

## Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission Meeting

### Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2013

#### Commission Members Present:

Mike Arnold	Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association
Michael Donahue	Chancellor's Designee from LSU
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

Chuck Albert – LFCA  
Wayne Cruse – FETI  
Jason Droddy - LSU  
Dusty Edwards – LFCA  
Carey King – FETI  
Christine Melancon – FETI  
Eddie Pyle – FETI  
Lori Ramezan – FETI  
Chad Roberson - LFCA  
Charles K. Stephens - PAFD

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Karen St. Germain at 3:06 p.m. The roll of commission members was called and a quorum declared. Acceptance of minutes from the November was deferred to the following meeting to allow for distribution and reading by commission members. The group said the Pledge of Allegiance and opened the meeting with prayer.

#### Financial Report

Mr. Donahue reported that there had been no extraordinary expenses during December. Mr. Browning asked if state debt was on target. Mr. Donahue explained that FETI had received its disbursement from the state on May 15, 2012 and would not receive this year's money until May 15. Mr. Browning asked if FETI was on budget. Mr. Donahue said it was because they budget only 85% of income so if there's a cut, FETI is prepared.

Mr. Browning noted the budget concerns last year and said he did not want to see that happen again. Mr. Donahue explained that last year's budget problem had resulted from receiving \$300,000 less than had been projected.

Ms. St. Germain suggested setting up a meeting with the state treasurer to discuss the matter.

Mr. Hunts inquired whether revenues are higher or lower than last year.

Mr. Donahue replied that the recruit academy is ahead, certification is behind and I-courses are neutral. Spending is lower than last year and revenue is projected to be fairly consistent.

#### **Director's Report**

Mr. Donahue drew commission members' attention to their copy of the municipal class offerings for this year. He said they have been posted on the website. FETI has identified those classes that are guaranteed independent of the number of people who sign up.

He added that the second thing he'd like to do is create a tentative night drill schedule, coordinating with local chiefs, to make sure it meets their needs. Then, he'll put that on the website as well.

Mr. Hunts reported that his training officer had called last week and was told last week that we could only have one night drill per month and it was limited to 30 people.

Mr. Donahue said he had not been a party to that conversation and that no hard and fast decision would be made without talking to the people affected.

"I didn't tell him 30," Mr. Donahue said. "If it needs to be 50, it will be 50. But the more people we have, the more lead time I need. So we'll work together on the kind of advanced registration needed and what exactly do you want, what evolutions of training do you need."

Ms. St. Germain asked what is the best way for Donahue to meet with stakeholders to make those decisions.

Mr. Donahue said he intends to make eight phone calls to try to coordinate a meeting; then, he and the chiefs will spend two hours, knock it out, and have people actually doing training who can answer technical questions.

"My concern is that I'm not the only one with this problem," Mr. Hunts continued. "Someone is not being truthful. We have had this problem before with poor communication. We're limiting our training abilities and if it happens again, I want to know why."

Mr. Donahue reiterated that he had not said anything about limiting training to 30 people once a month, but someone who works for him may have said it.

"But they made a mistake," he added. "People make mistakes. As always, if you hear something that doesn't make sense, pick up the phone and let's straighten this out."

Mr. Hunts replied that this had just happened a couple of days ago, but he knew he was coming to this meeting, so he could straighten it out then.

"If we have a meeting, we can coordinate this thing," said Mr. Donahue. "But if you have a problem, just pick up the phone and call me and I'll take care of it. We'll set a couple of dates before we leave today."

Ms. St. Germain asked to be kept informed of the night drill schedule, so she can answer questions from people who call her about it.

#### **Approval of FETI Director Job Description and Advertisement**

The Chair (Ms. St. Germain) recognized Jason Droddy to give a brief overview of LSU's proposed resolution of the problem regarding requiring a bachelor's degree for the position.

Mr. Droddy explained that all director positions at LSU are unclassified and require a degree. Going to a non-degree requirement opens LSU up to possible law suits from other candidates who were not considered for director positions because they did not have a bachelor's degree. He proposed an amendment to the job requirements section of the advertisement, which says that applications will be accepted and if no qualified degreed candidate is found, FETI would consider non-degreed candidates.

