



# Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc.

## Board of Directors Public Meeting ~ Minutes ~

Friday, November 12, 2021

[www.houstonforensicscience.org](http://www.houstonforensicscience.org)

1. **CALL TO ORDER:**

At 9 a.m., Board Chairwoman Stacey Mitchell called the meeting to order.

The Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc. (“HFSC” and/or the “corporation”) board of directors (the “board”) convened this in-person meeting on Friday, November 12, 2021 in the City Hall Council Annex Chamber, 900 Bagby St. (public level), Houston, Texas 77002. In a manner permitted by the corporation’s bylaws, the meeting was called by providing all directors with notice of the date, time and purpose of the meeting at least three days before the scheduled date.

In accordance with Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code (Texas Open Meetings Act) a notice of this meeting was posted on the bulletin board located on the exterior wall of the City Hall building at 901 Bagby on November 9.

2. **ROLL CALL:**

The following board members were present in-person:

Chairwoman Stacey Mitchell
Anna Vasquez
Philip Hilder
Francisco Medina
Vanessa Goodwin
Ellen Cohen
Lois Moore
Vicki Huff

The following board members were absent:

Vice Chairwoman Mary Lentschke
Tracy Calabrese

Chairwoman Mitchell declared a quorum was present noting that all members and presenters were physically present in-person.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Chairwoman Mitchell gave members of the public an opportunity to address the board. No members of the public addressed the board.

4. **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PRIOR MEETING:**

Following a motion by Director Ellen Cohen and seconded by Director Lois Moore, the board unanimously approved the September 10, 2021 meeting minutes.

5. **CHAIRWOMAN MITCHELL’S REPORT**

The chairwoman first acknowledged the observation of Veteran’s Day by expressing gratitude to the men and women, many of them at HFSC, who sacrifice to serve in the military and protect our country. She shared that Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC’s president & CEO, is himself a veteran of the U.S. Navy Medical Service Corporation.

She reminded members that a quorum is needed at the next board meeting on December 10 to finalize and vote on Dr. Stout's new employment agreement. Chairwoman Mitchell provided an update on the 2022 board meeting schedule. She noted that the board previously discussed adjusting the meeting frequency from every month to every other month. Chairwoman Mitchell requested that members consider the pros and cons of making that change and told them it would be discussed further at the December meeting.

6. **BOARD CRIME SCENE UNIT WORKING GROUP'S STATUS REPORT:**

Director Vicki Huff began by establishing that the working group consists of herself, Vice-Chairwoman Mary Lentschke and Director Vanessa Goodwin. They met twice to gather information about the current and past issues in the crime scene unit (CSU). She noted the group heard proposals for improvements through the lean six sigma project analysis of CSU and they also received and analyzed staff annual surveys, highlighting that CSU's comments have improved over the years. However, rising crime and the pressures of the pandemic continues to be a challenge for staff morale.

Next, Director Goodwin explained the group spoke with CSU's director, Carina Haynes, about specific steps she has already taken to implement change. They discussed how those changes were going, noting the group will need some time to evaluate whether the changes positively affect morale and open communication.

The group plans next to meet with Caresse Young, HFSC's director of human resources.

7. **PRESIDENT AND CEO DR. PETER STOUT'S REPORT:**

Dr. Stout reported that HFSC completed 2,136 requests in September and that turnaround times has remained steady.

He also explained HFSC's staffing portfolio, now with 209 employees and eight vacancies. He shared recent outreach efforts, noting his presentation to HPD Citizen's Academy and several laboratory tours with students, senior citizens and council members.

Dr. Stout later provided a brief update on the potential property room consolidation project. He mentioned that the engineering permit for the incinerator was submitted to the city permitting department. He stated the slated timeline for completion and move in will be at the end of 2022.

Dr. Stout discussed the current challenges with violent crime continuing to rise and the workload it places onto CSU. He explained the total number of requests has remained steady but pointed out the complexity in homicide scenes – which means more labor hours for the staff.

Next, he talked through the Astroworld tragedy where 10 CSIs spent more than 70 hours on scene. The CSI's inspected countless trash bags searching for identification cards and drug paraphernalia. He also acknowledge it was a learning opportunity for drone capture. CSIs participated in community outreach, noting monthly training for investigators at the HPD academy.

The court is struggling with a backlog of some 90,000 criminal cases. Dr. Stout said it significantly impacts HFSC, particularly noting the increase in record requests, subpoenas and rush requests for testing as cases move to trial. One solution is to have a true "on call" status for expert witnesses.

8. **QUALITY DIRECTOR ERIKA ZIEMAK'S REPORT:**

Ms. Ziemak reported that the quality division missed two September submission targets and met its

October submission targets for blind quality control samples and verifications. The group has delayed submitting a manuscript on firearms' blind quality controls to the Journal of Forensic Sciences for another month or so.

She mentioned HFSC received seven satisfied or very satisfied survey responses from attorneys, investigators and the community from July through September 2021.

Next, she discussed three disclosures and one complaint HFSC provided to the Texas Forensic Science Commission regarding CSU, forensic biology/DNA and latent prints. One disclosure centered around the forensic biology/DNA section losing a reference sample after it had been analyzed. She said the quality division audited the evidence vault and property room, but the sample has not been found. However, the remaining sample in the laboratory could be used for future testing if needed. The commission voted to take no further action on all three disclosures.

Ms. Ziemak said 41 analysts have testified this year, and four transcripts are being reviewed.

9. **TREASURER AND CFO DAVID LEACH'S PRESENTATION REGARDING THE 2021 FINANCIAL AUDIT:**

Mr. Leach first noted the audit report includes three letters addressed to the board of directors from the auditor, Blazek & Vetterling. He explained the letters are the auditor's findings and that nothing was discovered in the financial audit. He also added that a single audit was performed to ensure HFSC had handle federal funding appropriately.

9. **ADJOURNMENT:**

Chairwoman Mitchell requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Director Philip Hilder made a motion to adjourn. Many directors seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 10:28 a.m.

The undersigned secretary of the board hereby certifies the following are true and correct minutes of the Nov. 12, 2021 public meeting of the board.

By: *Amanda DeBerry* Amanda DeBerry, Secretary