



STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION

MINUTES April 23, 2026

Date: April 23, 2026

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: Grasonville Volunteer Fire Department, 4128 Main Street, Grasonville, Maryland

Call to Order

Chairman Carroll H. Spriggs, II called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

Commission Members Present

- Chairman Carroll H. Spriggs, II
- Vice Chair Mark Hopkins (via Google Meet)
- Commissioner Edward Tochtermann
- Commissioner Jerred A. Johnson
- Commissioner Randy E. Sanger, II
- Commissioner Eric L. Smothers (via Google Meet)
- Commissioner Jamie L. McAllister
- Commissioner Ephraim R. Siff (via Google Meet)

Staff and Guests Present

- Mary Beth Collins, Counsel
- Carl Witmer, Acting Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal
- Ken Bush, Chief Fire Protection Engineer
- Nicole Jordan-Jones, Maryland State Police, Government Affairs Office
- Terin Hopkins, National Fire Sprinkler Association
- Charles Biggus, IFMA and City of Rockville
- Robert Hamlin, Deputy Chief Fire Marshal, Baltimore City
- Dennis Dawson, Baltimore City Fire Marshal's Office

- Edward Walters, Maryland State Police
- John Bowes, Queen Anne's County Department of Emergency Services
- Donna McGuire AACO

Introductions

Guests and attendees introduced themselves and provided brief professional backgrounds.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Tochtermann identified a correction to the February meeting minutes, noting that a reference to approval of the previous meeting should reflect the December meeting.

Motion: Commissioner Sanger moved to approve the February meeting minutes with the correction.

Second: Commissioner Johnson.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Fire Marshal's Report

Chief Fire Protection Engineer Ken Bush presented the report on behalf of Acting State Fire Marshal Mowbray, who was attending a Maryland State Police awards ceremony.

Fire Fatality Statistics

2025 Totals

- 53 residential fire fatalities
- 7 vehicle fire fatalities
- 9 other fire-related fatalities
- Total: 69 confirmed fire deaths
- 12 multi-fatality fires

2026 Year-to-Date

- 14 residential fire fatalities
- 1 vehicle fire fatality
- 2 other fire-related fatalities
- Total: 17 confirmed fire deaths
- 8 deaths pending determination by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
- 2 multi-fatality fires

Agency Activity Summary (2026 YTD)

- 204 fire investigations
- 41 incendiary investigations
- 25 explosive investigations
- 278 total investigations
- 27 investigations closed by arrest
- 1,379 inspections completed
- 353 plan reviews conducted
- 35 Community Risk Reduction programs conducted statewide

Legislative Update

Updates were provided on:

- HB 149 / SB 513 – Residential Rental High-Rise Property Fire Safety Equipment and Fire Alarm System Technician legislation
- Lithium-Ion Battery Safety Commission activities
- Valet trash legislation
- Workers' compensation legislation
- Modernization Civil Relief for Service Members Act
- Short-term rental legislation

The Commission was advised that Senate Bill 436 concerning single-staircase buildings remains under study by the Department of Labor, with a final report due by the end of 2026.

Maryland Department of Planning Permit Council

C/FPE Bush reported ongoing participation in the statewide permit process review, including six pilot projects. A final report is expected by year's end.

Personnel Updates

The Commission was advised of several organizational changes:

- Deputy Chief Duane Svites reclassified as Section Chief, Special Operations.
- Deputy Chief Joseph Walters assigned as Section Chief, Support Services.
- Acting Deputy Chief Carl D. Witmer appointed to lead the Personnel Services Unit following the retirement of Deputy Chief Derek Chapman.

Retirement Recognition

Deputy Chief Derek Chapman retired after nearly 28 years of service with the State of Maryland and the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Awards and Recognition

The report highlighted:

- Deputy State Fire Marshal Helys Valles-Alicea's recognition during Women's History Month.
- Nominees for the James C. Robertson Deputy State Fire Marshal of the Year Award.
- Civilian employee award nominees.

Community Outreach and Public Education

Updates included:

- Smoke alarm installation partnerships on the Eastern Shore.
- Participation in the Red Cross "Get Alarmed" program.
- Installation of:
 - 361 smoke alarms
 - 69 carbon monoxide alarms statewide
- Public Fire and Life Safety Educator Seminar held March 21, 2026.
- Ongoing public awareness survey regarding the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Training and Special Events

The report highlighted:

- Planning for the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Life Safety Conference scheduled for September 15, 2026, in Annapolis.
- Lithium-ion battery safety training sessions with more than 120 participants.
- Public fireworks display inspector training.
- State House Community Engagement Event featuring State Fire Marshal and Maryland State Police K-9 teams.
- Explosive investigation training with Salisbury University students.
- Fourth Senior Leaders Workshop held April 21, 2026.

