Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
July 16, 2026
Camp Cole

Attendance: Jason Dennis, Ross Vezin, Billy Barnes, Ben Waring, Ryan Eubanks, Terry Sheriff, Brent McClellan, Larry Kardos, Charles Lamoreaux, Rickie Jenkins, John Bowers, Randy Arant, Jennifer Thackston, Matt Rhoton, Jack Kirlin, Zorrina Harmon, Brick Lewis, Ashley Boltin, Jamie Helms, Carter Jones, Brook Dennis, Rick Dunn, Patti Graham, Sydney Ellis, Bryan Bailey, Kim Bowman, Kim Voisine, Jana Kassianos

President Jason Dennis called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

Rickie Jenkins delivered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Dennis welcomed the committee and expressed his excitement for the upcoming year. He thanked the members for their dedication and challenged everyone to remain positive and focused on the Association's mission.

A motion was made by Ross Vezin to approve the minutes from the May 12, 2026, meeting as presented; Billy Barnes seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Goal and Committee Reviews

Past Presidents Chair: Pierce Womack — Absent

The committee discussed the importance of keeping past presidents informed and involved. Explore providing each past president with a shirt displaying the Past Presidents logo.

Research will continue regarding the development of a firefighters' retirement home, as outlined in the strategic plan. It was noted that Indiana, Michigan, Maryland, Texas, New Jersey, and New York currently have retirement homes for firefighters.

Finance Chair: Mike Norket — Absent

The Finance Committee is well-versed in the Association's financial matters. The committee will assist and work alongside the group responsible for financing the new building.

A design group has already begun its work. The Association does not want to reduce services, so the Finance Committee will continue monitoring the operating budget while a separate group focuses specifically on financing the building project. These two groups will be working together, with the Executive Director, to maintain financial responsibility throughout the Heritage Center project.

Legislative Chair: Kevin Henson — Absent

The committee will continue working with SKA (legislative agents) and the Executive Director to set the legislative agenda for the upcoming session.

The Conference Committee is operating under a continuing resolution, as no final state budget is currently in place. Approximately $27 million has been proposed for fire service projects, with the House version, and with Senate version the number increases to approximately $42 million. The Senate version contains a lower amount, reflecting differing priorities between the two chambers.

Action is currently paused pending further direction regarding the funding. The conference committee consists of three House members and three Senate members. At least two votes from each chamber's delegation are needed for an item to move forward.

It was noted that having eight fire service representatives present during the previous day's discussions made a noticeable difference.

Advisory Committee Chair: Ross Vezin

Will continue with Award and Leadership Institute selections.

Look at reviewing working changes that need to be made for awards.

Planning for the Training Officer Academy is progressing. Subcommittee working groups have been meeting and are close to completing a draft of the program objectives for presentation to the Executive Committee.

The committee is also developing the proposed budget. The preliminary estimate is approximately $15,000. Participant costs would include lodging, meals, and other program expenses.

The academy is expected to be offered once each year for approximately 24 students. Development of the full curriculum is anticipated to begin in the spring (this project has been handled under the Training & Education's LI focused group)

Bylaws Chair: Charles Lamoreaux

The committee discussed whether honorary members should be approved by the voting membership or by the Executive Committee. The process should be clearly defined in the bylaws. Honorary membership is currently addressed in the policies and procedures, while lifetime membership is already included in the bylaws.

Member Benefits Chairs: Ryan Eubanks

The committee was encouraged to continue its current work. As new benefits become available, they should be promoted more frequently through social media.

The committee discussed a possible supplemental benefits plan for retirees.

Members also discussed the potential effect of eliminating the state income tax on the Volunteer Incentive Program. If the current incentive is no longer available, another incentive may need to be developed.

Approximately two-thirds of the fire service is volunteer, while one-third is career. The committee discussed ways to increase volunteer participation and retention.

