



MINUTES

FIRE SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION

January 10, 2026

Oconee County Administrative Offices, Council Chambers
415 S. Pine Street, Walhalla, SC 29691

MEMBERS

Vacant, District I
Commissioner Truman Nicholson, District II
Commissioner Chief Favion Skelton, District III
Commissioner Chief Travis Collins, District IV

Commissioner Chief Larry Wilkerson, District V
Commissioner Chief Chris Smith, At-Large
Commissioner Chief Steven Swafford, At-Large

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The Oconee County Fire Service Advisory Commission met at 9:00 a.m. on January 10, 2026 in Conference Room at Fire Headquarters, 216 Emergency Lane, Westminster, SC, with 6 members present.

Press: Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting, date, time, place of meeting and agenda were posted on the bulletin board at the County Administrative Offices, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC, and the County Council website [www.oconeesc.com/council]. In addition, it was made available [*upon request*] to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

No members of the media were present.

Staff in Attendance – Councilman Thomas James / District IV, Council Chair Matthew Durham / District II

Call to Order:

- Chairman Travis Collins called the meeting to order at 09:06.

Election of Officers:

Commissioner Travis Collins opened the floor for nomination of a Workshop Secretary for this meeting only.

Mr. Wilkerson made a nomination, approved 6 – 0, to appoint Mr. Turman Nicholson as Secretary for the January 10, 2026 Workshop.

County Fire Chief Report:

- No updates to report

Fire Commissioner's Updates:

- Commission Chair Chief Collins welcomed Councilman Thomas James (District IV) and Council Chair Matthew Durham (District II) to the workshop and recognized them to address the Commission. Council Chair Durham expressed appreciation for the workshop and for the Commission's collaborative efforts in support of the greater mission.
- Commission Chair, Chief Collins, informed the Commission that Mr. David Nabors had resigned from the Fire Service Advisory Commission, effective immediately, resulting in a vacancy for Region I.
- Region 1: Vacant –
- Region 2: Commissioner Nicholson –

- No further update from the issues expressed in the December 18, 2025 meeting.
- Region 3: Commissioner Skelton –
 - Nothing to report at this time.
- Region 4: Commissioner Collins –
 - Commissioner Collins expressed that the Commission would go in to greater detail as a whole for Region 4 concerns.
- Region 5: Commissioner Wilkerson –
 - Commissioner Wilkerson reminded the Commission of issues discussed at the December 18, 2025 meeting. He noted that Mr. Aaron Smith had provided an email update regarding Communications, including the status of the Communications Tower to be installed in Cross Roads. Commissioner Wilkerson expressed the hope that Mr. Smith will continue to provide monthly updates on the tower.
- At-Large: Commissioner Smith –
 - Commissioner Chief Smith informed the Commission that the Communication Tower request is currently under review at the Administrator level and will subsequently be submitted to County Council. He also noted that all backup materials presented at the workshop were provided as requested by Secretary Madison Addington. Chief Smith explained that, due to the materials being split between two systems, the larger files are saved on a computer and can be retrieved if requested; for example, the first half of 2025 alone consisted of approximately 7,000 lines of reports.
- At-Large: Commissioner Swafford –
 - Nothing to report at this time.

Discussion Items:

- Commission Chair Chief Collins stated that the FSAC's first objective for 2026 is to develop a game plan for the year addressing the issues raised during Commission meetings. He suggested creating a flow chart to prioritize the top five to ten issues and an Action List to promote organization and efficiency.
- Commissioner Wilkerson emphasized the need to clarify expectations regarding the recently rewritten ordinance, specifically whether the Commission's goal should be a fully paid department, a combination of paid staff and volunteers, or another approach. Council Chair Durham stated his goal is to maintain a combination department while revitalizing volunteer participation and expressed interest in developing a plan to maximize volunteer involvement. Councilman James agreed, noting the county's size necessitates a blended system and stressing the importance of volunteers to ensure efficient service delivery and cost savings for taxpayers. Wilkerson acknowledged the discussion and thanked the Council members for their input.
- Commission Chair Chief Collins shared feedback from his region, noting the importance of improved collaboration and communication between paid staff and volunteers. He highlighted a concern that battalion oversight may not be necessary for 40-hour personnel, as battalion staff may not be familiar with department-specific operations. Chief Collins also raised the issue of Holly Springs Fire Department seeking its own FDID number to apply for grants independently. He emphasized that the department meets the requirements for a standalone FID and suggested prioritizing this process, noting it could be a relatively straightforward administrative action requiring County and State approval without affecting existing funding.
- Commission Chair Chief Collins reported that Long Creek discussed reinstating Active 911 countywide, citing it as more reliable than the Responder app. The estimated cost to implement Active 911 across all departments is approximately \$5,000–\$6,000. He noted past

