



**DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES**  
**OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

**MINUTES**

**FIRE MARSHAL TRAINING COUNCIL**

via Collaborate  
Tuesday, June 15, 2021

**Call to order**

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 by Chairman Donald Harwood.

**Attendance**

Members present: State Fire Marshal William Abbott, Chairman Donald Harwood, Joseph Asklar, Susan Bransfield, David Marcarelli, Victor Mitchell, Steven Sawyer, Walt Summers, Tim Tharau.

Members absent: Jeffrey Morrissette

DAS Staff present: OEDM Director Bonnie Becker, OEDM Trainers Sheila Taridona and DJ Zordan

Guest: Sgt. Paul Makuc, FEIU

**Approval of Minutes**

Motion to Accept the November 16, 2020 minutes made by Victor Mitchell, seconded by Tim Tharau  
All in favor. None opposed. Motion carried.

**Communications**

There were no communications.

**Staff Reports**

Office of Education and Data Management

Bonnie Becker reported that the fall 2021 precertification application was sent out June 4, and has a July 16 deadline. Becker stressed that this will be the last class till fall 2022 so that OEDM Trainers can update the curriculum to the new Code in the spring. Becker also reported that planning for Career Development webinars is ongoing, and that the new online system is anticipated to be operational this fall.

Office of the State Fire Marshal

No report from the State Fire Marshal.

**Old Business**

Chairman Harwood welcomed the new Council members and requested that a copy of the bylaws be sent to all members. Harwood suggested that at the annual December meeting new leadership roles should be determined. Harwood confirmed that there are three vacancies on the Fire Marshal Training Council – one for an administrator for a town over 70 K, two from the Board of Regents.

**New Business**

Proposed changes to fire training and exam admissions criteria.

DJ Zordan presented the proposal crafted by State Police FEIU and OEDM Fire Trainers. Zordan reported that CGS 29-298's five criteria don't really screen candidates, especially for the challenge exam. The proposal would increase the criteria to apply for the challenge exam. He said we need to look for a better knowledge base for the duties required. Online schools teach to a national curriculum, not to Connecticut. We're trying to ensure that when a FM receives a certification from us, they are truly prepared to do the job in the field. The proposal states that municipality-sponsored candidates trump the statutory criteria.

Steve Sawyer stated that 25 years' experience, is not enough experience to pass the Code test. "Five years of suppression doesn't do it for me," he said. Sawyer noted that on the proposal's challenge process, under investigator, 3A should be fire investigation, not arson investigation. He asked about 3B and how often the legal course is given.

Zordan stated that Legal Concepts is offered twice annually during the fire investigation program, adding that some thought has been given to putting it online. The State's Attorney's Office comes in and does the training.

Sawyer added that 3D under fire inspector has nothing to do with hazmat, and that hazmat must be added.

Joe Asklar asked under proposed Requirements for Admissions to Precertification Training Program, is it 1 and 2, or 1 or 2? Zordan acknowledged it should be or.

Asklar asked if under 29-298 (b), How do we determine where to set the bar for people who want to come and take this exam? The statute says accept successful completion of approved training developed by agencies or institutions. Where is the bar set to determine equivalent programs? Who determines it?

Zordan responded that right now there is no equivalency. It's up to the State Fire Marshal and Codes and Standards to evaluate for equivalence.

William Abbott related to what Sawyer said regarding legal training. "I'm all in favor of changes. They would give us a better product out in the field. I feel if you take the challenge exam, you should have to sit through the certification class too. In the past we've had people who have taken the challenge exam, get out in the field and have no idea what they are doing. This affects the municipality, puts them in a bad spot."

Zordan replied that it would be a little bit redundant to take the exam and the class. This committee or Codes and Standards should just eliminate the challenge option. Abbott stated he has no problem with that.

Harwood went back to what Sawyer said. "I don't think a change from 3 years to 5 years' experience, makes a difference, only depends on the candidate. Police officer would bring strong investigative skills, but that wouldn't make them competent in code compliance. This is a tough one. It's very hard. We could have a FM from San Francisco that moves his family here and is unbelievably competent and wants to challenge the test. I always try to compare this to other professions – every profession you could be very skilled, from college, could be better prepared than someone with 5 years' experience. What are the numbers? How many challenged? How many failed the challenge? How many failed from the class? Employees fail, have some skill sets, but not all skill sets. Online good idea for delivering Legal Aspects. Wondering if by tightening criteria, will we get people to fill the roles that we want. I'm not 100% in favor here. We're not going to get the benefit that we want."

