



## Fire Commission Meeting Minutes

January 20<sup>th</sup> at 1900 hours

~ Pledge of allegiance, moment of silence, attendance, and recognitions.

### Chief Blankenship:

- Mast Study Progress – revised draft under review by the County Administration. Work session scheduled for January 27<sup>th</sup> at 5 pm to facilitate board endorsement. Distribution to all departments is expected promptly after administrative approval.
- Immediate Stabilization Initiatives: Initial phases of the strategic plan focused on urgent stabilization measures, including the deployment of an additional 12-hour peak medic truck to address coverage gaps during critical periods. These first-phase actions are designed to create sustainable operational footing, while subsequent phases (II-IV) were outlined for more comprehensive, long-term strategic planning encompassing both EMS and fire apparatus needs, departmental staffing augmentation, and continued development.
- Transparent Recommendations and Planning: Attendees were advised that the full list of recommendations would be located in the rear of the standards of cover document, encouraging thorough review for departmental compliance and strategic alignment. Implementation of recommendations was to be formalized with a PowerPoint presentation to the board, followed by dissemination of an actionable plan and continued iterative improvements based on board and department feedback.
- Annual Audit and Policy SOG Releases: One agreed upon annual audit procedures for all departments, and another addressing vehicle and apparatus inventory management. The annual audit SOG formalized the policy that departments, categorized by odd or even years, are required to assemble and submit comprehensive audit files—including apparatus receipts, maintenance logs, and rosters—every January. The first submission was to benefit from a grace period, reflecting the recency of the policy's rollout.
- Funding Cycles and Operational Calendars: Emphasis was placed on aligning all audit and maintenance submissions with the annual fiscal planning cycle, with September 1 as the annual funding disbursement benchmark. Departments were reminded that thorough and timely data input directly enables effective county and departmental budget planning, encompassing maintenance, apparatus lifecycle needs, and seasonal funding requirements.
- Separation of Financial and Operational Audits: It was clarified that financial documentation and broader operational data are treated as discrete packages to reduce redundancy and maximize each department's focus during the biennial audit process. This structured calendar aims to simplify the compliance burden while enabling operational transparency.
- Apparatus Insurance and Budget Planning: Departments were asked to pre-notify administration of any non-county apparatus intended for procurement in the coming fiscal year, especially those impacting insurance requirements. The new SOGs were intended to prevent sudden budgetary or coverage deficits, with October 1 set as the deadline for future fiscal declarations. Departments



planning purchases after July 1 were to advise central administration before the upcoming Friday to guarantee budgetary adjustments could be made with the finance director.

#### Deputy Chief Johnston:

- **Outstanding NFIRS Reports:** All departments were reminded to close out outstanding NFIRS reports for 2025 by the end of January. An updated spreadsheet was provided to track outstanding items, contact LeAta Jackson for help troubleshooting and support.
- **NERIS Challenges and Support:** Some technical issues remain between NERIS and ImageTrend. Departments were reassured that vendor liaisons are actively working on these glitches. Please report any issues to LeAta and D.C. Johnston.
- **Current Legislative Priorities:** The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association's advocacy focus centered on three critical legislative items: (1) maintaining or increasing the \$5M state budget grant for PPE, which enabled dramatic extensions of PPE availability and departmental capabilities; (2) advocating for reworked and increased Aid to Localities (ATL) funding formulas, away from strictly population-based models, to direct resources to those with demonstrated need (especially rural and geographically dispersed communities); and (3) supporting expanded retirement benefits for 911 operators, cutting through persistent structural barriers at the state police administrative level.
- **Representatives were scheduled for organized lobbying days in Richmond,** where teams equipped with formal talking points would advocate directly to legislators. All departments were encouraged to amplify these efforts through grassroots engagement, private conversations with elected officials, and collective story-sharing to demonstrate the fire service's wide-reaching impact.
- **Hiring, Vacancy Updates, and Crew Assignments:** Noteworthy progress was reported on successful hiring efforts countywide, though a few vacancies remain in Big Island. Part-time staff were lauded for their responsiveness and willingness to fill critical coverage deficits. Ongoing candidate assessments are scheduled for late January to address remaining vacancies.
- **The commission reviewed forecasted severe weather risks,** urging staff to encourage proactive crew communication and station readiness. Staff working back-to-back shifts, or unable to safely travel, were empowered to remain at stations as needed. Special attention was given to resource deployment discipline, especially decision-making around ambulance releases during motor vehicle incidents.

#### BC Coleman (SOC):

- **The department scheduled opportunistic ice training sessions** due to ongoing cold weather, inviting any stations with appropriate equipment to participate as circumstances allowed. Chiefs also partnered with emergency management and sheriff's office staff to clarify roles and develop more robust procedures for technical rescue and search and rescue operations, highlighting recent lessons learned from delayed calls and shared responsibilities. Additional spontaneous and scheduled training events were discussed, with plans for expanded regional special operations classes.



### BC Jessee (Hazmat):

- With the retirement of the regional Hazmat Officer, departments will now coordinate directly with the Virginia State EOC for large-scale hazardous materials events.
- Provided up-to-date contact lists and personal willingness to facilitate communications, emphasizing the importance of collecting comprehensive incident data and swift escalation procedures.
- Persistent issues with gas monitoring equipment were discussed.
- Noted the need for early, proactive notification of problems so new software upgrades can be rolled out efficiently.

