



MINUTES

FIRE SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION

July 16, 2026

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

MEMBERS

Commissioner Assist. Chief Tony McAlister, District I	Commissioner Chief Larry Wilkerson, District V
Commissioner Assist. 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 April 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]. 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 April 19th Commission meeting were emailed out.
 - Motion by Commissioner McAlister to approve the minutes, second by Commissioner Nicholson.
 - Motion approved unanimously.

Public Comment:

- Chief Ashton with HazMat was in attendance to discuss importance of Sewage Spill Ordinance. Chief Ashton's comments and recommendations are reflected under the corresponding discussion item.

County Fire Chief Report:

- Commissioner Smith provided updated on the Active911 budget line item had been approved by Council and requested phone numbers and device information to determine iPhone and Android compatibility for the app setup. He also provided an update regarding the proposed Firefighter Training Program with the School District. The School District is interested in having Firefighters and Rescue Personnel visit schools to recruit students for the program, with an initial summer course proposed to assess student interest and participation before potentially transitioning the program to a school-year course. Commissioners expressed many concerns that a summer program may limit students' participation and emphasized that members of the School Training Program Committee should attend meeting regarding the program. It was also requested that Chief Smith and two Commissioners be included in future discussions.

Fire Commissioner's Updates:

- Region 1: Commissioner McAlister –
 - Nothing to report at this time.
- Region 2: Commissioner Nicholson –
 - Nothing to report at this time.
- Region 3: Commissioner Skelton –
 - Nothing to report at this time.

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- Region 4: Commissioner Collins –
 - Commissioner Chair Collins reported on district concerns regarding the Active911 setup and start date, as well as ensuring Fire Chiefs have full access and administrative rights to their respective stations. He also provided an update on the Holly Springs FDID number and ongoing review of the station's building lease, including concerns regarding call-response stipulations. Additional concerns were raised regarding the County website's volunteer application process. Commissioner Smith clarified that application are initially received by the State Fire Chiefs Association and then forwarded to him for review and processing to the Volunteer Fire Chief. Commissioner Smith also expressed efforts in trying to gain access to the County's website for edits on the Emergency Services Page.
- Region 5: Commissioner Wilkerson –
 - Commissioner Wilkerson raised recurring concerns regarding radio communications in the Cross Roads, Coneross, and Friendship areas, including the possibility of adding an antenna to the existing water tower to improve coverage. Commissioner Smith advised that the Cross Roads tower issues is currently at the Administration level for approval. Commissioners discussed ongoing concerns with the County's contracted radio services and emphasized the importance of documenting specific dates, times, and locations of communication issues due to potential safety risks associated with inadequate radio coverage.
- At-Large: Commissioner Smith –
 - Includes his updated in the "County Fire Chief Report"
- At-Large: Commissioner Swafford –
 - Commissioner Swafford reported that a representative from the Hamilton Career Center is scheduled to attend the August Chiefs Meeting to provide an update and discuss the proposed firefighter training program.

Committee Updates:

- Incentive: Have not yet met.
- Communication: Commissioner Swafford reported that the vendor was contacted to provide information needed to evaluate current radio coverage, and the information was shared with those involved. Staff is working to coordinate with the vendor to map and assess the existing coverage before any system adjustments are made. It was also noted that volunteers have previously carried radios into problem areas for several days and collected coverage data, but the County has not provided results of that testing despite multiple requests from Volunteers to compare data to narrow down problem areas.
- School Training Program: Commissioner Chair Collins reported that the members of the Committee have not yet met and they received a late notice of a meeting to be held the following morning. More details to be discussed in discussion items below.
- Truck Apparatus: The Commission discussed determining the amount of funding needed to acquire two engines and three tankers and request that staff confirm the lowest payment amount within the current budget before moving forward. The details of this will be taken to Procurement to ensure all processes are played out correctly. Commissioner Chair Collins volunteered to step down from his role in the Truck Apparatus Committee and appoint Commissioner Smith to maintain three Commissioners on the Committee. Commissioner Chair Collins called for a vote on the change, approved unanimously.
- Awards: Elect of one Commissioner to be held in November 2026. Commissioner McAlister volunteered to be on the Awards Committee since he was not apart of any of the others. Commissioner Chair Collins told Commissioner McAlister to wait until November.

Discussion Items:

- Discussion Item One- Follow-up on Ordinance Consideration: Sewage Spill Notification Thresholds Greater Than 5,000 Gallons: Commissioner Chair Collins requested an update from Commissioner Nicholson regarding the proposed ordinance. Chief Ashton of HazMat addressed the Commission and expressed concerns regarding significant sewage spills that may not be reported to emergency services in a timely manner. He proposed requiring spills exceeding 5,000 gallons to be reported to DES AND local emergency management, allowing HazMat to respond when necessary to protect public safety and prevent contamination. Commissioner Smith asked whether other local governments have similar ordinances in place, and Chief Ashton was not aware of any. Commissioner Chair Collins requested input from Councilman Don Mize regarding the County's ability to establish such an ordinance. Deputy Administrator Shirley stated that he would consult with the County Attorney and review the County's options.

