

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION
COMMUNICATION CENTER

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, April 16, 2024, 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, April 16, 2024, 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), Donald Smith, Charles Epstein, Chip Darius and Steve Wygonowski attended. Also attending were Executive Director Roger Hart, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri, Finance Manager Mike Lupkas, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes, Assistant Fire Chief Richard Driscoll and Town Liaison Councilman Brian Bonneau. Commissioners John Sokolowski, Robert McIntyre, Mertie Terry and Donald Goranson 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

The President noted that there was an addition to the agenda. There should be added Item. F. under Item IX. Consideration of Old Business. The item should read, Approval of Contracts/Contractors. It is a standard item on all monthly meeting agendas.

A motion was made by Commissioner Wygonowski, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as amended.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments at this time.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
MARCH 19, 2024

On page 4, under Chief's Report, 4th bullet from the top of the page stated the Police Dept. had 571 medical calls last month. It should read 571 medical calls last **year**.

On page 5, the last bullet under Water Operations states, "Hazbuilt." It should read, "**As Built**." Corrections were noted by the recording secretary.

On page 4, Item 2. Ambulance Billing – Hardship Case, it was noted that Commissioner Wygonowski voted nay on that vote. It was not a unanimous approval. He thought someone else also voted nay, but none of the Commissioners present tonight acknowledged voting nay that evening.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Board of Commissioners' meeting of March 19, 2024, as amended.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or appeals to report.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

A. Executive Director's Report. The Executive Directors' report for March had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

- Regarding personnel issues, 3 firefighters have submitted their resignations.
- Mr. Hart thanked Mr. Neto for his advisory role which will be ending this month. He acknowledged all the hard work and effort Mr. Neto has put into the District and professionalizing his position.
- Regarding facilities, they received a quote for the mini split in the server room on the second floor of West St. The cost is \$7,978. They are in the process of getting that work done by Daniels Energy.
- Regarding financial issues, the proposed FY 24/25 budget was presented to the Budget & Oversight Committee and the Commission. There will be a public hearing tomorrow evening to present the budget to the public. The public will have an opportunity to ask questions and review the budget presented. The public vote on the budget will be held next month.
- The collection policy language will be discussed later in this meeting.
- Mr. Hart has not heard back from anyone yet on his request to review the 2020 Q1 and Q2 submission.
- The District has contracted with CivicPlus to modernize the website. It is twice the functionality of the old site and at half the cost.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's Report for March as submitted.

B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for March had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

- Collections for Fire through March are at \$5.6 million. They are up to \$5.8 million based on the Grand List. It is 103% of what the District had levied this year.
- EMS calls last month from Shared Response is 126 calls. This year is a little bit over 1,400, and last year was 1,300.
- Cash receipts are at 114% of last year's number at this time.
- Water production this month was within 200,000 gallons for the year, 66.1 million gallons less than last year.
- Water bills for April have been printed and mailed. The total is roughly \$532,000. It is about 5% more than last year.
- Regarding collection efforts, there are approximately 30 parcels that are over \$1,000 for collection.
- Regarding interest in the revenue area, the STIF account is at \$117,000 for this year. On the Water side, the interest is off by \$17,000. There was a mis-posting, and the reposting will be reflected in the month of April.
- The General Fund revenue is \$309,000 coming from interest on taxes.
- They are watching the Fire Operations overall. Mr. Hart and Mr. Lupkas will be meeting with the Fire Chief to review Fire accounts that may be able to be cut back. Water operations is running a surplus of \$150,000 from what is forecasted including debt service.
- The audit was completed and electronic copies distributed to the Commissioners for review. Commissioner Epstein expressed concern over the timeliness of the audit. He would like to see the process begin earlier than it is now. Mr. Lupkas will be working on that this year. He will be discussing the overall audit process with the auditors this week.
- Commissioner Darius wanted to find out what it is costing the District per employee turnover.

