

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

Via Conference Call

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

5:30 PM

West Street Firehouse

1 West Street

Cromwell, CT

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners' meeting on Tuesday, June 16, 2020, at 5:30 PM, via conference call, at the West Street Firehouse, 1 West Street, Cromwell, CT to discuss and act upon Fire and Water Division business.

Per Executive Order No. 7B, Governor Lamont has ordered and directed that in-person open meeting requirements be suspended. Therefore, the Board of Commissioner's Meeting will be held via conference call. Members of the public may send questions or comments to meetings@cromwellfd.com on any agenda items.

Commissioners Lee Brow, Jason Hinnners, David Colligan, Robert Donohue, Charles Epstein, Johnathon Hamlin, Roger Rukowicz and Allan Spotts were on the call. Commissioner Mertie Terry had an excused absence. Also on the call were Executive Director Julius Neto and Accountant Mike Alibrio from Blum Shapiro.

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 PM, by President Brow.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as presented.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Attorney discussion and possible written legal opinion regarding:

- A. Robert Zajac Complaint
- B. Johnathon Hamlin Complaint

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to enter into Executive Session at 5:36 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to adjourn Executive Session at 6:30 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to have Attorney Rose work with either Executive Director Neto or President Brow to draft a document to reflect that the standing opinion of the Board of Commissioners is legal in addressing the complaints of Robert Zajac and Johnathon Hamlin, and as far as the Board is concerned, this matter is closed. Mr. Neto did not feel it would be appropriate for him to be involved in the drafting of the document because he is not a voting member. It should be an active member of that committee including the Fire Chief. He felt it would be a challenge for him to be engaged in this process. He will provide all the documentation that is available to President Brow and Commissioner Hamlin, but he did not wish to be engaged in the process. Commissioner Hinners amended his motion to say that Attorney Rose will work with President Brow to draft the letter. Commissioner Colligan seconded the motion, and it was voted 6 yes and 2 abstentions from Commissioners Terry and Hamlin in favor of the amendment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments submitted to Mr. Neto.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES OF
MAY 19, 2020

The Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of May 19, 2020, had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of May 19, 2020, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES OF
MAY 27, 2020

The Special Board of Commissioners meeting minutes of May 27, 2020, had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to accept the Special Board of Commissioners meeting minutes of May 27, 2020, as submitted.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or written appeals to report.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's report for May had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Neto did not have much to add to his report. He did briefly speak about the Radio Communications project. The project is moving along. This Thursday they will be working

on the site at Pilgrim Manor as well as two others. There will be a meeting with Commissioner Colligan, Paul Zito and the rest of the subcommittee within the next week or two to brief them. He also gave a brief update on COVID. He reported that the Fire District Offices are now open to the public from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. They are planning to follow that schedule for the following week as well. They have installed chains to alert the public as to where they have access in the building. People will be guided to use the elevator to the 2nd floor. If people are not comfortable using the elevator, they will be able to call the second floor offices, and someone can come down to meet them. Mr. Neto has been working with Mr. Palmieri and Environmental Partners on Diversion Permits. There will be a meeting soon with the Water Operations Committee to discuss the Berlin contract. He added that he was informed last week that a former Commissioner, Ralph DeFelice, passed away. The Board has sent their condolences, and they have purchased a cluster of 20 memorial trees planted by the Arbor Day Foundation at the Superior National Forest in his name sponsored by the Board of Commissioners. They felt it would be something different, and the family appreciated it.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's Report for May as presented.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for May had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Commissioner Epstein had a question regarding updating the reporting program. Mr. Neto reported that they are thinking of expediting the ESO program. They are finding they are having some challenges with the old system. It is putting a strain on collections. They have been making inquiries with other departments that use ESO. They have gotten some positive feedback. It is a simple, complete process. Mr. Neto is thinking about asking for an appropriation after the beginning of the new fiscal year. It can facilitate the revenue stream so it is considered a priority. Mr. Neto anticipates moving on this, but not until next month. He also discussed the financial report presented. He noted that some accounts are over budget, but some are favorable. He reported that the District will have a positive budget at the end of the process. There will be leftover monies that have been designated for legal fees because the District has not been using attorneys as much. They have been doing much of the leg work themselves and only using attorneys for advice with final draft documents. Instead of negotiating, the attorneys are part of the process of rewriting what has been negotiated. Mr. Neto pointed out that with the insurance, the District operates financially by the fiscal year. The new insurance carrier operates by the calendar year in terms of premiums. Therefore, there are 6 months of actuals and 6 months of projections. They projected 13 ½ % for the last 6 months. It came in less than that at 8%. That additional 5 ½% is not being spent. It will be put into the rainy day fund to manage taxation. Regarding collections year over year, last year the District collected more over the last fiscal year by \$17,000 than the previous year. It is trending nicely. He noted that signatures are missing on charts. COVID contributed to issues of not allowing Ipads to be used in facilities, etc. There is also a better relationship with Quick Meds. The District now receives monthly reports that go to the Chief. They are hopeful that ESO software will eliminate some of the mechanics of implementing. Quick Meds has been responsive to the requests of the District, and the process is better. However, they will still be looking into other billing companies. Mr. Alibrio concurred with everything Mr. Neto reported.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for May as submitted.

