

Cromwell Fire District

1 West Street
Cromwell, CT 06416
Telephone 860-635-4420

FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

6:00 PM

West Street Firehouse

1 West Street

Cromwell, CT

Also via Conference Call

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners' Meeting on Tuesday, February 16, 2021, at 6:00 PM, at the West Street Firehouse, 1 West Street, Cromwell, CT and also available via conference call, to discuss and act upon Fire and Water Division business.

Per Executive Order 7B, Governor Lamont has ordered and directed that in-person open meeting requirements be suspended. Therefore, the Board of Commissioners' 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 (President), Charles Epstein, Jason Hinnars, Robert Donohue, Roger Rukowicz, David Colligan, Robert McIntyre, Mertie Terry (called in) and Allan Spotts (called in) attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Acting Fire Chief Jason Brade (called in), Dispatch Supervisor Justin Lonergan (called in) and Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri.

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnars, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Executive Director did not receive any public comments for this meeting.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
JANUARY 19, 2021

A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and approved 8 to 0 to accept the Board of Commissioner Meeting minutes of January 19, 2021, as submitted. Commissioner Donohue abstained.

SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
FEBRUARY 8, 2021

The minutes for the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting of February 8, 2021, were not available. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to table the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of February 8, 2021, until next month.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS AND WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or appeals to report.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's Report for January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Neto had a couple of corrections to make on his report. He asked that in bullet #1, the word "the" be removed before the word "legal." Bullet #3 also has an extra "the" before the word "QuickMeds." Lastly, Bullet #7, the word "on-boarded" should be "on-board."

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's Report for January as submitted. Commissioner Hinners noted that there was not an error on Bullet #7. The statement was worded correctly.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. It was noted that Mr. Alibrio was not available for this meeting due to a family emergency. Mr. Neto was available to try and answer any questions. Commissioner Colligan as Treasurer of the Board wanted to discuss something that he brought up at the Fire Operations Committee meeting. Commissioner Colligan had asked the Executive Director to check overtime figures from the previous year comparing to this year. Last year at this time there was \$26,000 in overtime. This year because of COVID and related staffing issues, the overtime was \$66,600. The full time overtime is \$27,190; part-time is \$39,410. There is a difference of \$40,619. The District needs to figure out where they are going to get this money to pay out the overtime. This COVID-related overtime is not budgeted. There needs to be a discussion about this expenditure and how it relates to future expenditures. The financial report reflects the overages due to the COVID continuity plan. It has full-time, part-time and regular hours, and the seventh person. The seventh person impacts the part-time hours. Mr. Neto explained the big ticket items as the new special continuity plan schedule, the additional hours based on a seventh person and the bonus plan. Commissioner Epstein added that some of the cost is due to adding a seventh person, but they are able to service calls that they normally wouldn't be able to service. Some of that money will come back but it will not be known for a while what the net effect will be. Somewhere down the line the District may not get all of it back, but

maybe 50% of it back. The Executive Director noted that it is good to know in terms of response that when the Department is getting back-to-back calls, they can respond. Everyone needs to keep in mind that it is unbudgeted money. Commissioner Epstein added that because Cromwell is in the Emergency Fire and Medical business, they have an obligation to the taxpayers that they may not at some point get back enough revenue to cover what their expenses are. That is part of being in the emergency business. It might require doing other things to correct the deficit of unbudgeted calls such as increasing taxes. Commissioner Epstein feels it is a service to the taxpayer to be able to have the second ambulance. Statistics will show that EMS is supporting itself. In many cases they do have back-to-back calls. Commissioner Colligan reported that he asked the Executive Director at the Fire Operations meeting to try and come up with some data on the total cost of the COVID situation to the District, (payroll and equipment). That information should be available at the next meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for January as submitted.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Acting Chief Brade had called in to the meeting. He had a few things to add to his report. He reported that the Department has been getting a lot of calls, and the crews are working very hard to make sure they don't get turned over. He added that regarding the discussion about the seventh person, it really has helped on the medical side and the larger scale fire calls. The Department has purchased some half face masks as some staff that wear glasses had complained about wearing N-95's because they steam up their glasses. Some face masks, respirators and P-100 respirators were purchased. They have a tighter seal on the face and exhausts the breath out of the sides so their glasses are not fogging up. They can be worn while driving if a driver is wearing glasses. Some HEPA filters were purchased for Court St. They have not been installed yet. The Chief's Office is working with the school system on the Donald Harris Scholarships. There are two \$1,000 scholarships awarded to two high school seniors looking to further their education in emergency services fields.

