

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Fire Operations Committee

Tuesday, September 17, 2019

5:30 PM

**Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT**

Present: Commissioners Johnathon Hamlin (Chairman), Jason Hinnners, Allan Spotts and Robert Donohue. Also attending were Fire Chief Michael Terenzio, Ass't Fire Chief EMS Robert McIntyre, Executive Director Julius Neto and Commissioners Roger Rukowicz, Charles Epstein and David Colligan.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:40 PM, by Chairman Hamlin.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.
- III. Approval of Meeting Minutes of July 16, 2019. A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of July 16, 2019, as submitted.
- IV. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- V. Communications Report. Commissioner Colligan reported that the Chief has received confirmation of two grant awards. It is hoped one will be used for the voting stations for the radio project. He plans to have a meeting with the Communications Subcommittee and the Clerk of the Works, Paul Zito, at the beginning of October. It is time for Mr. Zito to report back to the Subcommittee on the status of the project. Some money has been sent to Motorola. Commissioner Colligan should be able to give a more detailed report at the next Commission meeting.

Commission Colligan added that the antennas have been changed, and there has been a big improvement. In that process Mr. Alvarado took some cables down, and everything was reprogrammed to the new frequency. The Cromwell Fire District is now legal with their licenses. Chief Terenzio added that there have been some discussions with Norcom to start purchasing and getting some of the equipment, such as the portables and mobiles. That will provide an increase in the efficacy of the communications. Commissioner Colligan updated the Committee on the reprogramming of the radios. They have all been reprogrammed except for the Kenwoods because they will not accept a Motorola frequency (PL).

Commissioner Colligan and Chief Terenzio have been discussing what the next steps should be. They get can the portables at any time. The Executive Director was asked for his thoughts. Mr. Neto noted that the District has the capital now and feels they should decide how to spend it if it expedites the efficiency of the system. Chief Terenzio and Justin Lonergan believe they have found a way to work around the Middletown system in the interim. For the long term he believes the District should get as much equipment as possible to facilitate moving forward in baby steps until the voting sites are up and all systems are fully operational. Any improvement above and beyond what the District has now is a step in the right direction.

Commissioner Colligan was looking for permission from the subcommittee to give Norcom the authorization to get the portables and get them all programmed now to the frequency they have. He suggested they need to start training people. Before the big switch-over is made, people need to be trained on how to use them. Then at the time of the switch, people can just turn in their old portables. Commissioner Colligan's recommendation is to both the Fire Operations Committee and the full Board of Commissioners to give the Executive Director and the Fire Chief authorization to contact Norcom and obtain all the portables. Chairman Hamlin stated that a vote does not need to be taken. The Subcommittee is still in effect, they have the funding and the approval to proceed accordingly.

Commissioner Spotts asked if there was any retail value to the old portables. Commissioner Colligan stated he has been discussing with the President of the Board and the Executive Director the fact that the Town is going to need to do something in terms of communications. They do not need to be on a P-25 system or a digital system, and the District will have a lot of mobiles and portables available to give them. The only thing the Town will have to do is get their own frequency for them. They could program them and have a Town frequency that could fit into the District's voting sites. They could purchase their own equipment and have coverage just as good as the Fire Department does throughout the whole town. Commissioner Colligan added that this would all be free equipment and would be a nice gesture on behalf of the District to the Town.

- VI. Reports of Chief Officers. Chief Terenzio reported that the Department did get two grants. They are waiting on a third one. He also reported that the new staffing model is working. He is getting a lot of positive responses to a lot of calls coming in. Last week there was a day where five calls came in within 20 minutes. They effectively answered all of them. If there was a significant incident during that time such as a fire, they probably would have been stretched pretty thin. The staffing model between the unscheduled and the volunteers seems to drop off. This issue will be discussed under the next agenda time. He also reported all the equipment is running. Everything is good. At this point, the Department is meeting its needs.

Ass't Chief McIntyre reported that a publication just came out today regarding EMT's decertified through the National Registry. He was not able to print it, however, Commissioner Epstein did have a copy available to copy and distribute. Ass't Chief McIntyre had emailed it out to everybody. The document was approximately 29 pages. Commissioner Epstein explained that people will be able to do their own classes or keep records of their classes or activity over a two year period. A person needs to do a required amount of CEU's. They allow credits to be given to EMT's taking classes in Cromwell to go towards the 50 hours in 2 years that they need. The plan was when this information came out to structure out training around getting people accredited towards their recertification.

