

Vermont Fire Service Training Council
Minutes of the November 10, 2022 Meeting

The meeting was held at the Vermont Fire Academy, Pittsford, Vermont and included a virtual call-in option. The meeting was called to order by Christopher Corbin at 10:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL:

Organization Representatives

Vermont Career Chiefs Association	Aaron Collette
Secretary of Education	Absent
Vermont Fire Chiefs Association	Absent
Commissioner of the Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation	Lars Lund
Professional Firefighters of Vermont	Christopher Corbin, Chairperson
Commissioner of the Department of Health	Bambi Dame
Vermont State Firefighters Association	F. Thomas Estey
Commissioner of the Department of Labor	Absent
Vermont Domestic Insurance	Matt Miles
Division of Fire Safety Director	Robert Sponable (proxy)
General Public	John Marcus, Vice Chairperson
Commissioner of Public Safety Office	Dan Batsie

Other Attendees: Michael Skaza, Jessica Pomainville, and Bill Jones

Modification of Meeting Agenda:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Motion made by Aaron Collette and seconded by Tom Estey to accept the minutes from the June 9, 2022 and July 19, 2022 meetings. Motion passed unanimously.

Report from the Executive Director of the Division of Fire Safety: Absent (report provided by Deputy Director Robert Sponable on behalf of Director Michael Desrochers)

The Rental Housing program has been approved through the legislature and four new Fire Marshals will be hired to carry out the new duties. One will be placed in each Regional Office.

The Plumbing Rules have been approved and will be in effect starting November 15, 2022.

The Director is trying to secure General Funds within the FY24 budget to fund the State USAR team.

The Division is working with a business analyst to assist them with replacing the Fire Safety

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database with a new modern platform.

The U.S. Fire Administrator is requiring that the current NFIRS database be archived by 2025 and replaced with a new system. This will be a cloud-based system operated by a third party. There are concerns about this proposal.

NASFM was successful at gaining two State Fire Marshals, one from Oregon and one from Colorado, to serve on a newly created Fire Commission which is tasked with looking at the Urban Wildfire problems.

John Marcus asked where the Division stands in the code adoption cycle. The Division is starting to move to the 2021 editions of NFPA 101, NFPA 1, and IBC. The 2018 codes were bypassed due to COVID. The referenced codes have been reviewed. Building codes will be adopted mid/late summer 2023.

Report from the Chief of Training: Michael Skaza

Two new instructors are in the hiring process. The Academy is continuing to recruit instructors. There was one instructor resignation.

Micah Genzlinger has resigned from a full-time Training Coordinator position at the Fire Academy to take a full-time Fire Chief position. Ben Whalen resigned his Site Coordinator position at the Fire Academy to join the DFS Fire Marshal's office in Springfield. Michael Skaza has been appointed the Chief of Training, leaving the Training Program Coordinator position vacant. The three open full-time positions have been posted, closed, and interviews are pending.

The DPS Deputy Commissioner position has been filled with the appointment of Dan Batsie.

Re-appointments to the Council (for terms expiring August 31, 2022) have been made for Chief Aaron Collette and Chief Tom Estey. Nominations for re-appointment were confirmed by their respective organizations, their names have been forwarded to Governor's Office in April, and approved in October.

There has been a good showing of students in our Firefighter programs. The Firefighter I in Danville has 17 students, the Firefighter I in Grand Isle has 22 students, the Firefighter I class in Marlboro had 13 students, and the Firefighter I class in Morrisville has 18 students. The Rutland Town program is a combined program and their Firefighter I student count is at 35 and the Firefighter II student count, which will start in early February, is at 40 with a waiting list still. There are eight on the waitlist. The Firefighter II program in Swanton has 18 students and the Firefighter I Hybrid which is based out of the Academy is at 39 students.