Through contacts the Department made with MAC Fire Protection, the entire training building has been sprinkler'd. The first two floors have been taken care of. MAC Fire utilized various sprinkler heads. One was for training to show what different sprinkler heads can do. The second is to provide protection for staff members when they are doing live fire training. It also has a steam pipe so they can practice hooking up to that. This is a huge benefit for the Fire Department. MAC has extended the sprinkler opportunity once the third and fourth floor staircases are in. They will come back and further sprinkler those areas. The Chief also reported that he and Justin Lonergan have done some radio testing. They put out to the Department two short videos on testing the new equipment and the radio signal being digital vs. analog. The video speaks for itself. The clarity in communications and the actual ability to communicate is such a huge improvement in the radio system. It is not active yet. They are scheduled to go live on March 3.

Also, the Fire Chief job posting is now live. It was sent out to the Fire Department's List Serve and Indeed. The District is now collecting applications for that position. The new Fire Marshal, Ray Saracco, started last week. The Department spent a week and a half getting him up to speed with the Town and the District and how they operate. Harold Holmes was great showing him all the different sites in Town and the major projects that are currently going on. He already has some good ideas that he wants to discuss with the Board.

The Chief reported that they took Chief Terenzio's policies and revised them to include additional practices from the beginning of the pandemic. They have been updated with the recent CDC and Health Dept. guidelines. They were put in place Monday including the mask policy that the Fire Operations Committee voted to add. There have been a couple of CDC changes so they will be modifying one or two things in the policies. They should be completed by next Friday.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hanners and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Chief's Report for January as submitted.

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri was present to answer any questions. He had nothing further to add to his report. President Brow asked about the status of the meter upgrades. Mr. Palmieri stated they have slowed down due to COVID, but they still get some here and there. They have done a few large meters which they are required to do through the Diversion Permit. They are doing one this Thursday at Cromwell Gardens replacing two 4 inch meters. Commissioner Donohue asked about the Berlin interconnection. Mr. Palmieri updated the Commissioners that Berlin was invoiced for the year. They have been shut off already because their water is seasonal. Sometimes the billing period is May to September or it could be May to December. It depends on how much water they need.

The Executive Director also gave an update on Berlin. A few months back the District negotiated a contract with Berlin because the current agreement was 10 years old, and the District was given a 5 year extension. After some research it was discovered that the interconnection bill was not fully paid. The District had no record of it. The District asked them for proof that they paid. They could not find any proof of payment. There was one payment made of almost \$7,000, however, they were invoiced for a little over \$24,000. That balance was paid recently. That bill was outstanding for the last ten years.

Commissioner Epstein stated that the Water Operations Committee has been pushing for a while to get the Water Department to be able to purchase a used truck so that when there is an event in the middle of the night or on a bad weather day, the Water Division has one truck that can keep all of their equipment that they need for those emergencies. He added that in light of the fact they have this "found" money from Berlin, he asked that they seriously consider giving the Water Department use of that money to start researching specs for a truck that will help them do a better, more efficient job than the good job they already do. Commissioner Rukowicz noted that this topic has been discussed numerous times, but before any money is spent they need to review what they need. The Water Operations Committee will review and get back to the full Board on this. They will need to document the money being reallocated. Commissioner Rukowicz stated the Water Operations Committee wanted to officially give Mr. Palmieri permission to look and research trucks. Mr. Palmieri has started that process. He has been in contact with MDC for any of their used equipment. He is looking for a truck with a small crane, a compressor, and room to store all the necessary equipment on it. The truck will not be used unless the Water Department has a big job.

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

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

Commissioner Rukowicz wanted to add that he watched the video on the pagers. He had no trouble trying to program his pager. He thanked Mr. Lonergan for taking a lot of his personal time and working different hours to get all the pagers done. He encouraged everyone to watch the video. The reception on the P-25 is fantastic. He thanked Justin for a job well done. Once the full system comes on line they will do the switch over and have everyone effectively communicating instantaneously once the switch is flipped. They are also working hard on getting all the portables on all the apparatus. That should be completed within the week as well as Justin also managing things in the Communication Center. There has been a lot going on but they continue to move forward.

