

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING

Monday, May 24, 2021

6:00 PM

**Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT**

The Annual District Budget Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District was held via conference call on Monday, May 24, 2021, at 6:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT.

Commissioners Jason Hinnners (Vice President), Mertie Terry, Allan Spotts, David Colligan, Charles Epstein, Roger Rukowicz and Robert Donohue attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Accountant Michael Alibrio, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri, Acting Fire Chief Jason Brade and Dispatch Supervisor Justin Lonergan. There were many, many Fire, EMS and Water Department personnel in attendance. Commissioners Lee Brow and Robert McIntyre were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM, by Vice President Jason Hinnners. Vice President Hinnners explained the rules of engagement for the meeting. He explained the location of the ballots, he informed everyone that the meeting was being recorded on the Owl, and explained the forum of the meeting. The forum was that there would be a presentation first by the Executive Director explaining what was done for this budget and why. Attendees were told that they did not have to stay until the end of the presentation to cast their ballots. There would be a question and answer period after the presentation.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Vice President Hinnners.

Commissioner Epstein read the Call of the Meeting.

The Executive Director gave an overview/summary of the budget. There were handouts distributed that contained all the information Mr. Neto discussed. Copies are attached to these minutes. Some of the information included was Capital Projects, Water rates over the last 25 years, State Dept. Of Health information and responsibilities, Fire Department necessities.

Dispatcher Brian Petrocelli addressed the group with information on EMS services and response times. He also discussed the role of the Communication Center. The Center is used for all calls not just Fire/EMS. There were pie charts and other visual aids to help the public understand their role as Dispatchers.

Commissioner Charles Epstein spoke next. He discussed how critical response times are for Fire/EMS, and explained the first responder's role. He discussed the need for continued training and the Communication Center's vital role. Everyone mentioned the increased housing development happening in Cromwell and the need for more services to handle the demand. Cromwell continues to have new housing, new elderly housing and new business warehouses for Amazon and Wayfair. All of this needs to have fire/EMS and water services. Commissioner Epstein also discussed the need for two ambulances for the same reason so that Cromwell does not have to rely on backup.

Commissioner David Colligan discussed how the Fire District has tried to maintain funds to sustain the Fire Department and Water Department without raising taxes. Because Cromwell is no longer a volunteer Fire Department, it has come to a point where there is a cost to running the Fire Department especially with mostly paid members, no more volunteers. They have tried to keep costs down, but to keep the level of response and services that the residents have come to expect, it is going to take money. Everything costs money, nothing is free.

Commissioner Mertie Terry discussed her support for the Fire Department and first responders. She discussed the importance of safety and how the Fire District does a great job in providing those services to the Town.

Commissioner Spotts did not plan on speaking. He explained his position on the budget and identified himself as the only Commissioner to vote no on this budget. He stated that not a lot of cuts were made to this budget. He had some suggestions for reducing costs, one of which is the closing of the West Street firehouse among other things. He felt that the Fire District needed to look harder to adjust spending similar to how the Board of Education's budget was negotiated.

Alice Kelly, 47 Willowbrook Road, discussed both budgets. In terms of the Fire Department, Ms. Kelly did not have a problem with the Fire Department budget, and discussed her experiences with the first responders in taking care of a family member. She had concerns that the Fire Department budget and the Water Department budget were just one vote as a combined budget. She demanded that the District's Bylaws be changed so that voters could vote separately for each budget. She also had concerns about the Water Department budget. She felt that the proposed water rate increase was too high for residents and businesses. She also had concerns about the amount of money that is being spent to comply with the Department of Public Health requirements for the water tank inspection and water initiatives. She also had concerns about the cost of the SCADA system. She asked if the District had a 5 year plan. She did not understand the water rate increase since the Sewer Department has not increased their rates in years.

The Executive Director explained the Department of Public Health requirements on Cromwell's water system and how the Fire District has remained in compliance and how they plan to fund the \$60,000 engineering study that needs to be done. Mr. Neto clarified Mrs. Kelly's concerns about the SCADA system, and explained the Water Department initiatives.

John Whitney discussed his concerns about the mil rate increase. He questioned why the Town needs two dispatching services. He agreed that the District needs to find ways to eliminate costs. He discussed the different financial resources the Town has compared to the District.

Firefighter Lieutenant William McKnight spoke on behalf of the Firefighter's Union, Local 4662. He discussed their support of the proposed budget and the importance of keeping the Town safe and maintaining a quick response time.

Ms. Robin Cassella, Main St., commented that the budget needs to be supported by the Townspeople. It is what needs to be done.

Brian Azer also asked about the voting and ballot process. The Executive Director explained the process for counting ballots and invited Mr. Azer to count ballots when the process was completed to assure accuracy.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. To consider and act upon a resolution to approve the budget for the Cromwell Fire District and its related funds, including but not limited to the Water Division, for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2021. A copy of said budget as recommended by the Board of Commissioners will be placed on file and available for public inspection at the Cromwell Fire District Office, One West Street in the Town of Cromwell, Connecticut, and online at cromwellfd.com. After Public Comments were presented and addressed, the remaining attendees were encouraged to cast their ballots if they had not already done so.

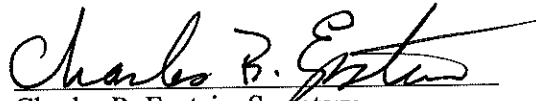
The voting results were: 54 ballots were NOT in favor of the proposed budget, 50 ballots were in favor. The Board of Commissioners reconvened at 7:30 PM for a scheduled Special Board of Commissioners' meeting to discuss and act on the voting results.

- B. To consider and act upon a resolution to lay a tax on the taxable Grand List of the Cromwell Fire District and fix the tax rate of the District to Meet the expenses of the District for the Fiscal Year commencing July 1, 2021. Based on the results of the vote, this Item B. on the Call of this Meeting was not relevant. A budget meeting will be rescheduled within 10 days of this date with a new budget proposal to come before the Town for another vote.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made, seconded and unanimously approved to adjourn the Annual Budget Meeting at 7:30 PM.

ATTEST:


Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
6-2-21