



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
COMMISSION ON FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL
OFFICE OF STATE FIRE ADMINISTRATION



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Jeffrey J. Morrisette
State Fire Administrator
May 28, 2003

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**MINUTES OF THE MAY 28, 2003 MEETING OF
THE COMMISSION ON FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL**

State Fire Administrator Morrisette opened the meeting at 6:10 p.m. with the following members present: Commissioners' Gomeau, Haber, Milewski, Nicol, Ouellette, and Wilkinson. Commissioner Johnson arrived at 6:25 p.m. Commissioners' Brammer, Carozza, Kowalski, Maheu, McDonald, Stankye and Vendetta were excused. Staff members Morrisette, O'Neil, Ouellette, Piechota and Piskura were present.

Mr. Morrisette welcomed everyone to the regular May meeting of the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control. He extended apologies on behalf of Chairman Carozza whose delayed flight just landed at Bradley Airport. It is unlikely he will be able to make the meeting and at this point we are short a body for a quorum thus we will proceed on an informational basis.

Secretary Haber asked attendees to take a moment to pledge allegiance to the American flag.

Mr. Morrisette stated that our host Dr. Cantor has not arrived and as soon as he does he will formally welcome us to Norwalk. We appreciate the opportunity to meet down here in Fairfield County and to be the guests of Norwalk Community College.

Mr. Morrisette asked the guests to the meeting to introduce themselves.

Guests to the meeting were identified as Chief James Verda, Norwalk Fire Department, Jim Eastwood, Fairfield Fire Department, David Rabito, CFDIA, Mark Greene, Turn of River Fire Department, Charlee Tufts, CT EMS Advisory Board, Chief Dennis McCarthy, Westport Fire Department and Dr. Jeffrey Cantor, Norwalk Community College.

Mr. Morrisette asked members of the Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves.

Secretary Haber asked whether anyone had questions on the Staff Report of April 15, 2003 through May 14, 2003.

Commissioner Nicol inquired about funding reduced to \$100,000 for the Limited Access Highway Account.

Mr. Morrisette stated that at the current time that is what has been proposed by the Appropriations' Committee as an adjustment to the Governor's proposed elimination.

Moving to item 4 a.) Mr. Morrissette gave a budget and staffing update. He stated as part of the Commission package, a copy of the adjustments recommended by the Appropriations' Committee were included. They are recommending the addition of one Trainer position and an adjustment to the Limited Access Highway Grant Program. The \$100,000 add back could actually put is a very difficult position as it would only be enough to fund about four months out of the year.

In regard to staffing, the agency has been authorized to move forward with the refill of the vacant Trainer position created by the passing of Ron Keane. We've had the opportunity to bypass the re-employment list and go directly to the two qualified individuals who were laid off. Dave Christoff, who has more seniority, has elected to waive his rights to that position. Bob Christ has accepted as of yesterday and he will be back on the full time payroll effective Friday of this week.

Regarding the Early Retirement Incentive Program (ERIP) Executive Secretary Alberta Ouellette has accepted the offer for the early retirement package and will be leaving us on Friday of this week. We've also received papers from Joseph Bartok who bumped into the position sharing it with Jim Carroll. As you recall, we were able to work out a stipulated agreement with the Union and Labor Relations to allow the two individuals to share a position with the understanding that Mr. Bartok would be leaving under the ERIP. He has submitted his paperwork and will also be leaving us on Friday. That action does not necessarily create a vacancy because he's been sharing a position within the agency with another employee. It has been our responsibility to cover both of their salaries the past two months. The second Trainer who has come into our agency as a result of the bump has not exercised his rights to the ERIP. He only has until June 1st to do so. It appears he is currently looking at the potential of a disability retirement. We're obligated by June 6th to submit a plan to OPM regarding the ERIP impact and refill request. Currently, the only position we can request to refill will be the position vacated by Alberta's retirement.

Commissioner Ouellette inquired whether Jim Carroll's position would still be at risk.

Mr. Morrissette stated that position is now stabilized. We've moved forward within that particular bargaining unit to classify Mr. Carroll as one of two key designees to be protected effective May 1st.

Commissioner Nicol inquired whether the Executive Secretary position would have to be filled from the SEBAC list or will it be a promotional opportunity within the staff.

Mr. Morrissette stated that it's not been clarified as of yet but he believes because it is an Unclassified position, we will have the opportunity to go out to the public or create an opportunity internally.

Mr. Morrissette stated that at this time he would like to introduce Dr. Jeffrey Cantor who is representing Norwalk Community College. He currently serves as the Dean of Continuing Education and Community Service and is our host for this evening's meeting.

