

Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission Meeting

Meeting Minutes

October 11, 2012

Commission Members Present:

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| Mike Arnold | Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association |
| Butch Browning | State Fire Marshal |
| Michael Donahue | Chancellor's Designee from LSU |
| Kenny Hunts | Louisiana State Fire Fighters Association |
| Chad Major | Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana |
| Louis Romero | Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana |
| Karen St. Germain | Louisiana State Representative, Governor's Appointee |
| Dwayne Thevis | Louisiana State Fire Fighters Association |
| Boyd Westbrook | Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association |

Other Attendees

Lori Ramezan – FETI
Miranda Meynard – FETI
Helen Valentine – FETI
Corey Miller – FETI
David Newman – FETI
Eddie Pyle – FETI
Eddie Tessmer – FETI
Wayne Cruse – FETI
Dennis Ford – Circola Fire
Ed Smith – Baton Rouge
Barry Mounce – Baton Rouge Fire Department
Chuck Albert – LFCA
Rusty Lenard – FETI
Thomas Stone – St. Bernard Parish
Nick Palmer – FETI
Carey King – FETI
Christine Melancon – FETI
Alan Joos - FETI

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Karen St. Germain at 3:04 p.m.

St. Germain noted that acceptance of the minutes would be voted on at the next meeting to give commission members more time to read them.

The group said the Pledge of Allegiance and opened the meeting with prayer.

St. Germain noted that the Vice Chairman, State Fire Marshal Butch Browning, had just added something to the agenda. She added that time for public comment would be provided at the end of the meeting, because the commission wants the meetings to be inclusive.

Financial and Budget Report

Commissioner Boyd Westbrook reported that the Financial Subcommittee met at the FETI building on the previous Tuesday and spent three hours reviewing the financial condition of FETI. He said commission members now have a better understanding of what's going on, but are not prepared to explain it yet. He said the Finance Subcommittee would have a presentation prepared for the next meeting.

Commissioner Kenny Hunts agreed with Westbrook's comments adding, "We've got it in our hands. It's a little more fluid for us now, but we need another month to be able to provide input."

St. Germain agreed to give the subcommittee an additional month to prepare its report.

Director Michael Donahue directed the commission's attention to the balance sheets provided and noted that the first grouping of six accounts are private, foundation-based accounts, which do not include public funds. In the next group is the plant account, which won't change on the monthly reports. The next grouping is accounts wholly or partially funded with state funds. The last grouping is FETI's grant accounts.

Westbrook added that the balance sheet reflects last year's year-to-date balances.

Donahue added that FETI has had a very successful month since the last meeting. Training has taken place without incident. There have been no unusual or major purchases or extraordinary maintenance expenses. FETI also received a donation from a Louisiana vendor to install at no cost a caf system on Tiger 2 so our recruits can train on technology that they don't have today.

On October 26, the Pine Country facility is having an open house for local business. He said FETI hoped to create new partnerships with the local energy production and transmission industry to execute training at that facility.

St. Germain approved the effort to reach out to industry, noting she had had lunch with someone with someone from Shintech, who said the company has no plans to move out of state.

Night Drill Recovery Costs

Westbrook reported that FETI is working on a plan to schedule night drills once a month. Fire departments can preregister, so FETI can ensure they have the right personnel on site. The new approach is a work in progress, but the subcommittee has some ideas that will help any department interested in coming here to meet rating requirements for night drills. They plan to come out with a schedule that goes out to everyone. It will be a great opportunity to relieve those costs they had thought FETI would have to incur.

Donahue added that the schedule will be multijurisdictional, rather than department-specific.

Westbrook said he had spoken with Chief Albert about getting with PIAL to get them to recognize that as a training facility that can be used for those drills.

Browning asked what happens if the department doesn't have a training facility.

Nick Palmer, the manager of the Pine Country facility, responded that that's why they are trying to get the PIAL recognition as a training facility. "It's working up there. I don't see why it wouldn't work here" he said.

