

## Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission Meeting

Meeting Minutes  
September 8, 2012

### Opening:

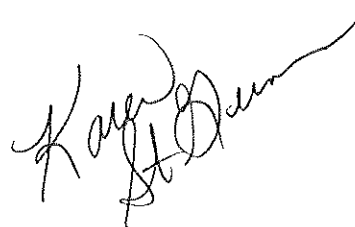
The first meeting of the Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission was called to order at 10:06 a.m. on September 8, 2012 in Classroom 1, FETI Administration Building by Michael Donahue.

### Commission Members Present:

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

### Guests Present:

Chuck Albert	Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association
Clay Crain	LSU-FETI
Wayne Cruse	FETI
Jason Droddy	LSU
Robert Hale	FETI
William Jenkins	Chancellor, LSU
Alan Joor	FETI
Byron Johnson	Alexandria Fire Department/Alpine VFD
Rusty Leonard	LSU-FETI



Eddie Pyle	CLH/FETI
Chad Roberson	LFCA/St. George's Fire Department
Jerry Tarleton	St. George Fire Department
Eddie Tessmer	FETI

#### **A. Greetings from Chancellor William Jenkins**

Chancellor Jenkins made an opening statement wishing the commission the best and assuring them that LSU wants to work with them and support them in every possible way.

#### **B. Election of Chair and Co-Chair of the Commission**

Karen St. Germain was nominated by Butch Browning to serve as chair of the commission. Commission members voted unanimously to accept her as chair. Browning was nominated to be co-chair of the commission. No other nominations were made. Commission members voted unanimously to accept Browning as co-chair of the commission.

#### **C. Open Meetings Requirements**

Michael Donahue directed the group's attention to the open meetings handout in their packets and described what the commission must do to be in compliance with open meetings law. "While it's not Robert's Rules of order, it is prescribed by Legislature what we have to do," he said.

#### **D. Ethics Training for State Employees**

Donahue informed commission members that they would be considered state employees and thus subject to the requirement for one hour of online ethics training. He added that representatives of volunteer fire departments are exempt from the training.

#### **E. FY12 Financial Review**

Donahue projected a spreadsheet of FY12 on the screen and said that the information had been compiled on short notice at the request of Butch Browning.

#### ***Discussion***

"It shows revenue stream, but there's not a tremendous amount of detail here," Donahue added. "In one month, we generate nearly a thousand pages of data, so I'd like to be able to work with you individually or collectively on providing the information you want. What we have is the number of different ledger or sub-ledger accounts, but there is no one place that has the salary information you're looking for."

St. Germain suggested that within the next two months, Donahue creates a ledger spreadsheet, specifically for the salary accounts, but suggested there may be requests from other members who want to get a feel for what commission getting in the middle of so they can make legitimate decisions.

Butch Browning said he'd like to see a list of all employees and their salaries, but also all expenses, so he can understand contracts and indirect costs.

Donahue noted that some of those things are already identified. This year, from Act 32 money, LSU collected \$92,000 as an indirect cost. It is shown in Account # 170400003. Indirect cost coming from campus. The allocation sheet shows indirect coming from LSU.

"After that is a quarterly allocation of expenses. All of these accounts can accept expenses but not revenues. Revenue is shown in another account. We're required in the last quarter of year to move expenses off those totals into another account so they show zero," he added.

St. Germain suggested that the commission form a subcommittee to examine the financial records in detail and accumulate the requests for more information

Browning said he was particularly interested in where expense has been in the last five years. He wants to see reductions now and compare them to five years ago. He would like a five-year spread of expenses and income and maybe some explanation of why there's a saving, maybe total number of employees.

"State government gauges everything on pre-Katrina and post-Katrina, so if we can see some sort of timeline, it would help," he said.

Donahue asked if a major expense would be more than a \$100,000. St. Germain replied that it could be less.

"You should be operating much more efficiently today," said Browning.

Donahue agreed, with the exception of supplemental funding no longer received, which amounts to close to \$1 million.

"In showing where expenses were, I can delineate how we got to today in terms of financial savings. As you read through here, and look at different cost categories, there's a ledger that tells you what goes into those accounts. When an expense is program-specific, it will be on that program's ledger account. But revenue generated from fees covers 20% of the cost of academy. The other 80% is paid for by our staff debit. Here's the percentage of those things not specifically attributable to one program.

Westbrook said he wanted to look everything over right now, but may have requests for information at the next meeting. He added that requests should come from the commission, not individual commission members.

Hunts suggested that a financial subcommittee be named to meet with Donahue to analyze financial information and develop a list of reporting requests.

