

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, January 17, 2023, 6:00 PM

Coles Road Firehouse

105 Coles Road

Cromwell, CT

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners' meeting on Tuesday, January 17, 2023, at 6:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to discuss and act upon Fire and Water Division business.

Commissioners Roger Rukowicz (President), Robert McIntyre, Charles Epstein, Donald Smith, Chip Darius (remotely) and Mertie Terry attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri, Finance Manager Michael Lupkas, Communications Manager Justin Loneragan, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes and Acting Firefighter Union President Alan Dominy. Commissioners Robert Donohue, David Colligan and John Sokolowski were absent.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM, by President Rukowicz. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Rukowicz.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. James Rude, Highridge Rd., commented there was a Pension Committee meeting earlier this month. One issue from that meeting is that he understands that the actuarial evaluation report finally showed up on the 15th of January for information dated as of June 30, 2022. The information is extremely late. It has held up the completion of the annual audit for year end June 30, 2022. He suggests strongly to the Commission that they consider changing actuaries. The current actuary is not providing the Commission with timely information. One of the very important elements that is derived from that report is some information that is called the funded status of the pension plan. It compares the assets of the pension plan with the liabilities of the pension plan. Without that information the Fire District has no idea what the funded status is and now receiving the information 6 mos. later, he strongly recommended that the Fire District change their actuary. He also recommended the concept of the funded status of the pension plan

be disclosed every quarter. The market moves and it is important to know what that number is going forward.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
DECEMBER 20, 2022

Before minutes were approved, Commissioner Epstein made a correction that the Bylaws Meeting had been scheduled for January 26, 2023, not January 12 as noted in the minutes.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of December 20, 2022, with the correction noted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
JANUARY 3, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and approved 4 to 0 to accept the Special Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of January 3, 2023, as submitted. Commissioners Darius and Terry abstained.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS AND WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or appeals to report.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He added it has been a busy month. They are continuing the online training on cyber security. The Commissioners and staff are required to complete the training by the end of February. This training is important to everyone not only at work but also in their personal lives (phones, email, internet).

Union negotiations with the Dispatch union are scheduled for Thursday this week. Commissioner Epstein asked about the status of the new roof on West St. Mr. Neto reported that the new roof is in great shape. There were no issues after its installation. Commissioner McIntyre asked about the North Road/mutual aid issue. Mr. Neto advised that it is ongoing. It is expensive to call an attorney with questions, so they have been trying to limit those discussions. The language in the agreement that the Board agreed to was presented to Rocky Hill and their attorney. They are still reviewing. Chief Brade said he and the Chief in Rocky Hill are on the same page. They have met and discussed the agreement. They also physically took a ride out there to get a better understanding of the area. They have always agreed to provide mutual aid services.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's report for December as submitted.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lupkas reported that the report shows the District has collected approximately \$2.75 million

including State funds, which is about 59%. This report is through December. Quarterly water bills went out January 15. Roughly the total was \$493,000. That is roughly 4% more than last year. Consumption year over year is down for this billing cycle. It will be showing a bigger increase in collections in next month's report. With the two billing cycles completed in this fiscal year the District is about 27% higher than the first two quarters last year. That is because it was in excess of the previous year. Regarding EMS, last month there were 267 calls that were billed. This relates to the backlog of charts that were cleaned out and processed. Receipts are 3½ % over last month.

The actuary report was received last week. Mr. Lupkas forwarded it to the auditors. They will be doing their final narratives and any other outstanding work. A final draft will be forwarded to Mr. Lupkas for review. The Executive Director will also review it and provide any comments.

Mr. Lupkas referred to the graph in his report on Page 4. He changed the order of the numbers there. It looked better to have it over 20 days next to the total balance. He asked everyone to review, and if it is confusing to let Mr. Lupkas know. He can adjust the report to meet everyone's needs. The following page lists the accounts over \$1,000. There was one less account because it was paid in full. For expenses and revenues on both sides, General Fund and Water, Mr. Lupkas did not see anything worth mentioning.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for December as submitted.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Chief Brade added that the Department finished the holiday season. There were a lot of activities in the community. They did some activities at the library with the kids. Regarding EMS billing, the Chief reported they are back on track. The backlog has been caught up. The revenue from those bills should start to come in and will be reflected on the monthly report.

Last night a meeting was held with all the volunteers. The Chief wanted to get thoughts and suggestions to start rolling out the new program. Career, part-time and volunteers are the three categories members can fall into. He reviewed the requirements for each category based on the volunteer program and the memorandum of agreement the District has with the Union.

The Chief has been getting ready for budget time with the Executive Director. He has reached out to the officers to see what their needs are or wish lists. Regarding apparatus, Squad 1 is in CT. It is at Firematic in Rocky Hill. There were a couple of minor change orders. They are adding electrical to the vent compartment for charging equipment. They are adding lights on the side to show water level on the apparatus. Once those orders are completed, Cromwell should be receiving the apparatus. Cromwell should be able to have a final inspection before they accept delivery. Mr. Logan will then be able to start building out the compartments and getting the equipment mounted. The Chief will be able to get assistance from the officers for that.