"We want to make it a center-based class, but the cost is shared because they'll still need to have instructors and adjuncts here," Westbrook explained. "We'll have a Saturday session that starts at 1 p.m., then a night drill Saturday and another session on Sunday morning. Departments will be able to get three of their 14 drills needed done."

Browning suggested opening it up completely. "The starting point is working with the state facility here to solidify that," he said. "If we get the PIAL Board to approve that concept, the next step is recognized drill facilities across the state."

St. Germain agreed saying, "Part of the problem having it in one stop like this, the people in the surrounding area get to use it more than the rest. If we could open it up more, let's make that happen as soon as possible."

Hunts said he thinks it's a good opportunity, and Bob Moore is easy to work with, but FETI needs to take it one step at a time. He said he is developing a proposal, which he will distribute to the commission upon completion.

Hunts also discussed center-based "I" training. The plan is that for the next year, FETI would always have at least one guaranteed class, no matter how many people show up for it. Sometimes classes have been cancelled because they only had 5 or 6 people. FETI needs to guarantee a solid date because some departments give out the training schedule for the year, members of the department request the training they want and then they schedule vacations. If a class gets cancelled, it messes everything up. This way FETI can tell them that classes are guaranteed.

Donahue agreed with that concept wholeheartedly.

Westbrook suggested funneling everyone into two classes so they'll make, adding that FETI has to also look at cost.

St. Germain asked if the proposal will be finalized by the next meeting. Hunts replied that they could have a calendar by mid-November, but the subcommittee will need to meet about it first to make sure it is satisfactory to Donahue.

Donahue said he believed they could have an agreement in place before the calendar is published, but they need to look at which months to have guaranteed classes. If there are too many, FETI will split the class and do 2-3 in the same week.

Hunts promised to have a meeting by November 1.

St. Germain said the commission will vote on it at the next meeting.

Weekend School

Wayne Cruse provided a status report on weekend school. He said as manager for Regions 1 and 2, he's had a lot of requests for the mini schools which used to be offered. He has scheduled one for Oct 27-28. As of now, he has about 30 registered for the firemanship section, 19-20 in officer training and 19-20 for pumps. He is bringing in certified instructors from around the state to help teach that weekend. The registration fee is \$50 per person. It covers hotels and meals for instructors. He said the class will be held regardless of the registration numbers. He'll adjust the number of instructors according to number of trainees registered. Trainers will concentrate on municipal fire fighting in both single-story and multi-story buildings.

Hunts suggested that any problems with attendance may be attributed to hunting season.

Cruse responded that he plans to advertise at LSFA, but had to hold off because of paperwork. He plans to offer two of these weekend schools in 2013 and advertise them better. There are plans to do one in spring and one in fall. He is also planning to re-introduce fire college, which is 40 hours of training, instead of weekend school. He wants to put one of those on in the upcoming year and see how it does.

Palmer noted that if the Center is planning to offer two classes rather than four, he needs to be part of that conversation. He explained that part of his responsibility is scheduling those center-based classes not only at Pine Country but at FETI as well. He said it is a very delicate balancing act the way those things are scheduled right now, because he has to coordinate with other instructors. Both inspector and investigator training have already been narrowed down to two classes—spring and fall (here) and a summer class at Pine Country. If those classes are going to be moved around, he needs to know.

Donahue responded that scheduling will remain as it is for now. Discussion will center on which classes to guarantee.

Approval of FETI Director Job Description

Westbrook noted that he had suggested not requiring a degree for the position. He would prefer someone with a bachelor's degree, but fears the requirement will limit the pool of applicants. He said the change he had submitted, but did not have in front of him, was similar to fire chief requirements that asked for a degree or a number of years of experience.

