



Organized May 7, 1977

# TEXAS FIRE MARSHALS' ASSOCIATION



Chapter 9

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March 19, 2019  
TFMA Spring Meeting  
Texas Fire Marshals' Conference  
Omni South Austin  
Austin, Texas

**CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATON**, John Paul Erskin, President called the meeting to order at 1700 and the invocation given by Vance Cooper.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGANCE**, by all Honor the Texas Flag

**ROLL CALL** conducted by John Paul Erskine.

**Board Members Present**

President, John Paul Erskine  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President Ariana Hargrove  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President Omar Garza  
Tim Dedear  
Reginald Alexander  
Robert Ford  
Deroy Bennet  
Nathan Kelly  
Brad Westberry  
Buddy Rice

**Members Absent**

Dan Mayes  
Mark Flathouse  
Christina Neely-Lopez

A quorum of the Executive Board was present and President John Paul Erskine advised an official meeting can be conducted.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**, The minutes of the October meeting have been on the website a week after the October meeting I would hope all of you have read them.

After a motion duly made by Tim Dedear and seconded, by Lee Perry the following resolution was unanimously adopted: Motion carried to accept the October 2018 minutes.

## REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES

**Finance Committee Report**, Ariana Hargrove reported “we have money,” our current balance as of 3/18/19 was \$44,569.84. Last year’s conference brought in approximately \$13,000 a little over that. What we have in the bank was reported right? Yes.

**Membership Committee Chairman’s Report**, Tim Dedear reported that the membership outreach plans and develops, membership and outreach and growth strategies for within the Texas fire service, they keep track and update documents and maps pertaining to the membership to determine geographical boundaries, the county fire marshal membership, municipal fire marshal membership, and university membership. Plans and develops strategies to gain members from groups outside of the fire marshal such as code and technical industry, etc. Makes report at semi-annual meetings. The membership outreach development committee has been active across the state over the past six months, since October. Advertisement in TFMA in January 2019 the North Texas Fire Marshal Conference and reached out to about 350 attendees about TXFMA, free registration at the conference was provided in a charity raffle at the conference and Fire Marshal Russell Batchelor from Grapevine Fire Department received the certificate. The Texas Department of Insurance, state fire Marshal’s office continues to advertise the conference and any other trends supported by the association. Membership from outreach also continues to be advertised to the University officials and county fire marshals throughout the year. Membership continues to grow.

**Bylaws Committee** – Joe Sakora or Rusty Kattner

**Personal Awards Committee** – Deroy Bennett, we had a great run and got our awards out in October we do not have any that have been turned in as of yet.

**Excellence Awards Committee** – Buddy Rice, *could not understand response*

**Logo Committee** – Tina Neely–Lopez, nothing submitted and Tina’s not here

**County Fire Marshal Committee**- Mark Flathouse or his representative. Mark said, county and legislative kind of all blend together we’re good with that. Our stuff going on with county and fire marshal’s leaning that both Laurie and Mark Flathouse, in Harris County and Fort Bend County, many people know both of those counties have gone through some major changes over the last several months, lot of changes in commissioner’s court which require a lot of out each of the fire marshal’s however, them as well as Travis county and several other counties are staying in very well contact, have been keeping an eye on all the different bills, Mark has been talking a lot to Chris Lopez about bills at IAAI has called on making sure that this association and IAAI are on the same page for that. Mark is hoping to be here tomorrow for the Legislative Day but doesn’t know for sure if he’s going to be able to make it or not due to some job requirements that he has at the house. He is working on a document for this association that he said he would produce by the end of the week that will have a list of all the bills that legislative committee for this association is tracking and following.

**Municipal Fire Marshal Committee**- Regie Alexander, we are, um I’m going to give basically the same report for the Code and Technical committee. Everyone should have their copies of the 2018 IFC, the North Texas Council of Governments had some really good example, we finished all of our amendments for the 18 and if you need to take a look at it you can go to the North Texas Council in Government if you want to see some of the amendments that we’ve adopted in the north Texas area.

