

Vermont Fire Service Training Council
Minutes of the June 8, 2023 Meeting

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

ROLL CALL:

Organization Representatives

Vermont Career Chiefs Association	Aaron Collette
Secretary of Education	Rob Evans
Vermont Fire Chiefs Association	Gene Perkins
Commissioner of the Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation	Absent
Professional Firefighters of Vermont	Vacant
Commissioner of the Department of Health	Chelsea Dubie
Vermont State Firefighters Association	F. Thomas Estey
Commissioner of the Department of Labor	Dan Whipple
Vermont Domestic Insurance	Absent
Division of Fire Safety Director	GJ Garrow
General Public	John Marcus, Vice Chairperson
Commissioner of Public Safety Office	Dan Batsie

Other Attendees: Michael Skaza, Jessica Pomainville, Hannah Spinks, Bill Jones, Jeffrey Alex Spencer, Christopher Corbin

John Marcus thanked Deputy Chief Corbin for his service on the Training Council for the last nine years. The State of Vermont Department of Public Safety presented Deputy Chief Corbin with a certificate of recognition for his service on the Training Council.

Modification of Meeting Agenda:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Motion made by Chief Estey and seconded by Dan Whipple to accept the minutes from the April 6, 2023 meetings. Motion passes.

Report from the Executive Director of the Division of Fire Safety: (G.J. Garow)

The Division of Fire Safety will facilitate the rule making process for the council once the changes are approved. Robert Sponable, Deputy Director will be “point person” for the Council and Academy in the rule revision.

The Fire Fighter Cancer Bill (S.73) was signed into law. The Division of Fire Safety is directed to complete a study to address the following items:

- Projected cost of screening all fire fighters for cancer (Career and Volunteer) and the cost for those enrolled in Firefighter I programs.

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- Cost of replacing firefighter PPE every 10 years on a rolling basis.
- Means to eliminate PFAS from turnout gear.

Fire Safety is still diligently working on establishing the new rental housing health and safety code enforcement program.

The Division is also working on identifying vacant or condemned buildings that have the potential to be converted into housing to help start a dialogue on being able to bring more housing opportunities on line.

Report from the Chief of Training: Michael Skaza

The Training Coordinator position has been posted since vacated by Micah Genzlinger with a poor response of qualified applicants. The Site Coordinator position is pending reclassification and will be posted once that process is complete. The Fire Academy is in the process of hiring a part-time Administrative Assistant. Three interviews were completed for part-time instructors and the applicants are working through the hiring process.

Three Council member reappointments are due in August: Matt Miles, Wendell Mansfield, and John Marcus. The PFFV has selected Alex Spencer as their new representative. Chief Skaza has assembled an appointment request packet and submitted it to the Governor's Office.

Program and Course Updates

Program	Location	Orientation	Final Certified	
Firefighter I	Danville	21	6	6 departures 6 failed HM - completed all else, 1 transfer to Morrisville.
Firefighter I	Grand Isle	23	16	17 eligible, 1 no show for exam, 3 departures, 2 no live fire, 1 academic failure.
Firefighter I	Marlboro	14	9	1 lost dept affiliation, 1 no car/dumpster, 4 failed HM
Firefighter I	Morrisville	21	13	2 departures, 6 failed HM
Firefighter I	Rutland Town	36	3 Certified 17 to FFII	11 departures from FFI mostly no shows and personal reasons.
Firefighter II (January start)	Rutland Town	17 from FFI 22 new 39 total	11 to FFII 14 to FFI/II	FFII: 13 eligible, 11 passed FFI/II: 16 eligible, 14 passed
Firefighter II	Swanton	18	15	3 failed FFII testing.
Firefighter I	VFA Hybrid	40	28	8 departures, 1 no live fire, 1 failed HM, 1 HM incomplete, 1 audit due to injury
TOTAL		209	134 (64%)	

*FY23 had a 70% certification rate. The average is between 60% and 70% each year.