Dr. Cantor apologized for being a little tardy. Summer school is starting this evening and there were a number of issues to attend to. He welcomed everyone to the College and hopes the accommodations are satisfactory.

Moving to item 4 b.) Commissioner Wilkinson gave an update on the CSFA Education Committee. He stated that the Committee still meets regularly. The Committee is cautiously optimistic and almost ready to roll up the victory flag as it deals with the issue of funding for the regional schools. Since the last reporting, some good friends to the fire service in key positions within the Legislature have secured a commitment from Governor Rowland and OPM Secretary Marc Ryan to provide \$15 million a year for the next two years. We were originally looking at a package of \$60 million over five years, but we're very gratified at this milestone.

Mr. Morrisette asked Mr. Piskura to provide a brief update on activities with Industrial Risk Insurers (IRI) that will also benefit the regional schools.

Mr. Piskura stated that General Electric took over control of IRI in Hartford several years ago. They recently made a corporate decision to vacate the premises on Woodland Street in Hartford. Industrial Risk Insurers has a very extensive sprinkler lab and as of this point they have vacated the premises and have allowed us to gain access and secure any equipment we want. We've taken various static displays and things that have antique value will be given to the Fire Museum. There are approximately 45 to 50 sprinkler risers, which are all different and up for the taking.

Mr. Morrisette stated we have been in negotiations with IRI over several months to gain permission to access surplus equipment in the lab. We knew if and when permission was received we would have very little time to access the equipment. We had asked Al Hawkins to send an email out to all the Regional Fire School Directors yesterday inviting them to share in the surplus equipment. They would be responsible to provide the personnel and equipment necessary to move the equipment.

Chief Verda inquired if discussion would be opened to the public later on the regional school concept.

Mr. Morrisette replied affirmatively.

Moving to item 4 c.) Mr. Morrisette gave an update on the Regional Foam Trailer Program. He stated that he had received the MOU agreement from the City of Waterbury. Their training is in the final stages of being completed and they anticipate the final trailer to be in operation probably by the second week of June. It's taken quite a few months to get all five units on line. We've been communicating with DEP who is the dispatch point for the trailers. Also, just recently we had an opportunity to do a briefing for the Connecticut Department of Homeland Security who is going to take that information and bring it back to the Governor. One of several items requested was looking at the feasibility of adding some additional trailers so we have coverage in all eight counties of Connecticut. In addition, we requested funding for foam stockpiles within the state. The program will be advertised as soon as he gets the okay from Waterbury. We just finalized the layout of the brochure and shortly we will be mailing it to all fire departments outlining the program and the details of it.

A question and answer period followed.

Moving to item 4 d.) Mr. Morrisette gave a Legislative update. He referenced the Bill Tracking Report dated 5/16/03 that was distributed earlier. A reminder the Legislative session ends June 4. It does not look promising that a budget will be in place by close of the Session necessitating a Special Session. Commissioners Kowalski and Vendetta were not able to attend this evening because they are

at the Capitol doing some last minute lobbying related to the fire/building code issue. They felt that it was important that they stay at the Capitol to insure that it keeps moving forward.

Moving to item 5 c.) Dr. Cantor gave an update on the Public Safety Academy initiative. Dr. Cantor welcomed everyone and gave a little bit of a background about Norwalk Community College (NCC). Norwalk is one of twelve Community colleges in the State. They function as a system with a system wide Board of Trustees in Hartford. Several of the colleges have fire technology degree programs, Norwalk being one of them. Many years back George Munkenbeck coordinated the fire technology programs on a statewide basis. Since George's retirement, the colleges have picked up the programs independently. He stated they no longer function as a system of five or six colleges offering fire technology programs, we do it locally. Norwalk has a Board of Advisors for the fire technology committee a couple of the Advisors will speak later tonight. That group steers and advises our program. We do speak with the other colleges, however they're individually administered as opposed to the way it was done some years back. Here at Norwalk we've been expanding the fire technology program in some new directions the last couple of years. One of those directions is in terms of emergency management and the Paramedic training program. He gave an overview of the fire technology degree programs and related initiatives NCC will be working on in the future in addition to their relationship with the University of New Haven, Charter Oak College and the Connecticut Fire Academy. Most recently he spoke of the National Fire Academy's initiative, (Fire & Emergency Services Higher Education), to move at the state level an arrangement to bring state fire academies, colleges, emergency management people and others closer together. More recently, NCC has submitted a grant application to the federal government for Homeland Security money to aid them in beefing up their offerings to local fire departments and to pay the cost for that training. They have worked with both Congressman Shays and Senator Dodd. In closing Dr. Cantor offered their facilities to the Academy for future offerings.

