

Cromwell Fire District

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Cromwell, CT 06416
Telephone 860-635-4420

FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, May 18, 2021

6:00 PM

Coles Road Firehouse

105 Coles Road

Cromwell, CT

Also Via Conference Call

1-203-666-2275, ID 575 257 556#

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners' meeting on Tuesday, May 18, 2021, at 6:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT which was also available via conference call (Teams), 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 Charles Epstein (Secretary), Allan Spotts, Robert Donohue, Robert McIntyre, David Colligan and Mertie Terry attended. Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Jason Hinners and Roger Rukowicz were absent. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Accountant Michael Alibrio, Dispatch Supervisor Justin Lonergan and Water Operations Manager Joe Palmieri had called into the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Secretary Epstein. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Secretary Epstein. Commissioner Colligan asked for a moment of silence for the New Haven firefighter who lost his life in the line of duty.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to amend the Agenda as follows: adding under New Business, Item E. Emergency Interconnection Project. Also, Item XII. Public Comment will be moved up in the meeting, and will be introduced at 6:30 PM.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
APRIL 20, 2021

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and approved by 4 Commissioners and abstained by two, to accept the Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of April 20, 2021, as submitted. Commissioners Spotts and Donohue abstained.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING OF
MAY 5, 2021

The minutes had been distributed at this meeting. The Commissioners needed more time to review them. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to table these minutes until they are signed.

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 April report had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Executive Director was willing to answer any questions. He highlighted the fact that management has begun negotiations with the Firefighters Union, Local 4662, regarding the part-time firefighters. He reported that negotiations are off to a good start. They set the ground rules for both sides. They should be able to accomplish their goals within the next couple of meetings. They are hopeful this will be a short process. Commissioner Spotts noted that a bill was passed out of the Legislature's Planning and Development Committee today regarding municipal volunteers for property tax abatements. He asked if the Fire District was eligible for this. Mr. Neto replied that the District is not because the District is not considered a municipality. The only thing the District can do is if a person lives in Town and is a volunteer, their Fire District taxes might be able to be affected. Commissioner Epstein suggested that going forward the Bill should include Fire Districts with it.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Directors report for April as presented.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for April had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Alibrio reported that there was nothing unusual to report. He has been spending a lot of time working on the budget. He asked if there were any questions. Mr. Neto added that there are some categories that are over budget and some that are under budget. Payroll for Fire Operations is over budget. This has been an issue over the last 3 or 4 months. Some insurance categories are under budget. Mr. Neto has not expended any funds on any of the information he was asked to gather. One was the \$18,000 for the Employee Handbook/Employment process. He is holding onto the \$18,000, knowing that the budget may be over in certain categories. The Executive Director's objective is to have a balanced

budget. Commissioner Epstein discussed some information that was put out by the Governor's Office today regarding municipalities receiving funding due to COVID. He asked if it would be possible that the municipality could share some of those funds with the Fire District to reimburse the District for some of their COVID expenses. Mr. Neto did not have an answer. The Recovery Act does have some funds allocated to Water for infrastructure improvements. There have been discussions with water and sewer. There was some discussion with the Town Manager regarding the West Street Heights project with the Water Dept. doing the water main improvements and the Sewer would take care of sewer improvements. They would also replace the streets as a combined effort.

Today Acting Chief Brade, the Executive Director and Mike Alibrio had a conference call from an individual from FEMA. They are trying to see if there is another opportunity to get some more federal funding. The person was very helpful in terms of giving advice on how to write narratives for subjects related to COVID. If the District can prove that they expended funds related to COVID, they may be reimbursable. Those 3 individuals are going to do some research and regroup to see what they can come up with. They are going to identify their \$13,000 expenditures as part of their expenses. They will put that in a different category. They will see if there is anything leftover that they can reapply for reimbursement.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for April as submitted.

C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for April had been previously submitted and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Chief had no changes to his report. It was a very busy month.

- They have started preliminary discussions with TPC for the Travelers Tournament with Kevin Harrington. The Tournament is going forward and is scheduled for June 21 through June 27 in a reduced capacity of approximately 10,000 to 15,000. The Fire Department will be staffing the event in coordination with St. Francis Hospital.
- The Fire Marshal's Office will be working with the school system for the high school graduation. They will be doing a Fire Watch during the graduation which is being held on June 9.
- The Fire Department will be attending the Car Show fundraiser being held May 28. Captain Roberts will be managing that event. There will be a ladder and flag display at that event. They held a demo display at Watrous Park for the scouts so they could get their merit badges.
- There was another posting to recruit more part-time staff, but they used the Indeed website this time and received a larger applicant pool. They should be starting to interview next week or the week after.
- They had a meeting of the Task Force where all the Chiefs got together from the Task Force so that everyone is on the same page in terms of planning. They are trying to keep the towns united, and Cromwell brought a piece of their apparatus so that members of the Task Force could go through each of the agency's apparatus. Newington volunteered their RV Command Post for the TPC Travelers Event.
- Firefighter crews made a water rescue. There was a kayaker that overturned their vessel.
- The Organizational Statement was completed and sent to OSHA.
- They will be participating in the Memorial Day parade. Melissa Roming will be in charge of that event.
- The Chief attended a regional Emergency Planning meeting with Eversource. This was with various Chiefs and different departments throughout the northeast. They discussed

regional response planning on their behalf and the participants' behalf. They were able to give input from a Fire Department standpoint. Eversource was very receptive and is changing some of its ways to adapt to better service to the Fire Department's need.

