

Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission Meeting

Official Meeting Minutes

April 11, 2013

Commission Members Present:

Mike Arnold	Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association
Michael Donahue	Chancellor's Designee from LSU
Louis Romero	Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana
Dwayne Thevis	Louisiana State Fire Fighters Association
Boyd Westbrook	Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association
Butch Browning	State Fire Marshal's Office
Kenny Hunts	
Chad Major	

Other Attendees

Loree Ramezan – FETI
Miranda Meynard – FETI
Carey King – FETI
Stephen Gibbs – FETI
Ricky Gary - FETI
Jacques Picou - LFCA

The meeting was called to order. Mr. Browning noted that Chairperson St. Germain was still in legislative session, and proceeded to lead the Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer.

The roll was called, and every member but Ms. St. Germain was found to be present. The Chairman's Report was due, but the committee was in agreement that the report could wait until Ms. St. Germain could be in attendance.

Budget and Financial Report

In reviewing the Budget and Financial report, Mr. Donahue said, in the handout reviewed, "the most important line as it applies to this commission is about a third of the way down. That's Np. 17040-0001. We are about \$300,000 behind our projections, and that's salaries. At this point in time, when we made the budget, our director was supposed to be on board, a regional manager was supposed to be on board, and two regional coordinator instructors were supposed to be on board, so they weren't all going to be on at the beginning of the year, but if you pro rate that, that means a salary savings of about \$300,000 and if it finishes the year like that, then that money will flow to the plan account. As we

discussed earlier, and that will just mean that the plan account will get to a million dollars in the first year instead of the second year. Then as we discussed, we'll budget to 100% from here on out and just have that plant fund as a reserve. If you look at some details, we have a few issues with some slow invoicing and some of our industrial, but I assure you, it's not lack of sales, because sales aren't reflected until the cash is received. Because we are well, well, well ahead of last year. Laurie, can you tell me just how far we are ahead of last year? In general for the whole revenue, self-generated?"

Loree Ramezan replied, "Based on these numbers, last year we were actually down or in the red by \$499,000. This year, we're in the black at \$218,000. This is our key season for industrial."

Mr. Donahue added, "That's when we're close by a half million dollars that hasn't been invoiced. We still have not collected. This is our peak season for industrial, and our Part I is again this year. Thank you, Loree. The relevance for us is that as we raise the industrial revenue, that allows us to do that overhead shift to where a greater portion of the fixed expenses get charged or allocated there."

The question was posed, "What are those numbers?"

Mr. Donahue replied, "Currently the number is \$ 5347. Currently it's \$ 5347. Municipal is paying 53% of the load, while Industrial is paying 47%, but as for those numbers. We could hopefully say that we would be 50/50 running next year, and then keep growing the industrial side, and that's in fact a raise for our municipal training."

"It creates a stat for us to use, if we pay less for those overhead costs, then we have more money to spend on municipal programs."

The comment was added, "Without getting any additional revenue from taxes."

Mr. Westbrook posed a question to Mr. Donahue, "You were saying that it's going to move out of stat debt? Where's that going to go?"

Mr. Donahue noted that it is directed into the plant fund.

Westbrook queried, "Where is that on here?"

The committee members took note that the plant fund is off by itself.

Mr. Donahue reported that P841, the plant fund, currently has \$403,000 in it, commenting that "If you remember, very early in the year I said that our goal was to add about \$350,000 back into the plant fund, and then next year have \$350,000. When we had \$100 million in reserves, then we would go budget to 100% of our projected revenue, because currently we budget to about 88 to 90 percent. When I mention the salary savings, that is just to inform that we're potentially getting to that million dollars sooner."

Noting approval, Mr. Westbrook continued, "So this is the question, Mike. I know your revenues dropped off for a while. What is a safe budget number for that plant fund to be generated every year? So, is it about \$430,000 that you think it will generate this year?"

Mr. Donahue responded, "This is a bank balance, and as such it's a fund balance. We started the year with \$403,000 in the account. Anything that is not spent by the stat debt rolls into that account."

Mr. Westbrook pursued the question, "I guess my question is, what do you think your revenue will be over expenses each year? Do you have an idea of what that should be?"

Mr. Donahue replied, "Typically, I budgeted this year for \$350,000 and I will budget next year for \$350,000. That would get us to that magic million, but what I'm saying is that we may actually get to a little better than a half a million this year -- because of the vacancies in personnel."

The query continued, "And so roughly about \$300,000 a year? You think you have revenue over expenses?"

Mr. Donahue clarified his reply. "Right. The reason we do that is that we don't know what the taxes will be, so we can't budget. I don't feel comfortable today with only a \$400,000 emergency fund to budget 100% of projected revenues, because they've never hit in the last seven years."

The question was satisfied, followed by another query: "This money that's left over, it's swept?"