- C. Fire Department Chief Report. The Chief's Report for May had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Chief added to the item about billing with Quick Meds by stating that Quick Meds only had two EMS reports since the beginning of the month. He reached out to Bob McIntyre who advised he had submitted reports up until June 10. He noted the Department is doing everything they are supposed to. They are trying to improve their process, but it is still a work in progress. They will be investigating further. Mr. Alibrio has been in touch with Jasmine at Quick Meds. The last time she received a group of calls that were submitted after the June meeting, it was a group of calls but they were all for the month of May. Since then she has only received 2 June calls. The Chief will review the calls that were sent in. The new process is a carryover from the new staffing model. There should be someone submitting reports on a weekly basis. He will be working on this tomorrow.

The Chief reported he has started an ISO process on the new survey. The last one was done approximately 5 years ago. The result of that was a ranking of a Class 3 Fire Department based on the significant changes that were approved by the Board and made with the staffing model. There was an increase in training and training hours. That is a huge portion of the fire service. With increased training and training hours as well as changes with dispatching procedures and having two certified fire marshals on as line staff, the Chief is confident the Department can achieve a Class 2 status this year. Currently their ranking is a 70.8. They need to receive an 80 to qualify for Class 2. With the staffing model alone, Cromwell could receive an extra 12 points. They are in good shape to get to a Class 2. That means all commercial underwriting that occurs has a lower insurance rating. That is good news. There are only approximately 1,000 fire departments throughout the country that have a Class 2 rating. There are only about 136 that are Class 1. It benefits the commercial tax payers which can tout the town's ability for services. That is something economic development can advertise to prospective investors. After tomorrow's staff meeting, the Department will be relaxing a little further on some of the protocols that are in place, i.e., allowing fire police to respond again on "delta" "echoes." Their services are still recognized as needed. They may need to wear masks, but it will be discussed further tomorrow.

Commissioner Colligan commented that Cromwell is losing part-time staff because other towns are following suit to Cromwell but paying at a higher hourly rate. He asked if the Department needs more part-time people. The Chief explained that he has been in contact with other departments. Some of the department members from Meriden were restricted due to COVID to work part-time anywhere else besides Meriden. However, since then they have been allowed to come back part-time. There was a member who requested a leave of absence because of training for a job he took at Sekorsky Aircraft Fire Brigade. That absence will only be until September. He did not know of any other full-time member that has been prohibited from participating in the staffing program. He stated that he feels Cromwell could use 6 part-time scheduled staff to make it easier to stretch out the hours so that they don't exceed the Dept. of Labor limits. The unscheduled staffing is spotty. Those leftover from the previous model are not participating. Some equipment has been pulled from people that have not showed up at all. It is unfortunate, but they will continue to try to identify other people; volunteers, unscheduled and part time. Commissioner Colligan added that he wanted to make sure that the Chief is not experiencing any issues with the Board to get more people. He asked if there was any way the Board could assist in his recruitment efforts. The Chief noted that the Board has been very supportive, but he has not had an opportunity to sit down and discuss this with the Executive Director about advertising for additional part-time scheduled. He is considering putting something on facebook.

Commissioner Donohue had concerns with the second phase opening tomorrow, June 18, regarding the fitness gyms. He asked if the Chief would consider going by that plan so that people can get in the gym earlier in the day. The Chief stated they are trying to follow the protocols issued by the State of CT for fitness gyms. Yes, the gym is under the District umbrella, and it will be opened up in conformance with State guidelines. He also added the Department is going to do its final drive by with the Police Department as a special request.