St. Germain proposed that the commission form a financial committee, comprised of no more than four members, one from each of the organizations represented on the commission, and Donahue.

The following individuals volunteered to serve on the subcommittee:

Kenny Hunts

Boyd Westbrook

Chad Major

St. Germain moved that these three men serve on a financial subcommittee for the commission. There was no opposition, so the financial committee membership motion passed.

#### **F. FY13 Budget Submission**

Donahue projected on the screen the Projected Account Information FY 2013. According to Donahue, the cover is a summary and after each is the budget by ledger account and sub-ledger account. Total projected revenue is \$3.6 million. The Revenue Estimating Conference projects \$3.1 million in collections. Another \$500,000 is revenue self-generated from municipal accounts. Some of the numbers are driven as a percentage based upon historical renderings and others are actual planning based on programmatic changes.

#### ***Discussion***

In response to a question from St. Germain about a particular budget item, Donahue explained that it was the emergency fund, and if there is, like this year a \$269,000 surplus, that's moved from one account to the plant account to be used as the fund balance for emergencies and capital improvements. The expenses that can be applied to it are restricted, but it's referred to as an unrestricted account. He could ask the LSU Director of Budget Planning to delineate exactly what expenses are allowed against that account. He said he can't hire and pay people from that account.

The media account exists for occasional requests for video production from industrial clients that would like their entire training videotaped, and they are billed for that. That account is used to upgrade computer and communications equipment.

FETI is required by policy to budget exactly at conference's estimate, Donahue explained. The operating budget is significantly less than that, typically, it's 20% less. We're actually operating at \$2.9 million, instead of \$3.1 million. But it's not listed. We budgeted this way to increase the emergency fund account. LSU says we should have an

emergency account balance of 20% of our budget. When that number gets to \$750,000, that will stay there in reserve and then we will spend all the rest of the money.

Major inquired about what happens if the fund falls below \$750,000.

Donahue said FETI's policy is to never hire personnel without full funding. One reason FETI got in trouble is that full time staff members were hired with supplemental funding, which caused problems when the funding went away. He seeks the advice of the commission as to capital expenditures to make, including mobile training props or an array of other things.

Browning asked if the emergency fund was ever used to balance the budget.

Donahue said that last year's budget was balanced out of that fund. In the last budget year, net operations was \$800,000 upside down, so the plant fund was liquidated to the point that it started this budget year with about \$130,000.

Browning asked what caused the deficit.

Donahue explained that municipal revenue self-generation was down about \$200,000. The balance was caused by the loss of a million dollars and some major expenditures, like a fire truck, mowers, vehicles, fleet size. He said he could easily create a list of the expenditures.

Browning asked if those were one-time expenses.

Donahue affirmed that they were and said the fire truck was paid for in cash. He said FETI now has no short or long term debt obligations. He explained that commission members go through these ledgers, they'll see a big expense, but it's not in the expense column; it's in accrued expense. We'll sign a purchase order for the delivery of fuel, but it might show on ledger as an accrual for \$180,000. As we use it, the accrual will reverse and show in expense column.

Donahue offered to provide commission members with a list of major capital expenditures. He explained that anything with a value of more than \$1000 has an inventory tracking tag, so he can pull that report and show them all the assets FETI has.

St. Germain asked him to create that report.

Hunts asked about the grants listed at the bottom of the 11/12 budget.

Donahue explained that those were one-time grant funds, which have an expiration date. Those are federal grants, which had included in an effort to be as thorough as possible.

Wayne Cruse added that the \$26,000 grant is a FEMA grant they get from National Fire Academy every year. They satisfy it on their fiscal year (Sept. /Oct.) That's a recurring grant that they apply for, and it's for delivery of 12-hour national fire academy training

offered in the state. The grant is down to about \$24,000 now. The National Fire Academy earmarks that it has to go to their classes, taught by their instructors.

“There’s no better grant you can write. Just make sure you get the grant,” St. Germain said.

#### **G. Proposed Revenue Recovery for Night Drills**

Donahue introduced the topic of proposed revenue recovery for night drills, explaining that there has been a tremendous request for additional training from regional customers—volunteer and staff trained away from FETI. Regional coordinators and adjunct instructors do training on a monthly basis in each parish.

#### *Discussion*

Cruse: We have the state divided with coordinators throughout state. Because of budget constraints, we’ve gone to adjunct instructors. We provide in-service training of one class per month in each parish. Some parishes take up to 3-4 nights per month. What’s happening right now is that a number of small volunteer departments have transitioned into career fire departments with 10-12 people on shifts. Now they’re requesting that classes are offered on each shift. We have to provide training in these departments two days on shift. We’re getting a lot more requests for training in these departments. The original training was for training in the fire department with no expense.

