

Virginia Fire Services Board

Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee

Thursday, September 19, 2024

First Responder Virginia Conference

1000 19th St, Virginia Beach, VA 23451

9:30AM – MR5CD

MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Administration, Policy and Finance Committee was held at the Virginia Beach Convention Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The meeting was called to order by Vice 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
Bettie Reeves Nobles – General Public

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Service Council
Steven Sites – Virginia Municipal League

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer
Jamey Brads, Chief of Training and Operations
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

GUESTS PRESENT

Lee Williams	David Haynes	Colten Lotts	H. Monty Willaford
Deshaun Steele	Chris Shaver	Gret Schact	David Hoback

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

No changes in the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comment provided.

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CONSENT AGENDA

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

Motion: Calvert **Second:** Johnson

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes adopted

REPORT FROM VDFP ADMINISTRATION

Theresa Hunter provided brief comments on the Administration Report, including funds available for grants and the various grants applied for under New Business.

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Abbey Johnston spoke about her attendance on behalf of the board at a pre-session meeting of fire and EMS groups related to legislation. The primary goals are related to fire/EMS funding, promoted by the Virginia Fire Chief's Association, cancer screenings promoted by the Virginia Professional Fire Fighters, and the inclusion of 911 dispatchers for enhanced retirement.

Johnston and Keith Johnson spoke about the need for people to get involved in legislation and lobby for these efforts. Johnson highlighted the need for the board to brief the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security on legislative items.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No unfinished business

NEW BUSINESS

a. King & Queen County Regional Fire Services Training Application

H. Monty Willaford spoke to the grant application. He stated that this grant continued the work from the grant they received in the previous year. He spoke about last year's application and the equipment received, which electronically simulate fire conditions. He also spoke about the small population and lack of volunteers in King and Queen County. He also stated that the county received an 80/20 hardship grant in the previous grant cycle. Johnston highlighted that the grant is a hardship grant again this year, which would be 100% funding from the VFSB.

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Johnson asked what the previous grant amount was and if it was 80/20. Hunter stated it was an 80/20 grant and that she would research the total grant award amount.

James Calvert clarified if the product was a digital system. Willaford stated it was a digital system that they are requesting funds to purchase additional tools for.

b. Augusta County Regional Fire Services Training Application

Colten Lotts spoke to the grant application. He spoke about the size of Augusta County and their fire training center, which is thirty-eight minutes from the furthest station. This grant will create mobile training aids and include all the necessary tools to keep units in service. Other jurisdictions around Augusta County will also have access to the trailer and the props included.

Johnston stated that Augusta County was eligible for up to 50% funding for the grant.

Hunter clarified the amount that King and Queen County received in the previous grant cycle, which was \$54,695.60.

c. Town of Blackstone Regional Fire Services Training Application

Lee Williams spoke to the grant application. He spoke about the need for the training prop and the expected use by the Crater Regional Fire Academy. The nearest propane prop is approximately 60 miles away. He also provided the committee and staff with presentation materials. Southside Virginia is financially distressed, and Blackstone is currently making payments on two pieces of apparatus. Blackstone respectfully requested a hardship grant.

d. Chilhowie Regional Fire Services Training Application

David Haynes spoke to the grant application. He stated that the training center operated by the department has been improved using ARPA funding and VFSB funding. The training center does not have any forcible entry doors outside of the door mounted on the live fire training structure.

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e. VDFP Training and Operations Regional Fire Services Training Application

Jamey Brads spoke to grant application. These funds would be utilized at the Virginia Public Safety Training Center. The agency plans to erect a training tower at the site for firefighter training. He spoke about the difficulties of building a burn building on state property. The grant funds would be used to pour a concrete slab at the facility to erect the tower. This will support rescue weeks in the area.

Calvert asked if this prop would assist with compliance with the proposed OSHA Emergency Response Standard. Brads stated that it would help address training required in the proposed standard. Calvert commended the agency for its forward thinking.