Chief Terenzio added that they had a meeting last night with the officers. They are establishing a policy to meet with operational officers and support officers on a bimonthly basis. The Chief will be asking for a monthly report. The meetings do have a cost value, although not significant. It would add up if the Chief mandates the officers to come to the meetings. The Chief has informed the Executive Director that they will limit the meeting time to 2 hours. Also discussed at the meeting was the new training directive that they will be entering into to remain compliant. The Chief explained to them there has been some disconnect as was explained to the Chief, because everything has been changing. The Chief reported that at the end of the meeting, listening to everyone that was there, they felt very positive with the new direction. The Communication Manager was at the meeting as well. He rolled out the new process for disseminating fire calls using the EFD which is similar to the EMD; with alpha, bravo, Charlie, delta and echo levels. With the new staffing model for compensation and calling out, the unscheduled and volunteers can essentially handle alpha, bravo and Charlie calls that would effectively be able to be handled by on-duty staff. Anything that gets toned out as a delta or echo, it will be announced whether it is a delta or echo level call for all personnel to report to their stations. They are attempting to get to a point where all unscheduled part-time and volunteer staff are going to be assigned to a station and that is where they are going to respond to man and operate the equipment at those stations.

It is a work in progress, but the Chief felt he had made significant inroads last night. Chairman Hamlin asked if they are discussing separating different categories of staff in separate firehouses such as having one firehouse for volunteers or part-time. The Chief stated that it is being discussed with the Assistant Chief and a couple of Captains in charge of those two stations. Although Court Street is pretty much staffed 24/7, there is other equipment that will be stationed there that they will still need, and there are individuals nearby to get that equipment out in the event it is needed. They are getting into a level that is a little more structured and hopefully more effective. Chairman Hamlin stated that everything seems to be going very well. Everyone knew there would be bumps in the road, but it seems to be smoothing out. Commissioner Colligan stated that he and the Assistant Chief were at the staff meeting last night. He reported it was one of the more positive staff meetings he has seen in a long time.

Commissioner Epstein stated it has been reported to him that Cromwell has cut down its response time to scenes by one minute. That is significant. Chief Terenzio stated that it was also received negatively by some because they are questioning why we are sending a fire truck with the ambulance. He explained they are doing R-1 response. With some of the levels of B and D, six people are being sent. There was also a call in the middle of the night on New Lane where the entire staff on duty was sent with the engine, R-1 response. It was beneficial. The on-duty staff whether it is career, scheduled, unscheduled, part-time and volunteers are being utilized. They are not isolating anyone. It is to everyone's credit. He hopes it continues to grow. More people will come to understand that why Cromwell exists as an organization, it is not for the individual but for the community. He added that the success of this process is due to everyone's participation and cooperation, including the Board of Commissioners who approve or disapprove of proposed policies and procedures.

The Chief reported that they have received \$459,580 for the SAFER grant, over 2 1/3 years to fund the salaries and benefits of 4 career firefighters. They also received \$267,619 from the AFG (Assistance to Firefighters Grant) for operations and safety equipment. It was earmarked for the radios. The Chief explained he was successful in securing the grants because it was an honest and realistic request because you have to know what you are asking

for and who you are asking it from. The third grant that he applied for is still in the pipeline. He is still hopeful because an email was received advising that their SAM account should be up to date on 3 grants. The first two grants are the ones that came in from that same email. The third one just under \$600,000 was for a fire truck and an ambulance and a rechasis. Because of the size of Cromwell, they are only eligible for \$1 million. The Chief feels that one of the mistakes he made in the previous go round was he aimed too high.

Chairman Hamlin asked if the turnout gear situation had been straightened out. It was noted that Commissioner Epstein is still working on it. The Chief added regarding the SAFER grant, the Board of Commissioners will need to vote on accepting or rejecting the SAFER grant. The Executive Director explained that on year 1 and 2 of the SAFER grant, the District will own 25% of each employee's salary and benefits. It will own 66 1/3% on year 3. There is going to be a financial impact on the budget over the next 3 years. The cost to the District for year 1 is \$61,700, year 2 is also \$61,700, and the third year is \$160,420. The District will own all of that cost in year 4. With 4 firefighters on staff full time, there will be less of a need for scheduled part-timers. The model now says 2 full-timers, 4 scheduled part-timers. If everything is approved, the model will be inverted potentially. The approval for the grant needs to happen within 30 days of receipt. In terms of staffing, there needs to be some contingency planning for firefighters that are out on medical leave or vacation. Extra staff would be helpful. Bolstered on-duty staff who are able to transport won't be experiencing the turnovers they have had. They are averaging approximately 12 – 13 subsequent ambulance calls where both vehicles are out at the same time. That is approximately \$100,000 in revenue @\$700 a call. They are turning over on average because of no crew, roughly 8 calls per month, totaling roughly \$67,000. The Town is growing. These statistics are not going to decline. Calls are going to increase. The Chairman asked the Chief to come up with some numbers to help them make some decisions about accepting or denying the SAFER Grant.

