

# **VIRGINIA FIRE SERVICES BOARD**

Full Board Meeting  
Friday, February 24, 2023  
Virginia Beach Convention Center  
9:00 AM

## **Minutes**

The Virginia Fire Services Board Full Board meeting was held at the Virginia Beach Convention Center. 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 Firefighters Association  
R. Scott Garber – Local Fire Marshal  
Bettie Reeves-Nobles – General Public  
James Calvert – Industry Representing SARA Title III/OSHA  
Ben Reedy – Insurance Industry  
Steve Sites – Virginia Municipal League  
Donald Hart – Virginia Association of Counties  
Jerome Williams - Certified Fire Service Instructor  
JM Snell II– Housing and Community Development  
Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Services Council  
Jess Rodzinka – Virginia Professional Firefighters Association  
Ed Zimmer, on behalf of Rob Farrell – Virginia State Forester  
Ernest Little – Virginia Fire Prevention Association

### **BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT**

Dennis Linaberg – Virginia Chapter of IAAI

### **AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT**

Brad Creasy, Executive Director  
Nicholas Nanna, Deputy Director  
Michael Parris, Deputy Chief of Training and Operations  
Theresa Hunter, Interim Assistant Chief of Administration  
Billy Hux, Chief State Fire Marshal  
Ken Brown, Coordinator of Community Risk Reduction  
Will Merritt, Marketing and Communications Manager  
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

### **GUESTS PRESENT**

Mike Moles	Eddie Ferguson
Jim Forgo	Jason Ferguson
Brandon Proffitt	Michael Berg
Mike Watkins	Larry Gwaltney

### **CHANGES IN THE AGENDA**

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No changes in the agenda

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chris Eudailey thanked the Virginia Fire Services Board and welcomed everyone on behalf of the Virginia Fire Chief's Association.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

- a. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (December 2022)

**Motion:** To approve minutes from the December 2022 meeting of the Virginia Fire Services Board.

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

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous approval

**Action:** Minutes approved

## **REPORT FROM VDFP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

VDFP Executive Director Brad Creasy gave the report. He stated that the vacant division chief positions have been filled. He also spoke to the issues occurring in Division 7 that are being remedied and vacant positions at VDFP headquarters. He stated that most of his report will be covered by Training and Operations.

Chair Keith Johnson asked that Director Creasy introduce the Deputy Director. Deputy Director Nicholas Nanna was introduced to the board and members of the audience.

Johnson thanked the agency for the hard work occurring across the Commonwealth. Creasy also thanked the Virginia Fire Chief's Association and the logistics section of VDFP for helping make the conference possible.

## **FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL COMMITTEE**

- a. Report from the Fire Prevention and Control Committee Chair

Committee Chair Ernie Little gave a report on the current code adoption cycle. He also stated the committee would be examining the Statewide Fire Prevention and Control Plan.

Spencer Willett stated that the Board of Housing and Community Development notified the board that the comment period on proposed changes to the code will begin February 27<sup>th</sup>. Chair Johnson encouraged those with comments to submit them.

- b. Report from the Virginia State Fire Marshal

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Chief State Fire Marshal Billy Hux offered updates from the State Fire Marshal. He recognized Troy Bower as the new Assistant Chief of Special Operations and Robbie Parker as the new Chief Deputy Fire Marshal for the Central Region. He also spoke about legislation that is moving forward to fully fund the operations of the State Fire Marshal. Chief Hux spoke about legislation regarding fireworks, thanking localities that sent representatives to speak against this legislation. Hux also spoke about legislation making the State Fire Marshal the authority-having-jurisdiction on state property.

The mobile lab trailer is behind schedule because of a metal shortage. The office has requested an extension on the grant that is providing funding for this.

c. Report from the Department of Forestry

John Miller from the Department of Forestry gave the report. Miller spoke about the Dry Hydrant program which has 16 new installations and 9 repairs. A single contractor is completing this work for the agency. Miller also spoke about the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program that is available to rural fire departments. Registration is opening for the statewide fire academy hosted by the Department of Forestry at Longwood University. Miller spoke about solar farm fires and the agency stance, which is to defend from the outer perimeter of the solar farm and not make access to the farm. This is recommended by solar farm operators to provide safer conditions.

