

# Chester Fire District Governance Bylaws

Established Under Act 1779 of 1972

Independence operation July 1, 2026

## **Section 1. Name**

The Commission shall be known as the Chester Fire District Commission (the “Commission” or “the District.” The Commission shall be known as the Chester Fire District in Chester County, South Carolina (“the District”). Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina.

## **Section 2. Purpose**

The purpose of the Chester Fire District (the “District”) is to provide fire protection services and other related public safety services, to provide for the Fire Control Commission for the District; to prescribe the powers, duties, and membership of the Commission; to provide for tax levies; and to provide penalties for certain violations within the incorporated areas of the City (three miles) and the unincorporated areas of the County, with the legally established boundaries of the District consistent with State law and Act 1779 of 1972 and with the amendments of 1988, and applicable South Carolina Law.

The District further exists to provide emergency response and related public safety services, and shall carry out its mission in accordance with all authority granted under state law and enabling legislation governing independent fire protection districts.

## **Section 3. Authority**

The Commission derives its authority from:

1. Title 6, Chapter 11 SC Code of Laws;
2. Act 1779 of 1972, as amended;
3. Act No. 765 of 1988;
4. Applicable South Carolina laws regulating public agencies and fire protection districts;  
and

5. The District's enabling legislation grants the Commission powers to organize, govern, and oversee District affairs; adopt policies; approve budgets and expenditures; protect public resources; and ensure provision of fire protection and emergency services.

#### **Section 4.**

The commission shall have the authority to levy taxes on all taxable property within the district; provided, however, that such levy can only be for the purposes of fire protection and first responders and rescue; and that the auditor and treasurer of Chester County shall not levy and collect such tax without the approval of the majority of the Commission of Chester County.

Upon the approval of a tax levy by the County Commission of Directors, the commission shall be charged with the responsibility of fire protection in the area within the district and shall have the following powers:

1. With the approval of the County Commission of Directors, the commission shall have the power to borrow money in anticipation of taxes, pledging the full faith and taxing power of the district for payment of such indebtedness.
2. To do such other things as may be necessary to carry out the responsibilities of providing fire protection within the district.
3. To operate as a completely independent State Commission separate from the City of Chester and Chester County, South Carolina, so long as authority is granted under applicable law and enabling legislation.

#### **Section 5. Tax Exemptions**

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no property shall be exempt from a tax levy for fire purposes within the Chester Fire District, except for eleemosynary properties exempted by specific statute.

#### **Section 6. Taxes Further**

After a district tax levy is approved, notwithstanding any other provision of law, no other municipality or special purpose district shall levy a tax against the property within the Chester Fire District for the purpose of fire protection. Any such tax so levied shall be invalid.

#### **Section 7. Mission**

The mission of the Chester Fire District is to:

1. Provide effective, efficient, and lawful fire protection, emergency response, and related safety services to the community.
2. Operate in a manner that upholds public trust through transparent, ethical, and responsible governance.

3. Ensure that District operations align with established policies, legal requirements, and public purpose.
4. Support organized oversight of District leadership and administration through a governance framework that promotes accountability and high standards of public service.

### **Section 8. Existence and Operational Status**

The District shall have perpetual existence and work in conjunction and in accordance with South Carolina Law.

Effective July 1, 2026, the DISTRICT shall operate as an Independent Fire Control Commission, and all bylaws, policies, and governance documents and practices shall be under the responsibility of the Fire Control Commission and interpreted and applied consistently with this Independent operational status.

### **Section 9. Principal Office**

The principal office of the District shall be located at a site designated by the Commission.

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## **ARTICLE II — GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND POWERS OF THE COMMISSION**

### **Section 1. Collective Authority of the Commission**

The Chester Fire District Commission (“the Commission”) exercises the governing authority of the District only as a collective body, acting through decisions made at duly noticed meetings or as otherwise authorized by law. No individual Commissioner has authority to direct District operations, commit District resources, or speak on behalf of the Commission unless specifically authorized by formal action or applicable law.

### **Section 2. Role of the Commission**

The Commission’s governance role includes, but is not limited to:

1. Establishing the District’s mission, priorities, and governing policies.
2. Providing strategic oversight and ensuring District performance aligns with the law and adopted policy.
3. Approving budgets, expenditures, and fiscal controls for responsible stewardship of public funds.
4. Appointing, supervising, evaluating, and supporting the Fire Chief leadership structure as established by District policy.

5. Overseeing major service, operational, and organizational matters impacting public safety.
6. Ensuring transparency, lawful decision-making, and representation of the public interest.

### **Section 3. Limitations on Individual Commissioners**

Individual Commissioners shall not:

1. Direct staff or interfere with operational, administrative, or personnel matters.
2. Represent personal positions as Commission positions.
3. Commit District resources or make promises on behalf of the District without authorization.
4. Attempt to manage or influence emergency incident decisions or operational deployments.

All such limitations reflect the governance–administration boundary described in these bylaws.

### **Section 4. Commission Authority and Powers**

The Commission holds all powers granted by South Carolina law. These powers include, but are not limited to:

1. Purchasing, regulating, and disposing of District property and equipment.
2. Approving contracts and overseeing financial obligations.
3. Submitting annual operating plans and millage requests.
4. Adopting and revising governance, operational, administrative, financial, and personnel policies.
5. Monitoring the implementation of Commission policy and strategic direction.