Mr. Donahue added that the degree requirement is a baseline. On top of that is fire service experience—leadership, budget planning.

"Do I evaluate all degrees on the same level? Absolutely not!" he said.

"Please understand that I could specifically say a four-year degree in fire science and that would exclude everyone," said Mr. Donahue. "Even when you look at degrees by name, there are equivalents. I would accept a degree in adult education or workforce development, because those things are aligned with a training program for adults. But if someone had a degree in French, they would be disqualified because they don't have a qualifying degree. But a business degree would qualify, as long as they had the fire service experience.

Mr. Arnold inquired whether an associate degree in fire science would qualify.

Mr. Donahue replied that it would not, because the requirement is a bachelor's degree.

Mr. Droddy agreed, saying, "That point was raised by the chiefs association as well. Associate degrees do not relieve us of our internal problems. A candidate with an associate degree would not be in the first pool of candidates to be looked at."

"Would it kick you out of the pool?" asked Ms. Germain.

Mr. Droddy replied that the first thing LSU is looking for is a qualified bachelor's degree because of the HR issue. If that is not met, then LSU would go to the second pool. One of the advantages of adding this language to the job ad now is that you don't have to go to Civil Service to get it approved.

"Not everyone who graduated from here has a degree; they have a certification," said Mr. Arnold.

Ms. St. Germain asked what happens with the first pool and who gets to look at all that.

Mr. Donahue replied that the three stakeholders include the Fire Service, LSU, Donahue himself. Ultimately, the Commission will recommend to the chancellor whom to hire and Donahue will make the final decision.

"Please understand that I want the most qualified person and I certainly wouldn't discount the input of this group," said Mr. Donahue.

"At the end of the day, we all have a strong feeling on moving on this and doing it right, but at this table there's a majority of us wants to make sure it's the right person," said Ms. St. Germain. "The majority of us don't want the requirement of a bachelor's degree to be a barrier to whom we hire. It will come down to us agreeing to do it this way, but also voting to make sure we have the best qualified person. All of us love LSU, but it's not about LSU. It's about the Fire Service and the State of Louisiana. We have to follow the process, make sure we have so many days to get description out, make sure it disqualifies no one. We don't want to miss out on anybody who thinks because they don't have a four-year degree, they will be disqualified. I ask that we vote today that we ask for the commission to get a voice that's heard and felt. "

Chuck Albert of the Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association requested permission to address the commission.

"At our board meeting this past weekend, we discussed it, it sparked me to dig deep and I researched and got questions answered that I needed to get answered," said Mr. Albert. "The key thing is to improve our training for the Fire Service of Louisiana. That's what the association bought into in looking at commission concept.

"First, we don't know as a commission where FETI will be a year from now, or two years from now. It may be here, but it may not be. Some requirements are needed to have this job. There has to be both a qualified degree and qualified experience. I do like the concept that there is not going to be one stack that gets thrown away and one stack that gets looked at. It does tell me you'll get a bigger pool of applicants. It also tells me that just having an associate degree with lots of experience, doesn't automatically exclude you.

"Here's where I step out on a limb. This is a pivotal year for the municipal fire service of Louisiana. We have to show we've turned this program around and we're doing something with money that's come in. True, we have to weight education and experience, but we also have to find best person for FETI. What about a third option? What if, while we're searching as a commission to find the best fit for FETI, the commission comes back and says we need to be outside LSU? Can that be done overnight? What happens to the Fire Service while we're engineering this idea? What about a Chief of Municipal Services at FETI? Whoever the director is will have his hands in it. The piece of pie we should be concentrating on is the taxpayer money given to provide for a municipal fire service.