Commissioner Epstein discussed the fact there are hundreds of people that graduate from EMS classes every year. He wanted to know if it would be possible to do a ride along program for those looking for experience. They could possibly become volunteers or part-time staff as a result of that. He would be happy to assist with that type of program. The Chief stated they are interested in doing something like that. It is considered more of an internship. The Chief stated they already have something like that with the ride alongs they do now on the ambulance. He agreed they could reach out to educational facilities as well. The current Acting Assistant Chief has access with a direct contact to Gateway College as well. The Chief would be in support of that.

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

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

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations Report for May as submitted.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. A meeting is scheduled for tomorrow, Wednesday, June 18, 2020, at 5:45 PM.
- B. Executive Committee. Meetings were held on April 22, and 23, 2020. Minutes for the meeting of April 22, 2020, had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to table the meeting minutes from April 23, 2020.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and approved 6 to 0 to accept the Executive Committee meeting minutes of April 22, 2020, as submitted. Commissioner Donohue abstained.

- C. Fire Operations Committee. A meeting was held on May 19, 2020. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and approved 6 to 0 to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of May 19, 2020, as submitted.

1. Communications Subcommittee. Commissioner Colligan reported that Paul Zito is scheduled to come down and do an inspection of all the sites. After the inspection, a meeting will be scheduled with the Radio Communications Subcommittee to bring everyone up to date.
- D. Pension Committee. Commissioner Epstein stated that a meeting had been scheduled for tomorrow, but it has been postponed.
- E. Personnel Committee. A Special Meeting was held on April 16, 2020. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. These minutes had been tabled from the last meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved 5 to 0 to accept the Personnel Committee meeting minutes of April 16, 2020, as submitted. Commissioners Donohue and Hamlin abstained.

- F. Water Operations Committee. There was no meeting.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. Mrs. Donohue was not able to stay on the line because she could not hear the participants on the call. Her report was read by Commissioner Donohue. The Sewer Collections are on target. Collections look good, but officials are cautious about their future progress. Town Council has created a diversity and inclusion committee. More to come on that. Town Council had originally budgeted monies to update policies & procedures, and job descriptions. They were ahead of the curve on this. They will be going back to the Board of Finance to fund. The Police Department is re-evaluating policies and will be initiating having Policies and Procedures and other information on line. Town Hall is open for business. The parks, etc. will be opening soon. The Town is pushing forward to analyze and implement operations on line for citizens. The Town is preparing for a second wave of the virus by trying to provide more accessibility to the Town.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
 1. Public Safety Tower Committee. A meeting was scheduled for June 5, but was canceled.
 2. Safety/Building Committee. There was no meeting.
 3. By-Laws Committee. A meeting was held on June 4, 2020. Minutes were not available for review. A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to table this item until the next Board meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Hinnners asked if there was anything being done for Fire Marshal Gagnon. There were some discussions about getting a plaque or stone. President Brow will work with the Executive Director to follow up on this. Commissioner Hinnners also asked about what took place for Memorial Day since the day's events were discussed at the last meeting. It was noted that nothing was implemented for that day.

Commissioner Epstein asked everyone in the Department and District to remember that with all that is happening in our country right now, first responders and employees need to be reminded that they at times need to be wearing iron shields sometimes. At least that is how it feels. He has witnessed employees get spit on, assaulted and attacked. If an employee were to be harassed in any way that employee needs to have the foresight to not react in a negative way no matter how degrading the situation may be. They need to be humane and well trained. The Chief will be enforcing those values to the staff.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to discuss.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There was a discussion about Harold Holmes. He had been approved by the Board to be hired. However, it was not stipulated that Mr. Holmes was hired as a private contractor.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and approved 6 to 0 to hire Harold Holmes as an independent contractor and accept his contract as negotiated. Commissioner Epstein abstained.