The ambulance should be delivered mid to end of March. They were able to get the powerload on order before any wiring was done. The Chief's vehicle will be arriving in CT next week. It will be going to MHQ who is the vendor. It will be outfitted at that point.

The Chief reported they finished the year with 2,811 calls. Call volume has been up. Fire Marshal Holmes did a fantastic job reporting the statistics.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report for December as submitted.

1. Fire Marshal's Office. The Fire Marshal submitted his December report at the Fire Operations Committee meeting. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Holmes also did an annual report with facts and figures. He reported there were 2,811 calls last year. At the time of this report there have been 176 calls. They are averaging 10.6 calls per day. He investigated 14 structure fires and 14 vehicle fires, 427 inspections.

With the last census the population is up and the housing stock is up. They are predicting another 500 – 600 units of housing and population. There are some manufacturing facilities coming into town, the Red Lion project is underway, and a new medical building is coming. Chicago Sam's will be adding a sports book venue for gambling. A new middle school project is going on, and some new restaurants are coming to Town. The Price Rite store is closing because they could not come to an agreement with the landlord.

He added that a lot of the shopping plazas have been doing face lifts. They have been painting and freshening up, and they are all working hard to fill their empty spots. There are only a couple of places open at 51 Shunpike. Texas Roadhouse is also coming which will be a draw to that plaza.

Since the ordinance was passed about charging for inspections and issuing permits to operate businesses, the FMO brought in \$16,175 to date. Cromwell responded to 280 calls at Covenant Village last year. Apple Health Care, 102 calls. 385 Main St., there was 206 calls. Not all are medical. Mr. Holmes goes to Woodside Elementary once a month and talks to 7 classes. There is a different topic every month, and each session is 25 min. The Chief has started a program with the library which has become story time with the Fire Department.

Mr. Holmes reported that his new Fire Inspector, Brian Mello, is a retired Captain from Southington Fire. He had been with that Department for 25 years. He is the lead State instructor and developer for the youth fire setter program for the State of CT. Colin Whalen should be returning to the FMO at the end of the month.

Commissioner Terry discussed the community involvement especially with the children in Town. She wanted to know how we let the community know what is being accomplished. Mr. Holmes noted that things do get posted on the official Cromwell Fire page. Commissioner Darius also works on the newsletter that is put out quarterly with the Water bills. He along with Commissioner Epstein is working with the Cromwell Chronicle to get things published. They have also tried to get more things published in the local newspapers.

Commissioner Epstein asked if we could drop off extra newsletters at various places in Town for people to read if they did not get a water bill. Mr. Neto stated that extra copies can be made, but the District will have to increase the print order so the District will be charged more. Commissioner Epstein suggested that anyone that may have any thoughts

or ideas about publishing or what to publish should contact Commissioner Epstein or Darius.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Marshal's Office report for December as submitted.

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri reported that their new truck has gotten the lights mounted, and they were working on the wiring as of last Friday. It will be going in for the graphics after the wiring is done. They are supposed to be fixing the backup camera. They hope to receive the truck by February.

Mr. Palmieri has been working on the annual Diversion Report. This would be for the Gardiner Well field and the Berlin Interconnection. That report needs to be turned in by the end of January. They had a problem over the weekend with Well #3. The person on call checked the wells, and Well #3 was not running. The problem was that the drive was burnt up. He is hoping to get a quote for that. The parts are in stock so they should not be down for too long.

Mr. Palmieri added that they have been working on cleaning up the water garage. He is going to invite the Commissioners down for a tour once all the work is complete. Commissioner Terry asked about the lead pipes in town. Mr. Palmieri explained about the low percentage of cast iron pipes that are left on some of the side streets. There are too many other projects going on that are expensive so they are not able to get to the replacement of some of those pipes. The percentage is approximately 5%.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations Report for December as submitted.

- E. Communication Center. The Communication Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lonergan noted that there was an increase in calls in the month of December. This brings on additional EMD reviews and radio transmissions. There is a part-time Dispatcher in training that is doing extraordinarily well. He should be completed with training in 2 or 3 weeks. A new project that Mr. Lonergan has added is looking at a Cloud-based system for the CAD system rather than a server-based system.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Center report for December as submitted.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations. A meeting was held on January 9, 2023. Minutes were not available for review. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre

and unanimously approved to table the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of January 9, 2023, until next month.