Mr. Donahue noted that "No, it never has."

Mr. Westbrook continued, "This money doesn't get swept. It goes to LSU. It doesn't get swept there?"

Mr. Donahue assured in his response, "No. It stays at FETI. It's at an LSU account. In the history of the FETI account, the fund has never been swept."

Mr. Westbrook commented, "I'm not talking about the plant account. I'm talking about the stat debt."

Mr. Donahue answered, "Well, the stat debt can't get swept. Maybe indirect costs would cure the question you are asking, Boyd."

Mr. Westbrook responded, "The question I'm asking is when the governor balances the budget every year, to use all this one time money, when we use all this one time money, it goes to the sweeps -- all these funds. There was money left over from the Fire Marshall's Fund; when it wasn't distributed, it got swept. And they used it, and threw it back into the general fund."

Mr. Donahue noted, "But all the money was statutorily dedicated."

Mr. Westbrook replied, "If he wanted, to, he could come get it. Is that the right answer?"

Mr. Donahue replied, "If you don't spend it, I mean in the history of FETI, the plant account has never been swept. Maybe indirect costs would cure it -- what you are asking, Boyd."

Mr. Westbrook said, "But all that money wasn't statutorily ... "

Mr. Donahue answered, "I didn't notice what it was, I didn't look at it last year. I thought the question you asked regarding the university was the indirect costs, the things the university might charge our attorney for services."

Mr. Westbrook continued, "LSU -- we're fixed at 3% for this year. Is that correct?"

Mr. Donahue responded, "The cost of that is \$1,730,003, but the indirect costs this year would be taxed for them for \$2 million 14 thousand. Campus is taking a total of \$214,000 from FETI and basically what happened is that's the same allocation; 53% of that is paid by the stat debt, and 47 percent is by industry."

Mr. Westbrook asked, "What exactly are the services for?"

Mr. Donahue noted, "I can provide a whole list, because it's for safety, police, HR, accounts payable, travel -- all of the stuff that they process before it goes in, and the biggest chunk actually of the 214 thousand is safety. It's like \$55,000 we have to pay to Rabelais and Company. Chief Rabelais, the police chief of campus. This year we will be taxed by them for \$214 thousand dollars. And that hasn't happened. Where's that at? So campus is taking a total of \$114 thousand dollars from FETI and basically, that is the same allocation."

Mr. Donahue called for any further questions on the budget, and acknowledged a motion to approve the financial statement in the budget.

A motion was extended by Mr. Hunts to approve the financial budget, and was seconded by Dwight Davis.

There was a call for any objections. The motion was then so moved .

Directors Report

Mr. Donahue remarked, "Briefly, our Survey has been out now for little over a week. We've had 57 responses as of yesterday morning. The good news is there has not been a rash of ping backs or undeliverable mail as we thought there might be. We're scheduled to do a follow-up, and then close in five weeks and hopefully within thirty days of the close, they can tabulate and we will have a report generated for FETI as well as the commission. Our hands are not in any of the tabulation."

The query from the members was, "it went to the Fire Chiefs?"

Mr. Donahue said, "Yes."

The query was tendered, "Did you get one? You would have sent it to Chad to send out?"

Mr. Donahue replied, "No. It was an e-mail that came directly from LSU to whatever the email address for the Chief of your department is."

Mr. Gate responded, "Mike, I got the e-mail . I filled out mine; I had one of my sub districts that has a separate FD ID. So when I tried to open the link for a second time, it said, 'Thank you for completing this survey. Over.' So if I forward that email and he clicks on that link, will it open for him?"

Mr. Donahue deferred the question to Loree Ramezan, computer specialist, who said, "Yes. If you forward that link, it will work. It is from your computer, based on your ID address which is unique to your machine, and so it blogs that. So it knows that you have completed it and it will not let you complete it twice. As long as it's not a machine on which you have computed. Use another one, like at your station, but the computer has to be different.

Mr. Gate offered, "I have a radio room, which is serves for an office," to which Mr. Donahue replied, "But you definitely have to use unique FEID numbers."

Mr. Donahue reported, "Something that is near and dear to my heart, but I just can seem to get it accomplished yet. I talked to a person, a director at financial administrative services, and they tell that we are two to three weeks away from our new and improved. It went for separate approval and there were some questions, and then it got kicked back to risk management. But my hope against hope is that before our next meeting ... and they promised me that it will be a concise, one-page document, that it doesn't take a JD to interpret."

A committee member said, "I've got some phone calls on the progress and I think it's been fantastic. We're looking forward to seeing it."

Mr. Donahue informed the group, "This commission met in executive session this afternoon with a tremendous degree of cooperation and insight; the 27 names were reduced to a lower number, and we will continue this selection process. At such a point in time as the nominees have been interviewed, then their names will be released to the general public. Prior to their having contact, we don't feel it's appropriate to release the names for consideration.