A chief of municipal programs would work and be directly responsible for municipal programs and certification programs, in coordination with director, so he is solely responsible for bringing the fire service what they want. He's not worried about hazmat, etc., only about the money the taxpayers have paid. He's only worried about the municipal program, bringing it back to where it was 28 years ago. Could we possibly have a stopgap measure to bring this person in to concentrate on municipal fire service? If two years from now, we move away from LSU, we have someone who can concentrate on logistics, planning. Maybe it's time to step out of the box and put the fire service first," said Mr. Albert.

Mr. Hunts said he had great respect for Mr. Albert and thought he made an excellent point.

"So, this person would be a chief, not a director, "said Mr. Donahue. "He or she would not have responsibility for industrial training programs, but instead would concentrate only on those aspects of

the program that deal with public funding. Honestly, nothing would make me happier to consider every application independent of degree requirement.

"I agree with what Chucky said," said Mr. Browning. "No one has put in front of me that we have do it this way. I really think we could just advertise this thing like we do chief jobs. You're only as good as your chief. This person will not be the director. He'll still answer to Mike. This chief of training would be handcuffed. Who would want that job with the uncertainty of what they'll be allowed to do, who they'll be working for. I find it crazy that we can't agree on how to advertise this job. It's almost like that there are some people dead set on having a master's degree to take this job. Personally, I think this job would be attractive to good fire service people with a bachelor's degree and experience."

"I would ask you to call the question," said Mr. Hunts. "Advertise. Hire the person and let them run the program. Fire Service should run this program. A big milestone has occurred to allow this group to exist. I don't have a problem with LSU running the training center, but let us hire someone to run this thing."

Mr. Browning offered a motion that the commission move forward with the advertisement and accept anyone with an associate degree and 10 years experience, five of which being at a chief officer's level as a minimum.

Mr. Romero asked if he meant experience with any fire service—volunteer/career and whether the associate degree must be in fire science.

Mr. Browning affirmed that should be the minimum to apply and suggested that the commission itself advertise the position.

Mr. Droddy answered that acceptance of applications by an entity outside of LSU is a problem as well.

Ms. St. Germain remarked that something similar had happened with a position at the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and they did accept, but the final decision was DNR's.

Mr. Donahue explained that the current policy is that LSU accepts no paper resumes, and he did not know if they would waive this policy. After advertising date closes, then the electronic resumes are available to the Hiring Department to see. The Hiring Department has to do validation. If we do validation and LSU's policy is a degreed director, they would kick back his hiring decision.

Mr. Thevis asked if the commission will see all applications.

"Absolutely," replied Mr. Donahue. "I won't hide anything from you."

"I suggest you do not go outside the LSU process," said Mr. Droddy. "That may be grounds for a lawsuit. If we accept all applications, the commission gets to view all applications."

"From what I'm gathering here, the verbiage allows for what Butch wants—everyone can submit an application into the system," said Mr. Albert. "The stumbling block is when it comes time to make the appointment. You promise to share all applications with the commission, so the commission can look at all the data. When it comes time to make the appointment, if their guy does not have a bachelor's degree, the then commission can go to work. The language you brought today allows for the

commission to make the appointment. So the mechanism is that what they're presenting does more than what Butch asks for. I think we got confused in the process. "

Mr. Westbrook asked if all applications be considered and was assured by Mr. Donahue that they would.

"We all want the best qualified person," said Ms. St. Germain. "It begins with the application process. The next step is to make sure when the application process is over, we can call a special meeting to have a discussion or have a sub-committee that makes recommendations to the commission. We need to make this as transparent as possible and nobody needs to second-guess. I think we're selling ourselves short. There are great people out there."

"We will take all applications," said Mr. Droddy. "Once the application date closes, you could have a meeting, collect the data on who the applicants are, then the commission could make recommendations on the candidate.

Mr. Thevis called the question.

Mr. Hunts requested that Mr. Browning repeat the motion.

Mr. Browning repeated his motion that the minimum requirements for the position be an associate degree and 10 years of fire service, five as an officer.

"A bachelors degree has to be in there," said Mr. Droddy.

"I'm not taking that out," replied Mr. Browning. "I'm just adding that this is the minimum to apply. If you open the field up, there's comfort in the process.

Mr. Droddy said the ad cannot indicate that one is in lieu of the other.

