

Vermont Fire Service Training Council
Minutes of the October 12, 2023 Meeting

The meeting was held at the South Burlington Fire Department 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	Absent	
Vermont Fire Chiefs Association	Absent	
Commissioner of the Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation	Lars Lund	(virtual)
Professional Firefighters of Vermont	Alex Spencer	
Commissioner of the Department of Health	Bambi Dame	(virtual)
Vermont State Firefighters Association	F. Thomas Estey	
Commissioner of the Department of Labor	Dan Whipple	(virtual)
Vermont Domestic Insurance	Matt Miles	(virtual)
Division of Fire Safety Director	GJ Garrow	(virtual)
General Public	John Marcus, Vice Chairperson	
Commissioner of Public Safety	Dan Batsie	(virtual)

Other Attendees: Michael Skaza, Jessica Pomainville, Bill Jones, Christopher Pixley, and Christopher Corbin

It is Fire Prevention Week and John Marcus thanked all the fire departments of Vermont for the work that they do every day.

Modification of Meeting Agenda:

Add a third request for a waiver under new business.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion made by Chief Estey and seconded by Lieutenant Spencer to accept the minutes from the June 8, 2023 meeting. Motion passed.

Report from the Executive Director of the Division of Fire Safety: GJ Garrow

The Division of Fire Safety is heavily engaged in an energy efficiency study and there is a strong desire to move all aspects of energy efficiency to the Division of Fire Safety. The Division is also actively engaged in a housing study with a focus on efforts to support the construction of affordable housing.

The Governor signed a proclamation recognizing Fire Prevention Week and there are numerous fire safety education programs occurring this week.

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The Division of Fire Safety has assembled a budget for USAR and the Commissioner of Public Safety has made this her number one priority for a new initiative.

Director Desrochers has met with national fire service leaders at the National Fire Academy and he attended the 2023 Fire Prevention Presidential Summit where work groups worked on several national initiatives to include wildfire, firefighter cancer, recruitment and retention, data technology, EV fires, and codes and standards.

The Pittsford training complex governance committee is working on a capital construction bill request to enhance projects at the facility's main building, the west cottage, and the connection of the complex to the municipal wastewater system.

Report from the Chief of Training: Michael Skaza

Chief Skaza welcomed Alex Spencer as a new member of the Council.

The Fire Academy continues to struggle with personnel resources including instructor scheduling. The Training Coordinator position has been posted since being vacated by Micah Genzlinger. Candidates have been interviewed without any success. We have another interview scheduled for next Wednesday. The Site Coordinator position has been posted several times and interviews have been conducted without success. This position has been reposted. Anne Briere joined our staff as a part-time Administrative Assistant. Kenyon Lord has resigned as an instructor and four new instructors have been hired: Will Moran, Nate Bourne, Kevin Kuzio, and Keith Branche. There are two others in the hiring process.

Matt Miles, Skip Bothfield, and John Marcus have been reappointed to the Training Council. Alex Spencer has been newly appointed to represent PFFV on the Training Council.

The FY23 budget ended with a \$300,000 carry forward due to vacancy savings, resource limited offerings, and deferred maintenance due to staffing. The cost savings have allowed the Academy to push forward with other costly initiatives such as tablets to start electronic testing. The Fire Academy's FY24 budget saw a \$300,000 General Fund increase allowing all full-time salaries to be moved back into the General Fund, from the special fund which was in the Fire Academy's Strategic Plan. The total General Fund and Special Fund budget is \$2.6 million. The Fire Academy plans to bring in some contract training focusing on upper-level topics and advanced level training.

The Fire Academy is currently managing \$1,029,026 across seven different grant awards.

In September the Fire Academy was awarded \$173,583 in HMEP grant funding. We were expecting a 9.7% reduction in the award from the previous year but were offered an additional \$66,000 award due to our high grant performance rating. In addition to funding hazardous materials training, this grant will partially fund a full-time position to support the Vermont Hazardous Materials Response team, assist the statewide LEPC, and oversee Tier II reporting.

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The Fire Academy received an AFG22 Grant Award in the amount of \$175,527 in federal funds with a \$17,553 match, bringing the total budget to \$193,080. The Fire Academy plans to purchase a second fully equipped PADO trailer, rescue manikins, tools, PPE, furnishing props for the burn building, and a cargo trailer.

All the Firefighter programs are up and running, break down is:

Program	Location	Orientation	Current	
Firefighter I	Bethel	26	21	
Firefighter I	Ludlow	39	35	
Firefighter I	Middlebury	33	31	
Firefighter I	Shelburne	37	29	
Firefighter I	Sheldon	22	14	
Fire Officer I/II	Hybrid/VFA	15	14	
PADO	Stowe	12	12	
Total		172	156 (91%)	
PADO	Woodstock	11	NA	Starts 10/14
Firefighter II (January start)	Ludlow	39 registered	NA	Starts in January
Firefighter II (January start)	Shelburne	40 registered	NA	Starts in January

The Fire Academy coordinated a Regional Fire School Group meeting which was held at the Fire Academy and virtually on June 28th. The Upper Valley Regional Fire School was held on September 16th and experienced low enrollment overall. The VFA offering at this regional fire school was canceled due to low enrollment. The Franklin Lamoille Regional Fire School was held on September 23 and 24. Enrollment improved over last year, but the VFA offering canceled due to low enrollment.