Mr. Phillips asked about the remaining number of candidates: "Can you tell us how many you narrowed it down to? 3 or 5?"

Mr. Donahue replied, "I think the right number is 9 -- 27 to 9. A number from out of state will be contacted by phone. The job description doesn't say everything. So we have to discuss benefits, and salary, and all those other issues. Someone could have applied for the job with the expectation that it was paying a quarter of a million dollars when in reality it's not anything close to that. People could remove themselves voluntarily from consideration. Once those phone calls are made, there's going to be an interview panel made up of the state fire marshal, myself, and a director from human resources that will physically interview each and every one. Then the next step of the process will be to report back to this commission the results, and then ask for some consensus to move forward to do an open public forum interview process like a provost search, where those candidates come in and we open it up to the public at large and the fire service especially, to come and meet these people, ask them questions under HRM approval, and ultimately take the feedback from that and make the final decision."

A committee member remarked, "I appreciated the group's work over the last few hours. Actually, that was the easy part. It was reading through loads and loads of document for the week and a half, two weeks. I was certainly was impressed by the applicants' work over the past few hours. I would like to say publicly, this is really the first time a director has been hired through this process. If you look at some of the past directors, they were really just hired by the university, or they were hired under a different type of interview committee. I like the process of making the final step public. And people get to see. But I can tell you from the outside looking in, I think everybody has gotten a fair shake so far -- there's been no "just cut people off." If they took the time to apply, they've gotten a fair shake.

The subject of old business, the monthly meeting date, was introduced.

Mr. Donahue reiterated, "Dwayne worked out that list, and we were going to have some further discussion of how frequently we wanted to do this as a road show. That list was every month for the next twelve months. "We were traveling from Baton Rouge, so we tabled the discussion for another meeting that asks whether once a quarter is an appropriate time. I prefer our meeting to be probably every other month at least. I think quarterly is not as frequent a time as we need.

"We still intend to meet every month but in a road show. So we can meet once a quarter in Monroe, or Lake Charles, so every third month, we go away from Baton Rouge."

One member responded, "This thing is starting to get more fluid and moving along. I personally don't see the need for us to be meeting as much. I think we can meet every other month, and accomplish what we're doing today our actual meeting agenda is really not that hard in resolving some of the issues for fifteen or twenty minutes.

Mr. Donahue replied, "Can we do that with the legislation that says "requires monthly meetings?"

The member's remark noted that several service oriented conferences happened throughout the year, in April , August, and October, and had a number of fire service members attending, posing the thought that attendance could work in tandem with the other conferences. Road show is never in the same place, so this year's conference is never where the next year's conference is.

Mr. Donahue replied, "That's a great idea and a wonderful compromise."

it was voiced that going on the road was unnecessary at that point in time until a new director would be put into place. Since the rules for action require a majority, t would be difficult to vote since no proxy or phone conferences were allowed. The member stated, "I think we really need to change that law because I really don't think it's necessary to meet each month. If we need to meet every month, we really need to hire another director."

Mr. Donahue noted, "We're bumping up against a date. If I'm not mistaken, were scheduled for the second Thursday of every month. That would be slap in the middle of CFSI."

The discussion set a date for May 2nd, 3 p.m. , same locale, and for June 13th at 3:00 p.m.

Mr. Donahue added that the next one would be fixed by the LSF, and that they were required by law to post an agenda for the public, where the duty would be held. Having heard that the LFS was going to be August 2nd, there was a suggestion by a member for July 11th with an opening for possible postponement.

The chair called for old or new business, and recognized Mr. Boyd.

Mr. Boyd noted that he had been busy and was unable to give proper attention to the financial reports and would be resigning after the director hiring process was complete, and that he intended to be present at meetings until that time. His involvement was appreciated by the group.

CDL Legislation

Mr. Donahue was invited to discuss CDL legislation. Mr. Donahue replied that he and Butch met with Commissioner Campbell and Assistant Stacy Haight regarding legislation to exempt FETI employees from CDL requirements due to the weight load, or size of vehicle. When the original exemptions were written, there was no federal legislation due for the interstate and federal highway system. State law reads, "Any individual who is an active volunteer or on the roster of a paid department, either contract or full time, that they are exempt from the CDL requirements, irrespective of whose vehicle they're driving." Having read the state regulations, the federal administrators agree that FETI employees remain exempt. With the commissioner's backing, FETI has only to persuade the risk management at LSU that the ruling is correct. It supersedes.

Mr. Donahue noted, "I want to publicly to thank you gentlemen very much for the process, it was great, and I really truly appreciate your advice and counsel and looking forward to get this thing moving forward with the skids greased."

There was a motion to adjourn, which was seconded.

Minutes submitted by:

Approved by:



7-3-2013