Donahue: The type of requests we’re getting is changing. If we come into a fire department and do a three-hour training session, that costs between \$110 and \$150 per session. Some requests we’re getting are for more mobile training props. That number goes up to \$500 per training session if we’re pulling a training prop. As we get more requests for the \$500 variety, we have to recover these costs.

Browning: This place was designed and built to do regional training. The rule is that’s what we should be doing. Everyone else in government is getting more calls for training. The problem I saw is that it’s not fair that Baton Rouge can use it and Shreveport can’t. But you’ve always charged for consumables, no matter who comes here. But then again, you have to decide how much training to allow. Do you say if you have so many personnel, you get so many hours of training from personnel? If I was a fire chief, I would not want to pay someone’s salary to train here when I can get training in my department free.

Donahue: They have the same model in Minden. The arrangement is that if they’re doing night drills, then that’s their training. So they have to decide to either forego night drill or pay for additional training. The night drills are multi-jurisdictional. They’re not departmental-specific.

There are lots of ways to approach this. I would be the first person to recognize that my communication was suspect. I didn’t understand the funding cycle of the different departments. I would be willing to speak with individual chiefs to see how their training budgets work.

Westbrook: The bigger issue is that there needs to be a strategic plan to identify all training the FETI will offer. We don't use regional instructors at St. George. For us to do a three-hour drill takes six days. No way we can do that. But for other departments, we need to figure out if the facility is available, what we're going to teach, what are we going to train on, how are they going to address all their customers. We need to figure out what resources you have, what you can afford to do and prioritize that.

Cruse: I've been doing management up in north Louisiana for several years. Based on the amount of money I had, I figured out four nights per parish, 12 hours per month per parish. I brought the same concept to the southern region. I offered parishes four nights of training. But East Carroll Parish doesn't have a need for four nights a month; they only want one night per month. If some other fire department wants more training, I'll use the money I would have spent in East Carroll on that fire department. This year, I am running into a problem, being that we've put props on a two-year rotation and props cost going into every parish. In doing that, I've got a bigger cost. In today's fire service we have a lot more fire departments with 10-12 people in a fire department, like Livingston, etc. Their budgets don't permit them to send people. They can't afford overtime, so they want us to come in and teach on-shift.

Donahue: Historically, the regional program was done 6-10 p.m. Now we're adding on-shift training and mobile props.

St. Germain: As a public official, we don't know. We can only listen and find these things out. For the purpose of what's being discussed and what's going to happen, we need to know what you used to do, how it's changed.

Cruse: We have several issues: how much we're going to offer each parish, offer each parish with participation. So I go into a fire department and it cost \$125-130 dollars to teach that class and I've got four people to show up.

Browning: It cost that much to hire part-time people to go teach?

Cruse: The coordinator manages the adjunct. Full-time staff is limited to a certain number of classes they can teach. I can get the same number of classes with five adjuncts as I can with one full-time person.

Browning: To get back to these regional costs, if they come here one time will pay for a full-time instructor, that's not fair. The model now is if someone calls, you try to accommodate them.

Cruse: I meet with the parish. If I can't meet with the parish, I go to each fire department, they make a request for training and I set up the training. Like I met with Dwayne the other day and we worked out a complete 12/13 schedule.

St. Germain: The reason to bring this up today is to see what the problems are, having decided this process without input of commission. What I look forward to is to bring it all out so we can start working on a fix.

Donahue: What we attempted to do here is we have a full-time staff that we maintain. If a fire department comes out after 4:30, there are additional expenses. If not, they are only charged for consumables.

Browning: Boyd made a great point. I look around this room and there is not representation across this state. If there were people from here from north Louisiana, they'd be telling you that before you cut my classes, close down Baton Rouge. You're trying to do the best job, I don't doubt that. If you took a vote across the state, they'd tell you the most important thing is regional training.

Donahue: We spend more of our budget on regional training than anything else.

Browning: If this information going out was to raise the certification fee by \$1, there would be a firestorm across this state. There will be an enormous task to figure out exactly what everyone wants. I think they'll say close Camp Minden and close Baton Rouge and provide regional training. We need a strategic plan. We need more dialogue.

Donahue: Would you advocate we approach this as a subset of finance committee? The strategic plan will be based on how much budget this is.

Browning: I hate to say this, but part of the peace pipe was reducing the certification cost.

Westbrook: With the regional program, you get four nights each parish once a month. So, how many classes did you do in EBR last year?

Cruse: We did a national fire academy class in Zachary. I've only had this area since the last part of January. Most parishes, on average, take 30 days of training a year, 3-4 hour classes.

