

MAINE FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES COMMISSION

MINUTES

Monday, September 14, 2026, from 9AM – 1:18PM

Held on Zoom and at Maine Department of Public Safety at 45 Commerce Drive, Augusta

Present

1. Chief Dan Brooks, Chair
2. Gerry Gay, 1st VP, PFFM
3. Ronnie Green, 2nd VP, PFFM
4. Vicki Schmidt, MSFFF
5. Jim Graves, MFSI
6. Steve Greely, BLS
7. Joe Guyotte, MSFFF
8. Ken Desmond, MSFFF
9. Chief Shawn Esler, FMO
10. Rep. Steve Bunker
11. Chief Robby Gross, MFS
12. Chief David Groder, MFCA
13. Senator Chip Curry
14. Senator Scott Cyrway
15. Charlie Soltan, Insurance

16. Larry Willis, MSFFF

Absent

1. Rep. Dean Cray
2. Catherine Nadeau, Public Advocate
3. Wil O'Neal, EMS
4. *Vacant, Governor's Office*
5. Chief Darrell White, MFCA

6. Rep. Mike Lajoie

Guests

1. Chief Bill Gillespie, MFCA
2. Bill St Michel, MFCA
3. Rebecca Graham, DPS
4. Kate Burkhart, BLS

Secretary

Michelle Mason Webber

Excused

Approval of Minutes: June 2026

Motion: Joe Guyotte Second: Gerry Gay – Approved, passes unanimously

Correction on June minutes: Chief Brooks did presentation -Fire science program at EMCC instead of junior firefighter

I. Committee Reports

A. Best Practices Committee - no updates

Steve Bunker-no nominations since last meeting

B. Professional Development Conference: Bill St. Michel: Sunday River conference set up for March 24-26, 2027: keynote speaker established, same types of workshops. 2028 contract signed for March 21-24, 2028 in Sunday River.

C. Education and Training Strategy Committee: Jim Graves: Farmington bills paid, FAA issue in Bangor, tore down Auburn facility. Dan B. said they need to check on when the funding lapses. FAA and DEP permits are in process. FAA permit is the bigger of the two permit issues. Bill Gillespie: non-lapsing funds? How long do we have until we have to do something different? Jim Graves: not sure if the footings will be in place in the spring. Dan Brooks will reach out to Marilyn to see when the drop-dead date is for the current funding we have in place. Vicki: is the 10-year summary ready to be sent out? Agreement by everyone that it looks good. Proposed sites that meet T&E criteria as possible LFTF's locations are on the document.

D. Recruitment and Retention Committee: Chief Willis: 30 new FF attended Penobscot county FF1 & 2 academy. Junior muster will happen again in Scarborough on October 25, 2026.

E. Wildland Fire Committee: Robby Gross: statistics for this year: 630 wildland fires and just under 320 acres: this is the 3rd year in a row with lowest # of burned acreage in the nation. In the last decade there has been an uptake each year of wildfires. This year 20 residences damaged/destroyed. 40 outbuildings damaged/destroyed. MFS received approval to put a new aircraft in their budget: cost \$6.5 million dollars. Aircraft makes a difference in the statistics he just mentioned. Railroad causes wildfires: he's organizing a statewide meeting for railroad representatives and a bill submitted (approved by Gov's office) to give MFS authority to stop trains suspected of starting wildfires. Federal excess program has Blackhawks, which are bigger than our current helicopters and need 2 pilots to fly: MFS would have to expand size of facilities and add pilots if they acquired a used Blackhawk: they only have 5 pilots total in MFS. Currently have Bell 407 aircraft but those don't have capabilities of Hueys (which is a Type 2 workhorse). Last August was busiest in last 30 years for aircraft use: to contract that use would have cost just under \$600,000.

F. Staffing Committee: Chief Esler: BRIC grant: UMaine researchers hope to finalize the report at the end of this month. At the October 7th MMA conference, a BRIC grant PowerPoint will be created for this meeting. 30-day extension to finish up process: end of October for opportunity for this Committee to ask for data analysis. Vicki: will we be able to see the whole dataset? Chief Esler said the databases will be accessible for members of the Commission via a request to Chief Esler- and FMO can provide the data via a thumb drive. The raw data is owned by the FMO. Outside people can get the data via a FOIA request to the FMO office. Dan wants a link on the Commission webpage that links to the final BRIC report that will be on the FMO site.

