

**Vermont Fire Service Training Council**  
*Minutes of the June 10, 2021 Meeting*

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The meeting was held virtually with a conference call-in available and called to order by Christopher Corbin.

**ROLL CALL:**

**Organization Representatives**

Vermont Career Chiefs Association	Aaron Collette
Secretary of Education	Rob Evans
Vermont Fire Chiefs Association	Walter (Skip) Bothfield
Commissioner of the Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation	Lars Lund
Professional Firefighters of Vermont	Christopher Corbin, Chairperson
Commissioner of the Department of Health	Absent
Vermont State Firefighters Association	F. Tom Estey
Commissioner of the Department of Labor	Dan Whipple
Vermont Domestic Insurance	Matt Miles
Division of Fire Safety Director	Michael Desrochers
General Public	John Marcus, Vice Chairperson
Commissioner of Public Safety	Absent

Other Attendees: Peter Lynch, Michael Skaza, Jessica Pomainville, Zachary Tillinghast, William Jones, Terry Farr, Bambi Dame, and Will Moran, William Jones.

**Modification of Meeting Agenda:**

None.

**Approval of Minutes:**

*Motion made to by Collette and seconded by Marcus to accept the February 11, 2021 minutes. Motion passes unanimously.*

The meeting agenda was altered and the first item under New Business – Delivery of sections of Programs in a virtual format is moved up in the meeting agenda. The Chairperson wants to hear from users outside the Academy staff to support or go against the movement of classes to a virtual format. The Lead Instructor from the Stowe Firefighter I program that was held in a hybrid format is attending the meeting to attest to how it went for his class.

**Report from the Executive Director of the Division of Fire Safety:** Michael Desrochers

The Director thanks everyone for being in attendance and thanks the Fire Academy for their help with the pandemic and distributing information.

The Division of the Fire Safety Central and Barre offices will be moving to Headquarters in

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Waterbury by November 8, 2021. There will be more security at the location but meetings will still be held there.

The Division of Fire Safety came into this fiscal year about 1.2 million short in the budget. The legislature gave the Division \$500,000 to help with the shortfall. Despite watching operational costs the Division still came in about \$300,000 to \$400,000 over budget this year. A vacant position has been surrendered in the Barre office however the Division is busy recruiting for a vacancy in Rutland, Springfield, and Barre. Out of the American Rescue Fund money there is about \$193 million going into housing and the Division has been working with the Housing Authorities about how the influx of permits will be handled due to all of the projects. The Department of Education is about to distribute millions of dollars to help schools install HVAC systems. Energy efficient funding will also be released so there will be an increase in the installation of solar.

The Division will be hosting the National Association State Fire Marshals (NASFM) annual symposium September 14 – 16 in Stowe. NASFM is made-up of individuals that hold positions similar to the Director of Fire Safety from across the Country.

The Division is in the process of adopting the 2021 building codes. The process has taken quite some time. The hope is to have it completed late fall maybe even January.

### **Report from the Chief of Training: Peter Lynch**

There are five Firefighter I programs in progress with 128 students who enrolled and 119 students are finishing up. All programs are being delivered virtually at this time due to COVID. The Instructor I ended with 15 students, there were 18 registered at the start. The Pumping Apparatus Driver/Operator program is booked through FY21. It is in very high demand. Course requests that were received in FY20 and the beginning of FY21 are being cleaned up. A 4-gas metering course was developed and piloted since the last Council meeting. The course was held in Warren and was received well.

The National Fire Academy courses that the Fire Academy had scheduled for FY21 had to be rescheduled twice this included Three-state weekend. Three State weekend will be held in August and the Fire Academy is still accepting applications. Three two-day courses were held in Proctorsville, Randolph, and Bennington. Two more are scheduled for August. Course requests for FY22 have been requested. The 6 -day Fire Inspection Principals class is being in June. The course is being offered in conjunction with the New Hampshire Fire Academy in Lebanon, NH.

The Academy has been trying to figure out how to serve the needs of the new officers around the state. Dan Batsie, Chief Lynch, and Michael Skaza were working on a leadership academy for EMS and Fire that would consist of modeled courses. Dan Batsie has since been promoted and replaced with Will Moran and the Department of Health has also hired Bambi Dame. Bambi will also be the Department of Health designee on the Training Council. A stakeholder meeting will be held late summer with representatives of both EMS and Fire. A pilot of the first delivery will most likely take place late fall/early Winter.

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The Academy did not offer a Fire Officer I/II last year because the Academy had lost Federal money assist with paying for the program, the money has been added back into the Academy budget. We hope to offer one again this fall.