### **Section 5. Governance Responsibilities During Transition to Independent Operations**

The Commission shall oversee and support the District’s transition to independent operational status effective July 1, 2026, including:

1. Establishing internal controls and administrative authority.
2. Aligning budgeting, finance, and service delivery systems with independence requirements.
3. Confirming operational command structure and reporting relationships.
4. Ensuring continuity of fire protection and emergency services throughout the transition.

## **Section 6. Accountability and Oversight**

The Commission shall ensure:

1. Compliance with state laws, ethics requirements, public meeting rules, and public records obligations.
2. Transparent and responsible governance practices that foster public trust.
3. Clear separation between governance and management, maintaining high standards for professional conduct and oversight without involvement in day-to-day operations.

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## **ARTICLE III — COMMISSION COMPOSITION, TERMS, VACANCIES, AND COMPENSATION**

### **Section 1. Composition of the Commission**

The Commission shall consist of **five (5) members**, each appointed by the Governor of South Carolina.

### **Section 2. Eligibility and Appointment**

Commissioners must meet all eligibility requirements prescribed by South Carolina law and any applicable provisions of the District's enabling legislation.

Commissioners are appointed by the Governor and serve in accordance with the terms and conditions established under state law.

### **Section 3. Term of Office**

Commissioners shall serve four-year terms, with terms staggered as may be required to ensure continuity of governance.

Commissioners shall continue to serve until their successors are duly appointed and qualified, unless otherwise required by law.

### **Section 4. Vacancies**

Vacancies on the Commission shall be filled by **gubernatorial appointment**, in accordance with applicable laws and the District's enabling authority.

An appointed Commissioner filling an unexpired term shall serve for the remainder of that term or as otherwise required by law.

### **Section 5. Removal**

Commissioners may be removed from office by majority vote of the Commission and only in accordance with procedures established under South Carolina statute or governing law applicable to appointed officers.

### **Section 6. Compensation and Reimbursement**

There shall be no compensation or reimbursement to the Commissioners unless permitted under State law.

### **Section 7. Oath of Office**

Each Commissioner shall take any required oath of office before assuming their duties, as prescribed by state law.

### **Section 8. Representation and Duty of Service**

Commissioners shall:

1. Represent the public interest of the Chester Fire District.
2. Serve with integrity, diligence, and adherence to governance responsibilities established in these bylaws.
3. Conduct themselves in accordance with applicable ethics, conflict-of-interest, and public service standards described in later Articles.

### **Section 9. Participation and Attendance**

Commissioners are expected to:

1. Prepare for and attend Commission meetings.
2. Participate in deliberations with civility, professionalism, and independent judgment.
3. Adhere to attendance requirements established by law or policy.

### **Section 10. Electronic Participation**

Commissioners may participate in meetings electronically when permitted by South Carolina's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and consistent with applicable Commission procedures.

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## **ARTICLE IV — MEETINGS AND DECISION-MAKING REQUIREMENTS**

### **Section 1. Regular Meetings**

The Commission shall hold its regular meeting on the second Tuesday of each calendar month at 7:00 PM, unless otherwise posted.

The Commission shall meet at least quarterly.

## **Section 2. Special Meetings**

Special meetings may be called by the Chair or by any two Commissioners, provided notice is given in accordance with applicable law and these bylaws.

## **Section 3. Public Notice and Open Meeting Requirements**

All meetings of the Commission shall comply with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), including requirements for:

- public posting of meeting notices,
- advance availability of agendas, and
- public access to meetings.

The Commission shall conduct its business openly, transparently, and in accordance with all state laws regulating public agencies and public deliberations.

## **Section 4. Agendas and Meeting Materials**

An agenda shall be prepared for each meeting and provided to Commissioners and the public in accordance with FOIA requirements.

Commissioners are expected to review all meeting materials in advance and participate in deliberations in an informed and constructive manner.

## **Section 5. Meeting Procedures**

Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, unless the Commission adopts alternative procedures by formal action.

Commission deliberations shall be:

1. Orderly
2. Respectful
3. Issue-focused rather than personal
4. Oriented toward informed, lawful decision-making

## **Section 6. Quorum**

A majority of appointed Commissioners constitutes a quorum for the conduct of business.

No action may be taken without a quorum present, except to adjourn a meeting.

## **Section 7. Voting**

Each Commissioner shall have one vote.

No proxy voting is permitted.

Actions of the Commission shall be by majority vote of those present unless otherwise required by law or by these bylaws.

## **Section 8. Participation and Conduct of Commissioners**

Commissioners shall:

1. Prepare for meetings.
2. Participate honestly, civilly, and in good faith.
3. Exercise independent judgment while respecting Commission decisions once adopted.

## **Section 9. Electronic Participation**

Commissioners may participate electronically only as permitted under FOIA and District policy, provided the method used allows full participation and public transparency.

## **Section 10. Minutes**

Minutes are **permanent public records**, must accurately reflect actions taken, and shall be prepared, approved, and maintained in accordance with state law.

## **Section 11. Public Communications and Representation**

Commissioners may express personal views but shall **clearly distinguish** such views from official Commission positions unless expressly authorized to speak on behalf of the Commission.

## **Section 12. Decision-Making Integrity**

Deliberations shall occur only in properly noticed meetings.

Commissioners shall not:

- Coordinate a quorum outside public meetings,
- Engage in “shadow decision-making,” or

- Make commitments on behalf of the Commission without formal action.
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## **ARTICLE V — OFFICERS AND GOVERNANCE ROLES**

### **Section 1. Officers of the Commission**

The officers of the Commission shall consist of a Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and At-Large Officer. Officers shall be elected by the Commission and shall serve four-year terms, or until their successors are duly elected.