Donahue said he recently attended the Annual Meeting of Fire Training Directors, which has varying degrees of requirements for the job. In almost every instance, if there's a degree waiver, it lists a

substitution. like x number of years experience and attendance at the National Fire Training Academy's executive degree program. Also, there are some qualifications for business/managerial classes like Certified Public Manager. Without the degree, there are opportunities to demonstrate expertise other than years of experience.

Chuck Albert of the Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association suggested the Commission consider all the components of the field of firefighting.

"If you limit your field to people with a bachelor's degree, there are some people you look at with a degree and say, 'Really.' By allowing the *or* factor, you allow more people in the pool for the Commission to have more options. Everyone on the commission hopes you pick a director that promotes this facility, grows this facility and trains the fire fighters in the state every day. Some of you are pro-education, and I am pro-education, because I teach college as well, but if we limit ourselves to academic degrees, we limit ourselves."

Hunts added that education is very important, but people trust the guys who have experience.

Audience member Thomas of St. Charles Parish suggested inserting language about the candidate having experience with a budget of the size of FETI or greater, but Commission member Chad Major disagreed saying, "We already have a budget director."

Donahue said he hopes to help the Commission develop a job description that can be presented to Human Resources and won't get thrown back. He said the job description must list specific experience desired, not just experience, so applicants know how we rate and value this experience. There are also EEOC considerations.

St. Germain responded that the real issue is that experience means more than a degree.

"At the end of the day, we're most concerned with who serves our fire service. I don't think LSU or HR should make a decision based on having a degree when this isn't LSU's class," she said.

"The decision to waive the degree is way above my pay grade," Donahue explained.

Browning said this is a position for an unclassified employee. Whatever LSU's requirements are, state law should not prohibit the Commission from emphasizing experience over degree. This Commission will make up a validated process. There will be some reasons why we say this is a number one candidate.

St. Germain suggested the Commission come up with a description that can be voted on at the next meeting, after members have had time to send her their comments.

Browning said he saw no need for postponing the vote as State Civil Service has for years accepted 10 years experience in lieu of a degree.

Hunts said he would rather look at it and vote on it at the next meeting.

Major noted that the proposed change would just allow good candidates without a degree to put in an application. Their resumes would have to sell them the rest of the way.

St. Germain said she is not worried about HR. This position should fall no different than other unclassified positions within the state.

Major suggested submitting the job description and taking the chance it will be rejected.

"If you submit that and they reject it, then we'll meet and discuss it," Westbrook added.

St. Germain disagreed, saying, "We really have to write it up and look at it. Send comments to Boyd [Westbrook]. We will have something before we leave the next meeting and we'll send it out at that meeting. I definitely want to speak to LSU and have a discussion with them, but as someone who deals with a number of issues in the Legislature, I don't see them having a problem with hiring the best person who will be training fire fighters in the state. If there's a degree, great, but if there is someone with years of experience but no degree, I'm more than willing to take any other motions. Let's move on to having it decided at the next meeting and submitting it to LSU that day."

Donahue objected, saying "I'll have to load it into the system, and I can't submit a document that violates policy. Right now there is no position at LSU at director level that allows a degree waiver."

Major suggested submitting a letter to LSU requesting the waiver.

Browning moved that the chairperson discuss it with Chancellor Jenkins.

St. Germain agreed to meet with Chancellor Jenkins, along with Mr. Donahue, and have that discussion to see if they can fast-track it.

"LSU has known for awhile that we want that change," she added.

"I'll do everything in my power to assist in crafting the best document possible," said Donahue. He also promised to provide the job description to Westbrook in electronic format.

Development of Stakeholder Evaluation and Strategic Plan

St. Germain then asked Westbrook to discuss the Stakeholder Evaluation and Strategic Plan he had suggested at the previous meeting in September.

Westbrook said his idea of the strategic plan is just like what the Commission is proposing for night drill solutions, He wants to create a whole comprehensive plan and not piecemeal things together at this meeting. He wants to assess what career departments need, what volunteer departments need, what should be center-based, what should be Pine Country. Part of those concepts is coming up with a night drill type situation. He said the Commission needs to look at the whole system.