Westbrook: That leaves 18 classes left that aren't taken.

Cruse: We're not budgeting for 48. We don't have the money to teach 48.

Westbrook: We need to figure our costs, how many regional classes we can deliver, etc.

Cruse: Again, let's take WBR since January. We have taught a 24 hour hazmat ops in Erwinville, 12 hour officer class in Erwinville, Brusly has asked me to cover a class in November. Port Allen has requested a 12 hour officer class to be taught in their department. You have 16 nights of drills out here. Port Allen has asked for six nights of drill.

Hunts – We only have eight. We've been coming out here and doing this, but this year, we suddenly we got popped for over \$8000 for it. You can't just arbitrarily start popping people for money. A lot of people in bigger departments can train people and it's all about rating. Smaller departments can't do that. If we're going to change that (free training except for consumables), we need to tell people. You can't have one guy making decisions that affect everyone's budgets and insurance ratings. We can't decide this today, but we need to come up with some kind of plan.



St. Germain: At the end of the day, what Kenny said is felt by many areas.

Donahue: Let's put this on hold. I've committed to meet with the chiefs respectively of everyone who requests night drills. If they can accommodate it in their current budget, then they will, but if they can't, they'll have a whole year to figure out how to do it.

St. Germain: Doing it that way still leaves a lot of people that won't know what's going on. It needed to be discussed. I agree with budget issues, but doing something without discussion of the commission is not prudent. A whole decision needs to be made. I understand your frustration, Kenny. My area was upset.

As far as email discussions, I would hope in future we discuss this out loud and don't fire each other up with emails that don't follow protocol. I want us to do that here, have a discussion on whatever and move forward to make this a body we're proud of

How we settle the financial ladder, I will leave it to you guys to decide that and I don't think we can decide that today

Donahue: Kenny, I'd be happy to work with you and the collective people who request night drills in conjunction with Boyd's recommendation that we have a strategic plan.

Hunts: We've got to do what Boyd says, see where we're headed, what our priorities are. Yes, I am very passionate about it. I do represent lots of volunteer firefighters. My phone was ringing off the hook.

Westbrook: We need to figure out what customers want and find a way to get it to them. When we come out of this, this may still be what needs to happen.

Hunts: We can start explaining to people now to soften up the blow.

St. Germain: Do as much communication as you can with your own service and then we can come together and discuss it.

Browning: The decision to do this was a budget decision.

Donahue: Yes, we had a budget cut and requests for services throughout region increased.

Browning: I hope you can explain that to the finance subcommittee. You are answering all requests for service right now? We need to reduce expenses. I'd say close this building down before eliminating regional training. You're doing lots of innovative things to stretch the budget, but do you really have resources to continue doing what you've been doing?

Donahue: We'll provide that information to best of our ability. Let's go back to requests for mobile props. When mobile props come, that's \$500.

Browning: The mobile props could be something you charge for. I don't think the situation is as bad as I thought it was when I got there. You're doing some innovative things. I'd be curious to let the finance committee work with you. It may not be as bad as we think.

Westbrook: Just to talk to the regional issue for a minute, when you do that, you don't advertise to see if other departments want to participate? Could other departments come and use the place at the same time.

Hunts: Yes, we have to split it up. We just have to do it, so they understand that's what's going to happen.

Westbrook: That may be the way they can economize. Do you do that in other parishes?

Cruse: All our classes are open enrollment. We advertise on Facebook, carry it online. Chiefs get a schedule and confirmation call and they're supposed to notify people.

Thevis: In Acadia Parish, when we have LSU training, we send email to everyone.

Donahue: This night drills business is only for training here after full-time staff is gone, because there's an offset cost. I would love to see parishes work together. There is no difference in cost between bringing out 20 people instead of 10.

St. Germain: You must have full-time people here for night drills?

Donahue: There are safety considerations with part-time people having 100% access to the facility. The person responsible for night drills is here – Rusty Leonard. He's also a full-time instructor in the academy. The boss will hire an adjunct to take his place the following morning. That's why the night drills moved from a regional responsibility to a center-based responsibility. We felt like it was safer, more effective, less equipment issues.

Westbrook: Do a lot of parishes come out at night?

Leonard: About six departments come out at night: Livingston, Fire District 5, Port Allen, Brusly, Plaquemine. Just for doing one burn it's usually me and two of my adjuncts. People on tac line, search line. We need to get here an hour early to set up and stay an hour later to take down.

St. Germain: The night drills policy will be on hold till after meetings with the finance subcommittee.

#### **H. Director of FETI**

Donahue brought commission members up to date on the hiring of the FETI director, a process that started last year with the intent of hiring someone who has fire service history and experience that he does not have.