### FM George:

- The Fire Marshal reported finalization of 823 incidents in 2025, with 101 already opened for the new calendar year, indicating a strong start.
- Case highlights included successful prosecutions and convictions on recent arson cases. The group noted continued improvements in inter-agency communication for incident management.
- The Fire Marshal reminded all field units that burn notifications must be properly routed through the dispatch's non-emergency number, emphasizing the importance of data collection for all controlled burns to ensure compliance and enforceability. Dispatchers were trained to ask standardized questions and capture required information, facilitating efficient follow-up and minimizing service disruptions caused by incomplete reporting.

### Captain McChesney:

- Firefighter 1 and 2 Hybrid Classes: Fire Departments have reported interest in current and upcoming hybrid Firefighter 1 classes, with demand for additional daytime sessions. The Fire 2 class with 12 active students is going well. Fire Instructor 2 starts February 18<sup>th</sup> and EVOC spring session will be scheduled soon. Departmental partnerships were essential for instruction delivery, and department thanks were extended to BFD for its vehicle extrication and FVFD for special teams support.

## **Fire Company Reports:**

### Company 1 Bedford:

- Prepared for upcoming flow tests. Also detailed a new policy (currently under review) for automatic dual dispatching based on specific six-month performance thresholds. The intent is to streamline and depersonalize resource allocation procedures and ensure consistency.
- Debate regarding the prioritization of animal rescue calls. Recommendations were made to reclassify most non-urgent animal incidents as non-emergent to better conserve resources and allow focus on calls with actual risk to humans or property. Context-specific exceptions were discussed.



- Discussions confirmed that only county nursing home staff are fully trained to perform lifts and medical assistance; all other assisted living or private facilities have restricted service parameters due to lack of qualified medical personnel. Clarifying policy and improving training in these contexts was recommended as an ongoing focus.

#### Company 2 Big Island:

- Revisited recurring communication breakdowns during radio tower outages. There was strong consensus for dispatch to proactively notify all chiefs via tones and emails at both outage onset and restoration. Resolved to tighten communications and implement accountability measures for these notifications.
- Wildland Alert Configuration: Errors during the Motorola CAD launch led to improper wildland callback procedures. Recent technical corrections have restored appropriate notification, but ongoing monitoring was requested to ensure reliability. Direct, personal outreach to affected individuals and prompt acknowledgment were key aspects of this approach.
- Delays in new radio delivery were noted, with departmental leads assigned to coordinate with Jeff for ongoing updates. Engine 2 approval was celebrated as an equipment advancement, and accompanying documentation and photographs were requested for county records.

#### Company 3 Boonsboro:

- Active engagement in training events (notably Amherst Part 1 class) and satisfactory responses to personnel and education-related questions were reported. The department's new rescue vehicle was scheduled for delivery between March and May, signaling operational enhancement.
- Aiming to celebrate 60th anniversary with an open house and cookout in September or October, with ongoing events and performance testing to showcase recent achievements and boost community ties.

#### Company 5 Forest:

- Updates on fleet maintenance included successful tower ladder inspections, a jam-packed truck school, and the temporary redeployment of Tanker 5 for ongoing repairs. Complete restoration was targeted within the week.
- In response to previous incidents of confusion during mutual aid and city callouts, Chief Coleman introduced operational run cards and assignment books for all cooperative companies (including those outside the county), aiming to harmonize expectations about command assignments, arrival order, and operational tasks. Implementation status meetings were scheduled.
- A comprehensive after-action review of a December fire outlined critical issues, such as the insufficiency of current 30-minute air cylinders during aggressive interior attacks. Leadership committed to pursue grant funding for higher-capacity cylinders and incorporate this need into future CIP discussions. The challenge of dispatching adequate help early (particularly air trucks, staff engines, and fire marshal personnel) was deliberated extensively, with emphasis on orchestrating automatic working fire responses that balance readiness with resource efficiency. Advocating air truck dispatch, reassignments, and managing on-scene radio confusion.



#### Company 7 Huddleston:

- Announced the purchase of another service body truck, documented local road washout issues, and called for greater awareness regarding GPS route errors when accessing affected properties. Recommended that dispatch be briefed to provide field-friendly accessibility notes.
- Membership and Community Events: Welcomed a new member recently completing firefighter training. Maintaining ongoing recruitment and announced March and September upcoming (training or fundraising) events.

#### Company 8 Moneta:

- Flagged continued issues in county-to-county mutual aid radio interoperability. Announced successful resolution—future radios to include seamless switching between Franklin and Bedford frequencies. Department's 70th anniversary celebration and open house were being scheduled for mid-fall.

#### Company 10 Saunders:

- Reported forthcoming brush truck delivery in March, ongoing engine repairs, and extended thanks for countywide mutual assistance during a challenging period. The department's 40th anniversary and continued resilience were noted and celebrated.

#### Company 11 Smith Mountain Lake:

- Impressed upon the group the importance of timely air truck requests and announced four recent Firefighter 1 graduates. Air 11 remains available for urgent air support, contingent on earlier activation for maximum effectiveness.

#### Company 12 Hardy:

- Announced April completion of a new brush truck, commended ongoing custom build efforts, and expressed interest in further radio/microphone upgrades for enhanced communications. Recent initiatives yielded increased public awareness and applications, including the suggestion to revive traditional fundraiser activities (e.g., eggs) to foster engagement and financial sustainability.

#### Company 13 Stewartsville/Chamblissburg:

- Applauded department growth after a period of stagnation. Implemented new truck assignment during multi-unit incidents. Emphasized the challenge of daytime staffing given current PPE/laundry cycle limitations, suggesting future acquisition of secondary PPE sets for high-frequency responders. Highlighted recent successful acquisition of a cascade system after decades of effort.