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- Discussion Item Two- Paid Staff Volunteering Status. Commissioner Chair Collins requested an update regarding paid staff volunteering. Commissioner Smith reported that the County Attorney is currently developing a policy addressing this matter.
- Discussion Item Three- Administration Approved Organizational Chart Discussion. Commissioners requested clarification regarding positions, duties, and staffing levels within the organizational chart, which Commissioner Smith provided. The Commission discussed identifying current employees by position and clarifying the total number of employees. Commissioner Chair Collins questioned whether the current organizational structure would support proposed station staffing and the five-day rotation plan. Commissioner Smith stated that current staffing levels are insufficient and expressed safety concerns regarding inexperienced personnel staffing stations alone. Commissioner Chair Collins suggested that the station staffing initiative be considered tabled due to the lack of support, despite previously being identified as the primary objective of the Volunteer Service. The Commission also expressed concerns regarding the County's ability to attract and retain qualified applicants due to current pay levels, noting that many applicants have little to no prior experience, receive training through the County, and subsequently leave for higher-paying positions elsewhere. Commissioners emphasized that this is a County-wide recruitment and retention concern, not solely an issue within the Fire Service. Concerns were also raised regarding inexperienced personnel responding to calls without adequate experience or knowledge, creating potential operational and safety issues. Commission brought forth ideas on how to keep applicants after training is complete and regional response efforts.
- Discussion Item Four – FY 2026-2027 Budget Review. Commission Chair Collins stated that this was the first time reviewing the FY 2026-2027 budget, while Commissioner Smith noted that the budget had previously been distributed to Commissioners for review. Commissioner Swafford questioned the remaining balance in the incentive budget, Commissioner Smith explained the original \$200,000 allocation, including incentives, supplemental insurance, helicopter insurance, and the awards dinner, noting that paid staff and travel insurance were later removed, leaving workers' compensation and applicable insurance as incentive-related expenses. The Commission reviews the \$10,000 Operation Fire Chief Association Recruitment and Retention line item and clarified that the funds are intended to support both fire and rescue volunteers. Commissioners discussed using the funds for regional recruitment efforts and hosting recruitment events in areas including Cross Roads, South Union, Keowee Ebenezer, and Pickett Post. Commission reminded everyone about the High Falls event scheduled for August 21st. The Commission also discussed the creation and funding of budget line items, including General Fund allocation, the 335 code for initial funding of new trucks, and lease payments for two engines and three tankers.
- Discussion Item Five – Training Schedule for Remainder of the Year. Commissioner Wilkerson stated that a meeting had been scheduled approximately four months ago with the Training Officer to explore options for offering classes when the State's minimum enrollment of eight attendees is not met. Commissioner Smith explained that classes may still be offered below the minimum when the Training Officer is certified to teach the course; however, certain specialized courses, such as HazMat and Fire Ops, cannot be held with only one or two participants. Hybrid day and evening classes were implanted to accommodate volunteers, but only three volunteers initially enrolled and two withdrew before completion. Commissioner Wilkerson suggested developing an organizational approach to increase class participation and retention. Commissioner Smith noted that the Training Officer has repeatedly contacted volunteers, offered to request specific classes from the State, and offered to host classes at various volunteer stations, but received little to no response. Commissioner Swafford ended the discussion adding that the Chiefs Association is working to coordinate a countywide Water Shuttle/Big Water class and is exploring the use of a third-party vendor. As well as, getting someone from the County to show volunteer stations how to implement members in Active911 with in-depth instructions.
- Discussion Item Six – Fire Service Advisory Ordinance. Commission Chair Collins expressed concerns regarding the FSAC Ordinance and the Commission's ability to fulfil its responsibilities, including advising County Council and other committees on fire station operations, equipment, personnel, training, and budget and long-range planning. He stated that the Commission has not been given the adequate opportunities to participate in these matters and expressed concern that meetings involving Chief Smith, Director Caudill, and Mr Shirley, including budget discussions, have occurred without the Commission's knowledge or involvement. Commissioner Skelton stated that if the current structure was established by County Council, Council should address the concerns or

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consider removing the ordinance. The Commission noted that the ordinance was implemented on August 16, 2025, and Commissioner Wilkerson discussed how the Fire Commission previously operation and the significant increase in costs since its creation. Commissioner Wilkerson further stated that the Commission should allow paid staff to manage the objectives and responsibilities of paid personnel, while the Commission should focus on providing oversight and assistance to volunteer stations, particularly efforts to increase volunteer membership and participation, rather than focusing on minor expenditures or request that primarily benefit individual volunteer stations. Commissioner McAlister agreed with Commissioner Wilkerson's comments.

- Discussion Item Seven – Budget Line-Item Totals. Commissioner Wilkerson requested a summarized breakdown of expenditures by budget code from the previous fiscal year, including the remaining balances for each code.
- Discussion Item Eight – August Meeting Date Change due to Voting. Commissioner Chair Collins read aloud an email from Mrs. Jennifer Adams regarding

Next Meeting:

- September 17, 2026 in Council Chambers at 6:00 P.M.

Adjourn:

- A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Chair Collins and seconded by Commissioner Skelton and approved unanimously at 19:45.

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Respectfully Submitted:

Madison Addington
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Staff Liaison

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