General Assembly. This course is being tested internally and will be released by the end of June. Creasy is proud of the product and the hard work put into it.

REPORT FROM THE FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL COMMITTEE

Committee Chair Steve Sites provided the report. He highlighted the report from State Fire Marshal Hux, which included information on the FAST lab trailer, funding for SFMO, a new memorandum of understanding between the Division of Engineering and Buildings and the office, new uniform standards, and increased use of IROL. He also spoke about the Fire Prevention and Control Plan and changes made during the committee meeting.

Motion: To approve the Fire Prevention and Control Plan

Motion: *Committee*, **Second:** Linaburg

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Plan adopted, to be posted by VDFP.

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REPORT FROM THE LIVE FIRE TRAINING STRUCTURE COMMITTEE

With the absence of Committee Chair Bettie Reeves Nobles, VFSB Chair Keith Johnson reported on her behalf. He turned the discussion over to Board Clerk Spencer Willett to explain the changes made by the committee to the Live Fire Training Structure Policy and Project Manual. Willett explained the changes as determined by the committee during its' April meeting. These changes included removing the Project Manual as a regulatory document, taking requirements in that document and placing them in the policy, updating certain components of the policy, and approving Prototype 4B.

Motion: To approve, as a block, the changes recommended from the Live Fire Training Structure Committee.

Motion: *Committee*, **Second:** Calvert

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Changes adopted, VDFP to begin implementation.

REPORT FROM THE FIRE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Committee Chair James Calvert yielded the floor to Chief of Training and Operations Jamey Brads to present his report since the committee did not meet. Brads spoke about the branch realignment and consolidation of testing and accreditation holistically, including assigning the tests and providing certificates. Division's 1, 3, and 7 have been aligned and Division's 4 and 5 will realign in July. He highlighted work by special operations related to multiple rescue weeks and aircraft rescue (ARFF) training. The branch met with directors of the regional airports to discuss changes to the ARFF program. VDFP expects the need to upgrade the aging ARFF training trailer in the next 1-3 years. IFSAC and ProBoard reaccreditation is ongoing, and the branch expects the number of accredited programs to increase to around sixty. Solicitation for updates to the mobile burn trailers are going out with an expected 6-month turnaround for each unit. Brads highlighted the counties that helped with developing electric vehicle (EV) fire training, including Loudoun, Fairfax, and Chesterfield. He also stated the branch rolled out microlearning related to first responder wellness. There is an upcoming instructor symposium in Loudoun County. Modular firefighter is being reviewed for efficiency. The actual training blocks will be the same, but how it is configured in each module is being examined.

Johnson asked when the EV training would be released. Brads asked Will Merritt to clarify, which Merritt stated would be the last week of June.

Calvert spoke about the proposed OSHA Emergency Response Standard. Willett stated a letter was being developed by VDFP to provide to OSHA with an expected release

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sometime in July. Creasy spoke about the agency's interactions with the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry. Calvert asked if volunteers would be considered employees. Creasy stated that it was his understanding if volunteers met certain parameters they would.

Calvert spoke about the Five-Year Strategic Training Plan and the need to update the plan. The committee and VDFP will begin working on this plan.

Calvert spoke about the concern posed related to "smoke buildings" and asked VDFP Chief Safety Officer Matt Dewhirst to explain. Dewhirst was concerned over introducing young members to carcinogenic materials. He also stated that adding a wood stove or smoke barrel to a Connex box could be dangerous for a multitude of reasons, including exposure to turnout gear, cancer, and life safety. These structures were not built for fire training necessarily.

Calvert stated he completed a literature search concerning hazards associated with these buildings. Calvert asked if current VDFP policy addressed decontamination after training and further explained that he looked at Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reports, as well as UL. It is Calvert's understanding that if the decontamination process is aligned correctly, it would cover VDFP from the exposures. A second component he noted was products of noncomplete combustion that could ignite in the structure. Calvert believes a white paper or letter educating people on the topic could be a course of action. Calvert asked for members of the committee to comment.

Abbey Johnston echoed Chair Calvert's concern but believes a safety briefing from the board is not the correct action. Johnston suggested this come from the Chief Safety Officer rather than the board. Calvert stated this is how they would proceed, and a conversation would occur between Calvert and Dewhirst.

Calvert spoke about the hard work by the Training and Operations branch. Calvert also touched on hazardous materials training in Virginia. He contacted a training site in Anniston, Alabama and was told that approximately 180 Virginia firefighters received accredited hazmat training there. Calvert stated that VDFP is working to meet the needs of the fire service in using this accredited training in the commonwealth.

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REPORT FROM THE ADMINISTRATION, POLICY, AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Committee Chair Abbey Johnston provided the report from the committee.

