



# MINUTES

## FIRE SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION

February 19, 2026

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

### MEMBERS

Commissioner Asst. Chief Tony McAlister, District I	Commissioner Chief Larry Wilkerson, District V
Commissioner Asst. Chief Truman Nicholson, District II	Commissioner Chief Chris Smith, At-Large
Commissioner Chief Favion Skelton, District III	Commissioner Chief Steven Swafford, At-Large
Commissioner Chief Travis Collins, District IV	

The Oconee County Fire Service Advisory Commission met at 6:00 p.m. on February 19, 2026 in Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC, with 7 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](http://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.

### Call to Order:

- Commissioner Chair Collins called the meeting to order at 06:00.

### Approval of Minutes:

- Minutes for the January 15<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting were emailed out.
  - Motion by Commissioner McAlister to approve the minutes, second by Commissioner Nicholson
  - Motion approved unanimously.

### Public Comment:

- Commissioner Chair Collins opened the floor for public comment.
  - Dwayne Peay, of Mountain Rest, addressed the Commission expressed concerns about recent staffing changes that could leave only one individual assigned to a station, stating this may create unsafe conditions. He recommended maintaining at least two personnel per station for safer responses. He also noted that due to the remote area where he lives, response times can be around 20 minutes, which could make certain calls more dangerous. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of maintaining team morale and reducing turnover.
  - Rannie Bond, Addressed the Commission regarding agreed with Mr. Peay's concerns, stating that assigning a young individual alone to a station could be dangerous due to limited supervision and training. He referenced a previous call involving cardiac arrest at the State Park, noting that the closest station could take approximately 20 minutes to arrive and may have to perform CPR for an extended period before additional personnel arrive to assist.

### County Fire Chief Report:

- Commissioner Smith reported that the first of six tankers have been delivered and is currently at the motor pool being outfitted with radios and other equipment. The second and third tankers are expected to arrive the week after next, with the remaining three to follow. Efforts are underway to prepare the tankers for distribution to departments. A reminder was also given about the Awards Dinner at Walhalla High School at 6:00 p.m.
- Chairman Collins stated that the tankers are very nice and noted that he drove one back from Sumter. He mentioned an issue that was identified, and Commissioner Smith reported that Freightliner determined it was a chassis issue that is being repaired on the current tanker and the remaining units.

### Fire Commissioner's Updates:

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- Region 1: Commissioner McAlister –
  - Commissioner McAlister expressed concerns about the proposed 40-hour staffing schedule, noting that five firefighters have already resigned and some could earn \$58,000–\$59,000 in York County as backseat firefighters. He stated that many firefighters work at multiple stations to support their families, which the 40-hour schedule would make difficult, and stressed the importance of finding a solution that benefits both the community and the firefighters.
- Region 2: Commissioner Nicholson –
  - Nothing has changed since last meeting.
- Region 3: Commissioner Skelton –
  - Nothing to report at this time.
- Region 4: Commissioner Collins –
  - Chairman Collins stated that there were no additional items to discuss, aside from ongoing efforts to obtain the FDID number for Holly Springs. He noted that Chief Smith is preparing a letter with Attorney Root, and the Public Safety Committee is working on finalizing the details for transferring ownership of the building to Holly Springs, with progress expected soon.
- Region 5: Commissioner Wilkerson –
  - Commissioner Wilkerson stated that Chief Brock is still inquiring about the tower in the area, noting no updates since the last meeting. Commissioner Smith added that the matter is now at the administrative level, with the County Attorney also working on placement of the tower on a property.
- At-Large: Commissioner Smith –
  - Anything I had, I included in my previous report.
- At-Large: Commissioner Swafford –
  - Commissioner Swafford stated that he was unaware that the chief in question was not representing the district that Tony filled. He spoke with two chiefs, who expressed concerns about the 40-hour staffing plan, with one chief unaware of the proposal and frustrated. Commissioner Swafford noted that nothing is finalized, as the January chiefs meeting was canceled due to an ice storm. The next Chief Association meeting is scheduled for next Monday at 6:00 p.m. at Keowee Fire Department, where the details will be reviewed.