**University FM Committee-**Brad Westbury, nothing to report

**Outreach/Social Media Committee-** Rachel Moreno, the only thing I have is that our Facebook and Twitter continue to grow, we have 664 followers on Twitter and 1755 followers on Facebook, as far as the website we know it needs to be updated. I just got the pictures for the 2018 conference so that will be getting updated at the next few weeks. If you have anything you want to see on our website and our social media please let me know, cause we're updating it constantly and we want to make it viewer friendly for everybody here.

**Professional Trades Committee-** Paul Findley, I didn't get anything from him

**Code and Technical Committee-** Reginald Alexander, was covered under Municipal.

**ATAC Committee-** Tim Choate/Tim Dedear, the ATAC at Tim Tips FMA have decided to merge together, are currently wrapping up the Bylaws into the TFMA organization merging their information and the financial portion of it the MA's have already set up an account to transfer the monies so there are a few more things that we've got to iron out on the accounts, the ATAC side to make sure everything's good for TFMA, to sort the money. The association is basically the same, we're going to be doing the same thing just as ATAC has always done as far as getting the information out to people that have an Arson in their community, and getting the posters out the hotline is still there TFMA is going to be supporting that. October it's all going to be under us. It's going to be probably before that but we're not too far away from completing that task.

**Conference Committee Report-** Rachel Moreno, the 2018 Texas Fire Marshal's conference has been closed out all certificates were emailed to attendees and speakers and hotel expenses have all been paid. Conference surveys of attendees have been completed and reviewed by the conference committee. The most comments we received regarding the condition of the Crowne Plaza Hotel there are also a number of comments seeking to shorten the conference, to three and a half days the travel and registration being on Monday, the conference would run Thursday through Friday, Friday maintaining a half day.

The conference committee will as met at the 2019 Arson Conference in March to begin the planning of the 2019 Texas Fire Marshal's Conference. An estimate for the conference software has been acquired at a cost of \$3,090. This is an approximate \$3,000 less than last year because they're dropping the conference lead app portion of the program. Vendors did not use this added asset, we will be dropping the access.

I worked with the Austin Convention Bureau for request for bid for hotels for the 2020 and 2021 Conference from Round Rock to San Marcos, once compiled I'll have a presentation.

**Reports of Special Committees,** There's not any. The FEMIT committee, which is the Fire Executive Management Training course, in conjunction with Sam Houston State. That committee has been disbanded now so all of that information will come under New Business.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

We had ATAC listed on the agenda but that's all been covered under the ATAC report, we will not be readdressing that. The ATAC dissolution that was in the agenda was talked about under the ATAC report.

Renewal of the CPA Contract for Randall Parr, CPA at \$1,800 annually or \$150 a month for his services.

Reading into the Minutes the contract for Jo Ann Conde, who is transcribing our minutes so that you have the most accurate verbatim minutes that we could have. That is per minute charge \$1.75 per minute for however long the minutes are recorded for. That was approved by the board.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- Discussion of new conference locations- One of the things we have gotten stuck with is that as time has gone on we've grown to the point where our host hotel is getting too small for us. We're the cheapest conference by far in the state for what we offer and it's not sustainable anymore. We've held our prices are artificially low for quite a number of years. In the last 20 years we've only gone \$100 from the original fee and \$30 of that was this last October and it was really part of the dues that were paying to belong to the association. The goal of the current administration and going forward with the Texas Fire Marshal's Association is to keep the conference where it sustains itself and the membership dues are used for sustaining the organization. Right now those funds are co-mingled in so we really don't have a good grasp of what's paying what and so that's one of the things we really tried to fix in the last five years for sure is working towards a budget that I think we will have available in October but we've assigned budget line item numbers and we started identifying those line items and where monies going to and for what trying to get that cleaned up. It's just growing pains really, so to that end we've had to start looking at a new venue, and a new venue is going to cost money, so there's lots of things we have to decide about that. As members your surveys are telling us the same thing that we're seeing, we've outgrown our place, we need to do something and we just want to be able to tell you guys from the beginning that we hear you we understand and you need to understand as we do this it's going to cost more money. I personally believe that in the long run it's going to get up to where other conference prices are because we are artificially low that there's not going to be any ripple affect at all. We want to be completely open and honest about what the possibilities for price increases are. This year we've gone up from \$219 to \$249, we're probably going to see other increases maybe \$100 as much more if we have to move venues, and that's really because what we're provided by our current host hotel and what they allow us to do for networking events, bringing outside food in and all this which is not the business model for modern convention centers and is not going to be a viable solution. So with that I'm going to turn it over to Rachel.