- D. Safety Valve. This is the program that has been on and off the agenda for a few months. CWPCA has adopted this program for insurance with the Sewer Dept. They are looking for approval from the Board, and the Water Department to support reinforcing the fact that customers should buy this insurance. Commissioner Donohue is a part of the CWPCA, and they have endorsed it. They wanted the Executive Director to lobby for it, but the decision to endorse it or not will be left up to the Commissioners. Commissioner Donohue clarified that it is not an insurance company. If someone buys into this, they are allowed \$5,000 per year for claims with three different entities. The first would be the sewer drain, anything that goes out into the street. The second would be the water line or anything related to the water associated with the house. The third would be more for landlords for in-house plumbing which does not have to do with the Water Department. The clarification Commissioner Donohue got from Mr. Peck that they are hoping the District will endorse the water portion. The CWPCA endorses the Sewer portion. There is no cross reporting or endorsement. Mr. Neto noted it is a separate policy for Sewer and a separate policy for Water. A reduced rate will be considered for anyone wishing to bundle. The question is whether to support a private entity to provide insurance to the taxpayers under the Water Department heading, i.e., Water District. Commissioner Spotts noted that the CWPCA has no control over the insurance. They are not selling insurance. If customers want to protect their sewer related components, they will be dealing with Safety Valve. The reason Safety Valve is pushing so hard is that if they have the endorsement of the Town and the Fire District, they can advertise with the Town and Fire District logo and support to get more interest/customers for their service. Basically Safety Valve is looking for the Board's endorsement. Commissioner Epstein suggested not endorsing this or any commercial entity with the District's name on it because it can be construed as the District endorsing something or the District doing the work. It puts the District in a somewhat competitive nature with any service related business associated with the Town of Cromwell. Commissioner Donohue stated that for clarity there is a clause that separates the endorsee vs. the company and upon signature it eliminates the endorsement for any liability.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and unanimously approved to NOT allow the District's name to be used for endorsement purposes for commercial entities selling products not related to the Fire District.

- E. LaMar Lease Proposal Outdoor Advertising Structure. The lease was discussed by Mr. Neto. He noted that LaMar is looking to renegotiate and reduce their rental. They proposed a five year contract. Mr. Neto relayed to them the District's position. The District understands the present business environment due to COVID, however, this did not feel right at this time. The District would like to partner with them and others, but a five year lease agreement to reduce expenses is not feasible. Mr. Neto explained this and LaMar came back with a one year lease agreement reduction. This would be a \$700 a year reduction in lease payments, and if and when the business comes back, they will go from 20% annual revenue to 25%. The rent is due now, and is paid whether or not there is advertising/revenue. Mr. Neto stated to them that just as he is trying to protect his business, the District is trying to protect the tax payer. They are in the same economic condition as Mr. Concalves' business is. It was noted that there was some discussion regarding advertising on the highway. LaMar is not in a financial position at this time to consider any type of expansion of their business.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to remain status quo and not agree to a one year lease agreement with LaMar Advertising.

- F. MOU Town of Berlin Fire Department Communications Center. Mr. Neto stated that at last month's meeting the Board concurred the Communications Center should get into assisting other towns. An agreement has been drafted by Justin Lonergan, and Mr. Neto has forwarded it to the District's attorney. It has been finalized. Mr. Neto had a copy for review and noted it has been drafted for President Brow's signature representing the District.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the MOU with the Town of Berlin for dispatching and authorize the President to sign the document.

Mr. Neto discussed Phase II of social distancing by Governor Lamont. Phase II will be in place for the next meeting. He suggested using the Coles Road Firehouse conference room which is twice the size or more of the 3rd floor conference room at West Street. Since some of the Commissioners that are calling in are having difficulty hearing, Mr. Neto suggested using Coles Road to meet in person using social distancing protocols or call in as long as the District does not violate State protocols.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to go back to the old meeting routine going back to Coles Road for meetings with social distancing. This would also mean allowing half the amount of public that would regularly attend. It would involve coming up with a predetermined number that would not violate State protocols. Commissioner Hinnens was of the opinion that the public not be invited. The staff that needs to be at the meeting is certainly invited, but it would not be a good idea to limit the amount of public. It can create more issues. He suggested having "required personnel only" for the next month or two. Commissioner Donohue suggested the feasibility of using Council Chambers for meetings. They are on a live feed 24/7 on U-Tube. He asked that we discuss this with the Town Manager. Mr. Neto reported that at the beginning of COVID he had approached Town Hall, and at the time they were not allowing anyone from the public to use the chambers. They considered the Fire District as part of the public. He noted that the cost would be significant. It is more costly than the District's use of the owl. Mr. Neto will investigate with the Town Manager. Mr. Neto will be able to define how many people would be attending a meeting at the Coles Road location, he would not be able to define who does or does not participate. That information needs to come from the Board. Those identified are in order of

priority: 9 Commissioners, the Executive Director, the Recording Secretary, Fire Chief, Water Operations Manager 2 assistant chiefs, Fire Marshal, Town Liaison, the Finance manager. The list cannot exceed 20 people. The Executive Director was given direction by the Commissioners to move forward with procedures for conducting public meetings under COVID protocols.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to have the Executive Director look into the cost for the installation at Coles Road of a camera and system similar to Town Hall with a U Tube feed and recording capabilities.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:02 PM.

ATTEST:

Jason Hinners, Secretary

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
7-6-20