

Minnesota Board of Firefighter Training and Education
Special Board Meeting Minutes of March 12, 2008 – St. Michael, MN

The Minnesota Board of Firefighter Training and Education (MnBdFT&E) was called to order at 1:30 p.m. at the Township Offices in St. Michael, MN by Vice Chairman Judy Smith Thill.

A	Marvin Calvin MSFCA	Willmar	2009			VACANT League of Cities		2007
P	Wayne Durant MSFDA	Brainerd	2009		P	Tom Pressler MSFDA	Bloomington	2009
P	Jim Fisher Ass'n of Townships	Zim	2009		P	Jerry Rosendahl Dept of Public Safety	St Paul	N/A
P	Daniel Greensweig Ass'n of Townships	St. Michael	2010		P	Kelli Slavik League of Cities	Plymouth	2010
A	Aliina Granholm MSFDA	Esko	2011		P	Judy Smith Thill MSFDA	Inver Grove Hts	2008
P	Jeff Swanson MSFCA	Detroit Lakes	2010		A	John Wiskocil MSFDA	Montgomery	2008
A	Barbara Frank Public Member	Danube	2011		P	Matthew Ashmore MPFF	Hibbing	2011
P	Richard Loveland MPFF	Moorhead	2008					

PPF = Minn. Professional Fire Fighters MSFCA = Minn. State Fire Chiefs' Association MSFDA = Minn. State Fire Dept. Association
 Visitors: Don Beckering – MnSCU; Warren Jorgenson – MnSCU; Frank Langer – MnSCU;
 Brian Rice – Rice, Michaels, Walther, LLP (Lobbyist for MPFF)

There were introductions around the room.

Inasmuch as this was a Special Meeting, only two items were on the agenda for discussion:

1. Legislative proposals concerning the board's status and operations; and
2. The executive director's position.

Legislative Proposals concerning the board's status and operations

Vice Chair Thill provided an overview of the reasons for calling of a Special Meeting to more fully understand the background of the bill as introduced by the MPFF; and, to that end Brian Rice representing the MPFF was introduced for further information.

Brian Rice expressed apologies for MPFF President Tom Thornberg who was not able to attend the meeting because he was attending the annual legislative conference in Washington, D.C. Brian indicated that he welcomed comments and questions during the presentation. [Scribe will put questions in italics within the comments].

The legislation is represented in HF 3716 (Ozment and Smith) and SF 3447 (Rest). The initial introduction (HF- 3716) evidently prompted this concern. A copy of changes to the bill via SF 3447 was distributed for purposes of discussion.

The background presented was that the need for licensure of career firefighters has been discussed by the MPFF for some time. Licensure for police officers has been around for some time; and, because such licensure does not exist for firefighters, there is a concern that possible funding streams are not available to the career firefighters. The legislation was basically modeled after the Police Officers Standards and Training Board (POST) and some of the rules may not be germane.

There has been a lot removed from the bill at it was originally introduced. Research indicates that the Fire Service is becoming more of a science in that FF I, EMT, HazMat and other areas are needed for training. Nyle Zikmund has indicated that licensure is important to the state. POST designates training and has made strides in the compensation for police officers based on licenses. The legislation addresses the fire service industry in the colleges and the fire service has evolved extensively in various disciplines as evidenced in the 35W bridge collapse. President Thornberg sees the need for licensure in the state – no other state has such a licensing board; and, while there may be some that say it is generally good, the devil is in the details.

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Why use the MnBdFT&E? Mr. Rice indicated that the training board seemed a likely fit and already seemed to be working with the colleges according to Nyle and expressed the belief that all Full Time Firefighters should be licensed. Minnesota ranks 44th in the nation for expenditure on Fire Service and licensure would possibly benefit the career firefighters as well as the state.

Concern about Rural Minnesota – paying of licensing for example. Mr. Rice stated that the legislation pertains to career firefighters only, but gives an opportunity for volunteer and paid-on-call firefighters to participate. There would be additional responsibilities for the board – ref Sub 3 (4) through (15).