Regional Fire Schools are making a comeback post-pandemic. North Country International Fire School was held this year, but they did not hold any VFA offerings. They have requested a Flammable Gas course for next year. Franklin-Lamoille Regional Fire School was offered a Modern Fire Behavior, but only 2 students registered resulting in cancellation. Overall, their

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enrollment was approximately 30 students. The VFA Course offerings for Regional Fire Schools has been released for this upcoming year. The VFA organized and held a meeting of the RFS group on October 26th, and it was well attended.

There are a lot of good National Fire Academy Course Offerings this year. There is a 6 Day Regional Delivery coming in December titled Command and Control of Incident Operations. This class is full with a wait list. Three State Weekend will be held on March 10, 11, 12. There will be a STICO offering in Lyndonville on January 7 & 8. Fire Investigation for First Responders will be in Wilmington on January 21 & 22. Incident Command and Resource Management for the Fire Service will be in Underhill on February 11 & 12. Shaping the Future will be in Rutland Town on February 25 & 26. Incident Safety Officer will be in Bristol on March 25 & 26.

There are several curriculum projects underway or completed. A review and update of the Hazardous Materials Awareness/Operations curriculum has been completed. Firefighter I was updated to include information from the UL FSRI Fire Dynamics Boot Camp. Every Firefighter I class now receives a Palmer Dollhouse demonstration and a fire behavior lab. The development of a Vehicle Rescue Technician Course was completed, a train-the-trainer was held with approximately 20 instructors now qualified, and the first pilot delivery was completed. The Rope Rescue Operations Program curriculum has made a full transition to the CMC textbook with goal of delivering two programs in spring/summer 2023. We are in the process of updating Fire Instructor I to the new edition of the Jones and Bartlett curriculum. We hope to have it completed in mid-December. The test bank review is complete, and we are preparing an application for accreditation.

There have been a lot of questions and demand for an Electric Vehicle Emergencies course. The VFA is working on curriculum development based on fire service demand. We hope to have a course available this winter. Due to demands of the fire service the academy has identified a need for a Cannabis Awareness training for the Fire Service. The Academy is working in conjunction with the DFS Fire Marshals Office to bring training to the fire service on this topic. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) contacted the Fire Academy because they have seen a spike in the number of complaints and settlements involving harassment, diversity, and inclusion in the fire service. They have asked to work with the Academy to develop fire service specific training to mitigate those issues.

The Fire Academy is now scheduling course and program requests into spring of FY23. There is still a high number of requests for Pumping Apparatus Driver/Operator and they are still coming in. The academy has committed to delivering 3 programs in FY23 to tackle the demand. Over the summer the academy completed a PADO Instructor course adding 10 newly qualified instructors. The requests will alternate north/south. Brattleboro just completed, certifying 11. The next offering is in Fairfax.

The East Cottage has been completed and is in use. To date we have had over 350 overnight stays.

The HMEP Grant was awarded. \$118,403 Federal Funds / \$29,601 in-kind Match / \$148,004 total

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project. This provides funding for Haz Mat training as well some LEPC funding for Tier 2 support functions. The AFG FY21 grant was awarded in the amount of \$183,750 for instructor PPE, 1 tow vehicle, 2 equipment trailers, and 2 forcible entry door props. The NFA FY22 grant was awarded \$20,000 to support Fire Instructor and Fire Officer programs.

A Budget proposal has been submitted with the support of the Director to increase the General Fund money for the academy. This proposal will transfer full-time employee positions out of the Special Fund freeing up more money to be directed towards training. The budget request also contains a request for a full-time position as a curriculum developer which is a high priority and part of the academy's Strategic Plan.

The Acadis implementation project is the academy's new training management platform. The full transition of written certification exams took place at the end of FY22. On July 1 the academy cut-over for all remaining training record management and that was successful. We are in the process of transitioning certification data into the new platform. Public facing changes will begin over the next year such as portal access for customers and departments.

Senator Sanders submitted a congressionally directed spending request which is an earmark request. He requested \$150,000 in federal funding to support and expansion of the VSFA Cadet Academy. This request made it into the draft of the Federal budget and the academy is waiting to see where it lands after it is debated in the legislative process.

