

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

Tuesday, July 20, 2021

6:00 PM

Coles Road Firehouse

105 Coles Road

Cromwell, CT

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners meeting on Tuesday, July 20, 2021, at 6:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to discuss and act upon Fire and Water Division business.

Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Jason Hinnners, Charles Epstein, David Colligan, Robert McIntyre and Robert Donohue attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade and Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri. Commissioners Mertie Terry, Allan Spotts and Roger Rukowicz were absent. Mr. Michael Alibrio had dialed into the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 PM by President Brow. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Brow.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The President had some adjustments to make to the agenda. He added Item I. under New Business, Approval of Full-Time Position of Dispatch Supervisor. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to add Item I. under New Business as Approval of Full-Time Position of Dispatch Supervisor, as discussed.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
JUNE 15, 2021

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of June 15, 2021, as presented.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
MAY 26, 2021

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of May 26, 2021, as presented.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or appeals to discuss.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He was available to answer any questions. He reported that they are moving along on the Communications tower on the Nike site. They should be putting in power by Friday. Next week they are hoping to bring Norcom back and should be able to have some activity on that site.

Mr. Neto gave an update on the Chemfeed site. There was another event that occurred there. There was a fire in the cabinet that houses sensitive equipment. There was a power failure and a failure of the A/C unit. Those cabinets have to be environmentally controlled with heating and cooling. That was part of the expense of the first cabinet when it was purchased. He credited Eric Roberts from the Water Division for detecting the problem. He had been working at Chemfeed and heard the alarm. This discovery led to alerting Angel Alvarado, Norcom, SBC and others. After 3 hours of troubleshooting, they found a neutral wire that had not been properly connected. Therefore, some circuits broke or failed. There was no power, and it was operating on battery power. The issues were resolved. Mr. Neto has had some discussion with Norcom and Paul Zito. Mr. Neto now wants an outside electrical specialist to come in and look at the corrective work that was done. He wants to make sure everything was repaired correctly. He has also asked Mr. Zito to have a private conversation with Norcom and their subcontractor. He would like to have in a documented format if the two events that have happened at Chemfeed can create any future problems. Mr. Neto wants them to know that the District is putting them on notice. The District wants some answers.

Mr. Neto added that he and Mr. Palmieri met with Environmental Partners. They are trying to kick off the pre-engineering study. There will be a meeting this week with Berlin to discuss interconnection.

Commissioner Donohue had questions about bonding. Mr. Neto explained that for now he is mainly concerned with a timeline. He wants to be able to begin the bonding or borrowing process based on the Board's timeline. Commissioner Colligan thought that by the fall they should be able to give Mr. Neto a better timeline once things have been spec'd out and priced.

Mr. Neto explained that if there is a need to spend money between now and six months from now, Mr. Neto would need to know relatively quickly. If the need is 9 months from now, Mr. Neto would need at least 3 more months. If it is 11 mos., Mr. Neto would need 6 mos. It will take between two and four months to get the money available to spend through the bonding or borrowing process.

The President responded that they know what the big three items will be for purchasing. There is also the air pack issue. They are waiting for the Chief to get some information from the Houston/Galveston area Council, and for the Apparatus Committee to have their first meeting. They will be hopefully deciding on their first priority within the next 3 to 4 weeks. They should be able to report at next month's meeting how to move forward with the first piece of apparatus to be replaced, and have a date in mind. They also have a list to work from of apparatus to be replaced which can be set up in a schedule. When the decisions are made Mr. Neto wants to make sure he has as many ducks in a row as possible so there are no delays in the process. The President noted they need to move sooner rather than later.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's Report for June as submitted.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Alibrio explained that the report includes the very preliminary year-end results for fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. There is a \$67,000 deficit on the General Fund. The Water Fund has a surplus of approximately \$700,000. He explained that the numbers will change before the final audit is complete. In the General Fund they projected a deficit of \$190,000.

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

The President interrupted the meeting to advise that he was called back to work for an emergency. Commissioner Hinnners, as Vice President chaired the meeting from this point forward.

Prior to the President excusing himself from the meeting, he quickly discussed Item F. under New Business. (See **New Business**)

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Chief Balletto did not have any changes to report. He gave a couple of updates.
- The Department hired one individual that started today. They also gave two preliminary hires. That process will be getting started in a week or two. The application process will be over on Friday.
 - PPE replacement has started. They ordered five sets of gear for career firefighters that needed replacement. They also purchased 14 pairs of rubber boots for replacement for part-time employees to replace expiring boots, and five helmets that are on backorder.
 - They purchased 4 MSA meters; 4 gas meters to replace the ones that need to be taken out of service. They are backordered until the end of August.
 - The Chief has been plugging away at the office. He was very appreciative of Assistant Chief Brade and his Administrative Assistant Lisa for helping him get acclimated. They have been an excellent resource to him.