Additional responsibilities will add additional extensive costs to the Board – how will those costs be covered? Mr. Rice expressed his belief that there would be a fee for the licensing and that should cover additional costs or there may be a requirement to increase the surcharge or get additional moneys from the state. *What is the budget for the POST Board?* Mr. Rice did not have that answer [From 2006/2007 Biennial Budget - \$3.943M and \$3,943M respectively]. *Is there a fiscal note for the legislation?* That has not been requested as yet.

Concern that legislation indicates that the MnBDFT&E supply materials that seems to be beyond the current scope? Mr Rice indicated that that area will be reviewed.

What is the definition of “employee”? Mr. Rice indicated that the intent is that anyone can obtain a license, but originally thought that it would be a 40 hour a week paid person. The fire service is changing the distinction between career and volunteer/paid-on-call and that distinction is not a prominent today as it may have been.

The training is the same for all firefighters, why is licensure necessary? Mr. Rice thought that licensure may carry possibilities of additional funding and that Nyle had indicated that he has a problem getting firefighters and this may help that.

It appears that the legislation does not permit credit for those that are trained outside of the state of Minnesota. Mr. Beckering of MnSCU indicated that with proper transcripts – training can be carried across state lines. Mr. Rice indicated that this would be another area for review. [MnSCU had suggested language changes and Brian Rice and Don Beckering met after the meeting to discuss that.]

Why not a separate Licensing Board? Mr. Rice indicated that there could be two separate boards, but there may be some competition between the two boards.

The legislation defines the hours needed for basic training – new standards indicate an increase of hours far beyond that in the legislation – who will define that? Mr. Rice indicated that his is another area for clarification.

There are issues on both sides pertaining to the aspect of using this board – politically the MPFF Licensing Bill has a hint of mandatory certification (a concern for some time of the fire service) and yet this board has started on a positive process that may be enhanced by the legislation – it will be necessary to determine the best avenue for the benefit of the fire service in Minnesota. Mr. Rice expressed appreciation for this insight.

There was some discussion about the numbers of firefighters in the state – the specific numbers seem to be elusive. An estimate from various members of the Board on various associated numbers in the state was that there are 11 – 15 career departments, 20 – 30 Combination departments and about 1500 full time MPFF members.

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Why a new concept of licensing if not in other states? Mr. Rice reiterated the benefits already mentioned for the career firefighters and reviewed that “certification” may have the same connotation as licensure in some jurisdictions.

It was mentioned that a joint legislative group representing several fire service organizations (not MPFF) passed a resolution opposing the legislation. Some discussion ensued about what version was the basis – subsequent information indicates that it was the revised version.

Vice Chair Smith wrapped up this portion of the special meeting agenda item with no formal motion or action by the Board. In general, some felt non-opposed to the concept, but felt the timing was not correct because of the current activities of the Board.

The executive director’s position

In spite of the approval of the Board to contract with Carriveau & Associates subject a successful contract with the State, the contract discussions reached a lull and subsequently Carriveau and Associates withdrew their offer.

Motion by Tom Pressler – that both RFP responses be rejected and the Administration Committee to update the RFP and reissue when completed. Second by Rick Loveland. Carried.

Discussion ensued about some of various activities of the Administration Committee (activities that were deemed by the state as proprietary during the review and negotiations) that were not known by the Board. Internal adjustments to Board procedure and clarification from the State will attempt to correct this.

Changes to the RFP should be completed shortly and submitted to the State. Pursuant to State advice, the changes will be shared with the Board as information prior to submission to the State.

Motion by Jim Fisher – to direct the Administration Committee to post the updated RFP. Second by Jeff Swanson. Carried.

That completed actions on the two posted agenda items.

Judy Thill Smith made the announcement that because of increased work-related commitments, she would be resigning as vice chair at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom Pressler, Secretary