*Rachel*, so what you're going to see in this presentation, we did a request for bid through the Austin Convention Bureau and they sent bids for all over Austin, up into Round Rock and down into San Marcos. And what you're going to see is the bids we got back and then what their cost are and what hotel didn't respond and what we're going to do in the future, with more research.

(presentation narration) so you're aware this is where we currently are and what they offer us. We don't pay for our meeting space, we don't pay for parking, the rate for hotels is \$126 and we get a free room for every 50 rooms we book. So that helps cover speaker rooms and other things like that. The charge is \$9.00 for breakfast coupons we get free coffee every morning, we have \$11,000 food and beverage minimum with a 21% service fee and we can bring in outside food and beverages so all the networking, we can bring in that food at a much lower cost. We can also bring in our own AV, and our exhibit tables cost about \$47 dollars a piece for us to have.

These are the bids we got for 2020 and 2021 so the Sheraton-Austin, Capital we'll get free meeting space, \$18.00 parking fee for every body that brings a vehicle, so that will be an added cost to you and your organization per night, your room rate will be whatever the prevailing per diem is so the government rate they want a \$30,000 food and beverage minimum which we meet every year at the Crown, the Crown's just lower for us. They would charge us \$50 per vendor table we could not bring

in any outside food or drinks but we can bring in our AV. If we wanted to do any networking we would have to pay the hotel and do anything through them.

The Double Tree also bid, free meeting space, their parking is \$10 a day, room rate would be \$145 we would get one room per 50 which is comparable to the Crowne it would be \$70 per vendor table plus \$100 a day for internet for the vendors, they would require a \$30,000 food and beverage plus a 23% service, which is higher, can not bring in food and beverage but we can bring in AV.

Hyatt Regency-Los Pines, \$209 a night, plus \$35 resort fee per night, per room, they would charge \$10,000 for meeting space plus a \$90,000 food and beverage minimum with 25% gratuity. They did not give us a price of what vendors would cost, we can not bring outside food and drink and AV must be purchased through their vendor.

This is a new resort, it's not open yet in Round Rock they're finishing construction on it. They can't bid for October because they don't have the dates available, so if we could move the conference to the first week of November or in August they could bid, room rate would be government rate, there is a \$30 per night per room resort fee, meeting rooms would be free, \$12,000 food and beverage 25% gratuity. They did not have a price for vendor tables but I'm sure they would charge for that as well. You can not bring outside food and drinks in AV must be purchased through them, there is free parking and free Wi-Fi.

These are the hotels that did not bid and the other one she said sent it to was the Embassy in San Marcos, they didn't bid but I have a contact for them and we're going to reach out to them separately so there may be some more info coming.

These are the ones that can not bid, because they could not meet the government rate we asked for per night or they were already booked. October is a very busy month so they already had conferences booked for the two weeks I gave them that we typically do the conference. They could not bid for either one of those two reasons. They didn't even put that in. Again, dates not available, couldn't provide government rate, space was too small, vendor space too small, or they couldn't provide any of the concessions, like providing us the free outdoor food or providing in lieu of one night where they sponsor a networking event. Like John Paul said there's obviously going to be a cost, whether it's on the association and or on you guys for coming and parking is the main thing. Again, John Paul and I talked we're going to reach out to Waco and Temple to see if there's anything outside of Austin that we didn't check on and I will put a call into the San Marcos Embassy, the big convention center to see if they can help us cut a deal and see if we can get any more prices but as of now those are all the bids we got for 2020 and 2021.

*Question and Answer session (unable to hear questions):* Some of these big resort, they have a lot of outdoor activities and swimming pools it's how they recoup their cost. Plus your city taxes. The big one in Round Rock that's not even open yet, they're going to be like a Great Wolf Lodge place but not the same. The Sheraton is the most comparable to what we currently have, other than the parking. Outside food is like the bar-b-que, there's an option to hold indoor event. Currently were at about these are on 200 rooms a night at the Crowne we're at 147/150 a night. The Sheraton we would be able to have lunch in a completely separate room we would not have to be switching. I'm going to see the property tomorrow at 10:30. It's somewhere downtown by the Capital, the only good thing on Legislative years we would be right there by the capital, and there's probably a lot closer to downtown activities, for people to go to and do at night instead of us hosting network events or we could maybe work with a bar downtown, or piano bars or something like that it would be something we would have to talk about.

