

Cromwell Fire District

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Cromwell, CT 06416
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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting**

Friday, August 2, 2019

6:00 PM

**1 West Street
Cromwell, CT**

A Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting was held on Friday, August 2, 2019, at 6:00 PM, at 1 West Street, Cromwell, CT to consider and act upon Special Fire District business.

Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Roger Rukowicz, Jason Hinners, David Colligan, Mertie Terry, Johnathon Hamlin, Charles Epstein, Robert Donohue and Allan Spotts attended. Executive Director Julius Neto and Attorney Linda Yelmini were also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM, by President Brow.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted. It was noted that because this is a Special Meeting, the agenda cannot be changed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Before the meeting was opened to comments from the public, President Brow read a letter he planned to submit as a response to the social media frenzy that is attacking the Cromwell Fire Department, the Cromwell Fire Chief and Fire District Commissioners. He asked that when he is finished reading, if Board members agree with the content, to show their support for the position being taken by the President of the Board and show a united front in addressing the social media frenzy. There have been a lot of misconceptions, the truth has not been published, information being published is mistruths and misquotes. Commissioner Epstein asked if there was a way to obtain more of the information that has been put on social media because some of the Board members are familiar with some of the information that was out there, but not all of it.

Mr. Neto stated that he has asked some individuals that have access to the material online to do some "screen shots" of some of it. President Brow is willing to pay fees for time and paper used by anyone involved in the process. He stated that he is "sick and tired" of this situation. If there are actionable items, the President would like the action to be swift, concise and just. Mr. Neto is working to get more of the information that was posted. In summary, he learned that 80% of the information was negative and 20% positive. There was some discussion regarding what was posted. The focus of who might have done any posting would be on people that are members of the Cromwell Fire Department or Fire District. Anyone else is irrelevant. If individuals have a connection to the Fire Department or Fire District, they will be held liable for information they

are putting out there. There have also been employees that have been putting positive information out there such as the Dispatchers. Commissioner Hanners added that it is six to eight people that are circulating the negative information. He offered to work with Mr. Alvarado to extract and print some of the social media postings.

After the letter was read, Mr. Neto stated he did not think a vote on the letter would be necessary because it was read under the public comment portion of the meeting. The other Commissioners can provide their support verbally. The subject matter could also be an agenda item for the next time the Commission meets. Other Commissioners were interested in signing the letter along with the President. Some Commissioners wanted the letter posted on the District's website. It was agreed that all information contained in the letter are facts. All actions taken by the Commission regarding the Fire Department staffing has been documented. The letter will be prepared to include all Commissioners' signatures and will be posted on the Fire District website. Attorney Yelmini suggested revising the letter to reflect correct grammar and use of pronouns when referring to the whole Board or just an individual.

Robin Cassela, 582 Main St., was in attendance. She noted that if the posting was sent to the "uncensored Cromwell group" they would take the posting in its entirety. President Brow asked if they would accept his request to become open to the uncensored group. Ms. Cassela said yes, it is the uncensored group so anything goes.

President Brow proceeded to read a document off of Robin Cassela's cell phone. It is a facebook post from the uncensored Cromwell group. It reads, "I am starting to think that all the homes in Cromwell are made of glass. Maybe we don't need a Fire Department." Ms. Cassela took that statement as a threat. She added that the comment was from a fake profile, Mike Cox. She added there were several other comments that were posted that in her opinion were nasty. She called them out on it. She is a person who speaks her mind. Ms. Cassela stated several times that she didn't give a ****. She is a blunt and up front type of person. She noted that Jen Daigle is the administrator for the uncensored Cromwell group page. She had encouraged others from the group to attend this meeting, but she was the only person that attended. She added that she plans to attend as many future meetings as she can in order to get a better understanding of Fire District and Fire Department operations.

She went on to discuss the District By-Laws as they pertain to the Fire Chief. She has been in Town most of her life and always remembered the Fire Chief living in Town. She did not know if it was part of the By-Laws that the Fire Chief must live in Town. The Commissioners confirmed that the requirement is not in the By-Laws. She then discussed the Chief taking his District vehicle home. If he responds to a fire call from home, what is the liability for that. The President explained that most Fire Chiefs in the State of CT, because they are not represented employees or line personnel, they are management and not required to be a first responder. There are shift personnel that run the incident. When a working fire is reported, the Chief is notified and the Chief responds, the Chief does not respond with lights and sirens from his home to Cromwell. The appropriate time to hit lights and sirens would be when the Chief reaches the town line. Ms. Cassela came to this meeting with an open mind and added that what went on uncensored was a **** **** storm.

It was also noted that the Fire Chief also manages the Fire Marshal's Office. As a manager, it is not a conflict of interest to manage the Fire Department and the Fire Marshal's office. Ms. Cassela stated that she wants to be more informed on what is going on. The Commissioners informed her that all meetings are open to the public. Unfortunately the history of the Department reflects that the only people that show up at the meetings were the volunteers. They

would manage to get a quorum of supporters to vote in favor of certain issues such as a new fire truck. Ms. Cassela asked if there was any way the District could be more visible for that type of information. She discussed having the meetings on the Town website or stream it on line. Commissioner Colligan stated that the Board has done everything they can to address the issue of publicizing information but are still criticized.

Mr. Neto asked Ms. Cassela what the process would be to get information out there. Ms. Cassela offered to contact the administrator of the web page. It is the uncensored Cromwell CT family page. If information is sent via email, it can be posted from email. It is a public forum and anything goes. She had issues with people using fake profiles and not owning what they are posting. Ms. Cassela also offered to post information that the Commissioners would want to say but can't say. She asked them to send the information to her and she would post it. She also discussed her feelings about cross training. President Brow explained that cross training is the best bang for the taxpayer's dollar.

She has been told that the Chief often plays referee between volunteers, the union and paid firefighters. President Brow explained the staffing model and the amount of career firefighters Cromwell has and part-time employees. They need 28 part-time people to supplement the career staff.

Ms. Cassela also discussed some of the rumors about some of the fire personnel. The purpose of her being in attendance was to pass on information she is getting, and does not want to be misinformed. The Executive Director explained the processes in the District regarding discipline and staffing issues. The President noted this body will follow progressive discipline as written in the Department's directives, standard operating procedures and guidelines.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Executive Session – District Personnel Matter. A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to enter into Executive Session at 6:55 PM, to discuss a District Personnel matter.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to invite Attorney Yelmini and the Executive Director into Executive Session.

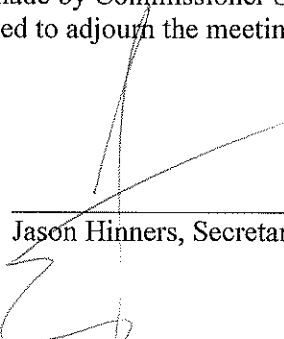
A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to come out of Executive Session at 7:56 PM.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:57 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary, 8-12-19



Jason Hinnners, Secretary