G. Cancer Reduction Grant: Rep. Steve Bunker: 31 departments got new washing machines, 17 departments got exhaust systems. Dan Brooks: is there interest in applying for more grants? Ken Desmond said it would be a good idea. There was discussion about getting hoods or PFAS-free gear. Rep. Bunker will look into those ideas. Dan Brooks wants the Commission members to come back to the next meeting with ideas for Rep. Bunker to pursue. Rep. Bunker would like to have cancer screenings as part of the physical fitness package for firefighters. Vicki said it cost \$350 for each screening.

H. Emerging Energy Hazards Committee: Dan Brooks: talked about the Maine Data Advisory Council draft letter he made with Jim Graves. Letter was sent to everyone on the Committee and there were no changes, so he will send the final version of the letter to the Maine Data Advisory Council. Jim Graves reached out to a fire engineer from Colorado on data centers. NFPA 85 regarding plans review from the FMO. Cooling towers are needed for data centers and Jim hasn't had time to look into this for training yet.

I. Treasurer Report: \$4,197.04: Dan Brooks, no changes. He got a message from Marilyn confirming the amount listed above. Another \$2,000 coming to us this year; we were denied an additional \$3,000 this year.

II. Legislative Report -: Dan Brooks: Fire strategy committee developing bills but nothing specific at this time.

III. Old Business

A. LOSAP Board Report – No report: Chief Gillespie said they will start meeting in October.

B. EMS Report – No report. Gerry Gay: Narcotics must be managed in fire house now. Lots of cost to local departments due to increased time to manage the process. Chief Groder: narcotics need to be locked in a lock box; do tracking of the drugs; must buy drugs ahead of time. Augusta will be working with Maine Vets pharmacy. TEA regulation influenced the decision. Gerry Gay: asked for the Maine EMS representative on the Commission to be at the next meeting to give the Commission an update on this issue. Dan Brooks will reach out to Wil.

C. OSHA/BLS Updates; Steve Greely: Combustible dust training later this week: 36 people signed up so far. This is done through the OSHA Ed center in New Hampshire, and they are doing it for free. BLS will try to get another class in place. April 2027 is when OSHA will come out with Emergency Response info. Kate Burkhart: Maine BLS identified training needs through our free SAFETYWORKS training program for rural, remote volunteer fire departments. Next year BLS wants to have more virtual evening trainings that are shorter. She asked for ideas from the Commission on how to get this done. She said when they do inspections we see lots of respiratory storage, use and equipment issues. That could be a subject to zero in on for training. Bill Gillespie felt that if a fire department got an abatement for an issue, if the same problem is found by BLS during the next inspection, another abatement should not be given. Dan Brooks: how many fire departments do you check in a year? Steve Greely: it varies per year but about 50 fire departments.

Ken Desmond: was in Washington DC at the FEMA headquarters for a meeting regarding AFG Safer and Fire Prevention grants. Submitting grants will be easier and there will be more funding. By Sept. 30th they will release the names of the grant recipients.

IV. New Business and News from Members

- Future of Maine's Fire Service Committee: Dan Brooks: the sub-committee is now on a weekly schedule to bring forward ideas to the Commission. Dan covered the draft document "Strengthening Maine's Fire Service" he sent to the Commission, covering the 4 "bills" or "parts". Bill #1 content comes from the DPS, so the FMO and DPS have moved forward with this to the Governor's Office. The sub-committee hasn't moved forward with the other parts at this time. #4 is a bond issue for more training facilities.
- #1: Chief Esler did an overview of the changes in this section. Vicki: regarding fire inspector: if the town doesn't have a code enforcement officer, does the fire inspector become default code enforcement officer? Answer was no. Vicki: what is the expected training or requirements for the fire inspector? Chief Esler: it depends on what the town wants. The text contained within #1 has gone to the Revisor's Office for revision. Rep. Steve Bunker likes the idea of having a database for firefighters in the state. Dan Brooks doesn't see the need to vote on it since it's already gone to the Revisor's Office. Gerry Gay wants to see what the Revisor's Office brings back for language. Chief Esler said the DPS is comfortable with the language at this point.
- #2: The Fire Commission would be granted authority to create standards for firefighters in order for local departments to be eligible for grant funding: this would be optional for the local departments. Senator Curry: this is in terms of the standards for eligibility for entry into training programs and this would be the body to do it. Chief Esler: volunteers are declining and there are barriers for them to access training. The protected approved-training leave will allow volunteers to attend weeklong basic training without problems from their employers, and employers would