**John Paul-** as you can see we've got lots to think about. We're weighing it in, as a board of directors as an executive board we've been listening to you, what's on the survey's and we're kind of in a tough spot right now.

**Brad-** we've got a lot of members who are not at this meeting, they need to see it because they're complaining about the Crowne and obviously by looking at this information the Crowne's the best deal going. Yes it's an old motel, yes it needs to be upgraded, yes it's got problems but they offer so much more.

**John Paul-** there's no doubt there Brad, our other issue is we're busting at the seams, I want to say that what we ended up having at the actual conference last year was 367 membership rolls, we have 416 so we're over the capacity. With the 400 chairs that they said I had a conversation with the manager and they won't put one chair more, because of the fire code. The fire marshal has a 400 capacity and we're not throwing another chair in here so that's where we're at. It's not that we want to move, it's not that we don't agree that we can't get a better deal at the Crowne Plaza, and certainly for as long as our relationship has been with them, even though I foresee at some point and time if we stay for them with them another 10 years they are going to start monetizing some of those things that other places monetizing even with the relationship we have with them. That's going to come in change in management, umbrella management companies, the local management staff that don't have a relationship with us it's inevitable. We need to address the problem however that works out. I don't know if that means we're going to stay there more than next year or not, practically speaking you have to start looking about two years out to even get to a place. As Omar has pointed out some our other meetings we've had we've been talking about this off and on for 5 to 10 years but no administration until this one has made a concerted effort to start looking and planning because it understands that it takes a couple of years to make it happen. Again, nothing in stone, you see what's out there, you see whose bidding and you see the prices and that's the going rate. That's the Austin market, and I think that up towards Waco it might get cheaper and you start talking about how far people in the south, people in El Paso, Amarillo have to drive that adds an hour or two to their trip that's already extremely long so just understand we're taking all this into consideration and as we get the information out then we'll get it out to you. We're probably going to set up something on the website that is particular to our plans for future conferences and how that's going, because we don't have an opportunity to get this information out to you except at a couple of meetings a year, that's not really going to be adequate to give you the best information. Keep an eye on the website and look for that information. I would start budgeting now for the \$350 range of conferences and be blessed that you don't have to use that.

**Rachel-** to answer your question Brad, I'll post it on the website and email my membership list that way you can look at it after I update it from San Marcos, that way there's not a lot of emails going back and forth.

- **FEMIT III**, if you guys are not familiar the training class that Sam Houston just came out with under the LEMIT it is the week of May 13, and looking like that class may not make it we don't get more registrants. It's been a good program, the FEMIT I and II class has been a good program and has been well attended I feel like that the FEMIT III stuff is not being looked at too much because they kind of came out with it in the middle of the budget cycle and people are just not prepared to pay for it. It kind of surprised everybody that they announced it when they did and it was so short, lead time before they were actually hosting the class. IF you are interested please go to the LEMIT website, and sign up. It's only a three day course, it's a super fair price, I'm sure it will make it in the future, there's lots of people interested, it just really fell at a bad time.