**Section 2. Officers' duties:** The commission shall be organized by electing a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and At-Large Officer who shall serve in their respective offices for a period of four years.

### **Section 3. General Principles Governing All Officers**

Officers shall:

1. Exercise only the authority delegated to them by the Commission.
2. Act in accordance with these bylaws and all applicable laws.
3. Not direct staff or involve themselves in operational or administrative functions.
4. Serve as facilitators of governance—not as operational managers.

No officer has independent authority except as expressly granted by formal Commission action.

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### **Section 3. Duties of the Chair**

The Chair shall:

1. Opens and presides over meetings of the Commission.
2. Ensure meetings are conducted and maintained in an orderly, lawful, and transparent manner consistent with the Robert's Rules of Order, FOIA, and Commission procedures.
3. Recognize speakers at the meetings and ensure motions are stated properly and placed in a vote and announce the results.
4. Execute documents on behalf of the Commission when authorized.
5. Represent the Commission when formally authorized or when required by law.

6. Facilitate effective governance by maintaining clear boundaries between Commission authority and administrative/operational roles.
7. Ensure that requests for information, directives, and follow-up items are routed through the Fire Chief structure rather than directly to staff.
8. Work collaboratively with other officers to support compliance, ethics, and professional conduct in accordance with these bylaws.
9. The Chair shall not unilaterally direct District operations, staff, or emergency response activities.
10. The Chair decides who has the floor, but must follow: Priority rules (e.g., maker of the motion speaks first); Fairness; and Alternating pro/con debate when appropriate.
11. The Chair shall not debate while presiding.
12. The Chair rules on: Violations of rules, improper motions, and disorderly conduct.
13. Any member may appeal the chair's ruling.
14. The Chair retains all voting rights as a Commissioner.
15. The Commission can overturn the chair by majority vote
16. The Commission elects the Chair by majority vote. Election shall be by ballot.
17. If the Chair position becomes vacant, the Vice-Chair becomes acting Chair, and the Commission holds an election to fill the Chair position.

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#### **Section 4. Duties of the Vice Chair**

The Vice Chair shall:

1. Perform the duties of the Chair as contained herein during the Chair's absence, conflict, vacancy or incapacity with the same authority as the Chair.
2. Support the Chair in fulfilling governance obligations.
3. Ensure that Commission processes remain consistent with these bylaws, particularly regarding governance boundaries and conduct standards.

The Vice Chair has no additional authority except as delegated by the Commission.

If the Chair resigns, dies, or is removed, the Vice-Chair becomes Acting Chair immediately until the Commission appoints a new Chair.

The Chair is to assign the Vice-Chair to: Oversee procedural reviews and assist with agenda planning

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## **Section 5. Duties of the Secretary**

The Secretary shall:

1. Maintain all official records of the District, including the Minutes of all meetings, Official correspondence, Membership rolls (if applicable), Notices of meetings, Agendas (if assigned), Bylaws and amendments and filing.
2. Ensure that minutes of all meetings are prepared and maintained as permanent public records to include: Type of meeting (regular, special, called); Date, time, and place; Who presided; Whether a quorum was present; All motions; the maker of each motion; The result of each vote; Notices, points of order, appeals, and time of adjournment. The minutes should be distributed in advance and approved at the subsequent meeting.
3. Act as the custodian and oversee the maintenance of official records in accordance with public records law.
4. Ensure meeting notices and agendas are properly posted and distributed in compliance with FOIA.
5. Support transparency and public accessibility to District records consistent with law and policy.
6. When the Secretary is absent, the Chair appoints a Secretary Pro Tem (temporary secretary). The Commission may confirm or elect a temporary secretary. The Secretary Pro Tem serves only for that meeting.
7. The Secretary shall ensure that District records are retained, preserved, and disposed of in accordance with applicable state law, approved records retention schedules, and District policy. No public record shall be destroyed except as authorized by law.
8. The Secretary shall coordinate with the District's designated FOIA officer, records custodian, legal counsel, and staff, as appropriate, to facilitate compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act. Nothing in these bylaws shall be construed to transfer statutory responsibilities assigned by law to another officer or employee of the District.

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## **Section 6. Duties of the Treasurer**

The Treasurer shall provide financial oversight for the District and shall be responsible for reviewing, monitoring, and reporting on the organization's finances.

The Treasurer shall:

1. Review District financial reports prepared by staff, accountants, or other financial professionals.
2. Provide financial updates to the Commission, including information regarding fiscal conditions, budget status, reserves, expenditures, internal controls, and audit results.
3. Support Commission oversight of reserves, expenditures, and internal financial controls.
4. Ensure financial stewardship consistent with public accountability standards.
5. Assist in preparing the annual budget by providing financial data and advising on anticipated revenues and expenses.
6. Maintain or ensure maintenance of appropriate financial records, including ledgers, bank statements, reconciliations, financial reports, audit materials, and budget tracking documents.
7. Present a Treasurer's Report at each regular meeting summarizing income, expenses, and account balances, and provide a detailed statement when requested.
8. Prepare or assist in preparing year-end financial statements and records for review by the Board or external auditor.

The Treasurer shall not spend or authorize the spending of funds on the Treasurer's own authority. Disbursements must be authorized by the Commission, the bylaws, or an adopted budget, and must be supported by proper documentation.

The Treasurer shall not direct staff on purchasing, budgeting, or contracting matters except through formal Commission action.