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

C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for March had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

- There were approximately 216 calls last month and a task force activation. They were down a little in the number of calls this month, but still a high number.
- They participated in the St. Patrick's Day parade. They were visited by the Girl Scouts. They participated in a Career Fair at the High School that went very well. They participated at an Easter Bunny event at Town Hall with the Police Department that was received very well.
- Regarding staffing, the Chief publicly thanked Eric Roberts for his years of service as a volunteer. He had been a volunteer officer and served the Department for 15 years. He has submitted his resignation in order to have more time with his family. Melissa Roming has been appointed as an Acting Volunteer Lieutenant until July 2024 when volunteer reappointments are made.
- There are four staff members that are leaving. Two people got jobs in Nashua, NH, in a larger Department. Another member went to Meriden for more fire and advancement opportunity. Another member is leaving to go to Wilton which is offering better pay.
- There are a couple of people left on the hiring list. They have a testing process underway with the anticipation of these other members leaving. A written exam will be given on April 25 and are working on a date for the oral exam. The Chief will be presenting a hiring list at the next Board meeting for approval to move forward.

- Some training was done on traffic incident management, forceable entry, hose line advancements and safety topics.
- Regarding health & safety, the Department has received a few quotes on the bird issue at Court St. This will be brought before the Health & Safety/Facilities Committee.

Commissioner Darius was looking for response time breakdown. The Chief will be following up on the Commissioner's request.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Chief's Report for March as submitted.

1. Fire Marshal's Office. The Fire Marshal's report for March had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Holmes highlighted that the TPC construction is underway. They increased some tent sizes by adding bays to the existing tents. There is a little over 10,000 in seating throughout the course.

The new Mexican restaurant, Feugo, should be opening some time in May. A new bakery is coming on Rte. 372, Bakery by Chan. They are located in the plaza with Benjamin Moore paints. Barb's Pizza will be moving to the Crossroads Plaza, and a Fusion business will be opening specializing in vitamin injections.

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

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for March had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri added:

- They are installing more meter pits for converting the seasonal meters to permanent quarterly billing meters.
- They have been working on their GIS data base needs assessment on lead and copper.
- There is a meeting on the Interconnection Project next week.
- Under the SCADA project, Evergreen Adult was completed today. They will start to work on Sanford Lane within the next couple of weeks. Sovereign Ridge alarm system is still in progress.
- Mr. Palmieri worked on the annual Consumer Confidence Report. He had a final draft copy which will be going to the printers. It should be mailed out in a couple of weeks. Everything in the report was double checked for accuracy.
- Berlin interconnection has not been turned on this year. Meter calibration needs to be done before it can be turned on. They will then be able to test the new SCADA system there and the new valve.
- They are underway with their water main flushing and fire hydrant maintenance. They have someone working on them almost every day.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations Report for March as submitted.

- E. Communication Center. The Communication Center Report had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr.

Lonergan was away at a conference. President Rukowicz reviewed the Communication Center report. Most of Mr. Lonergan's projects are ongoing. Completed projects were noted on the second page of his report.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Center Report for March as submitted.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. Executive. There was no report.
- B. Water Operations. A meeting was held on February 27, 2024.
- C. Public Safety Tower. A meeting was held on March 22, 2024. Minutes had been distributed for review.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Public Safety Tower Committee meeting minutes of March 22, 2024, as presented.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was a Council meeting last night. The Council addressed some of the current issues within the schools regarding bullying and racism. A committee has been formed as well as consultants hired. The Diversity/Equity & Inclusion Committee has become more active. Discussion regarding sewer usage fees were tabled. He is still in the process of drafting a policy regarding water billing for seniors and youth organizations. Mr. Bonneau has brought up the piece of land in front of the Court St. firehouse but has not received any specific feedback. He will follow up on that.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the report of the Town Council Liaison as presented.

