

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **SPECIAL DISTRICT MEETING**

Tuesday, May 21, 2019
6:30 PM

A Special District meeting of the electors and citizens qualified to vote in meetings of the Cromwell Fire District was held on Tuesday, May 21, 2019, at 6:30 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road in the Town of Cromwell, Connecticut to consider and act upon a resolution (a) to appropriate \$3,000,000 for costs associated with the purchase and installation of radio/tower/antenna upgrades and related work and improvements...; (b) to authorize the issue of bonds, notes, obligations, temporary notes and interim funding obligations of the District in an amount not to exceed \$3,000,000 to finance said appropriation... and (c) to authorize the President of the Board of Commissioners on behalf of the District to apply for and accept state or federal grants and loans to finance the project... Additional information regarding items (a), (b) and (c) are attached to these minutes and included in the original Call of this Meeting as read.

Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Mertie Terry, David Colligan, Charles Epstein, Roger Rukowicz and Allan Spotts attended. Also attending was Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Michael Terenzio and Tony Ambrosino from Norcom. Commissioners Robert Donohue, Johnathon Hamlin and Jason Hinnners had excused absences.

The meeting was called to order at 6:58 PM, by President Lee Brow. The President acted as District Clerk, and confirmed there was a quorum of legal voters and citizens of the Cromwell Fire District present. There were 26 qualified voters in attendance. The District Clerk read the Call of the Meeting. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Copies of information included in the Call of the Meeting were available to attendees for review prior to the meeting being called to order and also available on the District's website.

The Executive Director gave a history of the situation that has led to this point with the radio/tower/antenna upgrades. Approximately one year ago, a Special District meeting was held, and the voters voted to move forward on the upgrade of the communication system. The purpose of this meeting tonight is to pass a resolution for permission to borrow \$3 million to activate the program or plan that was passed last year. There was information at this meeting available to the public, i.e., maps and the resolution. There were also some individuals present to answer any technical questions. The objective of this project is to eliminate dead communication spots in town. The fact is that first responders cannot always be in communication with the Communication Center when on a call because of the dead spots. It is a problem from a citizen safety perspective. There is a communication tower, but the typography in Cromwell prevents the tower from solving all the issues with communications. The investment in this project is needed to resolve communication issues for the long term. Mr. Neto noted that Middletown is due to complete a similar project costing \$9.5 million. The objective is to get as close to 100%

coverage as possible. We need to add places (voting sites) with either telephone poles or towers to receive radio signals in appropriate spots so that they can be transmitted. Mr. Ambrosino from Norcom explained that what needs to happen is getting the signal to the firefighters in the field from a hand held portable radio so the firefighter can get the signal back. There are some buildings in town that are more problematic than others. It is a life safety situation.

Over the years some of the solutions for these issues have been through piece meal efforts. There have not always been resources available to address the problem. The call volume continues to rise, and it has become necessary to take action. Commissioner Colligan, Chair of the Communications Subcommittee, gave a brief history of what has been occurring over the last few years with communications. In certain situations it had been possible that someone could have lost their life. They started researching different ways to address the problem. They thought about hooking into the State's system or Middletown's system. They thought they could piggyback onto someone else's, but could not seem to find a safe solution. At that point a company was hired to do a professional analysis of the whole town in terms of identifying problem areas. Since then problems have been identified and this is the best solution that has been proposed for the long term. They also looked at ways to save tax dollars.

Mr. Ambrosino addressed the group by explaining when Norcom was hired they did an assessment of the existing system. They found a lot of areas where there were deficits in the system. Communicating within a building and outside a building put firefighters and EMS in jeopardy. This had to be addressed. The current system is a signal site which is off the Shunpike Tower. It covers a lot of the Town, but does not cover the Town completely. A mobile radio has a higher output power than a portable. A portable has low power and has a very short range. They have found that the firefighter portables are not able to go back and hit the system at Shunpike which then gets recorded at Dispatch with standards that the Fire Chief can explain at another time. They also noticed that one of the input frequencies being used was also shared with New Britain Transit. In other words, it was not a public safety frequency, it was a commercial frequency. That puts things in jeopardy for interference during a critical crisis. Areas that were looked at based on topographical maps, there are three or four interconnecting highways that run through Cromwell. They happen to be in the same area where the portables cannot get back into the system. There are a lot of accidents in that area.