The Treasurer shall have the same rights as other Commissioners, including the right to vote, debate, make motions, and participate fully in Commission business.

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## **Section 7. Duties of the At-Large Officer**

The At-Large Officer shall:

1. Serve as a liaison among Commissioners to support Commission workflow and communication.
2. Assist the Chair with tasks or initiatives as assigned by formal Commission action.
3. Encourage collaboration and alignment among Commissioners on governance matters.
4. This officer's role does not include authority over staff, operations, or administrative functions.

An At-Large member:

- Represents the entire jurisdiction, not a specific district or zone
- Has the same rights and duties as any other Commission member
- Is a full voting member

An At-Large member is chosen to represent:

- The whole county
- The entire district
- The full service area

An At-Large member is allowed to make motions

- Make motions
- Second motions
- Debate
- Votes
- Participate fully in all Commission business

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## **Section 8. Officer Conduct and Limitations**

All officers shall comply with the following governance requirements:

1. Officers must respect and uphold the governance–administration boundary at all times.
2. Officers shall not give directives to staff, intervene in personnel matters, or attempt to influence operational decisions. All avenues in the chain of command must be rendered and brought to the attention of the commission if issues arise.
3. Officers shall maintain civility, fairness, and professionalism in fulfilling their duties.

4. Officers shall communicate information requests and oversight needs through the Fire Chief structure.
5. To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, the Fire District shall defend, indemnify, and hold harmless each Commissioner, officer, employee, and authorized volunteer of the District from and against any and all claims, demands, actions, suits, judgments, liabilities, costs, and expenses, including reasonable attorneys' fees, arising out of or relating to any act or omission undertaken in good faith within the scope of the individual's official duties on behalf of the District.
6. The District shall provide a legal defense for any Commissioner in connection with any civil action or proceeding arising from the performance of official duties, provided that the act or omission giving rise to the claim was not the result of willful misconduct, gross negligence, intentional wrongdoing, fraud, malfeasance, or conduct outside the scope of the Commissioner's authority.
7. Indemnification shall not apply to any claim resulting from a Commissioner's criminal conduct, intentional violation of law, personal gain to which the Commissioner was not legally entitled, or any act determined by a court of competent jurisdiction to constitute bad faith, fraud, or willful misconduct.
8. The rights provided under this section shall be in addition to any rights otherwise available under applicable law, insurance policies maintained by the District, or other lawful sources of indemnification.

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## **ARTICLE VI — GOVERNANCE—ADMINISTRATION BOUNDARY**

### **Section 1. Purpose of the Governance—Administration Boundary**

The purpose of this Article is to maintain a clear and effective separation between the Commission's governance responsibilities and the operational and administrative responsibilities of District management, ensuring lawful, ethical, and efficient public service.

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### **Section 2. Role of the Commission in Governance**

The Commission's role is to:

1. Establish mission, policies, priorities, strategic goals, and expectations for District performance.
2. Exercise fiscal stewardship, approve budgets, and oversee public resources.
3. Ensure District operations comply with law, public purpose, and adopted policy.
4. Provide oversight through evaluation of the Fire Chief structure established by the District.

The Commission shall **not** involve itself in day-to-day management, supervision of staff, or operational command.

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### **Section 3. Role of District Management and the Fire Chief Structure**

District management, operating through the Fire Chief structure established by policy, is responsible for:

1. Day-to-day operations and administration.
2. Personnel management, supervision, and scheduling.
3. Emergency response, operational readiness, training, and deployment.
4. Administrative, financial, and compliance functions.
5. Implementing policies, directives, and goals adopted by the Commission.

Commissioners must respect the chain of command and should not give directives to staff.

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### **Section 4. Prohibited Actions by Individual Commissioners**

Commissioners shall **not**:

1. Direct, reprimand, or supervise District personnel.
2. Attempt to influence hiring, firing, discipline, promotion, or personnel decisions.
3. Give operational instructions at emergency scenes, stations, or training.
4. Attempt to alter deployment, schedules, readiness, or command decisions.
5. Request special services, preferential treatment, or resource allocation.
6. Request internal investigations, employee statements, or private briefings.

7. Make commitments on behalf of the District without Commission approval.

These prohibitions protect the integrity of the District's command structure and ensure public confidence.

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## **Section 5. Appropriate Alternatives for Commissioners**

Commissioners may:

1. Request information, updates, or policy implementation through the Fire Chief structure.
2. Place items on Commission meeting agendas for discussion or action.
3. Raise concerns about operations, performance, or conduct through established governance processes.
4. Establish clear expectations through policy, budget, and strategic planning.

These mechanisms preserve proper governance authority without encroaching on administrative roles.