- Support of the NFPA Conference in San Antonio, as most of you know that keep up with NFPA know the national conference is in San Antonio. I will be going there for the Presidents meeting on that Sunday, they have offered to us the potential, it's not nailed in stone yet, but the potential of having a vendor booth in their big vendor show case that they have. We're not interested in paying to be there but if they gave it to us because we're the host state, then that would be fine. Omar whose the second vice-president has volunteered to lead whatever's going to happen, if we choose to do it they give us the space, is there anybody from the membership that would like to potentially help with running a booth at NFPA? Ok, Rachel. That's all about the NFPA conference, we've turned that over for Omar to run with it, we're going to find out for sure if they're going to give us the opportunity and we'll let that play out as it does.
- One of the things we gained with the relationship with the State Fire Marshal's office was a great staff that supported a dual conference and we did that for 20 years. When we separated from the State Fire Marshal's office and decided to do our own thing and hold ourselves accountable and make it run for ourselves, it was at a time when Harris County was in charge at the President's position and of course Harris County has a large staff and was able to bring a lot of resources to bear to continue helping with our conference and in that Rachel Moreno who had been with the State and gone with Harris County and continue to do what Rachel has done so well for 11 years now, once Harris County was no longer in the President's role. The resource staff went with it. I'm a one man office, we're still self supportive, how do we make that happen. How do we get Rachel and not have her on one of our payrolls, and that's to have her on our payroll. Just like we've grown to the point where we have to decide about where we're going to go to conference, we also have to decide about whose going to plan this thing and make it happen and Rachel's the easy choice. We asked for a bid for services from her she presented one and after back and forth the executive board reviewing the financials with the Treasurer, with the CPA deciding what we could actually afford and counter offer and that's where we are today. I have the whole contract for review for anyone that wants to look at it but I felt that with the amount of money it was that it was not something that we wanted to decide with just the board of directors, which we could have done but I wanted to bring it to the membership in the air of transparency so nobody felt like we were trying to take advantage of the Associations money.

So with that being said, for the price of \$15,000 a year, plus a hotel room during conference. Rachel has offered to be our Conference Planning Director, that's going to get us all the stuff that she has done. She now has to do on her own time, instead of Harris County's time and her traveling up here to do things and the meetings, she has to go to and the planning for the year 2020 or 2021 conferences and whatever she knows about how to do that, it's outside of my "house" for sure and the Executive Board comes to the membership with a contract for \$15,000 for one year. It's not renewable, it's not mutual consent by both parties, after significant review of how this year goes. I would like to make a motion that we approve that.

A motion by Buddy Rice to approve the bid for \$15,000 to hire Rachel as Conference Planning Director, seconded by Deroy Bennett.

**Rusty** raised the question, Have any other entities, like SFMA lost their planning lady so they've got under contract a gentleman whose taking care of conference. I have no idea what he charges, he may charge \$50,000 but I know there are companies, individuals out there who do this kind of work, maybe working around to seek out those and get this new above to see if there's competitive. I'm not saying we should do it this year, but certainly we have to pay somebody, when you get the most bang for our dollar.

**John Erskine:** Phil, absolutely, please understand that we did not only choose Rachel, we did offer the company that does the NFPA and the Florida State Fire Marshal's Conference, we did a request for a bid which they did not answer. We did reach out to one other group and the reason for our only doing one bid this year or going straight away with Rachel is because of our history. The fact that we did not get an opportunity to approve this until this meeting, the way we wanted to approve it which was with your approval as a membership and the fact that she's already put in three months of work without knowing whether this was going to go through or not and her loyalty and her time and her, really her passion for this association of fire prevention in general I think owes her a year. We're asking her to help us transition. I absolutely believe what you say Rusty at some point in time we're going to go out and get multiple bids and see if somebody can't do it and to be honest. I personally believe that Rachel's career as a PIO and everything that she's doing in her own world is going to surpass what she can absolutely do for us from a timeframe standpoint, time and availability standpoint anyway. So it's absolutely going to happen.

A motion and a seconded on the floor, any more questions, any more comments. That is all in favor, all opposed, motion carries.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Legislation Day- John Paul Erskine**

Tomorrow is Legislation Day, for those of you who participated in the VFIS Texas breakfast that they used to have every morning, that has been cancelled. They no longer do that it wasn't a viable thing for them to continue on so that's not going to be happening in the morning, but the memorial service starts at 10:30 on the south steps of the Capital, of course SFFMA puts that on TFMA is the sponsor for the catfish luncheon that's going on so that's immediately following the memorial service and then we're going to have a contingent of legislative committee members and the board going up to the Capital for that, anybody else is welcome if they want to participate.

Do I have anything else from the floor?

Buddy Rice, just so you know there's a hospitality room upstairs. This association actually decided to do a \$250 tap there's refreshments up there, tonight we got a deal, chopped beef sandwiches, so you're more than welcome to come up. It's open all week except Thursday.

Meeting adjourned.