The Fire Academy transitioned from Jones and Bartlett to IFSTA for both Hazardous Materials and Firefighter. There were good results with the certification testing for Hazardous Materials Operations. The first attempt pass rate was 97%. Firefighter I certification testing will begin tonight. The feedback from the instructors has been positive.

A more formal survey will be sent to instructors to provide review of the new curriculum. Student evaluations will also be reviewed as they are returned.

Firefighter I and II combined programs will be different than prior years since IFSTA clearly divides the levels. This will allow students to opt out at Firefighter I and opt in for Firefighter II level only certification.

As of Monday, June 14 health safety screenings will end. However, the Academy will be following any mandates that come from the Governor, Human Resources, and the Director.

Sheetrock is in the process of being hung in the East Cottage. There are some delays in construction material. The goal is to have it completed in late Summer/early Fall.

Recertification is now due June 30 and no longer due in December. The recertification process has begun. This allows for those firefighters who are struggling to get training in due to COVID have another six months to complete it. The Academy will now align with the EMS recertification term.

At this time next year, the Academy will be in our new Database making recertification easier for the Academy and the firefighters completing their recertification.

The Academy has purchased a new records management system. The Academy now has a contract with Envisage and is setting up the Acadis readiness sweet. The Academy is working with their implementation team in the build out. While it is an off the shelf product it is highly customizable. It will have public facing portal and students will be able access their records without having to contact the Fire Academy.

Reaccreditation to Pro Board has been submitted. The hope is that the Academy will have its site visit this summer so that reaccreditation is finalized however since site visits were put on hold so the Academy cannot predict when it will be.

There are two Regional Fire Schools scheduled for this Fall. A meeting is scheduled for October.

S.42 – This is Responder Wellness Bill has been signed and the commission will meet this fall. All first responders will have access to pre-incident education and access to post mental health counseling after incidents.

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H. 72 - This is a Bill on Fire and EMS training at Technical Centers however it never made it out of committee.

H. 117 – This is the Firefighter Cancer Bill. This Bill takes the legislation that is in place currently and modifies it. In one section, there is a piece that says you have to have pre-cancer screening in order to successfully receive compensation once you have been diagnosed with cancer. The focus is to remove the pre-employment screening. The Bill started to move then stopped and has started to move again.

The Bill about making the Department of Public Safety to an Agency has slowed down.

The Blue Light Bill that says fire trucks and ambulances can have rear facing blue lights. And police cars can have rear facing red lights. The Bill has been passed.

Full time staffing at the Academy has remained the same. The Fire Academy is moving forward with hiring more instructors. Instructors who cannot commit to the Fire Academy are stepping away so the Academy needs to add more.

The Fire Academy will be ending the year with a small surplus in the Special Fund and no money in the General Fund.

The FY22 General Fund budget reduction is 5% (\$24,806). The FY22 Special Fund budget is the same except for \$65,000. The increase cost of Microsoft licenses and part of Acadis are expenses that we will have to figure out how to cover.

The Academy exhausted their HMEP funding until October of 2021.

### **Report from the Council Chair:**

The Council Chair was asked to testify in regards to the move from a Department to an Agency of Public Safety. While Fire Service Training Council governs the Fire Academy in certification. The committee did not understand the difference between the Criminal Justice Training Council and the Fire Service Training Council. Both Councils are very different.

### **Committees:**

Certification Testing Committee (Skaza) –Due to competing demands on time and workload, the committee that was scheduled to work on the certification exam process has not been able to meet. But now that the Academy is through the reaccreditation process it will be picked back up.

Governance Committee (Desrochers) – The legislature created a governance committee to oversee the training facilities in Pittsford. This committee has authority of over all capital construction funds, access and use issues, and contracts on the campus. There are eight members, four law enforcement and four fire. A twelve-million-dollar request has been submitted to upgrade the complex.

The Rental Housing Safety Bill which intends to turn health officer and rental code enforcement to Fire Safety Division has passed the Senate and went to a third reading before the legislature closed. They didn't have the 2/3 majority vote to send it back to the Senate so on June 23 & 24

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when legislature returns it is likely they will try to revisit the Bill then. This Bill will have significant impact on the Division. The Director requested \$600,000 to fund five Fire Marshals to run this. It would be a complaint driven inspections across the entire state. There would be an exemption for those departments who have exemptions.

### **New Business:**

The pandemic forced the Academy into delivering courses and programs in a virtual learning environment for instruction. The Academy experimented with fully virtual training, blended learning (where lessons were done in an interactive online website and then reviewed virtually with our instructors.