- B. Reports of the Special Committees

- 1. Health, Safety & Facilities Committee. A meeting was held on February 14, 2024. Minutes had been distributed for review and signed by Chairman Darius.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Wygonowski and unanimously approved to accept the Health, Safety & Facilities Committee meeting minutes of February 14, 2024, as submitted.

- 2. Volunteer Pension Committee. Commissioner McIntyre was not present, but is intending to have a meeting soon.

3. Budget & Oversight Committee. Meetings were held on April 2, 2024 and April 5, 2024. Minutes from the April 2, 2024, meeting were available. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Budget & Oversight Committee meeting of April 2, 2024, as submitted.

- C. Update on Money Owed from the Town Regarding Lateness of Their Tax Payment to the Fire District. Mr. Hart explained that the Town collects taxes for the District. Last year there was an issue with the former Tax Collector and his staff failing to reconcile the books causing a backup in the accounting processes. In order to distribute the tax funds owed to the District, they had to put everything on pause and reconcile their books. During that time there was a 2 month delay in the District receiving its payments. At one point a lump sum amount was given to the District in order for them to receive some of what was due, but it was not the entire amount owed. Some Commissioners feel that if the money was given to the District in a timely fashion, the District would have been able to invest and make some money in interest in the STIF account. It was calculated out to be a \$34,000 missed opportunity. Some Commissioners would like the District to recoup that loss from the Town. Both Mr. Hart and the former Executive Director are of the opinion to use caution if trying to get money back from the Town because there will be a meeting with the Town soon to discuss shared services. The District and the Town are committed to trying to work together. It may not be to the District's benefit to try to pursue this issue. Currently the District and the Town work together on certain projects sharing resources. There was a question whether it would be wise to pursue the issue. Once the Town recognized the problem, everything was rectified as soon as possible and was done responsibly without malice.

Commissioner Epstein did not think \$34,000 was a small item. The issue of tax collection is not a shared service with the Town. They charge the Fire District to collect Fire District taxes. If the District were paying an outside vendor for the service, it would be expected that the District would go after the \$34,000.

Commissioner Darius felt the value of goodwill and the shared services outweighs the loss of the potential income if those funds were invested, which at this point no one knows if they would or would not be invested. They could of potentially been used to pay off some debt.

Commissioner Wygonowski explained some of the issues the Town had with switching banks during that time which had a factor in the timeliness of corrective action being taken. He tends to agree that it may not be worth going after the funds that were lost. He felt that the Town should acknowledge this situation and realize the District had a missed opportunity as a result.

They asked Mr. Bonneau to bring this topic up at the next Council meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to table this issue until the next board meeting due to minimum quorum in attendance.

- D. Discussion of Language in the Ambulance Billing Hardship Cases. The current collection policy had been distributed and reviewed. Commissioner Epstein proposed making some revisions to reflect current administrators as opposed to the staff in place at the time the

policy was written. The issue seemed to be the language in the last bullet of item 1 regarding accounts being written off. The debate was to have a hardship letter and/or death certificate. There was discussion whether or not to have both. They discussed having more supporting documentation from the patient as to why there is a hardship.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to table this item until draft language is drafted by Commissioner Darius to be reviewed by all Commissioners who are not present at this meeting.

- E. District Audit. The audit was sent to the Commissioners electronically. The report was 80 pages. There were no questions or comments from the Commissioners. They discussed the Neto Fund which was a scholarship fund set up by Mr. Neto when he worked in the Fire Department. The fund has been discontinued, but there is money in the fund. The funds are earmarked for scholarship intentions. Mr. Lupkas does not have a letter defining the fund or its purpose or what it can be used for. Mr. Hart will get more clarification.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the District Audit report as presented.

- F. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein wanted to make sure all the latest deaths and funerals of family members of the Fire Department and Fire District are acknowledged by the Board. The President and Fire Chief have been taking care of acknowledgements.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:22 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary

Charles R. Epstein, Secretary