#### **Discussion Items:**

- Commissioner Smith provided an overview of the volunteer incentive program for both fire and rescue volunteers countywide. He explained that supplemental insurance, costing about \$20,000 annually, helps cover volunteer injuries in addition to workers' compensation, and transport insurance for the 177 volunteers receiving incentives this year is approximately \$28,000. Last year's transport insurance was \$30,000 and may have included some paid staff. Additional costs include awards, recognition bars, and volunteer award program meals, while paid staff meals are covered by the regular budget. The county also pays workers' compensation on each incentive check issued. Smith noted that \$48,000 remains in the account, which will largely be used for insurance payments this year. Chairman Collins stressed the need for the Fire and Rescue Committees to monitor spending to ensure funds benefit volunteers. Commissioners Nicholson and Swafford requested review of the supplemental insurance policy and coverage, noting that volunteers may be unaware of it. Commissioner Wilkerson emphasized that premium payments should proceed without delay. Commissioner Smith confirmed this year's payments are budgeted and can be processed, with future discussions to determine whether volunteers wish to maintain coverage or pursue alternatives. The Commission elected Commissioner Nicholson as chairman of the committee overseeing the volunteer incentive program.
- Commissioner Chair Collins stated there were concerns raised about communication and direction regarding the radio system. The Radio Committee invited Chair Collins to their recent meeting and asked for guidance on the direction they should take. It was noted that providing clear direction was difficult because a formal position has not yet been established. There appears to be general support for conducting an independent radio study to determine systems needs. The Radio Committee would like to jointly with the relevant commission committee before March 31 to discuss next steps. A date for this joint meeting needs to be scheduled, and a chairperson for the committee is still needed. Chairman Collins offered that position to Commissioner Smith and he accepted.
- Commissioners Nicholson and Swafford raised concerns that personnel prefer the old Active 911 system over the new Responder app. After discussing pros and cons, it was noted that some stations have purchased the old system independently. Commissioner Swafford suggested referring the matter to the Public Safety Committee, and

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Commissioner Smith stated that reinstating the old system countywide would need to be included in the budget. Chairman Collins recommended adding it to the budget to restore the system. This topic will be included as a discussion item on the next meeting's agenda.

- The replacement schedule for apparatus was discussed, and Commissioner Smith reminded the Commission of the need to begin developing the plan, noting that he is gathering information on it. Chairman Collins stated that this topic will be followed up on at the next meeting.
- Chairman Collins requested that the discussion regarding social media policies be addressed in executive session.
- It was noted that a policy for medical tones will be implemented when the 40-hour staffing schedule takes effect, so personnel are aware of medical calls in their area. The Commission discussed the need to establish a formal policy regarding non-response, emphasizing that fire departments are not required to respond to medical calls unless they have agreed to do so.
- An update was provided on several fire service matters discussed with the Planning Committee. It was noted that there is currently no formal plan for the proposed 40-hour staffing model, with an update expected at the next Public Safety Committee meeting. Council members also discussed developing a fire training program at Hamilton Career Center and the possibility of a junior firefighter program for high school students. The Fire Commission requested more detailed information on budget expenditures and asked to be involved in the development of the draft budget. Concerns were raised about bridge weight limits affecting fire apparatus, and the matter remains under review. An update was also provided on Holly Springs Fire Department's state certification process, with documentation being gathered and the Public Safety Committee working on a plan to address station ownership so the department can meet state requirements.

#### **Executive Session:**

- Commissioner Wilkerson made a motion to go into executive session, seconded by Commissioner Skelton.
- Commissioner Chair Collins called the meeting back at 20:48.
  - Commissioner Chair Collins called for a vote for a tentative staffing schedule to be presented to the Fire Chiefs on Monday night as discussed in executive session. Commissioner Chair Collins made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Wilkerson.
  - Motion approved unanimously.

#### **Next Meeting:**

- The next Fire Service Advisory Commission Meeting will be held on March 19th, 2026, beginning at 6:00.

#### **Adjourn:**

- A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Skelton and seconded by Commissioner Nicholson and approved unanimously at 18:50.

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Respectfully Submitted:

  
Madison Addington  
Staff Liaison

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