NERIS Transition Update

The transition to the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) continues to progress. Some jurisdictions are experiencing integration challenges due to compatibility issues with existing reporting systems.

Engineering and Code Enforcement Updates

C/FPE Ken Bush reported:

- Distribution of information regarding combustibile ceiling panel products to the International Fire Marshals Association Maryland Chapter.
- Participation in national discussions regarding fire protection standards for Tesla/Boring Company transportation tunnels.
- Monitoring development of the proposed FLAMES (Fire Loss Assignment and Mitigation Evaluation Service) rating system being developed by the American Association of Insurance Services.

Commission Discussion

Fire Fatality Data

Commissioner Johnson requested clarification regarding the fire fatality chart. C/FPE Bush confirmed that the "No Smoke" category refers to incidents where no smoke alarm was present.

NERIS Reporting

Commissioner McAllister asked about reporting challenges among larger jurisdictions, including Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Baltimore City, and Frederick County. C/FPE Bush explained that system integration and compatibility issues are being addressed.

Charles County Fire Investigation

Commissioner Tochtermann inquired about the status of the Charles County fire that resulted in six fatalities in 2025. Mr. Bush advised that no final determination has been released.

Tesla Tunnel Standards

Vice Chair Hopkins requested participation in the national tunnel safety standards discussion group, citing prior experience designing fire protection and life safety systems for the Las Vegas underground transportation tunnel network.

Commission Comments

Commissioners expressed appreciation for the thorough report and extended congratulations to personnel receiving promotions and award nominations.

New Business

House Bill 848 – Valet Trash Legislation

Chairman Spriggs introduced discussion regarding House Bill 848, recently signed by the Governor as emergency legislation. The bill mandates the Commission to amend the Maryland State Fire Prevention Code by adopting provisions from the 2024 edition of the NFPA Life Safety Code relating to the placement of valet trash and recyclable materials in building corridors and exit access areas.

Chairman Spriggs advised the Commission that two implementation options were available:

1. Adopt emergency regulations effective immediately for 180 days while beginning the formal rulemaking process.
2. Proceed directly through the standard regulatory process, which includes public notice and comment, but risk noncompliance with the statutory mandate during the interim period.

Discussion

Chief Fire Protection Engineer Ken Bush explained that the legislation requires changes to the State Fire Prevention Code regardless of the process selected. He clarified that emergency regulations would provide temporary compliance for 180 days while allowing time to complete the formal rulemaking process.

Vice Chair Hopkins questioned the rationale for treating the legislation as an emergency measure and expressed concern about permitting combustible materials within exit access corridors, particularly in high-rise residential buildings.

Nicole Jordan-Jones clarified that “emergency legislation” in the legislative context simply means the law becomes effective immediately upon the Governor’s signature rather than on a future effective date.

Commissioner Sanger noted that the legislature, which established the Commission, had mandated the action and that the Commission was obligated to comply.

Motion: Commissioner Johnson moved that the Commission:

- Adopt emergency regulations implementing House Bill 848 for the authorized 180-day period; and

- Simultaneously begin the formal regulatory process, including public notice and comment, to permanently adopt the required changes.

Second: Vice Chair Hopkins.

Public Comment

Charles Biggus, representing the International Fire Marshals Association and the City of Rockville, inquired how the legislation would affect local jurisdictions that had previously adopted stricter requirements regarding valet trash.

Chairman Spriggs advised that local jurisdictions should consult their legal counsel regarding the applicability of local ordinances and whether they may maintain requirements that exceed state standards.

Chief Engineer Ken Bush further explained that local jurisdictions may generally adopt more stringent requirements than state law, but each jurisdiction should seek legal guidance to determine whether its regulations remain enforceable under the new legislation.

Dennis Dawson, Baltimore City Fire Marshal's Office, expressed concerns regarding the legislation's application in jurisdictions operating under different fire codes. He noted Baltimore City has not adopted provisions authorizing valet trash and questioned whether introducing trash containers into corridors could increase risks to occupants, particularly in high-rise residential buildings.

Vice Chair Hopkins concurred with the concerns raised and emphasized the importance of conducting a thorough review during the formal rulemaking process.

Commissioner Tochtermann stated that while he intended to support the motion to comply with the legislative mandate, he did not support permanently allowing trash storage within exit access corridors.

Vote

Chairman Spriggs called for a vote.

Result: Motion passed unanimously.

Emergency Regulation Language

Following approval of the motion, discussion occurred regarding the specific code amendments necessary to implement the legislation.

Chief Engineer Ken Bush requested clarification regarding:

- Amendments required to permit valet trash under the referenced NFPA provisions.
- Statutory language changing the term **"inimical"** to **"harmful"** and whether corresponding changes must be made within the State Fire Prevention Code.