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## **Section 6. Two-Chief Administrative and Operational Leadership Structure**

When adopted by the District, the leadership structure may include:

### **1. Operations Chief**

Responsible for:

- Emergency response
- Training
- Deployment
- Field operations
- Readiness and command functions

### **2. Administrative Chief**

Responsible for:

- Administration and finance and work with the Commission

- Personnel administration
- Compliance
- Records and support services
- Planning and management functions

### **Commission Boundaries with Both Chiefs**

The Commission shall:

- Provide governance and policy direction only.
  - Not attempt to manage operational or administrative tasks.
  - Maintain unified accountability through the designated chief executive structure.
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### **Section 7. Chain of Communication**

Commissioners shall:

1. Direct information requests, operational questions, and follow-up items **through the Fire Chief structure.**
  2. Avoid bypassing established reporting relationships.
  3. Ensure staff are never placed in a position of receiving direction from an individual Commissioner.
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### **Section 8. Professional and Respectful Interaction With Staff**

Commissioners shall:

1. Treat all District personnel with professionalism and respect.
  2. Avoid public or private reprimands or coaching of staff.
  3. Avoid actions that disrupt operations or undermine supervisory authority.
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### **Section 9. Governance Integrity and Public Trust**

Commissioners must:

1. Preserve the integrity of governance processes.

2. Avoid conflicts of interest and improper influence.
  3. Conduct themselves in a manner that upholds public trust and transparency.
  4. Ensure decisions and oversight remain aligned with law and public purpose.
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## **ARTICLE VII — COMMISSION CONDUCT, ETHICS, AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

### **Section 1. Purpose of Conduct Standards**

The Commission shall conduct its affairs in a manner that upholds public trust, promotes lawful and ethical behavior, and ensures accountability within the governance structure of the Chester Fire District.

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### **Section 2. General Standards of Professional Conduct**

Commissioners shall:

1. Conduct themselves with honesty, fairness, courtesy, and professionalism.
  2. Treat fellow Commissioners, staff, volunteers, consultants, and members of the public with respect.
  3. Engage in deliberations constructively, focusing on issues rather than personalities.
  4. Prepare for meetings and participate actively in governance processes.
  5. Support Commission decisions once made, even if the Commissioner voted in the minority.
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### **Section 3. Ethical Compliance Requirements**

Commissioners shall comply with:

1. The **South Carolina Ethics Act** and all state ethics requirements.
2. All laws governing conflicts of interest, open meetings, and public records.
3. Confidentiality obligations when handling closed-session information or legally protected records.

Commissioners shall not disclose confidential information for personal or political gain, or to benefit others improperly.

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#### **Section 4. Conflicts of Interest**

1. Commissioners must disclose any disqualifying conflict of interest as required by law.
  2. A Commissioner with a conflict shall recuse themselves to the extent required, including abstaining from discussion and voting.
  3. Commissioners shall avoid any action that might create the appearance of favoritism, improper influence, or misuse of office.
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#### **Section 5. Prohibited Conduct**

Commissioners shall **not**:

1. Use their position for personal advantage or to benefit another improperly.
2. Interfere with the chain of command, direct staff, or attempt to manage operations. (See Article VI.)
3. Seek preferential treatment in deployments, inspections, responses, or administrative services.
4. Publicly or privately reprimand staff or attempt to influence personnel decisions.
5. Make commitments on behalf of the Commission without formal authorization.
6. Coordinate or participate in decision-making involving a quorum outside duly noticed meetings.
7. Share confidential information from closed sessions or internal deliberations without authorization.

Illustrative examples of improper conduct (operations interference, personnel influence, contract interference, misuse of position, independent investigations) are detailed throughout the Governance Policy.

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#### **Section 6. Public Representation and Communications**

Commissioners may express personal views but shall:

1. Clearly distinguish personal opinions from official Commission positions.
  2. Only speak on behalf of the Commission when formally designated.
  3. Avoid statements that undermine Commission decisions or public trust.
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### **Section 7. Non-Retaliation**

No person — including District personnel, volunteers, Commissioners, or members of the public — shall be subject to retaliation for raising good-faith concerns regarding compliance with law, policy, or these bylaws.

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### **Section 8. Internal Governance Concerns and Corrective Action**

Concerns regarding a Commissioner’s conduct shall be addressed through lawful Commission processes, which may include:

1. Discussion or clarification.
2. Additional training.
3. Direction from Commission leadership.
4. Formal Commission censure or other lawful action.
5. Referral to external authorities where legally required.

Enforcement shall focus on maintaining governance integrity and public trust.

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## **ARTICLE VIII — FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT AND FISCAL CONTROLS**

### **Section 1. Financial Authority of the Commission**

The Commission exercises full financial authority for the District as granted by Act 1779 of 1972 et seq, and applicable South Carolina law.

This authority includes the power to:

1. Approve budgets and major expenditures.

2. Oversee revenues, reserves, debt, and financial planning.
  3. Purchase, regulate, and dispose of District equipment and property.
  4. Submit required operating plans and millage requests.
  5. Safeguard public funds and District assets.
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## **Section 2. Budget Adoption and Amendments**

1. The Commission shall adopt an annual operating budget in accordance with state law and public agency requirements.
  2. Any material budget amendments must be reviewed and approved by the Commission.
  3. The budget must reflect responsible financial planning, support operational readiness, and ensure continuity of services.
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## **Section 3. Revenues, Reserves, and Expenditures**

1. The Commission shall oversee District revenues, expenditures, and reserve levels to ensure sustainability and responsible stewardship.
  2. Expenditures must comply with approved budgets unless otherwise authorized by Commission action.
  3. Reserves shall be maintained at levels necessary to ensure stability, compliance, and emergency preparedness.
  4. Millage requests and other revenue measures shall be submitted as required by law.
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## **Section 4. Purchasing, Contracting, and Internal Controls**

### **A. Commission Approval Required**

1. All contracts, agreements, and obligations must be **approved by the Commission** before execution.
2. Financial instruments must bear the signatures of authorized Commission officers.

### **B. Internal Controls**

The Commission shall ensure:

1. Proper segregation of duties.
2. Documented authorization for expenditures.
3. Compliance with procurement standards and competitive processes.
4. Deposits of funds only in Commission-approved depositories.
5. Regular review of financial reports, audits, and compliance matters.