Commissioner Epstein asked about backup dispatch with Berlin. After the large fire Berlin had recently, he asked if it made them aware of how Cromwell can be there for them. Justin explained that their backup system is twofold. The first is that Cromwell is their backup in case their system goes down or their center goes down. The other is that they be a major incident coordination center. The choice is theirs to utilize. For the Berlin fire, they did not activate Cromwell to take over that incident. Mr. Lonergan would like to have a conversation with the Fire Director and Chiefs there. He wants to know why the plan was not activated. Justin thinks they are interested in the entire prospect of communications with Cromwell, but Berlin is dealing with some internal issues right now.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to accept the Communications Center Report as submitted.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. Meetings were held on January 15, 2021 and January 27, 2021. Minutes were not available for January 27, 2021. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the District Operations Committee meeting minutes of January 15, 2021, as submitted. Commissioner Donohue abstained.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to table the District Operations Committee meeting minutes of January 27, 2021, until the next Board meeting.

- B. Executive. Commissioner Rukowicz reported there have been no meetings yet. They are waiting for the Executive Director to have his meetings with the Department heads. Once that has been completed, Commissioner Rukowicz will sit down with the Executive Director to review budget requests. Within a week after the review, the Executive Committee will have their first meeting. Everything should be wrapped up within a week. He will keep everyone informed of the Executive Committee meeting schedule.
- C. Fire Operations. Meetings were held on December 15, 2021, and January 19, 2021. December's meeting minutes had been tabled from last month. Copies are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of December 15, 2021, as submitted.

A meeting was also held on January 19, 2021. 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 Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously

approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of January 19, 2021, as submitted.

A Special Fire Operations Committee meeting was held on February 3, 2021. Those minutes were not available for this meeting. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to table the Special Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of February 3, 2021, until next month.

1. Communications Subcommittee. Commissioner Colligan reported that everyone heard Justin Lonergan's report about the pagers, and everyone heard Commissioner Rukowicz's comments regarding all of Justin's hard work and great job. He repeated that they will be going live with everything up and running on March 3. There is only one voting site that will not be up and running and that is the Nike site.
- D. Pension. There has been no meeting. Commissioner Colligan has been tied up with the communication project, but he will try to get a meeting scheduled for next month.
- E. Personnel. Meetings were held on January 5, 2021 and January 12, 2021. Both had been tabled last month. Copies of the minutes are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and approved 8 to 0 to accept the Special Personnel Committee meeting minutes of January 5, 2021, as submitted. Commissioner Donohue abstained.

A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to accept the Personnel Committee meeting minutes of January 12, 2021, as submitted. Commissioner Terry thanked Commissioner Hinnners for chairing the meeting in her place as she was unable to attend that meeting.

President Brow added that he has already spoken to Commissioner Terry regarding the part-time scheduled union negotiations that need to move forward. The President has asked Commissioner Hinnners who is Vice Chairman of the Personnel Committee, to fill in for Commissioner Terry temporarily until she is able to attend meetings. They will also have the Owl up if Commissioner Terry wishes to dial into any meeting. The first negotiation meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 23, 2021. The Executive Director will be contacting Attorney Weinstock who may or may not be present. The meeting will be to set the ground rules and have any preliminary discussions at that point. They do not want to get jammed up with any potential unfair labor practices.

- F. Water Operations. There was a meeting scheduled for February 9, 2021, but it had been canceled because of the weather. The Executive Director discussed the long-range plan of interconnection with MDC and Middletown. He stated that it is now time for the District to look for and advertise for an engineering company for that project. This is a very preliminary step. The State has processes that they are going to want Cromwell to follow. It is going to be their money that they are either going to loan or give to the District. One of the requirements is for the District to post an RFQ and advertise. The cost will be the cost of the Middletown Press to advertise. The RFQ will state that the District is looking for an engineering firm for professional services. He added that this does not need a vote. He has discussed this with the Chair of the Water Operations Committee. He wants everyone to be aware that the District is going to be advertising the fact that they are looking for an

