

# Virginia Fire Services Board

Full Board Meeting

Friday, September 20, 2024

First Responder Virginia Conference

1000 19th St, Virginia Beach, VA 23451

10:00AM – MR5CD

## MINUTES

The Virginia Fire Services Board meeting was held at the Virginia Beach Convention Center in Virginia Beach, 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  
Carla Keesee – Virginia Chapter of IAAI  
Kevin Duck – Insurance Industry  
Bettie Reeves-Nobles – General Public  
Jerome Williams – Certified Fire Service Instructor  
Jess Rodzinka – Virginia Professional Fire Fighters  
Ernest Little – Virginia Fire Prevention Association  
Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Services Council

### **BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT**

Billy Hanks – Local Fire Marshal  
John Miller, on behalf of Rob Farrell – Virginia State Forester

### **AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT**

Brad Creasy, Executive Director  
Nicholas Nanna, Deputy Director  
Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer  
Jamey Brads, Chief of Training and Operations  
Troy Bower, Assistant State Fire Marshal  
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

### **GUESTS PRESENT**

Glenn Dean	Greg Schadt	Colten Lotts
Chris Shaver	Jeff Flippo	David Hoback
Rhett Fleitz	Andy Foley	Larry Gwaltney
Vernie Francis III	Mike Perdue	Rick Grassel

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## **CHANGES IN THE AGENDA**

Board Clerk Spencer Willett announced that the Department of Forestry would provide a report under Unfinished Business.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Glenn Dean, on his own behalf, spoke specifically about the single stairway issue and the Board of Housing and Community Development (BHCD). He stated that the fire service is not involved enough in the code process. The fire service needs to reevaluate its priorities, focusing on codes, which is not always a priority of the service. Apparatus and training are emphasized more often. The code has a longer lasting affect then the other areas mentioned, having multi-generational effects. Dean asked what is being done to implement the Fire Prevention and Control Plan, as he does not see it. He further spoke about BHCD appointments and the history behind it. The fire service must rise back to the fight. He believes that the single stairway is going to become a reality and spoke about the contents and construction of single stairwell buildings and limiting the ability of people to save themselves. The fire service won't be able to mitigate the situation. He spoke about the move of the State Fire Marshal's Office to VDFP in 2006 to create a strong voice for safety. He does not feel this strong voice for safety exists.

Larry Gwaltney thanked the VFSB for attending the conference. He commended VDFP for providing training and support services at the conference. The joint memorial service would be held that evening and Tim Smith will be speaking during opening ceremonies. Keith Johnson thanked Walt Bailey and Larry Gwaltney for hosting the VFSB at the conference.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

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

**Motion:** Johnston **Second:** Bailey

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Minutes approved.

## **REPORT FROM VDFP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Executive Director Brad Creasy presented for the agency. He notified the VFSB of the passing of Steve Phillips from the Virginia Fire Marshal Academy (VFMA). The agency was approved for five new positions in the previous budget year, including a logistics technician, data analyst, and grants manager. Electric vehicle (EV) fire training is ongoing and approximately 5,000 have completed the training. The agency is finalizing legal language for online testing implementation. The VDFP Information Security Officer Phil Napier has worked diligently to get this project completed. Multiple reports are being completed by the agency for the General Assembly and Office of the Governor.

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These are handled by the Government Affairs section.

Creasy then, with the approval of the Chair, recognized the local partners that helped develop the EV fire training program. Creasy commended the staff and the locality representatives for their strong work. Creasy and Chair Johnson presented gifts thanking those in attendance for their hard work. Without the local staff, the agency would not have been able to build this from the ground up. He also highlighted Amanda Kennedy's strong work from the Learning Development Division.

Johnson commended the partnership between localities and VDFP to achieve the mission.

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

Steve Sites provided the report. The committee met the day prior. Single stairways were discussed during the meeting. Billy Hux, Steven Sites, and Andrew Milliken are on the Board of Housing and Community Development (BHCD) advisory committee for single stairwells. The group met earlier in the month for their initial meeting. Single stairwells in R-2 occupancies were defeated in the last code cycle. The group has been asked to find a way to make single stairwells work in Virginia. He provided that the Codes and Standards Workgroup advising the VFSB met and reviewed various concerns such as fire operations, evacuations, and others related to single stairwells. Sites reviewed Virginia Fire Marshal Academy (VFMA) updates and basic law enforcement (BLE) being canceled in the fall due to site specific issues. Two back-to-back BLE schools will be offered in Spring 2025. Sites also reviewed standard operations on the State Fire Marshal's Office, including a new deputy in the Special Operations Section. Sites brought one item to the board as noted below.

**Motion:** To approve Board Chair Johnson to send a letter to the Chair of BHCD asking for more fire representation on the single stairwell advisory committee.

**Motion:** Sites

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Chief Johnson will draft and send a letter to BHCD.

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

Bettie Reeves Nobles provided the report. Goochland County made a presentation and presented a plaque to the VFSB for the recent completion of their Live Fire Training Structure. The committee recommended approval for the City of Roanoke application and an extension for the Halifax County project for one year.

**Motion:** To approve the City of Roanoke Live Fire Training Structure Application

**Motion:** Reeves Nobles

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Application approved for Prototype 4 (Class A)

**Motion:** To extend Halifax County's project by 1 year

**Motion:** Reeves Nobles

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Extension approved for one year.