- He has been reviewing the training officer information. He did a full audit of everyone's ICS training and FEMA certificates. He needs to address that soon, it was not promising.
- He is working with Mr. Palmieri right now to make sure the Water Division has an Infection Control Policy, Respiratory Policy and a Hazcom Policy. He is working to do a Confined Space Awareness and Operations Protection for the Operations Manager of the Water Division. Hazardous Materials Operations Refresher for the Water Division, and getting them fit tested if they have to wear a fit mask.
- The Chief presented his apparatus replacement plan to the Fire Operations Committee at last night's meeting. He will be giving a quick presentation on EMS billing at tonight's meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report for June as presented.

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri had a couple of additions to his report. They had posted the Maintainer III position on the American Water Works website. The Water Department did not receive any applicants. He believes it is because it is a professional Water Company website, and the Cromwell Fire District does not have competitive pay rates.

He also posted the position on Indeed, and has received quite a few applicants. He has not had time to follow up on them. He plans on doing that later this week. The Berlin Road/ Kirby Road situation had a two inch water leak at the Dunkin Donuts service, they made the repair after 15 hours of working to repair it. The cost of the repair was \$5,000. They will probably spend another \$5,000 before it is completely repaired. Everything in the road should be replaced, but it was too wet that night. They will be working on this for a couple of weeks.

There was some damage to the well access road due to the heavy rain. The Town will be helping Mr. Palmieri out with some paving. If there is another heavy storm, they could lose more of the road. They hope to work on that next week.

Mr. Palmieri discussed the Water Division's collection program. They have collected \$170,000 in delinquent accounts since December. Every week they target 6 delinquent accounts. They go to the properties to make sure they can find the shut offs. They paint it, and the residents are already notified so they know something is going to happen once they see the shut off marked. They have not shut anyone off yet. Everyone has been paying, and the program has been very successful.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations Report for June as presented.

Commissioner Donohue brought up a point of order. He had to be excused for another meeting in 10 minutes. How would the process work with the agenda items. Now that the President has excused himself, when Commissioner Donohue exits, the Board will lose their quorum to continue this meeting.

The Executive Director mentioned that through the Chair, they can table some of the items on the agenda and prioritize other items in order to move on them. They would have to proceed as much as they can, and then table the agenda items they cannot get to. He felt that items I, G. and H.

under New Business and possibly Item E., EMS billing could be addressed before Mr. Donohue needs to exit. There can be a Special Commission meeting to deal with some of the items that are tabled or they can be tabled until next month.

NEW BUSINESS

H. Water Main Assessment Relief – John Sinacore, 11 Coles Road. Mr. Sinacore was present at this meeting to discuss his situation. Mr. Neto explained the situation at 11 Coles Road. Mr. Sinacore's parents purchased the house at 11 Coles Road. At that time a water main was being put in on Coles Road, and those residents received an assessment for their property or their portion of the project. It was the responsibility of the homeowner to pay that assessment even if they were not connected to Town water. It was assumed that the assessment was going to become part of the mortgage when the Sinacore's purchased their property. That did not happen. The assessment was for \$8,000, but now many years later with interest and late charges that amount is now \$27,000. Mr. Sinacore is looking for some relief to pay this invoice. There was some type of verbal agreement made at the time the home was purchased by the Sinacore's because they could not afford to pay the assessment when the house was purchased. The Executive Director and Mr. Sinacore discussed a proposal that Mr. Sinacore will present to the Board. It is important to note that the Sinacore's never hooked up to water, but the assessment is legitimate and no different than any other property owner in Town.

Mr. Sinacore was given the floor. He reported that he bought the house in 1995 with his parents. When they bought it, they did not know there was going to be an assessment on it. When the house closed they were not informed of the assessment until after the closing. Mr. Sinacore's mother had sent a letter to the Fire District at the time asking about the cost of hooking up to Town water.

The Sinacore's had to have their well inspected at the time. The inspection would require 600 gallons of water pumped within 3 hours. They were informed by the inspector that the inspection could fail which would mean hooking up to Town water. They were told if they did not get connected to Town water, they were going to lose their deposit on the house. The well did end up passing inspection. Someone from the Fire District in the financial office had communicated with the Sinacore's to inform them it would cost between \$1,200 and \$1,500 to be connected to Town water and between \$6,000 and \$7,000 for the assessment on the property. All the money they had went into the down payment, and some other necessities such as appliances. Mr. Sinacore was left with nothing.