Chair Keith Johnson spoke about the challenges posed by solar farms and battery storage facilities to the fire service.

d. Report from the Codes and Standards Subcommittee

No report for the Codes and Standards Subcommittee

e. Unfinished Business

i. VFSB/BHCD Memorandum of Agreement update

Fire Prevention Committee Chair Ernie Little gave a report on the memorandum and lack of action. He also spoke about the code process and how consensus versus nonconsensus items work. Little stated that the Statewide Fire Prevention Code is becoming

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more difficult to enforce. The memorandum has been placed on hold until after the legislative session and he hopes that it is in place before the next code cycle.

f. New Business

No new business to report

## **LIVE FIRE TRAINING STRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

a. Report from the Live Fire Training Structure Committee Chair

Chair Bettie Reeves-Noble gave a report. She thanked members for attending the special meeting held in January 2023.

b. Unfinished Business

- i. Motion to Approve Goochland County and City of Richmond request for prototype design exemption

**Motion:** To approve Goochland County and Richmond City, if they meet NFPA 1402 standards until VDFP can develop a standard, to construct a live fire container building as a test for VDFP.

**Motion:** Johnston

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Motion Carries

- ii. Motion to Approve TSG to work on a fourth prototype for a live fire container construction building

**Motion:** To ask TSG to work on a fourth prototype on a live fire container construction building. During the process also providing guidance to Goochland County and the City of Richmond.

**Motion:** Reeves-Nobles

**Discussion on the Motion:** Chair Johnson asked someone from the committee to explain the thoughts behind this motion. Jimmy Calvert spoke about the use of container type live fire structures in the Commonwealth without guidance. These systems have become a viable solution for localities. The committee reviewed NFPA 1402 and had an extensive discussion about these buildings. These designs met the needs of the localities and will follow guidance to make live fire training safe. Reeves-Nobles stated that the board wants to provide guidance for future localities that come to the board regarding live fire training in container

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structures. She also stated that using Richmond and Goochland as a test could lend to the prototype being designed by TSG.

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Motion Carries

c. New Business

i. City of Roanoke Renovation Application

**Motion:** To approve the City of Roanoke Renovation Application

**Motion:** Reeves-Nobles

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Motion Carries

## **FIRE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE**

a. Report from the Fire Education and Training Committee Chair

No report from the Fire Education and Training Committee Chair

b. Report from the Chief of Training

Deputy Chief of Training and Operations Michael Parris gave the report. The Division 4 and 7 Chief positions have been filled. Each division is also starting to receive additional adjunct instructors. The heavy/technical rescue branch is reviewing all programs and moving them to accredited status. The logistics division is updating various training trailers. This includes moving some trailers to Conex box style trailers to deal with the weight being carried. The large animal rescue trailer is also now in service. Online testing is being developed, with data being moved onto servers for internal pilot programs. Modular Firefighter I and II curriculums are being developed with the first Firefighter I class being piloted in Charlotte County. VDFP is also assisting VDOT with developing EVOC training for their employees who qualify to drive with emergency lights. Parris also gave statistics on class numbers and instructional hours to date.

Chair Keith Johnson asked for an update regarding online testing. Parris spoke about development with the Virginia Information Technology Agency and how the process has been slow. The data has been moved to servers for internal testing. Brad Creasy spoke about the difficulties faced by the Department of Fire Programs building this program because of roadblocks resulting from other agencies.

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Walt Bailey thanked VDFP staff for working with the modular program. He stated that Charlotte County has never been able to offer a Firefighter I class because of numbers, but they had a large number of applications for the modular training program. He reiterated that this is a benefit to the volunteer fire service.

Jimmy Calvert spoke on his work with the community college system to offer Wi-Fi or technology for online testing. He stated that the Central Virginia Community College has offered their facilities at no cost. Calvert also told the board about a new program that would put Firefighter I and II curriculum into the Central Virginia Community College. This would increase the pool of people available for both volunteer and career agencies.

Calvert also brought up the National Fire Academy. Parris spoke about the need to increase class sizes and lodging space for Virginia's weekend at the National Fire Academy because of the high number of students wishing to attend. This is the most students Virginia has ever had registered. The Virginia weekend at the National Fire Academy is March 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup>. Calvert commended the agency for strong work occurring across the Commonwealth's fire service.

Parris recognized Dennis Price, Division Chief 6 with VDFP. Parris spoke about the strong work being done by division chiefs across the Commonwealth.