Paul Makuc said, "I feel strongly about the challenge exam not being offered. In my 16 years of experience with CSP, having watched this program evolve, credit to DJ, Sheila, and Gary for raising the bar on the program. I've seen firsthand folks come through the challenge exam, pass the practical exam, not having gone through the program. I understand that people move into Connecticut, maybe some are competent to step into that role. I've always been a strong proponent that the legal class and the lessons involving legal, it's not just a one-day class, it's woven throughout the whole thing. I've seen it out in the field, I've seen folks that went through challenge go out into a fire scene, and violated people's constitutional rights, all but jeopardized an investigation scene. Class gives the benefit of having someone to call, that's the nature of the class. It's a disservice to certify people who go through the challenge exam." (At this point Makuc lost connectivity.)

Harwood added that he is impressed with from when he took the class to the class of today. "Quality is super important. The only other thing, how many people does it really affect and how do other states do it? Don't really have an aversion to making someone take the class. It's just that there's talent out there. This is not a bad proposal. Let's compare it to make sure it fits the bill. Then we'll push it to Codes and Standards and see if they want to run with it."

Walt Summers suggested a mix for the challenge exam. "If a candidate has national certification, obviously that person has done work on their own to prepare themselves. We create Connecticut-specific classes that meet FEIU requirements. If blend the two, then let sit for challenge exam. This would allow people who want to move to Connecticut to know these are the classes you have to take prior to taking the exam. Might produce a better product."

Zordan replied that with the new Learning Management system, it should be easier to track. He explained that five years was inserted as a benchmark based on Building Official requirements. The five years puts them on the same playing field as the BO. As candidates come in from small volunteer departments they will have a more limited knowledge base. These criteria are for nonsponsored, or independent candidates.

Becker said, "I have a problem with this. A standard is a standard. I don't understand why these standards aren't for everybody. Being sponsored by a municipality gets you preference into getting you into the class only," she suggested.

Zordan responded that the responsibility is on the municipality for picking a person that doesn't meet the requirements. Becker added that the way the statute is now, even if the municipality identifies a candidate, the person still has to have three years' experience.

Summers replied that we have to support our small towns. If a candidate from a small town is willing to dedicate his time to the precertification class, the instructors should note that and assist those candidates accordingly. "I think it should be harder for the challengers. Possibly add an internship with challenge exam. Get letter from sponsored fire marshal."

Sawyer responded that he agrees with Becker. "Minimum standards should be for everybody." He liked Summers portfolio idea for the challenge exam. "Do these five, six, eight things and sit for the exam."

Harwood commented that, "DJ and Paul have provided the most in-depth dialog in many years. Thank you. That's fabulous. Lots of good ideas." He proposed that between everyone who weighed in at the meeting, "let's see if we can find a blend or balance if you're sponsored or if you want to come in. I agree there should be some continuity to develop something a little broader. Great to bring in real life

experience. Maybe some modifications have to be made here. Based on today's comments, we're not ready to move this forward. Because of such good suggestions, a better product could be reached."

Summers proposed that Code suggestions – go to Bill. Investigations go to Paul.

Harwood suggested collaboration with one or 2 people. Get DJ involved. Could meet something that could meet the needs of the state.

Summers summarized, "Tighten up challenge exam process."

Abbott added, "Add hazardous materials."

Summers asked if this will be a statute change.

Zordan replied that he only wanted to do this once. "Split the statute, one for the precertification class, two for challenging."

Summers suggested that the group keep the statute generic and leave it up to Codes and Standards in the regulations.

Zordan said he was willing to accept direction.

Tim Tharau mentioned that a long time ago the group talked about having a separate class to be a fire marshal. You can't be a fire marshal until you take this class, which includes budgeting and interdynamics skills. You can be a fire investigator or fire code inspector and work under someone.

Victor Mitchell asked to see statistics. How many folks are we talking about?

Zordan replied that challengers from college programs, now want certificates. In the field, they are not prepared to do the job.

Harwood asked what are we looking at? "How many people a year? 2b in statute. Equivalent course... That might be the goal here. To try to define that. One course might not be enough. Look at minutes, have a couple of subgroups to talk about the options. I'm not sure this is ready for prime time, but it did start a whole different dialog. Fabulous."

Walt reached out to DJ for quick zoom meeting.

#### Board of Control

Individuals interested on serving on the Code Training and Education Fund Board of Control were asked to contact Bonnie Becker. Under a new law that passed June 14<sup>th</sup>, the Fire Marshal Training Council now has one seat on the Board.

Proposed next meeting to discuss proposal – September after small group discussions.

Sue Bransfield added, "The dialog was good, reflective of towns' needs. Good job everybody. I learned a lot."

#### **Adjournment**

At 11:13 Susan Bransfield made the motion to adjourn. All in favor. None opposed. Motioned carried.

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Donald Harwood, Chair  
Fire Marshal Training Council

DRAFT