### **C. Prohibitions Against Bypassing Controls**

No Commissioner shall:

1. Direct staff to purchase goods or services outside established procedures.
2. Suggest or imply favoritism toward a vendor.
3. Request purchase-splitting, expedited procurement, or avoidance of competitive processes.
4. Negotiate with vendors or commit District funds individually.

### **D. Appropriate Alternative**

Commissioners may set procurement policy, approve budgets and contracts through formal action, and request information through the Fire Chief structure.

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## **Section 5. Prohibited Financial Conduct**

To maintain integrity and public trust, individual Commissioners shall **not**:

1. Commit or authorize District funds without Commission approval.
2. Request or expect preferential financial treatment for themselves or others.
3. Influence staff regarding purchases, procurement selections, or financial tasks.
4. Use District assets, equipment, or funds for non-District purposes.
5. Attempt to override internal controls or bypass financial procedures.

Such actions undermine fairness, accountability, and lawful stewardship of public resources.

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## **Section 6. Financial Reporting and Transparency**

1. The Commission shall receive regular financial reports from District management, including revenue, expenditure, reserve status, and compliance updates.

2. All financial records shall be maintained in accordance with public records laws.
  3. The Commission shall promote financial transparency while respecting confidentiality requirements and legal limitations.
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### **Section 7. Independent Audit Requirements**

1. The District shall undergo an **annual independent audit** of its financial statements.
  2. The Commission shall review audit results, identify areas for improvement, and ensure corrective actions are implemented where needed.
  3. Audit findings shall be used to strengthen internal controls, transparency, and fiscal integrity.
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### **Section 8. Gifts, Grants, and External Funding**

The Commission may accept or decline gifts or grants, provided acceptance serves a public purpose and complies with legal requirements.

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## **ARTICLE IX — INTERACTION WITH PERSONNEL AND CHIEFS**

### **Section 1. Purpose and Guiding Principles**

This Article establishes the standards, limitations, and expectations governing interaction between Commissioners and District personnel. Its purpose is to preserve the integrity of the chain of command, support effective management, and maintain a clear distinction between governance and administration.

The Commission shall interact with District personnel only in ways that are consistent with law, these bylaws, and the governance–administration boundary.

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### **Section 2. Authority of the Fire Chief Structure**

#### **A. Role of District Leadership**

The District’s management and operational authority are executed through the Fire Chief structure established by the District. The Commission provides governance and oversight only; it does not supervise line staff or manage daily operations.

#### **B. Two-Chief System (if adopted)**

When the District operates under a two-chief leadership model, it shall consist of:

1. **Operations Chief**, responsible for:
  - Emergency response
  - Deployment
  - Readiness
  - Training
  - Operational command functions
2. **Administrative Chief**, responsible for:
  - Administration and finance
  - Personnel administration
  - Compliance
  - Records and support services
  - Planning and organizational management

### **C. Boundaries Applicable to Both Chiefs**

The Commission shall:

1. Approve the leadership structure and reporting relationships by policy.
2. Provide direction only through formal Commission action, not individual Commissioners.
3. Avoid involvement in operational command decisions, personnel actions, or administrative tasks.
4. Maintain unified accountability by ensuring directives flow through the designated chief executive structure.

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## **Section 3. Chain of Command and Communication**

### **A. Appropriate Communication**

Commissioners shall route all requests for information, follow-up questions, and implementation needs through the Fire Chief structure, not directly to staff.

### **B. Protection of Staff**

District personnel shall not be placed in a position where they receive direction from any individual Commissioner.

### **C. Non-Disruption of Operations**

Commissioners must seek information in a manner that:

1. Does not disrupt day-to-day operations.
  2. Respects established supervisory relationships.
  3. Avoids perception of directive authority.
- 

## **Section 4. Prohibited Conduct Toward Personnel**

Commissioners shall **not**:

### **A. Personnel Interference**

1. Direct staff regarding discipline, promotion, hiring, firing, assignments, or compensation.
2. Pressure a Chief to take or avoid a personnel action.
3. Investigate personnel complaints or performance issues personally.
4. Reprimand or “coach” District employees.

### **B. Operational Interference**

1. Give directions at an emergency scene.
2. Interfere with deployment, readiness, training schedules, or station coverage.
3. Request operational updates from on-duty personnel during an incident.
4. Provide operational “suggestions” that could be perceived as directives.

### **C. Preferential Treatment and Use of Position**

1. Request special staff access, services, or privileges for themselves or others.
  2. Use the District title to influence external agencies, vendors, or partners without authorization.
  3. Seek preferential response, inspection, or service outcomes.
  4. Share confidential information to benefit themselves or others.
- 

## **Section 5. Appropriate Alternatives for Commissioners**

In place of prohibited actions, Commissioners shall:

1. Raise concerns through agenda items, policy review, or formal Commission action.
  2. Request information or reports through the Fire Chief structure.
  3. Address systemic operational or personnel issues through policy changes, budget decisions, or strategic direction.
  4. Utilize lawful closed-session procedures when addressing personnel or sensitive matters.
- 

### **Section 6. Conduct at Stations, Incidents, and Public Events**

Commissioners are encouraged to engage with the District and the community but must do so appropriately:

1. Commissioners may attend stations, trainings, or events for observational purposes only.
  2. Commissioners shall not issue directions or influence staff behavior during such visits.
  3. Ride-alongs or station visits shall not be used to voice operational preferences or guidance.
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### **Section 7. Commitment to Professional Interaction**

Commissioners must maintain professional, respectful relationships with personnel at all times and shall not engage in conduct that intimidates, harasses, or retaliates against staff, volunteers, consultants, or members of the public.