Commissioner Johnson inquired relative to funding for Homeland Security, what type of courses NCC planned to offer. Dr. Cantor responded the programs would be related to Emergency Management and other specialized courses either in cooperation with the Emergency Management Institute, National Fire Academy or the Connecticut Fire Academy. He also indicated that they are working with the Coastal Fire Chiefs group to identify the types of training they require and to look at the best provider to offer those types of courses.

Commissioner Ouellette inquired whether the grant funding would be used specifically for programs here at NCC or whether they could be utilized for programs in other parts of the state at Community Colleges and at the Connecticut Fire Academy. Dr. Cantor replied that there were two different grant applications submitted. The grant application through Congressman Shays was specifically for southwestern Connecticut. The grant application submitted through Senator Dodd's office was a statewide grant submitted on behalf of the Community Colleges and provided for some leadership money in the Chancellors office and provided funding for the twelve Community Colleges throughout the State. The intention is to work with departments in the various regions to address their needs.

Commissioner Nicol inquired as to the dollar amount of the grant requests. Dr. Cantor replied that he believed the request was for \$250,000 at the state level. The grant request through Congressman Shay's was for a smaller amount around \$100,000.

Moving on to item 5 d.) EMS Commission Charlee Tufts, Chair of the EMS Advisory Boards Legislative Committee was introduced. Ms. Tufts thanked the Commission for the invitation to appear before them. She reported that she wanted to acquaint the Commission with the process and rationale as to how the EMS Board came up with the EMS Commission proposal and to hopefully move forward working together to find a solution to better administer the EMS system in the state.

Initially a focus group, a good cross section, was put together in April, 2001 to review the issue. They reviewed all of the previous EMS studies to look for common threads. A consensus opinion was developed rather quickly to look at the establishment of an EMS Commission modeled after the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control. A final working document was developed and available in December of 2001.

Ms. Tufts distributed a number of documents relative to her presentation to Commission members. She reported that the key point proposed was that the new Commission would replace the current Commissioner. All EMS regulatory and programmatic responsibilities would be transferred. As the discussion of an EMS Commission continued, a number of groups had indicated that they would not be in favor of the concept unless they had a seat on the new Commission. The current EMS Advisory Board and Regional Councils would remain in existence. The EMS Advisory Board has made some recent changes to strengthen itself such as adopting new bylaws, a new Chairman, reformation of a Steering Committee, etc. Also, Commissioner Garcia has agreed that he would better utilize the current board for advice.

Commissioner Ouellette inquired whether guidelines exist for the Regional Councils. Ms. Tufts replied that the Council of Regional Chairpersons is in Statute and its role is to guide the Councils and gain consensus independently and/or collectively.

Commissioner Nicol inquired whether the EMS Advisory Board was still pursuing a separate EMS Commission proposal. Ms. Tufts indicated that was still the position and focus of the EMS Advisory Board. The plan is to pursue that goal during the next Legislative session.

Commissioner Nicol continued discussion on funding of the Regional Council and the feasibility of consolidating them into state government. Ms. Tufts indicated there is a possibility that if the Councils were able to add to their staffing, they could take on some of the functions the state is no longer able to do. Each Council could in essence specialize in a separate area to prevent a duplication of efforts.

Commissioner Nicol indicated that he was aware there was opposition to a merger of OEMS with the Fire Commission. He referenced the merger that took place in the State of New Hampshire that appears to be very successful. He inquired whether their committee had looked at that action. Ms. Tufts reported that to her knowledge that was a recent merger and that their committee was researching the various operations throughout the United States including the New Hampshire model. She indicated they are not closed to anything but their EMS Commission proposal was the result of a lot of work. The bottom line is that the system needs a permanent fix. Ms. Tufts indicated the group is not closed to other options. At this time they would like to work with the Fire Commission gaining support finding common ground to move forward on.

Commissioner Johnson stated that the EMS system has experienced a decline. He asked Ms. Tufts whether in her opinion she felt the fire service has contributed in any way to the decline. Ms. Tufts responded that she did not believe so stating that it was clearly leadership and staffing issues at the state level. Commissioner Johnson asked Ms. Tufts whether she was seeking the Commission's help. Ms. Tufts responded that she would like to partner with the Commission to see how to solve the problems benefiting the EMS system as a whole. The partnership would best be served by maintaining an open door and dialogue.