The FY24 National Fire Academy Course Offerings have been awarded and they are:

- DMICO (F0457) - Washington County (Warren) January 6 & 7, 2024
- Incident Safety Officer (F0729) - Orleans County (Newport) January 20 & 21, 2024
- Fire Investigation for First Responder (F0770) - Addison County (Middlebury) February 10 & 11, 2024
- Exercising Leadership through Difficult Conversation (F0522) - Chittenden County (Williston) February 24 & 25, 2024
- Incident Command System and Resource Management for the Fire Service (F0376) - Rutland County (Castleton) March 9 & 10, 2024
- PICO (F0458) - Bennington County (Bennington Rural) March 23 & 24, 2024

The Fire Academy was able to secure a regional six-day NFA class by working with the other Region 1 fire academies. This will be a Fire Inspection Principles II: Inspection of Structures

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and Systems held at the Fire Academy from March 18 to March 23, 2024. This is a difficult class to get into on-campus at the NFA, so we hope that this effort alleviates that hardship.

The National Fire Academy Three State weekend will be held on June 22 and 23, 2024 in Emmitsburg MD.

The Fire Academy has been working on several curriculum projects. A Lithium-Ion Battery Fire Awareness course has been developed and two train-the-trainer sessions were conducted. The Fire Academy is currently enrolling students in five different regional offerings.

The Fire Officer I/II has transitioned to the 4th edition of the Jones and Bartlett curriculum and NFPA 1021, 2020 edition.

The Hazardous Materials Awareness/Operations is transitioning to the 6th Edition of the IFSTA curriculum in compliance with NFPA 470, 2022 edition.

Since the last Council meeting the Fire Academy has completed the second of two consecutive deliveries of Fire Instructor I. 19 students certified in the first class and 18 students certified in the second. The Fire Academy has held two Rope Awareness/Operations programs using a contractor supported by VFA Instructors. There were 20 students enrolled in the July offering and 15 in the August offering.

The July offering of the Roper Awareness/Operations class had certification exam issues with a 15% first-attempt pass rate, all failures were within the Awareness section of the exam. The Fire Academy reviewed and revised the exam after finding poor questions within the test bank. There was a 90% overall pass rate on the second attempt. The August class certification exam had a 60% first-attempt pass rate, and students are still in the retesting phase.

To date, the East Cottage has had 907 overnight stays.

For Council awareness, the requirement for full-time firefighter certification and recertification (Title 20 §3155 and Rules section 5.2.1) does not give enforcement authority nor a penalty for non-compliance. There is a discussion on what other trades have for penalties for non-compliance. Chief Skaza shared an overview of situations that the Fire Academy has encountered recently regarding full-time firefighters without proper Vermont certification. Matt Miles will do some research to see if there is any case history regarding a department being sued for having uncredentialed firefighters and being found liable.

The Fire Academy has been told that there are no restrictions on using the on-site food service at the Fire Academy.

The Chief of Training rates the status of the instructor shortages as critical since the Fire Academy is reducing its offerings based on the inability to staff classes. The Fire Academy has been continuously recruiting instructors. The Fire Academy has entertained the idea of adding some full-time instructor positions, but the Fire Academy is not in a position to ask for more full-time positions when they are already carrying position openings. The Fire Academy is working hard to fill open instructor holes. There is a discussion about the generational changes in interest in becoming an instructor.

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Report from the Council Chair:

No Report

Committees:

Governance Committee (Marcus)

A wastewater study is going to begin on the Pittsford campus. The Pittsford campus can not support more growth at this time without this work.

Unfinished Business:

The Rule change package submittal is about to go to ICAR for review in November. The Council gets to decide if a public meeting needs to be held. Chairperson Marcus asks the group if anyone objects to holding a public meeting. No one objects to holding a public meeting.

New Business:

Rule 5.1.2 requires that within one year of being hired as a career firefighter, an individual shall be properly certified. If in that one period, a firefighter experiences a hardship and cannot accomplished certification, the rules give the Chief of Training the authority to issue a waiver of up to an additional 12 months if that request is made within one year of the date of hire.

The three requests that are being presented came after one year of working as a full-time firefighter therefore the Chief of Training cannot act on them, however, the Council may act under the authority of the rules.

The first request is from Chief Howard of the Brattleboro Fire Department and is for firefighter Kyle Makridakis who was hired on June 27, 2022. He came from out of state and does not have Pro Board certification, has been working on getting himself ready to challenge the exam, and has a challenge exam scheduled for next week.