Mr. Donahue asked if the commission would consider any other associates degree, such as adult education, emergency management, and other allied degrees.

Mr. Browning replied that he considered fire or emergency services equivalent.

"It's an associate degree in fire service or equivalent," said Mr. Albert." If you put in 'or equivalent,' it allows for that type of process."

Mr. Westbrook proposed a friendly amendment to Mr. Browning's motion to read 'or 20 years in fire service with 10 years of that being supervisory.'

The commission voted on Mr. Browning's motion as amended. There was no opposition, so the motion passed.

"We will submit that language to Michael and set a date for that application to be advertised," said Ms. St. Germain." I think at the end of this process that we'll get the right person. I, for one, want this to work. I want to see that person that loves the fire service so much that everything we thought would be a problem is moot."

Mr. Donahue said he would be responsible for writing the advertisement.

"When I get minutes of this meeting, I'll revise the job advertisement. Then we need to look at it again. If you have a college degree, you're allowed less years of experience. I'll have something ready in two weeks. But I can't go to advertising without an acceptable job description," he said.

Mr. Donahue said he would send out the advertisement electronically for commission members to review.

Mr. Droddy reminded Mr. Donahue of the public records requirements, but he said, "We won't vote on it, just like at it."

Mr. Donahue said he would select cities in the state where it will run. He said the ad would run in New Orleans, Shreveport, Baton Rouge and be placed on the FETI website. He said he would also anyone who knows someone who is qualified to solicit their response.

"We can put it on our websites and email it out to our email lists," said Mr. Hunts.

"We need to get this done quickly. Whatever we can do to expedite this process, we need to do," said Mr. Browning.

Mr. Hunts suggested a resolution that the commission has information brought back within in two weeks to be moved into the next step in the process.

Mr. Donahue explained that for a directorship, the minimum advertisement is 30 days.

#### **FETI Evaluation Tool**

Mr. Donahue reported that the survey went to a subcommittee, but he didn't know what action they had taken, if any. He had met with a group and put together some general questions. It will take some time for LSU to massage it and get it back out there. He was shooting for mid-February to distribute it. The subcommittee was comprised by Mr. Hunts, Mr. Browning and Mr. Cruse.

Ms. St. Germain suggested the questions to everyone electronically, so the subcommittee could have a meeting on it.

Mr. Donahue said he was not trying to replace the subcommittee. He just wanted to get the process going.

"After everyone takes a look at it and makes their comments, I will turn it over to the professionals who write customer survey questions for a living. You have to ask multiple questions on the same topic, so there's a double blind for validity. We're getting at about 15 key items," Mr. Donahue explained.

Ms. St. Germain asked commission members to get their comments back within next two weeks.

**Monthly Meeting Dates**

Ms. St. Germain asked if the commission would like to continue meeting on the second Thursday of every month for the rest of the year.

Mr. Donahue reported that he often gets calls about location or cancellation of meetings. The further they are away, the more lead time they need.

Ms. St. Germain replied that that is not something we can always fix.

"We need to make sure as a commission that we give enough leave time" she said. "If you know you can't come, please let us know. Not do or die if we meet on that date. Let's look those dates over to see if there are any conflicts."

Mr. Thevis suggested having the next meeting at Pine Country.

Mr. Donahue remarked that Pine Country is not without its logistical issues.

Ms. St. Germain replied that she had attended a transportation meeting there recently, and it was ok.

Mr. Cruse offered to make arrangements for a meeting in Alexandria.

Ms. St. Germain said the February meeting was too close to change locations now. She suggested that Mr. Thevis make his suggestion for the March meeting.

**Mission Statement**

Ms. St. Germain read a mission statement for the commission that she had written to the group and suggested that the group vote on it at the next meeting.

Mr. Westbrook made the motion that the commission accept the mission statement as written.

The commission voted unanimously to accept the mission statement as written by Ms. St. Germain.

**Meeting Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 4:49 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for February 14, 2013.

Approved by: Karen St Germain  
Date: 1-3-13