Moving to item 5a.) Coastline Fire Chiefs Chief Dennis McCarthy, Westport Fire Department. Chief McCarthy thanked the Commission for meeting in Norwalk. Chief McCarthy indicated that he was a relatively new chief and his department is undergoing a lot of personnel changes that will present a lot of training problems. He indicated that his department has a great relationship with the agency and he appreciates the Connecticut Fire Academy's programs including the Recruit program where they expect to possibly have 8 students enrolled this summer. He reported that over the past six months a number of departments in the Fairfield county area, specifically those in the southwest regional planning agency, the 8 towns, including Stratford have been meeting to collaborate once a month. During that time they realize many of them face the same problems. One common area they need to address is the coordination of training opportunities. As a group they approached NCC, because many members of their departments have been associated with the school for years, to take advantage of their ability to bring together the fire department to provide training. He indicated the training discussed is not entry level, rather command and control, strategy and tactics for junior fire officers. They have been encouraged by the efforts NCC has made to assist the departments. This further encourages department members to take part in the degree program.

Once thing that is concerning to the group is the competition for funds. This issue was recently brought up at the last Career Fire Chiefs meeting. He stated that we cannot strengthen one part of the system such as NCC while the core, the Fire Academy is suffering. The Regional Schools are also a part of the system. He advocates strong collaboration between the players.

Moving to item 5 e.) Email List Serve Guidelines. Mr. Morrissette briefed the Commission on their electronic mail list serve that has been in operation over the past few years. He reported that on average four to five messages are sent out daily to individuals who voluntarily subscribe to the service. There is currently about 3,000 subscribers to the list serve. Recently, it had come to his attention informally, someone questioning whether the agency was using this state asset appropriately. This was as a result of the posting of a message for the Connecticut Fire Marshals Association (CFMA) that was seeking support for a legislative issue. Someone on the building official's side did not feel it was appropriate the service be used for that purpose. Both he and Mr. Piechota discussed the request from the CFMA to post the message and that he authorized Mr. Piechota to do so. The rationale was that the CFMA is represented on the Commission and that we don't censor requests other than to edit the messages for clarity. There is a disclaimer notice posted with each outgoing message.

In checking with the Department of Information Technology it is their opinion that each agency develop their own policies for email use. At this time Administrator Morrissette inquired whether Commission members present had any thoughts on the issue.

Commissioner Nicol stated that it may be best to obtain an opinion from the Attorney General's Office. Commissioner Milewski concurred with that recommendation. Administrator indicated that he would.

Moving to item 6 Comments from the public.

Chief James Verda, Norwalk Fire Department extended his thanks to both Administrator Morrissette and Mr. Piechota who had helped him with some recent problems. He spoke on the issue of standards for Regional Fire Schools. His community is interested in becoming a Regional Fire School and would welcome some guidelines. He also indicated that funding Regional Fire Schools with some of the new Homeland Security funding would be a good idea.

Commissioner Wilkinson responded that he serves as the Commission's liaison to and co-Chair of the Connecticut State Firefighters Association (CSFA) Education Committee which is the group that meets to discuss Regional School issues including the current efforts to secure funding to replace or rebuild the schools. He reported that Chief Verda's letter and that from one of his Deputy's requesting support for the creation of a new school was discussed just last week at the CSFA Executive Board meeting and forwarded to the Education Committee. He indicated that Chief Verda is correct in that there are currently no guidelines for the schools. Each one was created through some Legislative action.

Chief Verda responded that his department also provides training for area departments. He stated that it was not his intent to diminish any funding for the Schools.

Chief McCarthy inquired whether there was a way to look at some of the regional assets that exist in places like Norwalk and Stamford Fire Departments for training. It may be possible for them to become a part of the Regional Fire School system, as satellite facilities, without creating a new school within a particular region.

Commissioner Wilkinson reported that each school operates under different oversight. It might be advisable to approach the governing boards to discuss what may work in a particular area.

Chief McCarthy responded that a recent discussion at the Career Chiefs was the coordination of offerings at the Regional Fire Schools. The issue was to better understand what direction the Regional Schools have and what the expectations of the CSFA are.

Commissioner Wilkinson indicated that a Mission Delineation Agreement was formulated and agreed to between the Regional Fire Schools and the Academy. That document aids in coordination of efforts between the organizations.

FF David Rabito inquired about the status of the Limited Access Highway funds noting an article that appeared in the Journal Inquirer newspaper.

Mr. Morrissette indicated that the funding is appropriated to the agency from the state General Fund. The appropriation is based upon an estimate generated by him as part of the agency budget submittal. The estimate is generally based upon the average claims submitted and processed over the previous 2-3 years. Mr. Morrissette reminded Commissioner's that the Governor as part of his budget proposed

elimination of this program. The Appropriations Committee has recommended it be funded at \$100,000. Should the later pass, there will most definitely be a shortfall. He reported that in the current fiscal year we are currently facing an approximate \$30,000 shortfall. It is not clear as to how the pending claims will be handled.