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The data management system tracks the reasons that students leave. After tracking the reasons for student departures this year, it has proven to be what the Fire Academy has believed in former years; “Life gets in the way” as the most common reason. This includes work commitments, family commitments, and personal reasons.

The current budget is solvent due to vacancy savings. The Fire Academy will have a budget surplus driven by three things. First, vacancy savings caused by open full-time positions, secondly, there has been a decrease in the cost of part-time labor since the VFA has struggled with staffing, and third is that some maintenance has been deferred due to low staffing. The surplus will show in the special fund and the monies in special fund that carry forward should be safe. The FY24 budget increase is included in the budget passed by the legislature but vetoed by the Governor.

An update was provided on Regional Fire School activities:

April 15 and 16: Southern Vermont Regional Fire School, Mill River Union High School, Clarendon, Flammable Gas Control CANCELLED – LOW ENROLLMENT

April 22 and 23: Addison Regional Fire School, Vergennes High School, PPE and SCBA with Drager Trailer, Addison County paid for the offering since they did not meet the minimum enrollment.

April 29 and 30: Northeast International Fire School, North Country Career Center – Newport, Flashover was delivered.

May 5 and 6: Twin State Regional Fire School, Blue Mountain Union School – Wells River, Flashover was delivered.

June 3 and 4: North Country Regional Fire School, Alburgh School, Flammable Gas Control – Cancelled due to low student enrollment.

A coordinated Regional Fire School Group meeting is scheduled for June 28th at the Fire Academy

The National Fire Academy Incident Safety Officer course was held in Bristol on May 20th and 21st and 14 students attended.

The Fire Academy has received the following NFA course awards for FY24:

DMICO (F0457) - Washington County (Warren) on January 6 & 7, 2024

Incident Safety Officer (F0729) - Orleans County (Newport) on January 20 & 21, 2024

Fire Investigation for First Responder (F0770) - Addison County (Middlebury) on February 10 & 11, 2024

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Exercising Leadership through Difficult Conversation (F0522) - Chittenden County (Williston) on February 24 & 25, 2024

Incident Command System and Resource Management for the Fire Service (F0376) - Rutland County (Castleton) on March 9 & 10, 2024

PICO (F0458) - Bennington County (Bennington Rural) on March 23 & 24, 2024

Fire Inspection Principles 2: Inspection of Structures and Systems – Vermont Fire Academy on March 18 – 23, 2024 (six-day class)

Three State Weekend – Emmitsburg, MD on June 22 and 23, 2024

Curriculum Projects: Electric Vehicle Emergencies course: working on curriculum development based on fire service demand. Hope to have a course available soon.

Fire Officer I/II is being transitioned to the new edition of the Professional Qualifications Standard and into the newest edition of the curriculum. A fall delivery is planned.

We are now scheduling course and program requests into fall of FY24. In FY23 the Academy committed to delivering three Pump Apparatus Driver Operator (PADO) programs and are nearing completion of our third now (Brattleboro-11, Fairfax-12, Chester-10). We also supported an in-house PADO program in Burlington. There are more requests pending and the Academy will continue to alternate north and south with deliveries of the programs. The Academy has written a grant request to purchase the equipment needed for a second trailer.

Fire Instructor I first offering this spring finished with 19 students certifying. The second offering is underway with 19 students enrolled and set to finish this weekend.

To date the east cottage has had 751 overnight stays. The cadet academy has 40 candidates for the upcoming weeklong camp. The dorms are allowing for the cadets to stay on campus as well as offering space for law enforcement while the cadets are in the main dorm.

There are two grant awards pending. One is a HMEP Grant in the amount of \$106,887 Federal Funds / \$26,722 In-Kind Match / \$133,609 total project for support in delivering Haz Mat Training and to partially support a full-time position responsible for Haz Mat compliance with the Tier 2 program, this person will also double as a Haz Mat team member. This allocation is a 9.7% reduction from the current FFY. The Academy has applied for the AFG FY 22: \$173,772 Federal Funds / \$19,308 Match for instructor PPE, fully-equipped PADO trailer, training manikins, instructor scheduling software, assorted tools, burn building furnishings, equipment trailer. The award for this grant is pending.