- There was a potential active shooter at the Quality Inn. It came in as a fire alarm. On the way there the Dispatcher was also listening to the Police Department that was being dispatched to the same location for a shooter in the building. The Dispatcher held the fire crew back, and they staged for the Police Department to get there. It ended up being that no shots were actually fired. All injured people were taken care of. The Fire Department worked very well with the Police Department. The Acting Chief felt that there should be more training in this regard. Police Officers came from everywhere to respond.
- There were two minor accidents with apparatus that are being addressed. There were no injuries, just minor bumps.
- They are preparing for the line of duty death of the New Haven fireman that passed away attempting to make a rescue. They received a mutual aid request from New Haven for several specific staff members from here that are retired from New Haven to go back to help them out. Cromwell accommodated that request. We will be sending a contingent down for the funeral to represent Cromwell. They will also have a contingent for the highway overpasses for when the procession comes through because they will be going to Hartford. Mr. Neto also discussed the active shooter situation.
- In discussing the golf tournament, Commissioner Epstein had concerns about EMS personnel signing up to work for other EMS departments. He did not understand what the whole process was. Chief Brade will be investigating that issue.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

- A. Discussion on New Fire Chief's Contract. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to enter into Executive Session at 6:30 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to adjourn Executive Session at 6:50 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the new Fire Chief's employment contract as written with one correction that will be incorporated.

Commissioner Donohue left the meeting at 6:55 PM.

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for April had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri had called into the meeting. He reported that the Water Department has been very busy. They have been working on flushing, leak detection, meter replacements, Call Before You Dig, water leaks. They have been maintaining and everything is going smoothly.

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

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center report was distributed for review. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lonergan had called into the meeting. He had nothing further to report. There has been lots of movement and progress in the Communication Center with the new system going on line. He has been working with some of Cromwell's mutual aid partners on obtaining MOU's for interoperability. There have been drills on communication practice and formation with the Fire Department. He added that the QA process is ongoing. They will be working with the new Chief on their response matrix.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Center Report as submitted.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive Committee. Meetings were held on April 16, 2021, April 19, 2021 & April 28, 2021. Minutes were not available for the meetings held April 19, 2021 and April 28, 2021. Minutes were available from the April 16, 2021 meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Committee meeting minutes of April 16, 2021, as submitted.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to table the Executive Committee meeting minutes from April 19, 2021 and April 28, 2021.

- C. Fire Operations. A meeting was held on April 20, 2021. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. Commissioner Epstein reminded everyone that the Fire Operations Committee has changed its meeting schedule. They will still be meeting monthly, but they will be meeting on the Monday evening BEFORE the Tuesday evening Board meetings. Commissioner Colligan reminded everyone that because the Fire Operations Committee meeting schedule has been changed, every agenda going forward will be considered a "Special" agenda because the original meeting schedule for Tuesdays had been filed with the Town Clerk's office at the beginning of the year.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of April 20, 2021, as submitted.

1. Communications Subcommittee. Commissioner Colligan reported that there had been an issue at the Nike site. The concrete did not pass. They had to get the engineers involved. There was a solution so that not everything had to be ripped out and started from scratch. They are hoping to have it poured by this week. They will be pouring an additional 8 inches of concrete around the footings. By the end of next week the telephone pole will be installed. The following week Norcom will be coming in to put in the voting site and the generator and getting things all hooked up. He is anticipating another 3 weeks until it is up and running. Mr. Neto explained what had happened with the concrete.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the Communications Subcommittee report as presented.

- D. Pension Committee. There had been no meeting.
- E. Personnel Committee. A Special Personnel Committee meeting was held on May 5, 2021. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed, however, they were not signed by the Chair of the Committee. The regular Personnel Committee meeting scheduled for May 11, 2021, was canceled.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to table the minutes of the Special Personnel Committee meeting of May 5, 2021, until they are signed.