His father worked out an agreement with the Financial Office of the Fire District. They could not come up with the money right away, so they would put a lien on the house for around \$15,700 that would always be on the house. He could never sell the house without giving the District the \$15,700. This is how it was explained to Mr. Sinacore by his father. Mr. Sinacore's father passed away in 2008. Mr. Sinacore did not know that the District was sending out an annual bill. When he first saw it, he thought it was a sewer bill. He and his mother looked through all their files. His mother found the original bill. He explained to her that the District has been sending them out every year. His mother thought they were attached to the back end of the mortgage so she had been throwing them away. He knows he owes the \$15,700 and he is willing to pay it. He can pay half of it tomorrow or the next day, but he was asking for leniency to pay the back half of the balance in January. He is on Social Security and is only allowed \$18,000 a year.

The Executive Director did not think the District wanted to penalize Mr. Sinacore any further with additional taxes. They have come up with a 2 payment plan option. The first payment will be for Mr. Sinacore to come up with as much money as he can within the next week. Then in 6 mos. or at the end of the year/beginning of next year paying the balance without being penalized. Mr. Sinacore has shown good will and been straight forward with the District. This payment option if approved, means the District will forego \$12,000 worth of interest. They did not want to penalize Mr. Sinacore any further as he is also dealing with an elderly parent who needs more care as she gets older. Mr. Neto discussed the option with Mr. Palmieri who was agreeable to that payment option. They both agreed that this option was fair and equitable to both parties.

Commissioner Colligan thanked Mr. Sinacore for coming to the Board with his issue. Commissioner Colligan has been involved with the Fire District for many years. He remembered the assessments that Mr. Sinacore was talking about. The assessments at that time were \$6,000, \$8,000 and \$9,000. He had to agree with Mr. Sinacore. He also had an elderly parent living in Town, and he had to take responsibility for the property. He feels we need to show the residents that we are here to help too, not just always collecting money from them.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to allow Mr. Neto and Mr. Sinacore to work out a payment plan suited for Mr. Sinacore to ultimately satisfy his assessment pay off of \$15,800. Commissioner Colligan had amended his motion to reflect the dollar amount of \$15,800 as it was not originally stated in the original motion.

- I. Approval of the Communication Manager Full-Time Position. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the recommendation of the Personnel Committee to offer the position of full-time Communication Center Manager to Justin Lonergan.

- E. Discussion and Possible Decision on Travel Expenditures for Line of Duty Death Ceremony. The President explained that this is in reference to Cromwell's former Fire Marshal Todd Gagnon who passed away last year. The Board unanimously approved his death as a line of duty death because of the cancer that he had. The family has requested that President Brow present the flag to them. In the event that President Brow cannot make it, he would like to have in the motion the ability to delegate that out. That is a decision that will have to be made by the family. It is invite only. The President excused himself at 6:25 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to allocate an amount not to exceed \$2,000 for travel expenses for the line of duty death ceremony for the former Fire Marshal, Todd Gagnon. The money would be allocated for the President or someone else the family would designate for that purpose. If a designee is chosen, that person should be associated with the Cromwell Fire District or Fire Department and would need to be approved by the Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Donohue excused himself from the meeting at 6:54 PM.

PUBLIC COMMENT

It was noted that there was no quorum for the remainder of the Board meeting once Commissioner Donohue had excused himself. Mr. Jim Rude, Highridge Rd., asked if there would still be public comment. The Vice President who was Chairing the meeting allowed Mr. Rude's comments.

- Mr. Rude heard a wonderful story about 3 or 4 weeks ago about the Fire Department of Cromwell, who at the request of NYFD sent a team over to the 100th birthday party of a resident at Covenant Village. It was a huge success and a wonderful thing for the Fire Department to do. People could not say enough good things about the Fire Department. They made the gentleman's day that had the birthday.
- He knows water bills went out and he would like to encourage the Fire District to use that mailing as an opportunity to communicate better with the townspeople. The next bill goes out in October. However, the billing is after the Board election which occurs on the first Monday in October. It is unfortunate that the District has missed two mailing opportunities to communicate with the townspeople. He does not know what the District's plans are to address the communication issues, but encourages the District to take advantage of the quarterly billings.
- He wanted an opportunity to read the minutes of the Budget meeting of June 7, 2021. It was noted that the meeting minutes were approved. Mr. Rude noted that on the cromwellfd.org webpage there is some incorrect information on the Commission home page. The page still notes the Board meeting time as 7:00 PM. That should read 6:00 PM as that time was changed to 6:00 PM in January 2021.

Commissioner Epstein suggested that Item G. under New Business be forwarded to the Water Operations Committee for consideration since they are meeting on August 10.

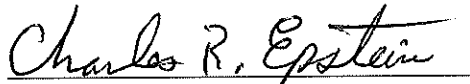
Commissioner Epstein also suggested that the remaining Commissioners stay after adjournment of the meeting to have a workshop to discuss Chief Balletto's EMS Billing presentation.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:04 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
8-9-21


Charles R. Epstein, Secretary