The State Guard's workers' compensation program provides a larger W/C percentage for coverage. The Executive Committee discussed whether the fire service could potentially be included in similar legislation. This will be passed over to the Legislative Committee to consider for their agenda. Director Helms discussed V-SAFE funds could possibly be used to assist on the Volunteer side by purchasing an insurance policy for additional coverage. Two percent (2%) of the V-SAFE funding, about $110,000 annually, could be granted to the Association for the purchase or develop a policy program. This matter will require further discussion and consideration.

Training and Education Chair: Terry Sheriff

Association conferences continue to improve and grow. The committee will work to prevent scheduling conflicts or duplicated programming with other agencies.

An EMS training track is being developed. The committee discussed creating challenges or competitions involving other agencies to increase attendance and participation.

The Training and Education Committee is scheduled to meet July 22, and the Advisory Committee is scheduled to meet August 12.

Fire Service Improvement Conference

It was noted that potential speakers and topics are increasingly being discovered through independent conferences and podcasts.

Supervisory Committee Chair: Waring

Submissions are received through the Association's website. Individuals contact Jeff, who then coordinates with the committee.

The committee discussed producing short informational videos to provide updates.

The recent audit was described as an interesting experience. The committee may conduct a review of the audit process with the company involved.

Health and Safety Chair: Brent McClellan

The Health and Safety Committee will continue working with the OSHA Committee to determine how information should be shared so departments are prepared when new requirements take effect.

The committee also discussed:

- Departmental self-evaluations to improve firefighter safety.
- The hood swap program.
- Awards or recognition opportunities for individuals who demonstrate a commitment to health and safety.

Strategic Planning Chair: Kardos

Technology was identified as an area of focus for the committee.

EMS Chair: John Smith

The committee has not received the desired level of engagement from EMS partners. Efforts will continue to strengthen those relationships.

The committee will review class topics to improve EMS educational offerings and attract more participants. An EMT competition was suggested as a possible way to increase interest.

The goal is to strengthen the Association's EMS voice and bridge existing gaps within the fire and emergency services community.

Bylaws Chair: Lamoreaux

The Parliamentarian is now working with the 11 voting members to ensure that established rules and procedures are followed when decisions are made.

Conference Committee Chair: Tom Gwyer

It was noted that Norton represents North Myrtle Beach on the Conference Committee rather than Galaganski.

Chaplaincy Chair: Rickie Jenkins

The committee discussed the future of the Chaplaincy Section, including the need for additional conference training and greater coordination among chaplains across the state.

National Volunteer Fire Council State Representatives: Jack Kirlin & Keith Minick

The Association will continue participating in NVFC meetings to address challenges and support mitigation efforts.

Volunteer recruitment and retention remain priorities, particularly regarding the use of the 2% funding. Continued attendance at NVFC meetings will help the Association stay informed.

Foundation Chair: Caggiano — Absent

The Foundation is exploring additional fundraising activities beyond the annual golf tournament. These activities could take place during the conference or at another time during the year.

Communications Chair: Thackston

The Communications Committee's goals have progressed well. Members were asked to identify any new areas that should be addressed.

The committee also plans to discuss the use of artificial intelligence and related technologies.

Heritage Committee Chair: Bowers

The committee discussed the future direction of the Heritage Center, including the archivist's report and the inventory process.

An archivist position or service is currently being developed. The committee is working with Jamie Helms and Malcolm on future displays.

The committee also discussed identifying and interviewing individuals who have played significant roles in South Carolina fire service history. These interviews could be connected to

specific artifacts or displays, but they may also stand independently as part of the historical record.

OSHA Committee Chair: Joe Palmer (Absent)

The OSHA Committee will continue coordinating with the Health and Safety and EMS committees.

The committee discussed when the Association should begin reviewing and preparing for implementation of the proposed OSHA plan. Implementation is currently anticipated for April of 2027.

The committee is also reviewing EMS-related considerations.

A large follow-up stakeholder meeting is scheduled for August 18, 2026.

Emergency Management Chair: Rhoton

The committee is working on emergency management field guides.