- F. Water Operations. A meeting was scheduled for May 11, 2021, but it had been canceled.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no Board appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. The Executive Director did not hear from the Town Council Liaison, therefore, there is no report.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
1. Public Safety Tower Committee. There has not been a meeting.
 2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. There was a meeting on April 22, 2021, however, the minutes were not available.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to table the meeting minutes until they are available.
Commissioner Colligan abstained from the vote because he did not attend that meeting.
 3. By-Laws Committee. Commissioner Epstein did not think that the Bylaws Committee existed anymore. No one recalled if it was formally disbanded. The Recording Secretary will check last month's meeting minutes to determine the status of the Committee as reported by the President.
- C. Approval of Coverage for Second Ambulance for Remainder of FY 2020/2021. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to continue the second ambulance coverage for another month because the new Fire Chief will be coming on board shortly, and the Fire Department is still at a point where they need it.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. The Executive Director introduced a DRAFT document regarding a Final Termination Notice for water service. A copy is attached to the minutes on

file in the Fire District Office. The Water Operations Committee and the Board have been dealing with delinquent accounts for quite some time. Because of COVID, the Water Department has relaxed its rules regarding collections because of the negative environment the virus had put everyone under. Now that things are getting back to normal after the virus, and because the list is growing, the Water Department plans to be more aggressive with its collections. The purpose of distributing the draft document is to make the Board aware of what the Water Department is doing. They will be articulating verbally as well as through written format, all the accounts that are past due. The letter is asking the customer to contact the Water Department to make payment arrangements. This will be communicated in the first letter. If they do not respond, a second letter will be issued. That letter will give them their rights as a water customer. A third letter is the draft letter that was distributed at this meeting. There are consistent non-payers that are not responding in any way. Approximately 25 agreements have been made with customers. This draft letter will be the last communication to the customer. The Water Department will then send an employee with that third letter the day before shut off and place the letter on the premises. They will not be using the Post Office. The letter will be placed on the front door or back door. They will be informed that if they do not contact the Water Department within 24 hours, their water will be turned off.

There is over \$300,000 out there on the books that needs to be collected. When discussing raising rates and infrastructure improvements of the water system, it is important to note that trying to fund those things are not possible unless everyone pays their water bills. It is not fair to the customers that pay their bills.

Commissioner Terry suggested sending a registered letter to the customer's home before sending anyone out to the property. She also wanted to make sure that if anyone is sent to the property, they are safe. The staff should not be put in any kind of jeopardy. Mr. Neto agreed and stated the District can use Marshall services if necessary, however, they would have to work with the judicial system, and there would be a cost involved. To investigate every single delinquent service would be cost prohibitive. They will be checking to see if any residents at a property have had a history of medical issues or police activity. The shut off policy will be gradual. They will notice the most delinquent people and will only shut off service for approximately 5 properties at a time. In order to keep their water on, these individuals will be required to pay a large portion of their bill as well as \$50 to turn off and \$50 to turn back on their water. There may be a point where the District may need to get attorneys involved which may involve the court system to collect. That burden will be passed to the rate payer. Also, every water service that is terminated, the Water Department will need to notify the Department of Public Health.

Commissioner Terry asked if it would be feasible to have a Fire Awareness Day or something similar to bring a fire truck or an ambulance to one of the fields to have someone talk about fire safety for the kids in Town. She would like to see a day dedicated to something like that. Acting Chief Brade stated they just did something at Watrous Park to help kids get their scout badges by learning about fire and EMT apparatus. The staff demonstrated how they operate and what was going on. He has also had some conversations with the Fire Marshal, Ray Saracco. During Fire Prevention week the Fire department will go into schools and read to the students and other activities. They are considering having an open house like they have done in the past. They would utilize the school system for notification. They let the Fire Department put out a flyer to all the families in Town through their PTO to reach all the families with children. There wasn't anything done that was community related over the last year because of the pandemic.

Commissioner Colligan discussed the New Haven firefighter situation where a firefighter lost his life. Commissioner Colligan felt that the firefighter would still be here if it were not for the situation in the house. He feels that we need to work with the Town as a Commission by trying to draft an ordinance to address hoarding issues. It seems that the Town does not want to be involved. He explained that this house was completely packed, and the firefighters could not find the windows. That was the reason why they got lost. There are many properties in Cromwell with similar situations. He is trying to implement something and has gone to the Town for assistance. He has not received any feedback from the Town officials. He suggested that the Commission start thinking about working with the Fire Marshal's office and the Water Department on ordinances that they feel should be in place. Once there are drafts put together, it would make sense to approach the Town to work with the District to implement the ordinances.

Mr. Neto stated that this issue is specific to Fire Marshal fees and whether or not there needs to be a Town ordinance to implement the fees. The District's attorney does not think there needs to be an ordinance, and the Town's attorney believes that an ordinance is needed. They are using the ordinance regarding fire hydrants as an example. We need to let the attorneys interpret the laws. Mr. Neto agreed that they need to have a joint force of dealing with these social issues. Acting Chief Brade discussed the complexity of enforcing a hoarding situation. It is not always clear. It is a balancing act with various agencies that need to get involved. The District does not feel it has a Statutory obligation to be able to take enforcement action.