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### **Section 8. Enforcement and Accountability**

Concerns regarding breaches of this Article may be addressed by the Commission through:

1. Discussion or clarification.
2. Additional training.
3. Direction from Commission leadership.
4. Formal censure or other lawful action.
5. Referral to appropriate agencies when required.

These processes maintain governance integrity and protect the District's organizational health.

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## **ARTICLE X — TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENT OPERATIONS (EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2026)**

### **Section 1. Purpose of Transition Governance**

This Article establishes the detailed governance responsibilities of the Commission during the District’s transition to independent operational status effective **July 1, 2026**. All governance actions during this period shall prioritize public safety, service continuity, legal compliance, and responsible administration.

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### **Section 2. Transition Authority and Responsibilities of the Commission**

During the transition, the Commission shall support the orderly transfer, establishment, or confirmation of:

1. **Administrative authority and internal controls** needed for independent operations.
2. **Budgeting and fiscal management systems**, including revenue handling, expenditure approval, and reporting processes.
3. **Human resources and personnel administration processes**, consistent with the governance–administration boundary.
4. **Operational command and reporting relationships**, as established by District policy and leadership structure.
5. **Records, contracts, information systems, and regulatory compliance functions** necessary for independent operations.
6. **Public communication** regarding the District’s independent status and any changes in services or governance.

The Commission shall ensure that the transition is implemented in a lawful, organized, and accountable manner.

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### **Section 3. Continuity of Fire Protection and Emergency Services**

The Commission shall ensure:

1. Uninterrupted delivery of emergency and fire protection services throughout the transition period.

2. Governance decisions prioritize public safety, operational continuity, and fiscal responsibility.
  3. The District remains compliant with all applicable laws, standards, and operational requirements.
- 

#### **Section 4. Governance Conduct During Transition**

During transition, Commissioners shall:

1. Continue to act only through formal Commission action.
  2. Avoid expanding individual involvement in administration or operations due to transitional changes.
  3. Maintain strict adherence to the governance–administration boundary established in Article VI.
  4. Route all inquiries and requests for information through the Fire Chief structure.
  5. Refrain from using the transition period to assert individual authority or influence over staff or operations.
- 

#### **Section 5. Transitional Reporting Relationships**

1. Staff and command personnel shall receive direction solely through established transitional command structures approved by the Commission.
  2. Any temporary overlap in administrative assistance, support functions, or staffing during the transition shall not alter the Commission’s governance role or authorize operational involvement by Commissioners.
  3. The Commission shall confirm reporting pathways for operational and administrative matters to ensure clarity and compliance.
- 

#### **Section 6. Administrative and Operational Adjustments**

The Commission shall support and monitor:

1. Implementation of new or expanded administrative systems for autonomy.
2. Establishment of financial controls, contracting procedures, and accountability structures.

3. Adjustments to staffing, leadership roles, or support relationships that ensure stable independent operations.
  4. Alignment of operational command systems, training expectations, and readiness standards with the independent structure.
- 

### **Section 7. Public Communication and Transparency**

The Commission shall ensure:

1. Accurate and timely communication to the public regarding the District's independent operational status.
  2. Transparency in transition-related decisions, budgets, and operational changes.
  3. Stakeholder awareness throughout the transition to avoid confusion or service disruption.
- 

### **Section 8. Governance Review and Adjustment**

Following the transition:

1. The Commission may review and refine governance practices, leadership structures, and administrative systems.
  2. Adjustments may be made to ensure the District's independent operations remain effective, lawful, and sustainable.
  3. Policies, procedures, and bylaws may be updated as needed to reflect operational realities and best practices.
- 

### **Section 9. Prohibited Actions During Transition**

During the transition period, Commissioners shall **not**:

1. Use transitional administrative changes as a basis for increased personal involvement in staff supervision or operational matters.
2. Attempt to direct staff or Chiefs regarding transition tasks or implementation details.
3. Seek or request transitional access to systems, records, or operations outside formal governance channels.
4. Create or imply commitments on behalf of the District without Commission approval.

These prohibitions reinforce governance integrity and prevent confusion or improper influence during the transition.

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## **ARTICLE XII — RECORDS, PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY, AND ELECTRONIC AUTHORIZATIONS**

### **Section 1. Public Records and Transparency Requirements**

The Commission shall maintain all District records in accordance with the **South Carolina Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)** and other applicable public records laws. All non-exempt records shall be accessible to the public upon request, subject to lawful confidentiality limitations.

The Commission shall conduct its affairs with openness and transparency, ensuring that public information is communicated clearly and accurately.

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### **Section 2. Minutes as Permanent Public Records**

1. Minutes of all Commission meetings shall be prepared, approved, and maintained as permanent public records.
  2. Minutes shall accurately reflect:
    - Motions
    - Votes
    - Actions taken
    - Attendance
  3. Minutes shall be made available to the public in accordance with FOIA.
- 

### **Section 3. Maintenance and Custody of Records**

1. The District shall maintain accurate and complete administrative, operational, financial, and governance records.
2. The Secretary, or designee, shall ensure proper storage, retention, and retrieval of records in compliance with legal requirements.