Johnston pointed out that the Blackstone application was being amended for a hardship grant. Committee Clerk Spencer Willett recommended the committee consider the applications that required amendment separately from those that did not. Bettie Reeves Nobles asked if King and Queen County was also a hardship grant, which Johnston stated was the case but did not require amendment.

Motion: To approve the Regional Fire Services Training Applications, as presented, as a block (excluding the Town of Blackstone).

Motion: Johnston **Second:** Calvert

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Applications recommended to the VFBSB

Motion: To approve Town of Blackstone application, as amended, for a hardship grant.

Motion: Calvert **Second:** Johnson

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Application, as amended, recommended to the VFBSB.

f. FY2025 VFIRS Applications

Johnston turned over the chair temporarily to Johnson due to a conflict with VFIRS applications.

Willaford spoke to cancer screenings for firefighters and his personal experience with screenings.

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Johnson read the VFIRS applications with the total funds requested.

Motion: To approve the FY2025 VFIRS Hardware Grant Applications

Motion: Reeves Nobles **Second:** Calvert

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Applications recommended to the VFSB

Johnson returned the chair to Johnston at the conclusion of the vote.

g. Mini Grant Policy

Hunter spoke about the funds available and the history. Approximately \$636,000 is available for the grant. The committee needs to determine the total amount of funds per grant application and what the grant can be used for.

Johnston encouraged discussion on items to be purchased, including equipment (PPE) and other items identified in recent surveys related to fire funding in Virginia.

Johnson asked Hunter if there was a maximum amount, Hunter answered \$10,000 per jurisdiction with no matching requirement when the grant was last activated. He supported PPE requests but was not supportive of apparatus requests related to how expensive apparatus is.

Reeves Nobles asked if EMS supplies could be purchased with this grant funding. She also asked about equipment bought the last time the program existed. Hunter stated it was mostly IT related items such as laptops when the program was last active in 2011. Reeves Nobles clarified whether EMS equipment could be purchased, which Hunter stated was dependent on how the committee structures the policy. Reeves Nobles further asked when the Mini Grant Program was last activated. Hunter stated it was 12 years ago.

Johnson supported using funds for actual firefighting equipment, rather than IT needs. Tools, PPE, and other equipment that are operations specific should be prioritized. Johnston stated this was consistent in the survey from HB2175 (2023).

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Johnston asked if Willett had recommended language. Willett stated it should prioritize operations equipment, but this could be included in the application. He deferred to Hunter. Hunter asked if it was a one-time priority. Johnston recommended it include priorities for operations at this point, not knowing when funding will be available again. Willett suggested the policy be adopted and that staff be directed to include in the application operational priorities such as PPE, equipment, SCBA, cancer prevention initiatives, and others.

Calvert spoke about uses for departments with aging equipment and increasing the maximum from \$10,000.

Reeves Nobles asked that the funding be used for operational needs. Johnson agreed with Calvert to increase the amount to \$15,000 or \$20,000. Johnston agreed with the increase and suggested \$30,000 to \$35,000. Johnston asked how many people requested the grant previously. Hunter stated 42 requests were made and \$118,000 was approved.

Brads talked about options for funding and creating consistency with other grants, specifically matching grants. He stated that \$10,000 does not go far operationally. Johnston recommended \$30,000 to \$35,000. Calvert spoke about justification to use funds for the grant program. The committee should prioritize improving departments with the most need to improve the fire service overall. Johnson suggested \$30,000 limit per locality.

Johnson spoke about the funds and how it will be important for the committee to review applications. Willett suggested that the language be kept broad, but that the committee rank applications and weigh different applications based on need. Reeves Nobles suggested a maximum amount be set that's less than \$50,000 so more localities can receive the funds.

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Motion: To recommend the Mini Grant Policy to the VFSB, with an increase in the total amount per grant to \$30,000 and for staff to include in the application funding priorities for operational expenses.

Motion: Johnston **Second:** Reeves Nobles

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Policy recommended to the VFSB, staff to create application.

Hunter spoke on the timeline staff expects for the grant program so that applications are available for review in December.

ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Committee

Spencer R. Willett