Chief McCarthy reported that this issue came up today at a meeting of the State Transportation Strategy Board Incident Management Task Force. One issue discussed was how to expedite the clearance time at incidents. It was thought that the Limited Access Highway Grant Program may promote an over response by volunteer fire companies who may want to take advantage of the program. He expects that some statement may come from the Task Force that would suggest that reimbursement be made, maintaining a level of funding, yet discouraging an over response. The general goal will be to come up with an incident management unified command system for responses to highway incidents. There is currently a model they are looking at in Ohio and Massachusetts. This will address common complaints received from State Police.

Mr. Morrisette commented that the recommendations Chief McCarthy has mentioned were already proposed several years ago by a legislative study committee formed to review the Limited Access Highway Reimbursement Program. Unfortunately, due to not meeting their statutory reporting deadline those formal recommendations were never transmitted to the Legislature.

Commissioner Johnson commented that local police do not respond to Turnpike incidents, only the state police. He further stated that he is upset the funding has been proposed for elimination. Again, it is funding for the fire service that is proposed for elimination not any funding for law enforcement functions.

Moving to item 7 Matters to be Raised by Commissioners and Staff.

Director of Training Adam Piskura reminded Commissioners that the staff is hosting a Remembrance Ceremony in memory of Ron Keane on Friday, June 6th at 5 p.m. He will be out of state at a strategic planning session for the North American Directors of Fire Training but he invited Commissioner's to attend.

Director Piskura also commented on a collaborative effort the Academy is entering into with a virtual reality simulator firm who will be holding a command simulator demonstration during the June Fire School. A press release will be issued later this week on this project. Commissioners are encouraged to attend.

Director Piskura also reported on Congressional activity, specifically his efforts to secure dedicated funding for state fire training operations.

Mr. Morrisette further explained that this effort parallels Dr. Cantor's efforts on behalf of the Community Colleges. There was some concern that we are in competition with one another, however it seems that is not the case.

Mr. Morrisette also reported on two briefings he participated in regarding homeland security. He had an opportunity to brief staff from all of Connecticut's Congressional offices in addition to a briefing

for agency Commissioners and Deputy Commissioner DeRosa. Recommendations from the later presentation are to be shared with the Governor. At both briefings he restated our long standing concerns regarding a lack of funding for training, actually the agency has less funding available today than before 9/11/01.

Secondly, Mr. Morrissette reported that he was invited to participate in a conference call between Deputy Commissioner DeRosa and agency Commissioners regarding the raising of the homeland security threat level. This is the first such call that the agency has been represented. We had previously complained to D/C DeRosa that the fire service has been left out of the communications link. Mr. Morrissette did brief Chief Ed Richards, head of the statewide fire rescue disaster response plan, on the call, but unfortunately, we do not have as yet, a means to communicate information shared with fire chiefs statewide. Connecticut Homeland Security is working on establishing such a system.

Mr. Morrissette mentioned that Peter O'Neil, the agency's Fiscal Administrative Supervisor, was recognized by the head of Labor Relations for his efforts to secure, on behalf of Ron Keane's beneficiaries, a retirement death benefit. Peter's written justification was recognized as outstanding. The Retirement Board will meet and make a decision on the request.

Mr. Morrissette reported that he had a personnel issue that he had planned to discuss under Executive Session. Due to a lack of a quorum, that would not be appropriate. He did report that an Adjunct Instructor has been suspended following an internal investigation that was passed onto the Connecticut State Police regarding a theft from the agency. A warrant will be issued for the employee's arrest in the near future. Ed Bycenski from the Business Office is to be commended for his in-depth research on this matter. Commissioners may call him for more details.

Commissioner Nicol commented that today's meeting will be Alberta Ouellette's last meeting before her retirement. He recognized her, on behalf of the Commission, for her professionalism and support to both the Administrator and the Commission.

Commissioner Ouellette commented that he was pleased with the presentations by Dr. Cantor and Chief McCarthy and that he concurs with the need to work cooperatively.

Director of Training Piskura reminded Commissioner's that at last month's meeting he distributed to them a CD outlining the National Fire Academy's Fire & Emergency Services Higher Education initiative that Dr. Cantor had remarked on.

Secretary Haber closed the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

Dated: 9-30-03

Edward F Haber

Edward F. Haber, Secretary
Commission on Fire
Prevention and Control