The Academy feels that in-person learning is still very important. But we do recognize from our experience that there are certain topics that can be done for efficiently for time management and convenience that can be delivered in an alternate format. It allows for more of the in-person time to be spent focusing on other things.

Zack Tillinghast who was a lead instructor in Stowe this year is in attendance to share his experience with the hybrid learning. The Stowe location had a lot of technology to utilize. Lead Instructor Tillinghast explains how they used a two classroom and the equipment that they utilized.

From December to April the didactic work was done online. Quizzes were completed online using the IFSTA bundle. Instructors no longer had to grade quizzes however they still had transfer from Resource One to the grade book. Traditionally quizzes would be done in an exam setting, however by doing it online there is no way to make sure students were not using their student manual however the quizzes are learning tools.

Feedback from students said that some of the hands-on topics are very hard to learn online. Various videos were used to engage students. Students did prefer virtual because there was less travel, worry about inclement weather. Some content is better for in-person and some is better can be delivered better in an online platform. Pros and cons are discussed over student doing an open book quiz. People did fail quizzes and there were not chapters that all students scored 100's.

Chief Collette asked about student connectivity issues. Zack explained that there were some issues. Two instructors are really necessary one to moderate and one to lecture.

Some instructors chose to have a mandatory camera on so you can see if your students were truly there.

There were some technology issues for instructors and students but they were not overwhelming at least in the Stowe program.

Chris Corbin asks about the demonstrations that go along with some chapters and if some chapters were shorter having been delivered virtually? Zack agrees that the demonstrations were not able to be done and that some chapters were able to be shortened for the lecture. There is discussion about EMS learning experiences and studies.

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The Academy will look at pass rates once we get through the testing process for this years classes. If you compare the students who completed HMO in a hybrid version versus those who completed the classroom in-person, the pass rate is 95%.

Strategic plan had alternate methodologies included in it. The Academy hopes to purchase technology needed to assist with moving forward using hybrid learning in it's programs and courses.

The Academy is seeking endorsement from the Council to continue using virtual learning as appropriate.

Corbin asked if the Academy would allow instructors do things differently or telling instructors that are using a virtual learning here is the platform you are going to use and here is how you are going to do it. The Academy wants to leave some flexibility for what works best for the class, but yes there would be some parameters placed on the leads. Discussion there is benefit in bringing the students back together and reviewing and answering questions about chapters that were done online.

The Instructor program was able to be conducted as a whole state offering. There were teach backs when reviewing materials which was very beneficial.

Instructor training will need to continue with our instructors so that they can get better and more comfortable.

The Chairman asked if it's the Chief's intent to have endorsement for hybrid learning.

Lars Lund said that the online worked for ANR's piece of the Firefighter I curriculum.

**Motion for the Council to endorse and support a blended/virtual instructional environment as appropriate by Lund – seconded by Whipple. Motions passes.**

Program request map was handed out. Seventeen requests were sent in by the program request deadline.

The Academy has met and has recommendations for the Training Council which are also on the map that is handed out. The Academy has the budget to support six programs this year so it was hard to narrow it down. The Academy asked for a department list of who was supporting the request. The Academy received some requests that were a combined effort either for the county or the surrounding area. Applications were also suggested to submit with the request so the county could identify interest for the request.

Two requests came in from the southwest corner of the state. One, was Winhall and the other was from Bennington and at the same time Rutland County did not submit a request however Rutland County sent applications in support of a program in Bennington County and Addison County. After discussion the requests have been combined to a Manchester location and Bill

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Jones has secured that location. The Academy supports a Firefighter I in Manchester.

Middlebury has a large student base and Rutland County agreed to send students to that location. The Academy supports a Firefighter I in Middlebury.

Chittenden County had three requests from Milton, Williston, and Huntington. Huntington had no applications. The Milton program request was pulled and replaced with one from Franklin county after the Academy reached out to both Milton and Williston similar to what happened in the Southern county and made them aware of the duplicate efforts. The Academy supports a Firefighter I/II in Williston.

Franklin County submitted a Firefighter I application for Georgia when the Milton request was rescinded while at the same time requested a Firefighter II in Swanton which was submitted with eight applications. The Academy believes that some who want Firefighter I from Franklin County will drive to Williston the Academy will offer the stand-alone courses within a Firefighter I program to Franklin County. The Academy supports an FF II in Swanton as an alternate so if a program gets cancelled Swanton would be given the opportunity to host a program.

The Northeast kingdom submitted three program requests (Barnet, Lyndon, and Newport City) so the Academy did the same as they did in the south and reached out to find someplace in the middle that would serve the needs of all three of the requests. The Academy supports a Firefighter I in Orleans.