Operation Mayday! has been completed. The VFA managed a \$10,000 advertising contract with Gray Media and provided administrative support to the program. Over 90 Vermont Fire Departments conducted an open house on May 13th.

John Marcus asked about the restriction on the use of food services for those who stay in the dorms. Chief Skaza says that BGS has lifted the restrictions on food service.

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Report from the Council Chair:

Nothing to report.

Committees:

Governance Committee (Skaza) –

There has not been a meeting. However, they supported the capital bill that has funding for planning upgrades to the Police Academy building. Connecting the campus to the municipal sewer remains a high priority with the Committee.

Unfinished Business:

Council meeting rules revision review. There are some minor changes that need to be made having to do with grammar, capitalization, and titles.

There was a comment that there was an error in 5.2.1. The citation of part of title 20 is incorrect. There was a typo and the need for correction was noted. In section 5.3.4 the rules said National Fire Protection Association Standard for Professional Qualification Accreditation (NFPA) and Certification system, the Fire Academy moves to strike Accreditation and Certification system since it is stray language. The Reciprocity section received no further comments.

The Staff has questions on the following:

Section 5.3.2 says the Council may only change the number of hours required for Vermont certification maintenance at the last regular meeting of the calendar year and the effective date of those changes shall be greater than one year from the date of approval. When this rule was written, the certification term was January 1 to December 31 now that the term has changed to July 1 to June 30 should this be reworded? Discussion of the proposed language document.

The next step in the process is for the Council to come to agreement of the draft proposal that they would like to see. Next the document is submitted to ICAR and then it goes into a public comment period and review. There will be more time for comments in the process.

The other section the Academy would like the Council to look at is Section 5.5.2.3 which is in the reciprocity section. It is speaking to reciprocity for pre-requisite purposes. It says the applicants certification shall be compliant with the current or previous two editions of the applicable NFPA standard, this can sometimes be a problem, it is on page 6 of the document that is handed out. An example is given of an applicant who applies for reciprocity with a Fire Instructor certificate from another state and want to apply for Fire Officer. This rule says the VFA can only accept the Fire Instructor certificate as a prerequisite if it is compliant with the current or previous two editions of the applicable NFPA Pro Board standard. This can be a hang up for members who have been in the Fire Service for a long period of time and decide they want to take an advance level course. This can be a problem for Haz Mat as well but the changes in HMO over time are very significant.

When the Fire Academy starts offering Fire Instructor II and III this will also affect our instructors.

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John Marcus suggests that the Council go thru what there are for changes to the Rules and then go back and review the substantial changes.

The suggested substantial changes are to change the effective date in 5.3.2, the Academy would propose it be changed to “shall not take affect sooner than the date of the next certification term”.

Discussion of the current edition and/or the prior two editions being acceptable.

Discussion of if there is an inequity between a VT firefighter who decertifies and then has to take a test to regain certification while an out of state firefighter can apply for reciprocity and not have to take an exam. Discussion that the VT firefighter gave up their certification therefore the need to test is required as noted in Section 5.6.1.

Discussion that once firefighters whether they start VT certification from within VT or if they are using reciprocity as a means to enter they all be treated the same once Vermont certification is issued.

Recertification cards will not be sent this year.

A motion is made by Chief Collette to accept the proposed rules changes as presented with the amendment to delete section 5.5.2.3 seconded by Chief Estey and passes unanimously.

New Business:

There has been pushback from students on Hazardous Materials Operations testing. A handout was distributed and discussed. The results we are seeing this year are no different than past years with regards to pass rates. Haz Mat is one of the more difficult courses. No action taken.

The Fire Academy will be moving to the next edition of the Haz Mat curriculum later this year.

Question about if the Academy sees IEP's. The Fire Academy does not require a IEP for students that request more time or a quiet space to take their written exam. Anything outside this request does require an IEP, but the Academy does not see a lot of IEP's.