Committee Appointments

The committee list is currently being updated.

Conference After-Action Review

Brook is finalizing the conference after-action review and ensuring that all financial matters are completed.

The conference generated many positive conversations. Members agreed that success should not be measured only by attendance numbers, but also by the overall atmosphere and attendee experience.

The committee discussed replacing the term “soft opening” with a different description.

Items discussed during the review included:

- Noisy lanyards.
- Providing real-time updates when classes reach capacity.
- Updating the conference app.
- Using stickers or other markers to identify full classes on schedule boards.
- Allowing attendees to select first, second, and third class choices in the app.
- Reviewing the 518 attendee responses regarding requested future topics.

- Dividing portions of the opening ceremonies, including the bagpipe and honor guard presentations.
- Developing an Explorer competition.

The committee recessed for lunch.

Building Report Presented by Executive Director Jamie Helms

The Association is awaiting a decision regarding conference committee funding.

Phase One of the building project includes demolition of the first floor and upgrades to utilities and related infrastructure. Current projections indicate that the Association may have sufficient funds available to complete the second floor for staff offices.

Many positive questions about the project were received during the conference.

Executive Director Helms thanked the committee for approving funding for air conditioning in the annex building. Work is also underway to improve the seals around the doors.

The FBI recently returned to the property to conduct tactical training.

Malcolm's committee has met twice and is preparing to meet again.

Kerber recently underwent a medical procedure, which caused a slight delay. However, Kerber remains a valuable partner and is expected to assist with items for the Heritage Center displays.

The "Busted Plug" or "Hidden Gems" social media feature was discussed. The city manager is eager to work with the Association and is currently coordinating with the city council.

The South Carolina Bar Association is now occupying its building and recently held a large opening event.

Signage is still needed at the former Association building. Bowers offered to assist.

The Association plans to invite members of the Richland County Legislative Delegation to tour the property so the organization can share its vision. The Association would also like to host a political or legislative event at the facility.

The project is progressing well, but additional funding is still needed. Many fire departments have begun sending contributions. It was noted that 1% funds may be used when departments specifically designate the funds for the Heritage Center and educational purposes.

Playbook Review Executive Director Helms reminded members that the playbook is an evolving document. A dedicated Playbook Review Day will be scheduled.

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation memorial weekend will look different this year.

Approximately 50 cancer-related firefighter deaths have been approved for memorial recognition. The Foundation plans to establish a team to conduct a pre-memorial weekend meeting for families and fire chiefs. The meeting will provide an overview of what to expect during the memorial weekend.

Members were advised that the memorial activities will require a lengthy weekend commitment.

State Firefighters Memorial Funding for memorial maintenance has been moved into the State Fire budget.

The committee needs to mee to discuss whether the existing memorial wall will be able to support additional names as more occupational illnesses become federally recognized as line-of-duty deaths.

Six firefighter deaths by suicide have received national recognition, and two of those deaths were from South Carolina. The committee discussed whether individuals who receive Public Safety Officers' Benefits recognition should also be recognized at the state level as line-of-duty deaths.

The Association should consider what role it wants to have in determining how these individuals are honored in South Carolina.

Members were encouraged to review the strategic plan, which is available on the Association's website, and identify any items requiring attention.

The next strategic planning session is scheduled for March 24–25, 2027, in Columbia.

Legislative and Congressional Updates Senator Graham's office has requested the involvement of fire chiefs from across the state for an upcoming ticketed event. Members were advised to watch for additional information.

Laurie Traywick was recognized for helping direct significant funding back into South Carolina and the fire service.

Kaitlin Williams is assisting with community project funding opportunities and is working to support the Heritage Center.

The following staff service anniversaries were recognized:

- Ashley Boltin — 20 years of service on July 5.
- Zorrina Harmon— 20 years of service on August 1.

- Carter Jones — 13 years of service on July 16.

A motion was made by Brent McClellan to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ross Vezin. The motion carried unanimously.