3. Confidential records shall be protected from unauthorized disclosure, including closed-session materials and personnel files.
- 

#### **Section 4. Public Access to Records and Information**

1. Requests for public records shall be processed pursuant to FOIA.
  2. Fees for copies or administrative processing may be charged as permitted by law.
  3. Information provided to the public shall be accurate, lawful, and timely.
  4. The Commission shall promote transparency while balancing legal confidentiality obligations.
- 

#### **Section 5. Transparency in Governance and Operations**

To support public trust and lawful operations, the Commission shall ensure:

1. Clear public communication during major operational changes, including the transition to independent operations.
  2. Compliance with open-meeting requirements for deliberations, votes, and decision-making.
  3. That Commissioners distinguish personal views from official positions when communicating with the public.
- 

#### **Section 6. Electronic Records and Documentation**

1. Documents in electronic form shall satisfy any requirement for records to be “in writing,” provided they comply with District policy and legal standards.
  2. Electronic documents shall be maintained with the same integrity, accuracy, and accessibility as physical records.
  3. Electronic storage solutions must comply with public records requirements and ensure secure preservation.
-

## **Section 7. Electronic Signatures and Authorizations**

1. Electronic signatures may be used for official District documents if they are secure, verifiable, and compliant with law.
  2. The Commission may require verification measures for electronic authorizations.
  3. No Commissioner shall use electronic signatures or digital tools to circumvent established approval processes or internal controls.
  4. All electronic approvals must reflect formal Commission action when required.
- 

## **Section 8. Integrity and Security of District Information**

1. The Commission shall ensure that District information systems protect the integrity, confidentiality, and availability of public records.
  2. Commissioners shall not request or access confidential electronic records outside proper channels.
  3. Cybersecurity practices and protocols shall be maintained consistent with legal requirements and best practices.
- 

## **ARTICLE XIII , DEVELOPMENT, AND COMMISSION EVALUATION**

### **Section 1. Purpose of and Development**

The Commission recognizes that effective governance requires ongoing education, development, and performance review. This Article establishes training for Commissioners and outlines expectations for Commission self-evaluation.

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### **Section 2. Required Training**

Commissioners shall complete all training as required by South Carolina law and any mandatory educational programs applicable to public agencies or fire protection districts. Required training may include, but is not limited to:

1. Ethics and conflict-of-interest training
2. Public meeting and public records training
3. Financial oversight training

4. Training mandated by state or county agencies
- 

### **Section 3. Recommended Training and Continuing Education**

Commissioners are encouraged to participate in ongoing development related to:

1. Governance best practices
2. Strategic planning
3. Fire and emergency services operations
4. Budgeting and finance
5. Legal and regulatory compliance
6. Public agency leadership

Training should enhance the Commission's ability to provide informed policy direction and responsible oversight. The Commissioners will receive training on Robert's Rules of Order each term. The Commissioners are members of SCAPD and are encouraged to attend any of its sponsored events. Members will receive liability and risk training from any designated VFIA agent each year.

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### **Section 4. New Commissioner Orientation**

Newly appointed Commissioners should receive orientation covering:

1. The District's legal authority, enabling legislation, and governance framework
2. Commission policies, bylaws, and procedures
3. Budget and financial fundamentals
4. Organizational structure, including the two-chief models, when in effect
5. The Commission's governance role under independent operations

Orientation shall be scheduled promptly following the appointment.

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### **Section 5. Continuing Education During the Transition to Independent Operations**

Before and after **July 1, 2026**, Commissioners are encouraged to receive specialized training on:

1. Independent operations governance

2. Administrative oversight and fiscal controls
3. Leadership reporting relationships
4. Governance–administration boundaries
5. Legal and compliance responsibilities

This training ensures that the Commission remains prepared for all responsibilities associated with independent District operations.

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## **Section 6. Commission Self-Evaluation**

### **A. Purpose**

The Commission shall periodically evaluate its own performance to ensure effective governance, accountability, and continual improvement.

### **B. Scope of Evaluation**

Self-evaluation may include review of:

1. Meeting effectiveness and deliberation quality
2. Policy leadership and strategic focus
3. Fiscal oversight and stewardship
4. Working relationships between the Commission and District leadership
5. Compliance with governance boundaries and ethical standards
6. Readiness and performance related to independent operations

### **C. Application of Results**

The Commission shall use evaluation results to:

1. Improve governance practices
  2. Identify training or development needs
  3. Inform Commission leadership
  4. Refine Commission policies and expectations
-

## **ARTICLE XIV — AMENDMENTS AND SEVERABILITY**

### **Section 1. Amendments**

These bylaws may be amended only by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Commission at a properly noticed meeting, provided that the proposed amendment has been included on the meeting agenda and made available to Commissioners with reasonable advance notice.

No amendment shall conflict with South Carolina law. Any amendment adopted becomes effective immediately unless the Commission specifies a later effective date.

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### **Section 2. Periodic Review**

The Commission should periodically review these bylaws to ensure consistency with:

1. District operations
2. Legal requirements
3. Best practices in governance
4. Independent operational status effective July 1, 2026.

### **Section 3. Severability**

If any article, section, or provision of these bylaws is determined to be invalid or unenforceable by a court of competent jurisdiction, such invalidity shall not affect the remaining provisions, which shall remain in full force and effect. South Carolina law shall govern.

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**CERTIFICATION**

These bylaws were duly adopted by the **Chester Fire District Commission** on the \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ June, 2026

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**Chair:**

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**Vice Chair:**

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**Secretary:**

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**Treasure:**

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**At-Large:**

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(Names or additional signatures may be added as needed.)