engineering company down the road. He added that the District will be paying for the study up front. The cost will be rolled into the money the State is going to loan or give the District. They have targeted \$1.5 million as a targeted dollar amount. Chuck Adelsberger will be speaking to the Water Operations Committee. He wants the Board to fully understand the steps and nuts & bolts of what is going to be required. This is going to be a pretty big project. Financially not as big as the Communications project, but logistically it is big, and it will be a multi-year project. This is just a point to start somewhere. This is a baby step in the right direction. The objective is to have a backup water system for the taxpayers and citizens of Cromwell and the potential to sell water. Commissioner Rukowicz as Chairman of the Water Operations Committee stated that this is something that the Water Committee agrees needs to be done as they need to look ahead to the future. They would like to do both systems at once, MDC and Middletown. But the cost needs to be considered. This will not only be good as a backup system, but will give them an opportunity to sell water as well.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to allow the Executive Director to move forward with advertising an RFQ for the interconnections with MDC and Middletown.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. Mrs. Jen Donohue did not call into the meeting.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
 1. Public Safety Tower Committee. There has been no meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, March 5, 2021, at 10 AM. The Executive Director explained that there is not that much going on with the Tower. They are still looking to get the vendors to reinforce the tower on their dime. The study that was done a couple of years ago will expire in June. If the District does not do anything between now and June, they will have to do another study. He added that AT&T is very interested. Verizon and T-Mobile are no longer interested. AT&T is now interested in all of the other vendors' space as well. If they are paying the whole bill, they want to sublease their weight increment. The District is a little uncomfortable about that right now. The thought is that the tower is the Town's. If a vendor were to manage or control it? It is something to think about. They will be proceeding cautiously. Cromwell does not need it. There is less of a critical need for weight for Cromwell since equipment was removed that they were no longer using or was not working.
 2. Safety/Building Committee. A meeting was held on January 14, 2021. The minutes had been tabled last month. Copies are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Safety/Building Committee meeting minutes of January 14, 2021, as submitted.

3. Bylaws Committee. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to table the Bylaws Committee report until next month. President Brow explained the reason the updated Bylaws are not coming for a vote tonight is because there is language in the Bylaws regarding the volunteer/part-time officers' positions. They are currently delineated out in the Bylaws. If the Department and the Fire Operations Committee decide that those positions are going away, the Bylaws need to be changed to reflect that. Instead of voting on a set of Bylaws and coming back in another month to re-change those Bylaws, they would rather make the change once if it needs to happen. If not, they will be voting on the Bylaws at the March meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein commented that when a person sits in a meeting as a Commissioner, you realize the job it is not just a walk in the park. There are a lot of committees and a lot of important things going on. It takes everyone to make things work. Between Fire Operations, Communications and Water there is a lot going on. He thanked all his fellow Commissioners for all the work they do, and the Executive Director and the Executive Secretary. Commissioner Rukowicz stated he thought this was a good meeting. Everyone had good input. That's what it takes to make this happen. Commissioner Rukowicz usually does the head counts, and he stated that in January there were 12 meetings. That is a lot. It is not a part-time job or a walk in the park. It takes everyone working together.

Commissioners Terry and Spotts discussed the fact that by calling in to the meetings they miss a lot that is said because the audio breaks up every few words. They don't get the full flavor of the meeting. The President and Commissioner Rukowicz will discuss this issue with Angel Alvarado to see what can be done. Commissioner Hinnens stated that from sitting on the other side of the owl, he learned that everyone that is on a meeting call should mute their microphone. The problem almost completely goes away. He added that every rustling of paper, every clearing of the throat, every dog barking noise gets picked up. The microphone picks that noise up as a speaker and gives you priority. It then shuts off everything that is going on in the conference room. You can tell if you are a participant on the other side. If you watch, every time the noise goes out, you can see whose microphone is being activated. The microphone is very sensitive. He doesn't think it is an owl problem, but rather a training of participants' problem. If everyone keeps their microphone off until it is time to speak and then shut it off, all of those issues go away. Commissioner Spotts added that on his computer at home all he has is audio, not video. He is familiar of how the system works because he uses it at the Capital.

Justin Lonergan stated that he has experience with video conferencing. He confirmed that the issue absolutely is exactly the fact that people are not muting themselves whether on the Teams app or cell phone. You either need to mute yourself or have someone manage muting those participants in the conference. You have to mute yourselves on the other line.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report.

- D. Discussion and Possible Decision on Recommendations from the COVID Committee on Next Steps (tabled last month). The Committee will be doing more work within the next week or so. The Executive Director suggested that this item be tabled.

A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to table this item until the March meeting.

- E. Discussion and Possible Decision on Non-Career Officer Positions in the Fire Department (tabled last month). A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to table this item until next month.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

There were no items to discuss under Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

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

ATTEST:

Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
3-5-21

DRAFT