Motion: To accept the Town of Lebanon Fire Report

Motion: *Committee*, **Second:** Calvert

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Report adopted, presentation to be scheduled with Town Council

Motion: To approve the Patrick County request for a Fire/EMS Study

Motion: *Committee*, **Second:** Johnston

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Study approved, VDFP to contact Patrick County

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Chair Keith Johnson highlighted the successful Virginia Fallen Firefighter and EMS Memorial Service. He also spoke to the 2021 code process that is now complete and preparation for the 2024 code process. He noted that Cindy Davis of the Department of Housing and Community Development is retiring. Johnson also briefly spoke about the pharmacy changes related to use of drugs by EMS agencies.

Johnson thanked the board for their support of his department after the line of duty death of Trevor Brown. He highlighted the investigation that is being independently completed on the incident. Johnson also spoke about how vital attending VFSB meetings is and implored members to do their best to attend.

FULL BOARD BUSINESS

a. Unfinished Business

i. Report from the VFSB Clerk

Board Clerk Spencer Willett reported that travel reimbursement forms were provided and that they should be signed and initialed before the members departed. He also stated that the next meeting would occur during the First Responder Virginia conference in September in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The December meeting is expected to be in Christiansburg, VA and hosted by Board Member Billy Hanks.

ii. Election of Chair Pro-Tem

Chair Keith Johnson, without objection, appointed James Calvert as Chair

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Pro-Tem.

iii. Report from the Nomination Committee

Prior to the appointment of a Nomination Committee, Chair Pro-Tem Calvert asked Board Clerk Willett for a list of nominees for Chair of the Virginia Fire Services Board. Willett stated that Keith Johnson and Abbey Johnston were nominated. Calvert asked if there were additional nominations from the floor. No nominations were made from the floor. Abbey Johnston graciously declined her nomination as chair.

No Nomination Committee was selected with Keith Johnson as the sole candidate for Chair of the VFSB.

Chair Pro-Tem Calvert asked Board Clerk Willett for a list of nominees for Vice Chair of the Virginia Fire Services Board. Willett stated that Walter Bailey and Abbey Johnston were nominated. Calvert asked if there were additional nominations from the floor. No nominations were made from the floor. Willett stated that Walter Bailey, by phone prior to the meeting, declined his nomination as Vice Chair of the VFSB.

No Nomination Committee was selected with Abbey Johnston as the sole candidate for Vice Chair of the VFSB.

iv. Election of Officers

With no objections from the VFSB, Keith Johnson was elected as Chair of the Virginia Fire Services Board and Abbey Johnston was elected as Vice Chair of the Virginia Fire Services Board unanimously.

Keith Johnson, after the conclusion of the election, resumed duties as the presiding officer of the meeting.

b. New Business

i. Rules and Procedures Approval and Signing

Willett explained that the board, according to the Rules of Procedure, were required to approve at the June meeting the adopted Rules of Procedure. These rules had not changed since the last alteration was made related to the Codes and Standards Workgroup.

Motion: To approve the Rules of Procedure

Motion: Johnston, **Second:** Linaburg

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

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Action: Rules of Procedure adopted

ii. Request for Committee Assignments and Chairs

Chair Keith Johnson asked that board members submit their interest in committees to the chair, vice chair, and board clerk.

iii. Presentation of Service Awards

Chair Keith Johnson presented service awards to outgoing Board Members Ben Reedy and Dennis Linaburg. Willett read a short biography of each member as each was provided a plaque. Reedy served four years and Linaburg eight years representing the insurance industry and the International Association of Arson Investigators, respectfully.

iv. Legislative Update

Willett spoke about 2024 General Assembly session, including the significant amount of legislation related to fire and EMS funding. He highlighted there was confusion over the multiple funding bills and that the fire service did not present a united voice. Johnson spoke about the importance of coordination of fire service initiatives. He stated that last-minute legislative items derailed the efforts of the fire service that were agreed upon and included in the booklet provided to legislators.

v. Demonstration of Fire Reporting

Ken Brown spoke on fire data and the importance of fire reporting. He discussed how software like the type from ESRI provided in the demonstration collects data from multiple areas, allowing for correlations to be drawn. He stated that issues encountered currently include a 18-24 delay for data from the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) but stated that the new National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) should be almost real time. Brown provided that around 200 of 300 fire departments in Virginia are not adequately reporting. He suggested that beginning in 2017-18 that many of these departments stopped reporting. This is around the same time many localities switched reporting software which required them to change how it was reported up the chain. Many departments believe they are reporting when it is not making it to the national system.

Chris Spatig demonstrated how data could be used to show target areas and comparison of regions or localities. Henrico County was compared to Charlotte County when looking at fire incidents and demographical information. Brown spoke about building this out so that all localities would be able to access this information and use it for community risk

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assessments on the VDFP website.

Johnson spoke about how it is hard to believe that reporting is not being done. Brown stated that some might think the reporting is being done when in reality it is not making it to the system. Calvert spoke about the hardware grant provided by the board and if that is still an issue. Brown stated that NERIS will be available through a smartphone or similar device and is expected to be much simpler to complete.

The discussion ended with a consensus that fire reporting needs to be adequate and timely to inform decisions by fire departments and community leaders.

ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Board
Spencer R. Willett