Mr. Ambrosino noted that Norcom has spent the last 2 ½ years trying to enhance what Cromwell already has. They found that the link from Shunpike to Dispatch which is a critical link for getting all communications back, is a shared microwave with Middletown. Middletown is currently going through an upgrade to their system, so the microwave will not be available much longer. Cromwell will need to find another avenue for being able to get all that critical information back to Dispatch. They found areas where Cromwell needs to rely on Portland. If Portland does not keep up with and maintain their sites and communication, Cromwell will be in jeopardy. There were a lot of failing points within the existing system that could not be controlled by Cromwell. They also looked at equipment that was used to see if there were budgetary restrictions. It was noted that it is a higher commercial grade of equipment rather than public safety equipment. The demands of the Federal Government and the FCC are driving public safety entities to a true public safety platform that does allow for grants to help offset bonds. All surrounding towns (mutual aid towns) are doing upgrades and will soon leave Cromwell behind the times if Cromwell does not address the issues. This is starting to become critical because the equipment out there being utilized is not made anymore. Technology standards are more IP based type, computer driven. They have been working with Cromwell property owners willing to lend their sites as voting sites to help out. They are working to try to bring a true public safety system to the Town.

Ann Keiser, 7 Bow La., in her career working for a utility company has done some work projecting costs. She sees no issue with the price of the project. However, she thought she heard that not all areas of Town will be covered, so she asked what will not be covered and whether or not an effort has been made to apply for any grants for the project. She also asked if Cromwell is working with any other Towns to see what their plans are, or can there be any piggybacking done. Mr. Ambrosino responded that Norcom has worked with the State of CT. The State uses a mobile-based system for State Troopers. They do not use portable radios. That is outside the realm of what the Fire Department does. It became cost prohibitive. It was unclear what the maintenance costs would be, and additional equipment would have to be purchased as well as pagers and a console. The only thing was that the State would provide Cromwell with a link to their CORE system.

Mr. Ambrosino also contacted with Middletown because they are putting in a new system. It would be possible to drop an extended site in Cromwell who would purchase their own subscribers and console. This would put Cromwell in the same scenario they have now, which is that they do not have control of their own system. The situation presented by Norcom would give Cromwell total control of their system which has not happened in many years.

Regarding the question about grants, Mr. Neto noted that Chief Terenzio has applied for some grants and is waiting for responses. Mr. Neto also pointed out the contrast in coverage from maps that were distributed. The coverage will increase substantially after Norcom gets involved and installs voting sites. It was noted that Cromwell has done its homework and done a lot of vetting of this process.

Commissioner Colligan explained some of the situations that have occurred because of the communication issues. Mr. Ambrosino noted that with the new system, Cromwell can be dependent upon themselves but they will still have the capability to interoperate with other towns. New radios and scanners are included in the new budget. Commissioner Colligan discussed the P-25 versus the Analogue system. The new system required is a digital system. It is now required by NFPA and the Federal Government to go to a P-25 system. This system is made for fire services and emergency services. Ashlyn Cooke noted that they visit 325 Main St. often. Mr. Ambrosino stated they have tested with the analogue system with fire ground and it was hampered. It was then moved to digital where a real life situation was set up. Communicating from the building out had clear signals.

Janine Mulder, 38 Evergreen Rd., asked if issues are being resolved with the antennas and if there will be any ongoing costs with the voting sites. It was noted that Marriott and Shop-Rite will be fully cooperating and not charging any type of rental fees. Pilgrim Manor has also been fully cooperative.

Samantha Slade, 128 Nooks Hill Road, started by saying she is totally in favor of this communication project. However, she added regarding the grant, she has stated this before that you cannot bank on a grant. They are very difficult to come by. If Cromwell is approved for the grant, that would be great. However, tonight's vote will be on the cost being proposed for bonding. Commissioner Colligan added that the new pagers purchased are compatible with the old and new systems.

Curt Anderson asked about performance guarantees. Mr. Ambrosino noted that there are acceptance test plans that identify the problem areas before the keys are turned over. The maps and system designs are tested. Commissioner Colligan added that this project piggybacked the

CFD Spec. Dist. Mtg. 5-21-19 Bonding for Radios

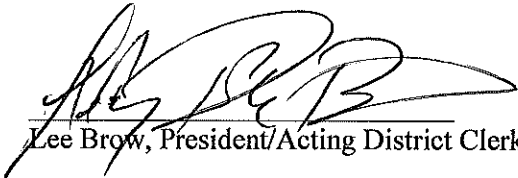
state bid. That is the lowest price that can be obtained. Commissioner Epstein referenced the maps that were presented. He added that with Cromwell obtaining a new system, it is hoped that other towns could piggyback off of Cromwell to ease the financial burden.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and approved 26 votes in the affirmative, none in the negative to approve the appropriation for bonding and related costs of the radio/communication project as so noted in the Call of this Meeting.

Commissioner Colligan thanked all those that attended to hear about the project and all the hard work and efforts of many individuals to get to this point.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 PM.

ATTEST:



Lee Brow, President/Acting District Clerk

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
6-6-19