



Office of the Town Manager
Judson Rex

STAFF REPORT

Warrenton Town Council

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Council Meeting Date:	July 14, 2026
Agenda Title:	Consideration of Appointment Ms. Heather Kincaid as Fire Official for the Town of Warrenton
Requested Action:	Appoint Ms. Heather Kincaid as the Fire Official
Department / Agency Lead:	Community Development
Staff Lead:	Hunter Digges, Building Official

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hunter A. Digges is currently filling the roles of Building Official, Property Maintenance Official and Fire official. The realignment of the Fire Official responsibilities, designating Heather L. Kincaid as the Fire Official, reduces the potential for conflicts and competing priorities that currently exist within the combined Building Official & Fire Official role. These competing responsibilities are particularly evident during the inspection and enforcement processes involving residential properties, commercial businesses, and public facilities throughout the Town, where independent code interpretation and enforcement are critical to maintaining objectivity, accountability, and public safety.

Heather L. Kincaid has pursued various certifications since joining the Department of Community Development on July 31, 2023. During this time Ms. Kincaid has become certified as a property maintenance inspector and fire official. Heather has shown the desire to protect the citizens, and business owners of the Town of Warrenton.

Ms. Kincaid's certifications and trainings are as follows:

- June 20, 2023 – Passed the fire inspection certification exam and is recognized by the Commonwealth of Virginia as a Fire Inspector;
- September 26, 2023 – completed fire protection systems certification course;
- October 19, 2023 – Completed property maintenance inspection certification course;
- April 14, 2024 – passed the property maintenance inspection exam and is recognized by the commonwealth of Virginia as a Property Maintenance Inspector;
- June 12, 2026 – completed the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development advanced official training course and is recognized by the Commonwealth of Virginia as a Fire Official.

Background

Since joining the Town of Warrenton Department of Community Development in July 2023, Ms. Heather Kincaid has completed coursework and successfully passed certification exams for both Property Maintenance and Fire Official. She has consistently demonstrated excellence in her code enforcement role and continues to make valuable contributions to the department.

The Town's Building Official and Fire Official positions are both currently held by Mr. Hunter Digges; and can create a conflict of interest in certain instances. Designating Ms. Heather Kincaid as the Fire Official will minimize potential conflicts associated with Hunter Digges serving as the Building Official and Fire Official for the Town of Warrenton.

Prior to joining the Town, Heather gained extensive experience conducting fire inspections, investigations, and enforcement activities in accordance with the Virginia Fire Prevention Code. Since her employment, she has had a substantial positive impact on the Town's fire prevention program. Heather has expressed a strong interest in serving as a Fire Official and has successfully completed the examinations required to obtain the certification. Ms. Kincaid is a Town resident and cares about the safety of her Town.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends designating Ms. Heather Kincaid as the Town's Fire Official

Service Level/Collaborative Impact

The Building, Fire, and Code Enforcement functions within the Community Development Department are experiencing a steady increase in work driven by continued residential and commercial growth, expanded regulatory responsibilities, and increasing community service demands.

As of January 1, 2026, building, fire, and code enforcement staff have completed approximately 1,900 inspections, including building code compliance inspections, fire safety evaluations, property maintenance inspections, and required follow-up visits. In addition to inspection activities, the department processes a significant volume of plan reviews associated with building and fire permits, responds to a growing number of service requests and complaints, and is actively managing approximately 115 open enforcement cases, with additional cases continuing to be initiated. Additional responsibilities associated with permitting compliance and annual fire prevention inspections further contribute to operational workload demands.

The data below reflects inspections and permits from January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025; January 1, 2026 through June 30, 2026; and the full calendar year of 2025. While the total number of permits issued has remained relatively consistent across these periods, the number of required building inspections has increased by more than 100 percent. This increase is directly related to the type and complexity of permits being issued. For example, new construction permits require approximately 23 inspections per permit, whereas trade permits generally require substantially fewer inspections.

	<u>2025 Total</u>	<u>Jan 1 - June 30, 2025</u>	<u>Jan 1 - June 30, 2026</u>
<u>Building Permits</u>			
Records Created	531	241	276
Inspections Completed	1777	745	1709
Permits Issued	584	249	286
 <u>Annual Fire Prevention Inspection</u>			
Records Created	102	44	34
Inspection completed	150	59	53
 <u>Code Enforcement</u>			
Records Created	127	70	77
Inspections Completed	50	7	61
Permits Issued	0	0	0
 <u>Amusement Devices</u>			
Records Created	14	10	6
Inspections Completed	14	8	7
Permits Issued	14	9	7
 <u>Fire Permit</u>			
Records Created	6	4	6
Inspections Completed	6	4	6
Permits Issued	6	4	6
 <u>Fire Inspection for Business License</u>			
Records Created	106	63	64
Inspections Completed	99	62	44
Permits Issued	104	61	62

With an estimated 1,100 new residential units projected for construction over the next five years, the demand for inspections, plan reviews, permitting oversight, and code enforcement activities is expected to continue increasing significantly. This projected growth will directly impact the department's ability to maintain required annual fire prevention inspections and other regulatory obligations, creating measurable service-level impacts across both building and fire operations if additional operational capacity is not established. Therefore, separating the Building Official and Fire Official responsibilities is intended to assist with mitigating (no eliminating) these operational impacts by creating a more specialized, sustainable, and efficient service delivery model. The result is a more

responsive, scalable, and high-performing inspection and code enforcement system that better serves the Town, its residents, businesses, and future development needs.

Policy Direction/Warrenton Plan 2040

One of the main goals of the Comprehensive Plan is to ensure the physical safety of the population. Separating the Fire Official role from the Building Official ensures that responsibilities do not become blurred and ethical decision making remains constant and consistent. The Town's Department of Community Development remains dedicated to providing a high-level of service that is expected.

Fiscal Impact

The fiscal impact is minimal. Ms. Kincaid's salary grade would change from a grade 8 to a grade 11. Ms. Kincaid would assume the Fire Official's responsibilities without the need to hire an additional full-time employee.

Legal Impact

While the Virginia Statewide Building Code and Statewide Fire Prevention Code do not require the Building Official and Fire Official to be separate positions, these being separate positions is widely recognized as a best practice among local governments. Separating these responsibilities provides clear lines of authority, ensuring that each official administers and enforces the code within their respective area of expertise. Additionally, even though a single individual may legally serve in both capacities if properly certified, many jurisdictions choose to separate the roles due to the complexity of modern building and fire codes. Doing so promotes impartial decision-making, reduces organizational risk, and aligns with industry best practices for effective code administration and public safety.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution
2. Fire Official Certification