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

James Calvert provided the report. He highlighted the important work of the division chiefs of VDFP. Calvert also provided an update on the Chief of Training's report to the committee, including changes to curriculum development, instructor symposium, reaccreditation of VDFP courses, and online testing. Calvert discussed the OSHA Emergency Response Standard and that VDFP's Executive Director sent a letter to OSHA on the issue. He encouraged people to testify at the public hearing on the proposed standard. He also stated that the committee would be revising the Five-Year Strategic Training Plan for approval in December.

Calvert spoke about filing rosters with the county clerk for Line of Duty Death benefits. He also spoke about an increase in Cornerstone users due to the electric vehicle fire training modules. He briefly mentioned working with the Deputy Director on involving community colleges in fire training. Calvert is upset that the Governors Fire Service Awards are not receiving many applications and that this will hurt the program. Calvert also reported on the annual state weekend at the National Fire Academy. Calvert also recognized VFSB Clerk Spencer Willett who was named Firefighter of the Year in his locality.

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

Abbey Johnston provided the report. She presented the Regional Fire Service Training Grant (RFSTG) applications and recommended they be adopted as a block.

**Motion:** To approve the RFSTG applications (King and Queen County, Augusta County, Town of Chilhowie, Town of Blackstone, and VDFP) as a block

**Motion:** Johnston

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Applications approved by VFSB

Johnston asked that Keith Johnson go over the VFIRS Hardware Grant applications since there was a conflict for her. Johnson provided a short overview before a vote was taken.

**Motion:** To approve the 2025 VFIRS Hardware Grants as provided by staff

**Motion:** Johnson

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Applications approved by VFSB

Johnston spoke about the interest earned on the Fire Programs Fund that allows The Mini-Grant Program to be funded. The committee discussed increasing the maximum and focusing the grant on operational expenses incurred by fire departments.

**Motion:** To adopt the Mini-Grant Policy with a focus it on fire department operations and increase the maximum to \$30,000.

**Motion:** Johnston

**Discussion on the Motion:** Sites asked what the total amount available for the program is. Johnston and staff stated just over \$600,000.

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Mini-Grant Policy adopted

Johnson highlighted the board recently visiting Patrick County for the Patrick County Fire and EMS Study. He thanked those involved in the fire and EMS studies and spoke about their impact.

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

Chair Johnson thanked the Virginia State Firefighters Association for inviting the VFSB to the conference. He welcomed Carla Keese and Kevin Duck to the VFSB as this was their first meeting. He thanked everyone who supported Loudoun County during their line of duty death. He thanked Virginia Beach Fire Department and Deputy Chief Vance Cooper for their hospitality. Sonny Daniels was promoted to Deputy Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security. He also commended VDFP staff. He discussed the approaching 2025 legislative cycle and the need to get involved. A large impact can be made, and lives saved through legislative change and code changes. Johnson stated his cause is residential sprinklers. He encouraged fostering a cooperative relationship between BHCD and VFSB.

## **FULL BOARD BUSINESS**

### **a. Unfinished Business**

- i. Report from the VFSB Board Clerk  
VFSB Clerk Willett requested that members sign and provide their travel reimbursement forms prior to departing. He announced that the December VFSB meeting will be held in Christiansburg, VA on December 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. This will be hosted by Chief Billy Hanks. The agency has received few applications for the Governors Fire Service Awards and the awards have been open since February. At this point, some recipients would receive awards simply by applying. Staff will provide an update on this in December with recommendations on the sustainability of the program. Willet also provided an update on the board's grant documents, which are being repealed as regulatory documents. These will remain as policies as approved by the VFSB.
- ii. Department of Forestry (DOF) Report  
Dave Houttekier provided a report on behalf of DOF Fire and Rescue Chief John Miller. He spoke about a busy fire season, including an increase in acreage but that overall fire numbers are down. The dry hydrant program has set a record in fund utilization as a result of a good contractor installing the dry hydrants. DOF is fielding larger dozers with more capacity. The agency will be utilizing seasonal fire crews for the first time, which will be part time state employees. He highlighted the important relationship between wildland firefighters and local structural firefighters. Johnson spoke about U.S Fire Administrator Lori Moore-Merrill and her work to address the wildland urban interface and data analytics.

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## **b. New Business**

Walt Bailey spoke about fire and EMS studies and seeing issues with lack of resources and funding across the state. There is a growing crisis in fire and EMS, specifically highlighting that on a recent study that the team heard 16 pages for an EMS call. Mutual aid is decreasing as localities struggle to handle their own calls. He spoke about a current study of fire and EMS funding by the state through Virginia Commonwealth University. Bailey stated that the VFSB should send a letter to the Governor or Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Terry Cole related to fire funding and resources.

**Motion:** The VFSB would send a letter to the Governor related to the lack of funding and resources for fire and EMS in Virginia.

**Motion:** Bailey **Second:** Hart

**Discussion on the Motion:** Calvert spoke about a roundtable last year where issues such as this were discussed. Calvert believes that the service is in an emergency and strongly supports the initiative.

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** VFSB will send a letter to the Governor.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Clerk of the Board  
Spencer R. Willett