There is a discussion of the level of comfortability for a student to share that they have an IEP. Alex Spencer offers a suggestion that the Fire Academy offer training on how to identify struggling students and work with them. The Academy does plan on offering some instructor development this year and the Chief offers to put it on the agenda.

Instructors have been identifying that some of the younger VFA students are struggling the most this year with academic application and struggle with how to apply themselves, and many don't know how to study. The Fire Academy is considering offering a lesson on how to study at the start of the programs.

Karson Swart applied for reciprocity but was denied. A waiver has been requested by his Fire Chief seeking up to 24 months to gain Vermont Certification along with a plan to achieve that.
A motion by Chief Estey and is seconded by Whipple, motion passes, Chief Collette abstains.

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Chief Skaza will send a letter to the requestor on behalf of the Council.

Discussion of FY 24 Firefighter Program requests, two documents are distributed.

Eight requests were received from around the State. The Fire Academy reviewed the request against where programs have been previously, where they are going next year, and the amount of information supplied by the requestor.

The Fire Academy supports the following five requests to be approved, with a total of seven since individuals are allowed to jump into the Firefighter II portions of the combined programs.

- Sheldon Fire Department sent in county request with 16 applications for a Firefighter I
- Shelburne sent in a county request with 23 applications for a Firefighter I and II
- Ludlow sent in a coordinated request with 18 applications for a Firefighter I and II
- Middlebury sent in a county request with 1 application for a Firefighter I however they did not have a class last year and they typically have good student turnout.
- Bethel sent in a request with three applications for a Firefighter I this is an area who hasn't had a class in quite some time and their students will come from the top of Windsor County and the Southern portion of Washington County.

The Newport request is not recommended since the request said they would take any level meaning that had not determined a specific need for those in the area like the other requests had. In the last fiscal year there was a class in Danville that is a 40-minute drive from Newport that turned out low numbers. The year prior to that there was a program offered in Orleans which is a 15-minute drive from Newport and there were also poor numbers. The Academy does not feel like the area has built a student base strong enough to support a program in that area.

The East Montpelier request came with five applications. They requested a program last year and were not awarded, but there were two other programs in the area; one 15 minutes away and one 40 minutes away and they chose not to enroll in those offerings. The Academy does not believe that the student base is in that area.

The Brattleboro request came with no applications and in FY23 there was a program that alternated between Marlboro and Putney and there were very low student numbers. In FY22 a program was offered in Wilmington that did not have high turnout. The Academy does not believe the student demonstration of need is there at this time.

A motion is made endorsing the program locations supported by the Fire Academy by Dan Whipple and seconded by Chief Collette. Motion passed unanimously.

There are lots of other courses that will be offered around the state. Three PADO's, stand-alones, and NFA classes are finalized for the upcoming year. There is a discussion that this is a resource problem and not a budgetary reason for limiting the program offerings. No hybrid program will be offered this year but is planned for FY25.

Discussion that the Vice-Chair elections can wait until the next election since there are many

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Proxy's in the meeting today.

Motion is made to table the Vice-Chair election until the October meeting by Chief Collette, and seconded by Chief Estey. Motion passes unanimously.

Coalition Report:

There has not been a meeting since the last coalition.

Vermont Career Chiefs: (Collette)

The last meeting was on May 25. The New England Chief conference is moving to October and will be at Mohegan Sun.

Vermont State Firefighters Association: (Estey)

No report

Vermont Fire Chiefs: (Gene Perkins)

No report

Professional Firefighters of Vermont:

Vacant

Agency of Natural Resources: (Lund)

Absent

Department of Education: (Evans)

Absent

Department of Health: (Dubie)

The Training Administrator position has been reposted. The Vermont EMS Leadership and various pediatric training are going well. Ambulance Inspections are underway.

Department of Labor: (Whipple)

No Report

Vermont Domestic Insurance: (Miles)

Absent

General Public: (Marcus)

Five new applicants on May 13th as a result of the Make me a Firefighter campaign in his local town.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 12, 2023 location to be announced.

Chief Estey made a motion to adjourn the meeting, motion seconded by Chief Collette. Motion passed unanimously.