VII. Firefighter/EMT Staffing Hiring and Response Capability. This had been previously discussed.

VIII. Old Business

A. Discussion and Possible Decision on Blue Light Permits. The Executive Director noted that this item was brought up two months ago related to a concern from when the staffing model changes from volunteers to scheduled or unscheduled part-timers. The Chief has informed the group about the Statute which is pretty clear that blue lights are for volunteers and not for scheduled or unscheduled part-time employees. At the time it was brought up, the Fire Operations Committee had decided to table it. Mr. Neto stated that we need to give the Chief some direction because he is the authority that allows the permits to be provided or rescinded based on Statute. It is not going to be well received by the scheduled or unscheduled staff that may have had blue lights in the past. A copy of the Statute was distributed and reviewed. Law officials in Town have also been paying attention. A decision needs to be made regarding how many blue lights will be issued. The Chairman asked the Fire Chief for his thoughts. He does not see a lot of benefit to it because it does not give permission to the driver to go any faster to a fire scene or give permission to not obey any traffic laws. Fire Police can have a red light on the back of their car when it is stationery. Commissioner Donohue was asked for his thoughts as a Fire Police member. He stated that during the day, the lights cannot be seen. He does not feel comfortable having the red lights on his personal vehicle or truck. The Committee suggested a refresher course in the Blue Light Statute, and reviewing the privileges that go along with compliance. Currently there are 17 volunteers.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to follow the law per CT Statute, Chapter 246, Sec. 14-96Q allowing blue light permits to be issued only to volunteers.

IX. New Business

- A. Establish Minimum Basic Response Requirements for Unscheduled Part-Time Employees. This item was placed on the agenda to discuss a baseline for unscheduled part-time employees. Chief Terenzio has informed the Executive Director of an appropriate percentage of calls to be used as a baseline for unscheduled part-time employees. Over the last couple of months, the level of response is not what the public requires or needs. He suggested setting a target number of bare minimum percentages of what is expected. Should it be 10%, 20% or 30%. Mr. Neto is looking for a policy or practice from this body that states the Cromwell citizens and visitors have a need for fire and EMS services 24 hours a day.

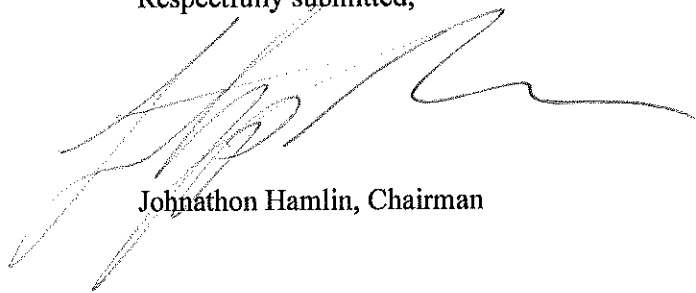
There are scheduled and career staff. A certain percentage of calls are going to require more hands on deck. If people are on the roster, Management needs them to participate at the level this Committee is tasked to determine. This issue is for calls that are alerted for everyone. The staffing model is such that it has unscheduled part-timers available. People opted to be at that level of service. They made a choice to be in that category. If the District goes down what Mr. Neto feels is a slippery slope and additional costs of staffing, costs are only going to increase expedientially in the next 5 years for all the District's services. If there were not 37 people available on the roster, it would be an enticement to get people on deck. He believes the staff have not transitioned to the new model or are holding back services for some reason. The former volunteers/employees were used to 10 percent. Mr. Neto feels that 7 people should respond between the hours of 8 and 6 which is a 20% response rate. What is the bare minimum acceptance rate? That is what needs to be decided by this group. There needs to be training. The part-time scheduled people are required to put in a minimum of 18-20 hours a week. So as very delicately as he possibly can, the Chief requested they talk to their staff and make them realize they have a cost value and the Department needs them. The Chief wants to give this a month to see if there is any increase in responses. After a month's time, an advisement should be issued to an individual letting them know we appreciate their service, but they are of no value if they do not respond to calls. He also feels this body or the Personnel Committee should set authorized strengths. That means there is an authorized number of people on the roster because it costs money. The Chairman asked for the Chief to come up with a set of numbers for each category of staff and authorized strength. Mr. Neto has been tasked with coming up with a cost for unscheduled part-timers on the roster to be sitting there not responding to calls. The same is true for volunteers.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to table this item, and Mr. Neto will provide the Committee with hard costs to the District or Fire Department what is an unscheduled part-timer and the expense associated with a volunteer. Mr. Neto feels that this body should still think what would be a minimum requirement for service. What would be critical is the analysis on what the community needs. How many people did they have and what is the need on an operational basis. That should determine the percentages. Standards also need to be looked at. There should be 35 people certified firefighters to effect an operation at every call. In order to be effective, maybe we should have 15% - 20% response on toned out

delta, echo levels or all calls. It used to be 10% to get the stipend. The Chief thinks that 20% - 25% might be something to be considered for toned out not everything else. Currently the volunteers and part-timer unscheduled are responding to less than 1% and that number went down after July 22.

- X. Commissioners' Comments. There were no Commissioners' comments to report.
- XI. Public Comment. There were no comments from the public at this time.
- XII. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Hamlin', is written over the printed name.

Johnathon Hamlin, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
10-17-19