MAINE FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES COMMISSION

**Minutes**

## **Monday, June 6, 2022**

**9:00am**

**(ZOOM)**

Chief Dan Brooks called the Maine Fire Protection Services Commission meeting of June 6, 2022 to order at 9:00 a.m. via ZOOM. Fire Commission members present for the meeting included:

Members Present: Chief Brooks, James Graves, Vicki Schmidt, Chief William Gillespie, Chief Chris Wytoch, Chief Joseph Guyotte, Steven Greeley, Harty Norris, Charlie Soltan, Ken Desmond, Gerry Gay, Vicki Schmidt, Troy Dare, Bruce Willis, James Graves, Ronnie Green, Robby Gross, Roger Hooper

Guest: Lt. Troy Gardner of the Maine State Fire Marshal’s Office

**Old Business**

Minutes from the March 7th and May 2nd Commission meetings were approved. The April 4th minutes were approved with amendments.

**I. Committee Reports**

1. Best Practices

B. Professional Development

Chief Brooks introduced guest Lt. Troy Gardner of the Maine State Fire Marshal’s Office who proposed adding some new awards to the next Professional Development Conference.

Lt. Gardner recommend setting aside time at the conference to recognize exceptional fire service work for positions such as fire instructors, fire chiefs, civilians who’ve contributed to saving fire victims and other fire service positions. He stated that this has been done for law enforcement officials for several years and he believes the same sort of recognition should be given those in the fire service.

A lengthy discussion ensued as to what the nomination process should be, who should be involved in the process, the amount of time available to coordinate the process, and how much time should or can be dedicated to making these awards at the conference itself.

It was recommended that those organizations currently nominating and awarding the same or similar awards continue to do so but make the awards at the Best Practices Conference. An idea which received support from Commission members present.

There was agreement that the best day to make the awards would be Wednesday even though there may not be as many in attendance as there will be on Thursday.

Other events such as the Legislative Breakfast were considered as other potential venues to make these awards but uncertainties surrounding the alternative events brought the discussion to an end as it was agreed the Best Practices Conference was the best setting.

Guest speakers, sponsorships along with other details regarding the logistics and timing of the awards process will continue to be discussed in various meetings to come.

C. Education and Training Strategy Committee

Chief Brooks brought LD 731 to the members attention focusing on the Commission’s role in creating criteria to award training grants. He suggested the creation of a committee focused exclusively on developing the criteria. He went further to suggest that the vague language of the bill offered the Commission opportunities and flexibility to come up with that criteria and hopefully lower the cost of training.

James Graves expressed serious concern about the grant being directed away from the fundamental purpose of the legislation, that being to provide fire fighters with much needed basic training and certification many fire departments can’t afford. He believed that veering off that intent would require additional staffing and time that is not available at the Maine Fire Science Institute.

Chief Gillespie raised the question as to whether-or-not the granting process and dollar amounts for the grants would be subject to audit.

Charlie Sultan stated he did not believe it would be subject to an audit.

James Graves added that the Institutes financial analyst is keeping close watch and recording the expenditures of the Institute.

Chief Brooks brought up the idea of pushing for additional funding during the 131st legislative session for facilities in the amount of $700,000.

Chief Gillespie suggested staying with original requests for $1,000,000.

Chief Brooks informed the members that there will be a discussion with the Republican gubernatorial candidate Paul LePage as to whether he’d support an increased level of funding.

Chief Brooks noted that there will continue to be efforts to fund LOSAP in the upcoming session.

Chief Gillespie informed the members that it would be helpful for them to bring ideas about potential legislation forward to be considered for the session.

D. Recruitment and Retention

Bruce Willis pointed out that the free tuition to Maine’s community colleges will be a great opportunity to recruit future fire service personal and that members should encourage colleagues to spread the word of this opportunity.

E. Wildland Fires

Robert Gross of Maine Forestry notified the members of the Bureau’s purchase of two 407 helicopters. He also noted that language regarding the definitions in laws pertinent to federal funding of forestry related programing is being considered but didn’t have a great deal of information to discuss that language at this time.

Mr. Gross went on to express his believe that mitigation of wildland fires and programs of that nature need to be considered seriously at this time. The impact of climate change and recent weather events such as wildland fires necessitate the need to fund wildland fire mitigation efforts.

Training firefighters in wildland fire was discussed and it was agreed that this was something that forestry should lead in terms of curricula and training programing in general.

F. Staffing

Chair Joseph Thomas was not in attendance, so no report was provided.

**II. Old Business**

Chief Gillespie stated that the contracts for the third-party administrator are being finalized at this time.

**III. New Business**

A. Other

Former Chief William St. Michelle (Spelling) expressed his concern that the language of LD 731 regarding tax credits for employees who are first responders was so vague as to render the legislation useless despite the considerable funding included in the bill.

A discussion of the tax credit portion of LD 731 continued leading to Chief Brooks recommending that language clarifying that portion of the bill be considered during the 131st legislative session.

Vicki Schmidt recommended a letter be drafted and delivered to the relevant parties admitting this piece of the law was a mistake and needs to be fixed.

Roger Hooper asked whether anyone attended the Emergency Management Services listening sessions and that during the sessions it was mentioned that EMS have a cabinet level position. He went onto ask about the EMS relationship with the Commission.

Chief Brooks stated that EMS and MEMA have Commission seats, but their attendance has been low.

Roger Hooper stated that this is something the Commission needs to watch as it could impact the fire service.

**Next Meetings**

Chief Brooks introduced the idea of not holding July and August full Commission meetings as has been done in the past.

A motion was made to not hold the July and August meetings and was approved. A second motion was made to amend the motion to not hold the July and August meeting but to continue Commission business at the committee level. That was approved.

The next meeting of the Commission will be held September 12th, 2022. Time, location/format to be considered and announced later.

Chief Brooks adjourned the meeting at 10:39 A.M.