Johnson spoke about record attendance at the conference and at VDFP training events across the Commonwealth. Johnson stated he felt that the fire service is headed in the right direction and thanked everyone involved in providing training for firefighters across the Commonwealth.

- c. Unfinished Business
- d. New Business

## **ADMINISTRATION, POLICY, AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

- a. Report from the Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee Chair

Committee Chair Abbey Johnston commended the work of VDFP and the board for their work for Virginia's fire service. She recognized VDFP members including Ken Brown, Theresa Hunter, Will Merritt, Spencer

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Willett, and others who work behind the scenes.

Johnston went on to highlight legislative work from the previous General Assembly session. This includes progress on cancer presumption, fire service studies, 911 dispatchers, and other important pieces of legislation. She thanked all that were involved in the process and assisted during the legislative process.

## b. Report from VDFP Administration

Theresa Hunter reported that Aid to Locality funding information was included in the boards packet. 111 localities have not been paid. In April, forfeiture notices will be sent out. Hunter provided information that \$566,000 remains unallocated in the Live Structure budget.

## c. Unfinished Business

- i. Virginia Fire Services Board Studies Review
  1. Pulaski County Update

**Motion:** To adopt the Pulaski County Fire/EMS Study

**Motion:** Bailey

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Study approved for submission to the Pulaski County Board of Supervisors

2. Sussex Update
3. Town of Lebanon Update

Committee Chair Johnston gave the floor to Walt Bailey, which provided an update on Sussex County and the Town of Lebanon. Bailey stated the Sussex study will take place the week of February 26<sup>th</sup>. He further explained that the Town of Lebanon did not need a formal study but asked for a review of their fire system from an outside group. The board will do this via zoom and issue a letter as opposed to a full study.

Johnston thanked those who participate in the studies.

## d. New Business

- i. City of Richmond RFSTF Grant extension

**Motion:** To approve the City of Richmond RFSTF Grant extension

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**Motion:** Reeves-Noble  
**Discussion on the Motion:** None  
**Vote:** Unanimous  
**Action:** Grant Extension approved for one year

ii. Alleghany County, Virginia study request

**Motion:** To approve the Fire/EMS study request by Alleghany County, Virginia  
**Motion:** Hart  
**Discussion on the Motion:** None  
**Vote:** Unanimous  
**Action:** Study request approved. Study Liaison Walt Bailey and Spencer Willett will contact Alleghany County

iii. Amherst County, Virginia study request

**Motion:** To approve the Fire/EMS study request by Amherst County, Virginia  
**Motion:** Hart  
**Discussion on the Motion:** None  
**Vote:** Unanimous  
**Action:** Study request approved. Study Liaison Walt Bailey and Spencer Willett will contact Alleghany County

iv. VFSB study process review

Johnston spoke about the committee's discussions regarding the study process and staff recommendations regarding studies. She went on to highlight the large amount of work by board members and staff related to studies and the high number of study requests being received by the board. She also wanted to make sure the studies were of quality and that board members were not overstretched. This will be discussed at a future meeting.

Johnson stated that studies cannot fall to only people on the board. Johnson suggested using stakeholder groups with talent and experience to assist with conducting these studies as the board moves forward.

v. Virginia Fire Service's Board Virtual Meeting Policy

Johnston asked Spencer Willett to explain the remote participation and



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virtual meeting policies. Willett highlighted the differences between the two policies and the need for the board to adopt these policies to move forward with future virtual meetings. Willett also explained the need for VDFP to prepare for this logistically before the board moves forward.

**Motion:** To adopt the Virtual Meeting Policy and Remote Participation Policy with an enactment date of July 1st, 2023.

**Motion:** Bailey

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Motion carries

vi. Governor's Fire Service Awards discussion

Johnston highlighted recommendations to include additional community risk reduction awards in the Governor's Fire Service Awards. She stated that the committee tabled this issue until next year.

Johnson thanked VDFP for the hard work on the Governor's Awards.

Johnston also stated that Spencer Willett will be examining the awards process and will present this at the next committee meeting.

**Motion:** To table discussion of CRR in the Governor's Fire Service Awards to after the next Governor's Fire Service Awards.

**Motion:** Calvert

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Discussion of the Governor's Fire Service Awards moved to the next meeting of the Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee after the 2023 Governors Fire Service Awards.

