MAINE FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES COMMISSION

**Minutes**

## **Monday, September 12, 2022**

**10:00am**

**Bolton Hill & ZOOM**

Chair Chief Dan Brooks convened the meeting at 10:04 AM on September 12, 2022.

Present members: Jim Roy, Troy Dare, Chief Brooks, Secretary Vicki Schmidt, First Vice Chair Gerry Gay, Chief Higgins, James McClean, John Churchill, EMS Director Sam Hurley, Chris Whytock, Fire Marshal Thomas, Second Vice Chair Ronnie Green, Senator Chip Curry, Bruce Willis, and Forestry’s Robby Gross.

Chair Brooks thanked Forestry’s Robby Gross for letting use the Bolton Hill Facility for this meeting.

**I. Committee Reports**

A. **Best Practices**

Nothing to report

B. **Professional Development Conference**

Chief Higgins stated that the Conference will be held in March and that speakers we’re being lined up.

Chief Brooks asked if there was any consideration being given to returning to a summer conference.

A discussion ensued and it was acknowledged that returning to a summer event will be considered and that there will likely have to be a change of location as Sunday River was becoming too expensive. It was also noted that the Sunday River Facility was too small anyway. The discussion concluded by recognizing that the Maine Chief’s will ultimately drive this decision but there is a need to start looking for the alternative location now.

C. **Education and Training**

Chair Brooks stated that the Education and Training Committee will need to convene. He went on to note that there will be and needs to be a continued effort for additional funding and mentioned the previous legislation to fund training at MFSI would require that a planning process or rules might need to be set up in order to manage the funds.

Jim Graves, the Director of MFSI stated that MFSI can manage it and that the funding must focus on standards-based training and nothing else. The funding will specifically be used to pay for travel, educational materials, and other items directly tied to the delivery of that training. Director Graves emphasized that MFSI could manage the training and do grants as well for Firefighter I and II training. The grants, Graves added, would be awarded to departments meeting perquisites such as using NFIRS, having approved apparatus, and more. A considerable need is to have the chiefs committed to the/a process. Finally, Graves noted that additional money might be obtained from funds not needed in other programs at MFSI.

Chief Brooks remined members that the current funding does roll over.

EMS Director Sam Hurley inquired as to whether any of the funding Director Graves discussed went to EMS related training.

Director Graves suggested funding for EMS training could come from money not needed in other programs. It was emphasized again that that the training focus on rural departments. Once proposals for funding be made MFSI needs to review it. With this model MFSI can speed up the funding process and save money at the same time and allow programed training to be completed.

Gerry Gay inquired as to whether BLS components were being incorporated into FF I and II programs or will that be separate training.

Director Graves said it is incorporated and went on to express his concern regarding PFAS and the water used in training firefighters use of foam citing that the water cannot come from ponds but rather municipal sources and even some of those had PFAS.

D. **Recruitment and Retention**

Bruce Willis of the Maine Federation of Fire Fighters noted that the recent Community College free tuition program will help put additional students into Fire Science training and subsequently into fire departments and that legislation passed for the Maine Association of Retiree’s will allow firefighters to collect additional retirement funds. Finally, Orono and Old Town Fire Departments had added another shift lowering time on the job while maintaining the same level of pay.

Chief Brooks asked if public service announcement being discussed would focus on recruitment.

Chief Gillespie responded yes and that they will be reaching out to experienced media people to discuss the PSAs further.

EMS Director Hurley expressed concern regarding the audience the PSA’s might miss because they will be played mostly on cable. He suggested working with a marketing firm to avoid missing the larger audience.

E. **Wildland Fire**

Forestry’s Robbie Gross discussed the new Community Defense Grants being made available through the USDA. The funding will help communities in the wildland urban interface to implement program aimed at reducing the risk posed by wildland fires. Maine Forestry will be applying for funding and Mr. Gross let the Commission know that communities can as well.

EMS Director Hurley asked if the money can be used to develop evacuation plans for hospitals and other facilities at risk from wildland fire.

Mr. Gross responded that it could be used for evacuation planning. It’s up to the community to focus what it needs to do to optimize its wildland fire defense.

The Wildland Fire Committee is going to convene a meeting soon.

F.  **Staffing Committee**

Fire Marshal Joe Thomas said the Hancock Fire Recruitment and Retention Survey was essentially complete and the group was now planning out how and to whom the results will be presented to in addition to the County Fire Departments.

The Fire Marshal stated the group, including the University of Maine’s Margaret Chase Scholl of Public Policy had applied for funding from FEMAs Fire Prevention and Safety Grant Program. The funding will help the group take the survey statewide.

In connection with results of the Hancock survey Marshal Thomas pointed out that adding a couple firefighters here and there will not resolve the Maine’s fire department staffing issue and suggested the various departments working together would more likely resolve the problem the lack of staffing is creating to begin with, incident response and prevention.

The Fire Marshal also mentioned that the State Fire Marshal’s Office is looking to purchase Craig 1300, an NFPA Community Risk Assessment Tool. The tool could be used by the SFMO, Maine fire departments and other organizations around the state to identify risk in selected communities as well as where there is a need for additional staffing and subsequently where to focus recruitment and retention efforts.

**Treasury Report**

Chief Whytock, the new treasurer, stated that there is a current balance of $2,074.70 in the treasury.

Chief Brooks noted that he needed to get the funding request for the Commission to Fire Marshal Thomas.

EMS Director Hurley informed the Commission that their platform (ImageTrend) can collect data on fire department personnel and their certifications, training and other details about each firefighter and apparatus as well.

A discussion ensued regarding the value of the system Director Hurley described. There was consensus that such a system would be of value and that it should be discussed later.

**II. Old Business**

**A. LOSAP**

All the contracts are complete and presentations about the system to departments in some counties has begun. Registration in the system is now open.

An estimated 30 departments are setting aside funds to put toward registration at this time. Hopefully this type of funding will result in getting everyone registered and in a position to benefit from the program.

**B. EMS Report**

EMS Director Sam Hurley provided the Commission with a detailed outline and description the strategic planning process the EMS Board has undertaken. Director Hurley discussed why strategic planning was needed and the benefits it would have as well as the challenges carrying out such a planning process entails.

Director Hurley requested the Commission proved a letter of support for the EMS strategic planning effort.

Chief Brooks stated that the Commission would consider drafting a letter of support.

**III. New Business and News from Members**

**A. Legislation**

Chief Brooks mentioned legislation aimed at funding and funding LOSAP in particular. He went on to suggest incorporating these various efforts under one umbrella and subsequently provide a unified approach.

LD 731 a bill that provides training funds to MFSI was discussed and it was pointed out that the bill also, in a sense, provides funds to businesses whose employees left work to serve their community in fighting fires. The funding would reimburse the businesses for economic losses incurred due to the temporary loss of staff . There is concern as to the bills definition of firefighters who are receiving NO PAY and that this needs to be fixed so that businesses employing volunteer firefighters that do collect some types of pay be included in the reimbursement program. Chief Brooks stated that discussion with Senator Stuart had begun to remedy the wording of the bill.

Fire Marshal Thomas pointed out that such business reimbursements could be helpful particularly in rural areas.

Chief Higgins concurred with the Fire Marshal and restated the need to clarify the bills language.

**B. Other**

Fire Marshal Thomas pointed out the need to replace Chief Thurlow on the Commission and the committee chair post he held.

Chief Brooks suggested that fire service awards should all be presented at one conference and in one presentation.

Chief Brooks adjourned the meeting at 12:03 PM.