1. Communications Committee. There was no meeting.
2. Apparatus Committee. There was no meeting.
- D. Pension Committee. A meeting was held on January 4, 2023. Minutes were not available for review. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to table the minutes until next month.
- E. Personnel Committee. The January Personnel Committee meeting was canceled. There was no report. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 14, 2023.
- F. Water Operations. There was no meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 1.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was no report from the Town.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
 1. Public Safety Tower Committee. There was no meeting. The next meeting of the Public Safety Tower Committee is Friday, March 3, 2023.
 2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. The quarterly meeting in January was canceled. The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 5, 2023.
 3. Bylaws Committee. Commissioner Epstein reported that a meeting is scheduled for January 26, 2023. All the Commissioners should have received in their meeting packets, a copy of the current Bylaws. They were asked to review them and to make any notes regarding anything they would like to discuss for change or improvement. Any questions or comments should be forwarded to the Executive Director who will forward all notes and comments to Commissioner Epstein before the meeting on the 26th. They recently received information from the past President who helped work on revisions last year. All Bylaw Committee members will receive copies of those edits.
 4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. President Rukowicz complimented Commissioners Darius and Epstein for the great job that was done on the newsletter that was enclosed with the January water bills. There is more to come with the Committee looking to expand their publishing to a wider audience and increasing the amount of information that is printed. Commissioner Darius clarified that the newsletter published there were 2,956 calls, but in the Chief's Report and the Fire Marshal's Report there were 2,800 + calls. The difference is that there are calls that result in a NFRS report, calls that are found to be just calls and calls that go to Mutual Aid when the system is on overload and Cromwell does not have a resource to send. The number that was published in the

newsletter were calls that were a request for service. The ones in the NFRS report are the calls that were actually fulfilled by Cromwell. He added that Mr. Lonergan can answer any questions about the call volume reports. He thanked the Department heads and those that gave input for the content of the newsletter. He thanked everyone that helped increase communication to the community.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein discussed call volume. He wanted everyone to be aware of the amount of calls the crews are doing.
- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report.
- D. Discussion and Possible Approval of Dispatchers Attending Navigator Conference. Mr. Lonergan explained that there is a Dispatcher Conference held every year called the Navigator Conference which his Division budgets for.

One of the goals is to become an accredited center with the National Academy of Emergency Dispatchers. Cromwell's dispatchers are trained through this National Academy. Cromwell uses EFD and EMD programs for incoming calls for service. The Dispatchers do a screening process that is geared to get quality information out of the caller to dispatch quality levels of service whether a fire response or EMS response. EMD is mandated by the State of CT for any 911 municipality or EMS service. EFD is something Cromwell has elected to do to serve the community better. The Navigator Conference furthers the training program. It also counts as continuing education.

This conference helps to further the quality assurance program personnel to quality assure the calls. It is an important part of the overall response matrix and the overall response of the Cromwell Fire District on the emergency side. They are able to send ambulances on cold response as dictated by medical control at Middlesex Hospital. On the fire side they are able to send a single engine response vs. 5 engines for a more minor level call. That is based on the quality assurance program and the intake of the call.

Every year the Communication Center budgets for this trip so they have the money available. This year the trip is Apr. 18 – 20 in Denver, CO. Mr. Lonergan usually works through Quality Dispatch which is the parent company of the National Academy to comp Cromwell's conference fees. This year the conference fee is \$655 Per person which is usually comped. With the comps taken care of, Mr. Lonergan usually will try to send another dispatcher. Last year they were able to take the former Fire Chief who learned an incredible amount of information. This year Chief Brade had expressed an interest in attending. Commissioner Epstein stated the importance of keeping our staff attending this conference.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to send Dispatchers to the Navigator Conference. Commissioner Darius would like to send the Chief to this conference if he is interested.

- E. Update on New Phone System. Mr. Lonergan reported that he has taken on the new phone system project from Angel in order to move it forward. The new phone system was approved through the budget process. The current phone system is old and outdated. The phone

systems at Court St. and West St. are tied together. Coles Road has its own phone system. The Water Division/Water Garage has its own phone number. Chem feed has its own phone number.

The goals of this project is to modernize the phone system, get off copper and get to an IP based phone system which is more reliable. There have been a lot of problems over the years with copper lines. Phone companies are failing to keep the copper lines in service. The goal is to have the whole District on one phone system. Call intake needs to be modernized. He distributed copies of some of the types of phones to be used depending on the purpose of the location.

Money had been allocated for this new system, however, with rising costs, it might be more expensive than the original quote. Mr. Lonergan felt that some monies could be moved around to take care of any overage. There is no ETA because Mr. Lonergan needs to sign the agreement with the vendor. The order will then be placed, and the supplier will give an ETA of when the equipment will be in so installation can be scheduled. They are using Total Communication for the new system.

PUBLIC COMMENT

James Bellamo, reminded the group that funds for communications should be able to be accessed through the Tower Fund.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Executive Director's Review. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to adjourn the regular meeting and enter into Executive Session at 7:12 PM, inviting the Executive Director into the session.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn Executive Session at 8:10 PM.


A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's job review as discussed. A copy will be given to Mr. Neto for his files.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to give the Executive Director a 5% increase in salary.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business a motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 8:14 PM.

ATTEST:


Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan, Recording Secretary