Acting Chief Brade also noted that if the crew finds out about one of these situations through the FMO they will enter that information into Red Alert so that if they are dispatched to one of the residences, a flag will alert the Dispatcher and the people on the apparatus warning them of a potential situation inside before they get there. Commissioner Colligan thinks that this is one of those instances where the District and the Town can combine forces to have a joint venture. Commissioner Terry asked about the Blight Ordinance. Mr. Neto confirmed that the Blight Ordinance still exists.

Commissioner Epstein had comments about the draft letter presented tonight. He agreed with the letter and the intentions of the Water Department and the District. He also agreed with Commissioner Terry regarding keeping the Water crew safe. He suggested when going to the property to shut off, maybe a police officer could accompany the water staff in case protection is needed. Mr. Neto and Mr. Palmieri will be meeting tomorrow and discuss some of the suggestions from this meeting.

Mr. Palmieri added that the Water Department has done this before. They do send two people, and they only do a few at a time. In the past it has worked very well. From the amount of notices that are sent out in one grouping, more than half usually respond. They usually make a payment arrangement. Therefore, they will not get shut off on the second day. He explained the Water Department's plan for notices.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments – Water Enterprise Fund and Water Capital Fund. Board members received a copy of the Adjustment in their meeting packets. Commissioner Epstein read the resolution for the adjustment. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the budgetary adjustment as read.

- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors.
- D. Update on 2021/2022 Budget; Prepare for Town Meeting. The Executive Director gave a brief update on the budget process/town meeting. The meeting will be held one week from yesterday, 6:00 PM, June 7. He passed out some information on the budget that he wanted to publish on the website. The proposed budget is on the website now. The document he distributed tonight gives more context to the proposed budget which is really just numbers. He is hopeful this will give the public some background as to what the budget represents. He added that the meeting will be held in the bay at Coles Road. A projector and screen were rented to illustrate the budget points. There will also be a microphone for the public to make comments. There will be chairs set up that are socially distanced. There will be a brief presentation. If there is anything that the Commissioners would like to have or to be set up, they can contact the Executive Director. Commissioner Epstein noted that the Commissioners should make an effort to be there and be able to answer any questions the public may have. The Executive Director explained the process that will take place checking in voters that night. There was a question about absentee ballots. The Executive Director noted that absentee ballots do not work in a Town meeting. He clarified that this is a Town Meeting and not a budget referendum. That issue was discussed with more than one attorney this week. Town meetings are legal, and they are part of the District's Bylaws. The meeting has been advertised on the website, the electronic signs of the District and Town. Mr. Neto spoke with Jeff Mil last week to do a story in the Middletown Press. They spoke last week and set up a date for tomorrow. Yesterday Mr. Mil informed Mr. Neto that he has resigned his position at the Middletown Press. He will reach out to Mark Depallo to get the word out. Commissioner Terry suggested a ballot box because some people don't like to vote by raising their hand because it isn't private. It was also agreed to allow voters, once they are checked in, to vote by ballot at any time during the presentation or after. It was noted that the District is going above and beyond what the Town does for Town meetings.
- E. Emergency Interconnection Project. The Executive Director explained that this is the project that has been discussed recently. Some preliminary work has been done to connect the water distribution system to the north and south with the Department of Public Health. Cromwell does not have a backup water system. They have a single source that is self-supporting and self-sufficient. If the water tank should have any type of problem, they do not have a source of water. In the very near future, they are going to need to take the tank off line. To take the tank off line without a backup system is dangerous and not advisable. There is a \$60,000 item in the budget to do a preliminary engineering study. If the budget passes, those funds will be used for that study. That will be when they will determine the cost from the engineering study, cost and timeline. It would also be the time when there needs to be discussion and negotiating with MDC and Middletown on how this project will be completed. FEMA, Homeland Security and the State of CT will support any utility project that does not have a backup system. It is hopeful that the Recovery Act will provide some monies to support it. If the budget passes, the Executive Director needs some official approval from the Commission to proceed to the next level because in principle this Commission has agreed that the interconnection project is an important project as part of the infrastructure of the Water Department. After Monday if the budget is approved which includes the \$60,000, Mr. Neto will need some direction to connect with Environmental Partners for the study and to take it to the next level. This is going to be a multi-million dollar project. It will also involve working with the State to obtain grants or low cost bearing loans for the next 10 – 15 years.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved that if the budget is passed next week, the Board gives the Executive

Director permission to use the \$60,000 for the Engineering study to be performed by Environmental Partners.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Commissioner Epstein asked the group if any of the Commissioners are interested in participating in the Memorial Day parade. He will contact the Commissioners to see if anyone wishes to participate.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 PM.

ATTEST:

Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
6-10-21

DRAFT