be made whole via wage reimbursement. Dan Brooks clarified that career firefighters would not be eligible for the protected approved-training leave. Senator Curry said this process will also support LOSAP. Representative Steve Bunker asked if this is based on an existing model used in the state. Dan Brooks said it's based in part on the National Guard model. Chief Esler said it is also based on the Maine Criminal Justice Academy. Jim Graves also spoke about the National Fire Academy training model, which reimburses for travel and provides housing and meals on-site. Senator Bunker said we should look at the New Hampshire setup for ideas and an easier sell on the proposed ideas. Chief Esler says nothing prohibits the Commission from deciding we could reimburse a volunteer fire chief for attending training. Dan Brooks mentioned that there are dollar amounts needed for #2 to fund items and establish 2 positions at FMO to be shared with FSRI as data coordinators. Senator Curry asked if the coordinators will be providing operational support for the Commission. Chief Esler said he could see them assisting with the Commission if their workload allows. Chief Esler said in #2 there are provisions for confidentiality in data.

- #3: Dan Brooks: they put in a placeholder for \$3 million to finish the facilities. Discussion about MFSI moving under the FMO umbrella. Dan Brooks says this includes a proposed \$4 million retirement package to buy out the time for MFSI and FMO personnel so people can continue their retirement pathway. Chief Esler said the \$4 million dollars is just an estimate: we don't really know how much would be needed at this point. Senator Curry said it has been strange for him that the President of the Community College system is the head of the fire training, since they are in charge of MFSI. He feels that moving the training forward means the FMO office should be in charge, with the policy governance from this board, and that would be the best way to move forward. Vicki asked if MFSI would be moving under FMO and operate just as it is now, with the staff becoming state employees? Chief Esler: that would be the goal over a period of time, perhaps over the course of 3 years. There would be more staff added on, because they would be infused with the FMO office. There is no definite timeline at this point to get the merger to happen. Jim Graves expressed that the transfer shouldn't happen within 6 months: it would need to be over the course of several years, so that the training programs won't suffer. Vicki said she would need more information on this before she could get behind it. Chief Esler said there needs to be much more information put together on this, but he put this to the Commission to see if this is something the Commission could get behind to support this. Senator Cyrway said there are already things in place that we could take advantage of. He mentioned perhaps an apprenticeship program. Vicki: this proposal wouldn't impact the fire science or live-in programs at the Community College? Jim Graves: wouldn't impact the fire science program: it may impact the live-in programs. Chief Esler: the state still allows contract employees, and he said the Commission members could help design it. Bill Gillespie: the Community college doesn't support MFSI now, and the capacity that is needed to train the fire service needs more capacity. Ronnie Green: most people who are firefighters aren't interested in getting degrees. Senator Curry: people have to feel confident that the Commission is in control of the training, which is why he likes the training program being housed in the FMO office. Chief Esler: the State Fire Marshal is approved by the Criminal Justice Committee and then the full legislature has to vote on the State Fire Marshal. Multiple opportunities for people to have input in the process. He believes the Fire Commission has the ability to recommend to the Governor that changes be done as to who is leading the Fire Marshal Office. The Fire Commission can report issues to the Governor's Office. Ronnie Green: the Fire Commission doesn't currently have influence over the Community College President. Dan Brooks: #3 says there would be 3 Assistant Fire Marshals- includes a new one in place for training: this bill allows the State Fire Marshal to remove any of them, compared to current law where the Commissioner has to remove an Assistant Fire Marshal. Dan says Commission should meet with the college and have a public meeting so people can ask questions. Bill Gillespie we have 1-2 months before we need to wrap this up with a plan forward to start discussing with people. Dan asked if the Commission is comfortable with the sub-committee to continue working on the content. Vicki asked if the President of the Community College had been asked about our Commission concerns. Chief Esler said he has always relied on

Jim Graves to do the communication. Jim said that the communication isn't easy. Robby Gross told the members to bring their concerns to Dan for discussion in the sub-committee. Michelle will send a copy of the sub-committee minutes to the Commission along with the draft minutes of this Commission meeting to the members this week.

Gerry Gay presented a plaque to Chief Esler from the Commission for the FMO office space. It contains a newspaper article about the events of September 11, 2001.

Next meeting **October 5, 2026**

Adjourn 1:18 pm - Motion: Steve Greeley, Second: Ken Desmond – passes