### *Discussion*

Donahue explained that the director would sit in the chair he has and he would slide to a different chair to provide support in budgetary, financial and other areas. He added that a written job description is available in the packet. He'd like commission members to read it and help him develop a good quality job description that can be advertised, although some of what it already includes must remain due to the requirements of the LSU protocol office. He said the last time resumes came in, he shared them with the chiefs association and the Louisiana State Fire Fighters Association.

Browning asked Donahue what position he would occupy.

Jason Drodgy explained that Donahue would supervise units other than FETI under the large umbrella of NCBRT, but he would support administration at FETI, while the director ran fire training. Donahue's office would be at FETI and it would comprise no less than 60-70% of his job responsibilities. He will report to Jim Fernandez. His role will be financial oversight of FETI, but he will be the director's supervisor.

Donahue added that this is a transition period during which he'd like to rebuild relationships with the industrial component, to take that piece, raise the revenue and build that.

Browning agreed that it's important to reach out and build bridges with industry.

St. Germain suggested that commission members send in their comments and requests within the next two weeks for Donahue to review.

Drodgy said that once commission members decide on the job description, they need to decide who will review resumes, how to conduct the interview process and how to select people to be interviewed.

Donahue said they would be starting the search process over, except that the position has been approved.

Browning said that while he agreed with the requirement of a bachelor's degree in the spirit of making sure we get a fire person who is good and capable, and would find it hard to vote for someone not embedded in Louisiana, he asked if it should it be a requirement that we have someone from Louisiana.

Westbrook agreed, saying that a lot of people at the table may not have a master's or even a bachelor's degree, but would still be well-qualified to be the director.

According to Browning, the reality is that if that were a requirement for fire chiefs across the state, we'd be hiring people from California.

St. Germain said the bachelor's degree is a good requirement, but experience should be more important.

Major suggested that the job description should read "bachelor's degree or experience."

Donahue that it is possible to obtain a degree waiver, but currently there are no non-degreed directors in the LSU system. They would have to run the ad with the degree requirement and come back and say not one of the applicants are qualified to do this job. Then we could go back to administration and ask for a degree waiver. Right now, the description says degree plus so many years.

Westbrook said there are a lot of people in this state who are very knowledgeable, but may not have a degree.

Major said there is a difference between someone being a department head within a university system teaching people who have degrees, and someone in this system teaching people to perform a task.

Donahue said he understood their concern and had worked in an organization here at LSU that granted degree waivers for training.

St. Germain said she'd like to figure out how to get a degree waiver up front, so the commission doesn't have to wait any longer

Arnold agreed, saying, "Let's not wait. Let's get it in place now."

"Let's not sell fire service short," said Eddie Pyle. "There are people in it with degrees all the way up to Ph.D. We may have a more qualified pool than you think."

Major said that's why he suggested requiring a degree or experience. "There are lots of people with degrees who aren't worth a damn as a fire chief," he added.

Donahue noted that not every degree is the same. If you have a degree in vocational education, etc., there are some opportunities that elevate your qualifications beyond the degree.

St. Germain said, "Let's not eliminate people who are just as qualified without degrees. That's our first priority. We're going forward with looking at requirements."

She instructed commission members to send their comments to her and put them in a new resume requirement list.

### **I. Monthly Meetings**

Commission chair St. Germain asked the commission to determine when its meetings should be.

#### *Discussion*

Westbrook said meetings on Wednesdays or Thursdays are best.

Hunts suggested the third Thursday of every month, saying the commission could always change it if necessary.

Browning suggested October 11 at 3 p.m. at the FETI Administration Building for the next meeting.

Westbrook suggested moving the meetings around.

Browning said the commission should facilitate a meeting at Camp Minden. Those people have a different opinion.

Westbrook said they have a different perspective in Lake Charles, too.

Donahue offered to make the FETI meeting room telephone-capable, so people can conference it.

St. Germain requested getting the agenda out a little earlier next time, so people from outlying areas can attend. She directed Donahue to continue to maintain the agenda and said people with items for the agenda should email them to Donahue.

Donahue offered to put the agenda on Facebook.

St. Germain said they would have that discussion next time.

Westbrook said the finance committee would meet next week. Donahue suggested the finance committee meet at FETI, because all financial records are there.

**Adjournment:**

Meeting was adjourned at 11:56 a.m. by Karen St. Germain. The next general meeting will be at **3 p.m. on October 11, 2012** in Classroom 1 of FETI Administration Building.

Minutes submitted by:

Carol M. Madere, Ph.D.

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Karen St. Germain".