Hunts added that the goal is to make sure everyone gets a taste of what they want so the Commission can start the process of providing aid and volunteers and understand where it's going down the road. He

said the Commission needs to work on this as soon as possible, because when the new director comes in, his or her input will be needed on that, too.

“We need to make some moves on it, get some opinions on it,” he said.

Browning suggested distributing a statewide surveymonkey of some sort and ask the right questions so the Financial Subcommittee can prioritize funding.

Donahue suggested using email to accumulate the collective wisdom of the Commission to help develop the survey questions.

Browning volunteered to help with questions. Donahue said he would like the email responses to come back to him.

Donahue added that survey results have to reflect to whom the survey was distributed.-

Browning suggested having respondents check their parish.

Carey King of FETI suggested using the department on campus that does surveys.

“We can tell them what we’re looking for and they’ll figure out the best way to do it.”

He said he would contact them on behalf of the Commission.

St. Germain appointed Browning to serve as chair of the Strategic Plan Subcommittee and Westbrook and Thevis to serve on the committee as well. She also invited the members of the public who were present to serve on the committee if they desired.

Dennis Ford of the Circola Fire Department, a member of the audience, said, “My parish has 4-5 departments. Everyone has different needs. In my aspect of it, we love all hands-on training. Some others like all-classroom. That’s something else to look at. I work pretty closely together with Nick. We’ll work together to get more people involved in LSU training.”

St. Germain asked if there was an email address where people could send comment. Donahue provided his:

Donahue—FETI@LSU.edu

“I think Donahue has an excellent idea about funneling emails. Our email database is Louisiana Fire Chiefs and some people are also in Fire Chiefs. If we had one central place to get the survey, you get one survey, instead of 3-4 surveys,” said Albert.

St. Germain asked what it would cost for the on-campus group to do the survey work.

Donahue responded that it wouldn’t obligate any large sums of money.

“LSU has been very good to us. They have waived fees for a lot of things they do support for us. We are here today because it’s part of their community outreach mission,” he explained.

Ford commented that a lot of people who run volunteer departments don’t use email. The Commission needs to look at email or some other flyer.

Donahue said the regional staff can hand-deliver surveys for those who don’t respond to email.

King added that LSU’s phone bank can call, too.

Browning commented that people completing the survey need to understand the financial restraints FETI faces as well.

“That’s the real picture, too. There’s only so much money to go around. We need to paint a picture of what the priorities are,” he said.

Cruse asked when the survey would be distributed.

Westbrook replied the survey could be distributed by the end of the year, if we can get the questions together by the next meeting.

Cruse noted that probably 25% of the parishes will have chief meetings during that time frame. If the Commission has a representative at every one of those chief meetings, in a two-month period, they could probably contact 80% of the fire service.

“As long as we have feedback, that’s great. Whatever we have to do,” replied Hunts.

St. Germain directed the group to address that at the next meeting, rather than making a decision today.

Fix Monthly Meeting Dates

St. Germain noted that the Commission had discussed meetings being on the second Thursday of each month, but she wanted to confirm that. The group voted to make the meetings the second Thursday of each month at 3 p.m.

Donahue mentioned that at the last meeting there was some discussion of having a meeting at Pine Country to bring in constituencies from around the state.

St. Germain suggested having the January meeting at Pine Country and then laying out a plan of other locations for meetings. She directed that the next meeting be at FETI on November 8 at 3 p.m.

New Business-Mission statement

St. Germain said she wants to develop a mission statement that is more specific about the fire service than what she has read so far. She invited the group to email her their department’s mission statements and promised to have a rough draft of a mission statement for the Commission at the next meeting.

Public Comment

St. Germain invited the public to comment on the Commission's activities, but no one offered a comment. The meeting adjourned at 4:19 p.m.

Approved by: Harvey St Germain