An initiative is being worked on with a number of fire service partners around the state on a statewide recruitment effort. It is a statewide campaign called Operation Mayday. The concept is to open fire stations on a select date in May for the purpose of recruitment. The VFA is supporting this effort using a \$10,000 subgrant being awarded to the Division of Fire Safety from the Division of Emergency Management through the Emergency Management Planning Grant. The academy has started a new webpage to highlight fire service job opportunities.

Chair Chris Corbin asked if there will be a FY23 Fire Officer program. The academy has not discussed it yet.

Aaron Collette asked if there will be a standalone Fire Dynamics course for the future or if there is a plan to add it to the Firefighter II. The academy has not discussed adding it to Firefighter II. The academy does plan to develop a stand alone Fire Dynamics course that is going to be managed by Micah Genzlinger on a part time status.

Report from the Council Chair:

Three or four months ago Saint Michael's College asked about developing a Fire Service Degree to begin in the Fall of the 2024. Saint Michael's college is in the research process. They have asked about the Fire Academy allowing them to host a Firefighter I program every year.

Committees:

Certification Testing Committee (Skaza) – No Report

Governance Committee (Skaza) –

Director Desrochers is the chair and Executive Director Simons has taken the vice chair position.

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There are two studies going on at the campus. One is looking to make improvements to the Firing Range and the second is a study of what the best use of the Police Academy main building is. This will guide future capital requests for the complex. The Safety sub-committee is working on preparing the annual Safety Report to the legislature.

Unfinished Business:

Changing the method of selection of Firefighter program locations –

The Fire Academy staff has attended meetings across the state about this topic offering an option that the counties would be numbered and on the odd years the odd numbers host a class and on the even years the even numbers would be offered a program. A lot of groups were good with the new option. The Fire Academy encouraged the various groups to offer feedback. There was not a lot of feedback. There is time before the next seasons offering to make a change.

Chief Collette distributed a package of email replies that he collected when he polled the Career Chiefs. The poll had three questions. Discussion of Battalion Chief Troy Ruggles response which was to let every county identify a county location that is best for the entire county. This ideally would have best logistical needs and then going back to every other year. This will give predictability to the location so that departments can plan. Average drive time should be about 40 minutes to a class location. The minimum student enrollment would still be a factor in whether a program is held. There was a discussion that the Fire Academy would not need to bring the Firefighter program locations to the Council if we start using the discussed options. It was noted that department officers like being able to tell new recruits where and when the programs will begin. The Academy staff will work on what this will look like in a more formal manner and bring it for further discussion at the February meeting.

Discussion of the medical clearance policies and how students are medically cleared after injury. Chief Skaza surveyed the North American Training Directors and there were three different ways it is handled:

- 1) Require a physician sign off on a medical exam conducted of the candidate within a certain amount of time from the start of a program.
- 2) Responsibility of the employer or sending organization to sign a form indicating that the student has been medically cleared by the sending organization.
- 3) Do nothing.

New Hampshire has a form that the Chief can sign that says that the student has been signed off in accordance with their department policy or the form can be filled out by a health care provider. There is no indication or evidence that this has improved the outcomes. There seems to be healthcare providers signing off the forms and not fully understanding the physical requirements of the jobs. This conversation has not been had with the Department of Public Safety legal team.

The update of the Rehab program has significantly decreased the number of transports. There are now mechanisms in place to warn students when they are not well enough to continue. The blood pressure screening that currently done is helping to identify students at risk. The academy does have policies in place that require return to work authorization which seems to be helping as well. Discussion that the academy needs to recognize the issue and have a plan on how to

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manage the situation if an incident occurs. The Council has approved the guidelines that are currently being used to guide operations.

New Business:

Standard Operating Guidelines:

No one has any questions regarding the FYI on Vehicle Use.

Discussion of Reciprocity process. The Council rules give the academy the authority to review and authorize Vermont certification through reciprocity provided the applicants meet criteria established in the rules. The rules were recently revised with no public comment. There have been complaints from fire departments about candidates that don't meet the rule criteria being denied Vermont Certification when being hired from out of state.