Counsel Mary Beth Collins advised that the emergency regulations would need to reflect the same substantive changes that would ultimately be incorporated into the final regulations.

Work Group Referral

Chairman Spriggs proposed referring the matter to a work group to develop the necessary regulatory language and recommendations for Commission consideration.

Chief Engineer Bush agreed to participate and identified several sections of COMAR that would likely require amendment or repeal to align with the new legislation, including provisions related to existing restrictions on valet trash operations. Vice Chairman Hopkins and Commissioner Tochterman also advised he would like to be part of the workgroup.

The Commission discussed:

- Removal of conflicting code amendments.
- Reservation of existing code section numbers where appropriate.
- Preparation of draft language for both emergency and permanent regulatory adoption.

The matter was referred for further development and recommendation to the Commission.

New Business

House Bill 848 – Valet Trash Legislation

Chairman Spriggs continued discussion regarding implementation of House Bill 848. Following Commission approval to proceed with emergency regulations and the establishment of a work group, Chief Engineer Bush identified several COMAR provisions that may require revision or repeal to align with the legislation. The Commission discussed the anticipated timeline for completing the work group's review and recommendations.

The Commission appointed the following members to the work group:

- Chief Engineer Ken Bush
- Vice Chair Mark Hopkins
- Commissioner Edward Tochterman

Chief Engineer Ken Bush advised that the emergency regulations would remain in effect for 180 days, during which time the Commission would need to initiate the permanent regulatory process.

Commissioner Tochterman inquired about the status of the 2027 NFPA code development process. Chief Engineer Bush reported that final voting was scheduled for June 2026, with publication anticipated in August or September 2026.

House Bill 1221 – Short-Term Rental Fire Safety Requirements

Chairman Spriggs introduced discussion concerning House Bill 1221, which establishes annual inspection requirements for short-term rental properties and requires counties and Baltimore City to report inspection data to the Office of the State Fire Marshal beginning July 1, 2028.

Chief Engineer Ken Bush advised that the legislation requires consultation with the State Fire Prevention Commission regarding any alternative requirements authorized by the State Fire Marshal but does not require immediate Commission action.

Vice Chair Hopkins expressed concern regarding the ability of local jurisdictions to implement and manage the inspection requirements.

Commissioner McAllister inquired about the number of short-term rental properties subject to the legislation and whether jurisdictions currently maintain systems to track such properties. Chief Engineer Bush advised that many jurisdictions do not presently have formal tracking mechanisms in place.

Commissioner McAllister also raised concerns regarding the legislation's requirement that smoke alarms be "clearly audible" and questioned how inspectors would verify compliance. Chief Engineer Bush stated that the legislation does not provide a specific technical definition for audibility.

Commissioner Johnson noted that the legislation references alarms being loud enough to be heard above background noise. Additional discussion occurred regarding interpretation and enforcement of the requirement.

Commissioner Sanger questioned whether existing NFPA standards adequately address the terminology and requirements contained within the legislation. Chairman Spriggs advised that the bill does not direct the Commission to develop such standards and that implementation responsibilities would largely rest with local jurisdictions.

No action was taken by the Commission regarding House Bill 1221.

House Bill 149 – Fire Alarm System Technicians

Chairman Spriggs reviewed House Bill 149, which requires the State Fire Prevention Commission to adopt regulations governing fire alarm system technicians.

The legislation requires the Commission to:

- Define fire alarm system technicians and fire alarm systems.
- Establish licensing requirements and professional standards.
- Establish liability insurance requirements.
- Create a schedule of licensing fees.
- Establish procedures for license denial, suspension, and revocation.

Chairman Spriggs recommended creation of a work group to begin drafting regulatory recommendations and coordinating with the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

The following members volunteered and were appointed to the work group:

- Commissioner Jamie McAllister
- Vice Chair Mark Hopkins
- Commissioner Jerred Johnson

Captain Dennis Dawson of the Baltimore City Fire Marshal's Office requested that Baltimore City be represented on the work group. Chairman Spriggs approved the request, and Captain Dawson was added as a participating representative.

Chairman Spriggs requested that the work group prepare a draft proposal for presentation at the June 2026 Commission meeting.

Next Meeting

Chairman Spriggs announced that the next regular meeting of the State Fire Prevention Commission will be held on:

June 23, 2026, at 11:00 a.m.
Ocean City Convention Center
Ocean City, Maryland

Commissioner Comments

Vice Chair Hopkins and the Commissioners were provided an opportunity for final comments. No additional comments were offered.

Adjournment

Motion: Commissioner Tochtermann moved to adjourn the meeting.

Second: Commissioner Johnson.

The motion carried, and Chairman Spriggs adjourned the meeting at 11:00 a.m.