Waterbury submitted a Firefighter I request. When the Stowe class was held COVID limited the student maximum, so the Fire Academy offered Waterbury the pre-requisites for 2020 and a program in 2021. In the end many of their members were offered spots in the program. However, we recognize that we never were able to offer them the stand alones last year. So, we will offer them this year as well as offer Waterbury to be a second alternate.

Windsor County had two requests (Springfield and Hartland) and were unwilling to meet in the middle so since Hartland had submitted 19 applications so the Academy supports a program in this location. We asked if Hartland would be willing to host a combined instead of a I so as to invite the Randolph fire department members. Hartland agreed so the Academy supports a Firefighter I/II in Hartland

Windham county submitted a county request for a Firefighter II to be held in Brattleboro which was awarded. The Chief of Training states that while people insinuate that Brattleboro will be awarded since they have preferential treatment from the Fire Academy, there is no preferential treatment in this decision making process. Decisions are made based on Fire Academy SOG's and what is best for the state as a whole.

Chief Collette will be abstaining from the vote due to the fact that he is a requestor who is being awarded.

***The motion is made to endorse the program locations that the Fire Academy has put forth and there was a motion by Marcus and seconded by Lund. Motion carries.***

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The map of all the program and course offerings the academy has planned for the upcoming year so far is distributed and discussed. There are several new classes such as Ice Water, Vehicle Extrication as well as Flammable Gas which is revised.

There has been a push to deliver a Fire Officer program on a night and weekend schedule. The Academy has decided to hold a Fire Officer program on a nights and weekend schedule. With the Council's approval of using a blended program offering the Academy will be able to utilize it in this delivery.

Corbin speaks on behalf on his constituents and states that they would like to see a weekday schedule. Corbin asks if the class is filled with career firefighters that the Academy consider moving the schedule to a weekday delivery.

For several years the Academy has allowed students that have provided ICS 100 or 200 certificates prior to the class session to be excused. The Academy would like to require students to do the training online prior to the class session and then come to class for a four-hour tabletop exercise.

*There is a motion to endorse the ICS format change to have students do self-study online for ICS 100 and 200 and then the classroom portion would be a tabletop exercise by Collette, seconded by Desrochers. Passes unanimously.*

The Chairperson has heard that the IFSTA curriculum is not meeting all the needs. He would like to see the Academy review the curriculum and make it better through out the summer months. Michael Skaza plans on surveying the instructors on what changes may need to be made.

**Unfinished Business:**

None

**Standard Operating Guidelines:**

The two SOG's were sent to the Council prior to the meeting so all members have had a chance to review them, and the Chair would like to ask the members to take make an motion to approve the updates to the Test Development and Review SOG and an motion to endorse updates to the Registration process SOG.

*A motion is made by Marcus to endorse the updates of the, seconded by Collette. Passes unanimously.*

There is no discussion of the FYI SOG's.



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**Coalition Report:**

No report.

**Vermont Career Chiefs: (Collette)**

On Wednesday, October 20, 2021 at the Hilton in Burlington Waterfront the Career Chiefs will be hosting their annual convention. Chris Guam will be presenting Fireground Leadership and Operational Excellence: Old School Principles for Today's Demanding Fireground.

**Vermont State Firefighters Association: (Estey)**

August 14, 2021 is the VSFA Annual meeting.

**Vermont Fire Chiefs: (Bothfield)**

Had to leave early.

**Professional Firefighters of Vermont: (Corbin)**

No Report

**Agency of Natural Resources: (Lund)**

There are only three qualified Wildland instructors at this time however Emily Meachum and John Cherico are new employees who in the process of being trained. Delivering all the classroom time being virtual opened up more time for conducting longer practicals. Ground fires are very difficult to put out so more time can be spent on learning how to suppress them. The Forest Fire Warden annual meeting/training was held virtually.

**Department of Education: (Evans)**

Had to leave early.

**Department of Health: (Dame & Moran)**

Thanks for the invite to meeting. Will explain that the Department of Health will continue the support and working relationship that Dan Batsie had previously established. The Department of Health will be continuing to respond with COVID-19. Dame offers to help the Academy with evaluating hybrid models for use.

There is discussion about how the academy and the EMS office can work together and resource share.

There is discussion about the new level of first responder and if the First Aid and CPR can be packaged together and delivered within the Firefighter programs.

**Department of Labor: (Whipple)**

No report.

**Vermont Domestic Insurance: (Miles)**

No report.

**General Public: (Marcus)**

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No report.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 7, 2021 at 10:00 am at the Fire Academy in Pittsford.

*Lund makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Collete. Motion passes unanimously.*

DRAFT