80% of the reciprocity applications come from career departments. Statutorily, new career hires have one year to gain Vermont certification and the Chief of Training is authorized to provide a waiver extending this timeline. The greatest number of reciprocity requests are for Firefighter II. The top reasons why people are denied are because they did not have proof of additional training, or their certification was gained three years prior to the reciprocity application being filed. Candidates can test into the system either by challenging the current certification exam for their level or advancing to the next level of certification if their certifications are accepted for prerequisite purposes.

Discussion that in the current recertification process you have to recertify annually and if you fail to do that for three straight years you are decertified. This is why certifications older than three years are not accepted for reciprocity. A common complaint is that applicants do not have the Vermont Wildland course. One of the academy's thoughts is that since the rules can't just be changed, we can manage the process through policy. The thought is that we can accept wildland from other states and infer that applicants with a Firefighter I certification have met the wildland fire suppression requirement as that is a JPR within Firefighter I. Lars Lund states that ANR doesn't have a problem with the Academy accepting reciprocity applications without a Vermont wildland course or its equivalency provided that the applicants have passed the wildland JPR.

Chief Collette shared that Hartford and Burlington both have trouble with wildland fire control and traffic incident management and feel if they come with some type of training required for NFPA 1001 that it should be accepted. Chief Collette asks for a reminder on the types of proof required training. The academy will accept a training transcript, certificates of training, a letter signed by a previous fire chief attesting to the fact that the person has received the 24 hours of training.

Discussion of Council Rules section 5.5.1.3 and that Chief Collette does not believe that it was meant to be as restrictive.

There does need to be some parity between the standards that out state firefighters are held to and what in state firefighters are held to.

The Council Chair asks that the Chief Skaza submit a formal document to the Council laying out

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what policy changes the Academy can make short term. At the same time, the Chair will speak to Director Desrochers about making a rule change. The Chair would like to see a group get together and start putting together a list of problems with solutions with the current rules. Perhaps have Chief Collette chair that group.

Chief Collette asks if 5.5.2 allows the Chief of Training to trump any of lines above that, specifically 5.5.1.3. There is discussion that 5.5.2. is not speaking to the opinion of Vermont issuance of Vermont certification but is speaking to deeming a certification equivalent for prerequisite purposes.

A rule change can take from six or twelve months.

Coalition Report:

Waiting for legislature session to begin. Efforts this session will focus on including more types of cancer in the cancer bill.

Vermont Career Chiefs: (Collette)

Just met in St. Johnsbury. There was an excellent presentation by the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition. Recommends this demonstration to a department or agency that is looking for a PSA on pushing home sprinklers. They are available upon request.

Vermont State Firefighters Association: (Estey)

No Report

Vermont Fire Chiefs: (Bothfield)

Absent

Professional Firefighters of Vermont: (Corbin)

No Report

Agency of Natural Resources: (Lund)

The Wildland course is going to be redone and they will be doing away with the 3-hour weekday lecture and fold that information into a workbook.

Department of Education: (Evans)

Absent

Department of Health: (Dame)

Leadership bootcamp is underway. VSP and the EMS office are going to be working on active shooting trainings. The EMS conference is in planning for early fall.

Department of Labor: (Whipple)

No Report

Vermont Domestic Insurance: (Miles)

No Report

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General Public: (Marcus)

John Marcus encourages groups to talk about home heating safety to their constituents. With the cost of fuel oil and kerosene people need to be aware the dangers of heating with other sources

Aaron Collette polled the Career departments on supporting a residential academy and there was a lot of interest in the Academy hosting one in March of 2024. The first step would be a commitment of the Career Fire Chief's. Aaron Collette offered to start the discussion with the Career Chiefs and perhaps put some type of package together to present to the academy.

Tom Estey made a motion that the current officers be re-elected for 2023, seconded by Lars Lund. Motion passes unanimously.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 9, 2023 with the location to be determined.

Tom Estey made a motion to adjourn the meeting, motion seconded by John Marcus. Motion passes unanimously.