challenges with department-level access being removed, which led to system clutter, and emphasized that each department should have control over its own Active 911 access. Commissioner Skelton added that volunteers are demoralized when they lack control over department-specific systems, and the group agreed that chiefs should manage their own department access without needing to request it from central administration.

- Commission Chair Collins reported that Region 4 supports hiring a dedicated, qualified communications specialist to manage all county communications, including dispatch, Active Responder app issues, and radio programming. He noted that having a single point of accountability would reduce redundant work and allow staff to focus on other duties. Collins also highlighted ongoing infrastructure and frequency challenges with the current radio system, noting that coverage and performance vary across the county. He suggested engaging a communications consultant to evaluate the system and determine cost-effective solutions, including potential grant funding opportunities for upgrades. Initial testing of alternative systems, such as Fleet Talk, showed promise, though local adjustments may be needed for optimal performance in certain areas. Commissioner Chief Smith suggested creating a communications committee to further address these issues and oversee implementation of solutions.
- Commission Chair Collins and Chief Smith discussed the potential implementation of 40-hour staffing at fire stations. Smith noted that previous 40-hour staffing had high turnover and challenges with inexperienced personnel, which improved after transitioning to 24-hour staffing. He explained that new schedules had been developed with Chief Hollifield to deploy personnel during daytime hours at select stations while maintaining 24-hour coverage at night, allowing consistent staffing without increasing overall personnel. This approach would also provide dedicated time for training on weekends. The proposal focuses on optimizing existing resources rather than hiring additional staff. Chief Smith will finalize the 40-hour staffing proposal, and Travis will present the 40-hour proposal at the next Commission meeting.
- The Commission addressed low response at certain stations and discussed strategies to allow personnel from other districts to provide assistance during periods of low staffing. Commissioner Chair Collins emphasized that coordinated support between stations would help ensure timely responses while maintaining volunteer engagement. It was decided that Chief Chris Smith will speak with each department to implement this approach.
- The Commission discussed legal considerations regarding volunteer and paid staffing. It was decided that the Councilmen will request the County Attorney to investigate whether a county employee may serve as a volunteer at a fire station without being required to receive overtime or other compensation beyond what is provided to volunteers. The Councilmen also discussed options for compensating volunteers for training hours, and Chief Chris Smith will consult with Orangeburg regarding potential grant funding to cover volunteer training costs.
- The Commission discussed that Councilman Matthew Durham will speak with Tri-County Technical College regarding a dual enrollment option. The Commission also agreed to advocate for firefighter training to be offered to high school students during school hours. Commissioner Skelton and Commission Chair Collins will check on the equipment already available at the Career Center to support this training.
- The Commission agreed to review the Incentive Program. Chief Chris Smith will provide details on how incentive funds are currently being spent. It was also discussed that transportation insurance and meals will be provided to all personnel and will not be deducted from the incentive program funds.
- The Commission discussed financial and operational matters, including proper procedures for moving funds between line items and strategies to reduce personnel being dispatched to non-emergent or out-of-duty calls. The Commission also reviewed the replacement plan for apparatus and truck specifications and highlighted the need for an Emergency Service Vehicle

Maintenance Technician. Chief Chris Smith noted that an ISO audit is anticipated in approximately 1.5 to 2 years.

Next Meeting:

- The next Fire Service Advisory Commission Meeting will be held at 18:00 on February 21, 2026.

Adjourn:

- A motion to adjourn was made by Commission Chair Collins and seconded by Commissioner Wilkerson and approved unanimously at 12:36.

Respectfully Submitted:

Madison Addington

Madison Addington

Staff Liaison