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

Board Chair Keith Johnson thanked the members of the Virginia Fire Services Board and the employees of VDFP. He also spoke about the good work done during the legislative process and HB 2175, which directs that a study of Virginia's fire service be conducted. He spoke about the dedicated funding

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provided to law enforcement that is not provided to the fire service. He also spoke about adding 911 dispatchers to enhanced retirement like firefighters. This is moving to a JLARC study.

Johnson spoke about the hard work going into the code cycle process. He told the board about concerns with the process and highlighted his meeting with Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Bob Mosier about this. This meeting voiced concerns from the fire service about the code process. He also highlighted that members should stop by the American Red Cross booth at the convention. Johnson invited Fire Service Board members to the Fire and EMS Memorial Service on June 3<sup>rd</sup> in Richmond, Virginia. He spoke to the meaning and powerful message from this event.

Johnson also recognized Robbie Dawson and Ken Brown as former members of the board.

## **FULL BOARD BUSINESS**

### a. Unfinished Business

Scott Garber offered apologies for being late to the meeting.

### b. New Business

#### i. Motion to Approve 2023 VFSB meeting schedule

Chair Keith Johnson brought up the 2023 board schedules. He recommended four meetings for the Virginia Fire Services Board. He suggested a retreat and meeting in December like was done in December 2022 in Loudoun.

**Motion:** The Virginia Fire Services Board meeting schedule for 2024 will be at the Fire/Rescue Conference in February, VDFP headquarters in June, the First Responder Conference in September, and an additional location in December.

**Motion:** Johnson, **Second:** Johnston

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Motion carries

#### ii. Nominations for 2023 VFSB seats

Chair Johnson spoke about the two spots opening in 2024 on the board, which includes the certified fire instructor and local fire

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marshal spot. Each spot needs three recommendations for the Governor's Office, which would include the two current board members seeking reappointment.

Chair Johnson asked if there was further discussion from the board. Walt Bailey spoke about HB 2175 and the need for it. The public safety budget is around 5 billion dollars, which the fire service does not receive a penny of. He suggested that identifying funding streams for the fire service is a duty of the board and would be accomplished by this bill. Many localities have a lack of equipment, no equipment, or other critical issues that are affecting fire and EMS services. Bailey suggested the board support HB 2175.

**Motion:** To send a letter to the Governor's Office supporting HB 2175.

**Motion:** Bailey, **Second:** Calvert

**Discussion on the Motion:** Jimmy Calvert spoke about old equipment seen in various studies that shows an emergency in the fire service. He also spoke about a roundtable meeting where stakeholders expressed concern about recruitment of volunteers and career firefighters. Calvert suggested that the fire service is in crisis and a resolution from the board could carry weight to support HB 2175. Keith Johnson spoke about increasing costs on departments, highlighting how fire trucks cannot be funded through donations and fundraisers. Sustainable funding is needed for Virginia's fire service.

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** Motion carries. A letter will be sent to the Governor's Office in support of HB 2175.

Ernie Little stated he could not find minutes from previous meetings on the VDFP website. Spencer Willett stated that he believed all approved minutes were uploaded but would investigate the matter.

Calvert spoke about his involvement with the Secure and Resilient Commonwealth Panel and suggested that someone from the Fire Services Board present to this group on the issues in the fire service. This would give background and emphasize the needs of the fire service.

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Spencer Willett explained that a workgroup was created to examine the inclusion of fire marshals into the definition of law enforcement into the *Code of Virginia*. He suggested the board request a spot on the workgroup to represent the fire service.

Steven Sites clarified what the recommendation from the board would be regarding the two spots opening on the board in 2024. He suggested the board support Scott Garber and Jerome Williams to continue in these positions. Johnson agreed to put emphasis on the two current board members retaining their seats and stated that the process was to recommend three names. Willett suggested this be formalized in a motion.

**Motion:** To recommend Scott Garber for the Local Fire Marshal position and Jerome Williams for the Certified Fire Instructor position to the Governor's Office.

**Motion:** Johnston, **Second:** Sites

**Discussion on the Motion:** None

**Vote:** Unanimous

**Action:** The board will recommend Scott Garber and Jerome Williams to continue in their roles on the Fire Services Board.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Clerk of the Board  
Spencer R. Willett