Chief Collette makes a motion to allow the waiver for the Brattleboro Firefighter, seconded by Spencer, motion passed unanimously.

The second request is from Chief Lovett of the Rutland City Fire Department and is for firefighter Zachary Ames. He came from out of state and does have Pro Board certification. He previously served on a volunteer department in Rutland County that failed to submit a reciprocity application and believed he had Vermont certification. He was then hired in Rutland City and it came to light when he applied for an upper-level class that required certification and was denied. Ames will either challenge Firefighter II, pass Fire Officer, or the rule will change and allow him to receive Vermont certification through reciprocity.

Chief Estey makes a motion to allow the waiver for the Rutland Firefighter, seconded by Collette, motion passed unanimously.

The third request comes from Chief Stagner and Deputy Chief Claughlin of the Springfield Fire Department and is for firefighter Nick Skrocki. This is a firefighter who gained certification out of state and was employed by a career firefighter for about three years and no reciprocity request was filed. He then changed fire departments and told his new department (Springfield) that he

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was all set with reciprocity. Springfield added him to their recertification roster and the Fire Academy informed the department he was not eligible for Vermont certification but did not follow-up further because Springfield is a combination department. It was assumed that the firefighter was a call firefighter, which does not statutorily require certification. The new leadership in Springfield was informed that Skrocki was not Vermont certified. The career firefighter has been on a career department for six years without Vermont certification. Springfield Fire is requesting a one-year extension starting on October 12 and as soon as the rule changes the firefighter will apply for reciprocity with the belief that he will qualify for reciprocity. Springfield Fire Department has said verbally that they are working with the prior fire chief to supply proof of 24 hours of continuing education for the three years that he was on a previous department.

Chief Collette makes a motion that the Training Council will apply the extension upon confirmation by the Fire Academy on the evaluation of the portfolio that the continuing education had been maintained through the duration from the initial certification on, however if the rule change does not go through the firefighter will need to challenge the Firefighter I exam. Seconded by Chief Estey, the motion passed unanimously.

Coalition Report:

The new Chair is Chris Dube. There is a meeting in Hartford coming up. Discussion that there is no member of the coalition on the Council.

Vermont Career Chiefs: (Collette)

The last meeting was on September 28th in Rutland City. Several career departments have vacancies and studies are being conducted on what causes might be for vacancies. There was a discussion about pending EMS changes. The New England Career Chiefs conference was held at Mohegan Sun and there were several good speakers delivering very good information.

Vermont State Firefighters Association: (Estey)

The annual meeting was held on August 4, 5, and 6 in Newport. There was quite a bit of discussion about retention and recruitment. The new President of VSFA is John (Pecker) Heffernan.

Vermont Fire Chiefs: (Skip Bothfield)

Absent

Professional Firefighters of Vermont: (Spencer)

Alex is trying to motivate PFFV members to work for the Fire Academy.

Agency of Natural Resources: (Lund)

There are some major changes coming in the Forest Protection section with the Agency of Natural Resources with Fire and Forest Health being split. Lars will no longer be the ANR representative on the Fire Service Training Council. It is not clear right now if Lars will be able to continue to teach within the Wildland course offerings.

Department of Education: (Evans)

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Absent

Department of Health: (Dame)

The Department of Health was legislatively mandated to conduct a study looking at the challenges and opportunities related to EMS and emergency response coordination looking for recommendations for improvement. The Department of Health hired a contractor to assist with this study. Four open regional meetings have been held. There seemed to be a misunderstanding that the study was trying to regionalize EMS, however, the goal is to improve and sustain EMS in Vermont. All the meetings are posted on the EMS website. There is also a way to submit public comments.

EMS is redesigning AEMT classes and was looking for feedback on the redesign. The EMS educational council never submitted comments to the EMS advisory committee. EMS is looking to switch testing methods to a proficiency-based testing method.

Department of Labor: (Whipple)

The Federal/State meeting was held in New York. There was a discussion of FEMA's heat regulation that may become an OSHA regulation. A COVID (pandemic) rule is being developed and will primarily affect healthcare, but first responders may be affected by it.

Vermont Domestic Insurance: (Miles)

No report

General Public: (Marcus)

No report

Election of Council Chair and Vice-Chair positions.

A Motion is made by Chief Collette to nominate John Marcus as the Council Chair for the Vermont Fire Service Training Council for the next term and seconded by Chief Estey. After hearing no other nominations, Chief Estey cast one ballot for John Marcus to be the next Council Chair.

A Motion is made by Chief Collette to nominate Chief Estey as the Council Vice-Chair for the Vermont Fire Service Training Council for the next term and seconded by Marcus. After hearing no other nominations, Chief Collette cast one ballot for Chief Estey to be the next Council Vice-Chair.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 8, 2024 at the Fire Academy in Pittsford.

Lieutenant Spencer makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Lars Lund. The motion passed unanimously.