

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 **Special Fire Operations Committee Meeting**

Monday, August 16, 2021

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners David Colligan (Chairman), Jason Hinnners, Charles Epstein and Robert Donohue. Also attending were Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Assistant Fire Chief/Deputy Fire Marshal Jason Brade and Communications Manager Justin Lonergan. Fire Marshal Ray Saracco was absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM, by Chairman Colligan.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as presented. The Chairman noted that because this is considered a Special meeting, no changes could be made to the agenda.
- III. Approval of Meeting Minutes of July 19, 2021. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Special Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of July 19, 2021, as presented.
- IV. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- V. Communications Report. The Chairman reported that next week will be an important week in terms of testing at the voting sites. The Chairman did not think he would be available to go around to the sites. He requested a report, text or email be forwarded to him of any issues or concerns. Mr. Lonergan will keep a running list of anything that comes up. Once the final testing is completed, a meeting of the Communication Committee will be scheduled for a review and debriefing before final payment is made to the vendor. Everyone noted there is a huge difference in transmission with the Nike site antenna.

Chairman Colligan discussed something mentioned at the Health & Safety/Building Committee meeting regarding the fire ground channel and a small hardware change and programming upgrade. The Chairman thought that a price of \$50,000 was discussed. Mr. Lonergan was not at that meeting and stated that they did not get a price on that. The price should be a derivative of Norcom giving the District a price. It would be expensive to upgrade the FNI (Fixed Network Infrastructure) to properly transmit on the fire ground channels.

Chief Balletto explained the miscommunication. The original price was \$50,000 when the process was originally started. Taking into consideration the time that has gone by, the quote will probably be double from what it was originally. The Chief will be doing more research before he is ready to speak about it. The Executive Director noted that this was discussed at length early on in the Communication Committee meetings and is documented in the meeting minutes.

At the beginning of the process with the communication system, there was a price of \$4 million. At that time there was a takeaway to make the cost more realistic for the taxpayers. When this comes under consideration again, it will be an expensive jump and there may not be sufficient dollars. Norcom or Motorola will not be doing this in the timeframe of this project. It could be an add-on with Board approval with an appropriate quote. There is a need to have this for the operation and the safety component. The item should stay on the Committee's radar screen, but it is not thought that this can be done within the next 2 or 3 months, maybe next fiscal year. The Chairman agreed and thought the Committee should wait on taking any action until the Chief has completed his research. Mr. Lonergan added that this has been discussed many times by his staff, and they feel it is a safety concern.

Some of the Commissioners had questions. Mr. Lonergan explained that the issue is the ability to communicate back to the units on fire ground. He explained the process under the old system. The new system is designed as receivers only. If someone is on the fire ground channel, Dispatch can hear that person, but they cannot communicate back to that person. There was a lengthy discussion regarding situations of fire ground and May Day.

Mr. Lonergan added that if the District is seriously looking at upgrading the system, they should be trying to get a price to work with. The Executive Director suggested the Communication Manager focus on two things: get a quote from Norcom for fire ground communication with the current system and get started researching a band aid approach short term. The financial impact also needs to be assessed. Chairman Colligan asked the Communication Manager to also research Tango, Tango.

Commissioner Epstein asked about the State's system. Mr. Lonergan noted that the State's Connecticut Land & Mobile Radio Network has been up and running for a while and has recently been upgraded. It is being used by many jurisdictions around Cromwell. The new District radios are compatible. The Communication staff is still working on the programming template to add the State's information into the new radios. Once everything is completed, Cromwell should be on the State system.

Commissioner Epstein asked what the cost would be to do the upgrades through the State system. Mr. Lonergan explained that you really don't want to use the State's repeater system for fire ground communications. They are two different things. There are identified State channels that are Simplex fire ground channels that Cromwell can use as backups.

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

VI. Reports of Chief Officers

- A. Fire Marshal's Office Report. Chief Balletto noted that Fire Marshal Saracco apologized for not being able to attend this meeting. His report for July had been submitted to the Board in their monthly meeting packets. Copies were also available for this meeting.

Nothing has changed in the report since submitted. Chief Balletto discussed how the FMO has been going above and beyond his expectations. The Fire Marshal and Harold Holmes have been getting their objectives accomplished even though they are extremely understaffed at this time because there was a recent resignation in the FMO.

They recently started inspections of the schools. Two schools have been completed, and they plan to continue for the next couple of days to finish. They have been working with the Chief's Office and his firefighters to do a preplan of all the schools and will incorporate that information into the Red Alert System. Mr. Saracco also did one of his fire prevention classes at one of the Day Cares in Town. It was posted on Facebook, and the kids loved it.

Chairman Colligan commended Chief Balletto and Fire Marshal Saracco on the public information they are getting out to the Townspeople on the District's new Facebook site. Right now the administrators of the Facebook page are Chief Balletto, Ass't Chief Brade and Commissioner Colligan. They are putting as much information as possible out there. Information is also being advertised on the electronic billboards. All agendas for meetings are posted on the Facebook page. Any community activities are also being put on the electronic billboards and Facebook.

The Executive Director was also acknowledged for direction and assistance on the publicity initiative. Mr. Neto added that the Fire Marshal and Fire Chief will be interviewed by the Cromwell Chronicle and Rare Reminder this Wednesday. He has submitted a few articles to be published. His objective is to have an article every month from the District or any of its divisions. The Water Department is also a part of this process.

Commissioner Hinners discussed the Publicity Committee and asked Commissioner Donohue to speak about the Committee's objectives. Commissioner Donohue discussed what he has been doing behind the scenes to familiarize himself with how the social media sites work and are managed. He has also been in touch with the local newspapers to touch base on future publications. Commissioner Colligan also gave some contact information for Pastor Paul.

Ass't Chief Brade is working under Chief Balletto's direction with a private company that is making available a large quantity of PPE supplies. There are more supplies than Cromwell FD will ever need so they are looking to do a mass distribution to Cromwell residents to assist the Townspeople and create a good PR event for the Fire Department. He is coordinating getting the supplies picked up and then distributed through one of Cromwell's venues for distribution such as Cromwell's Farmers' Market. He also plans on contacting Rodney Bitgood from the Chamber of Commerce.

- VII. Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability. Chief Balletto reported that last week they interviewed approximately 13 people. He along with David Barillaro interviewed a possible volunteer candidate. There will be two part-time candidates and one volunteer candidate that will be scheduled for physicals. The Chief has paperwork for other candidates, but he cannot hire anyone else at this time until he has made a decision about PPE.

Regarding staffing, they are having a hard time getting people to work. The people that are working are continuously working and are exceeding the 40 hours that are required. The Chief is doing everything he can to remedy this.

Regarding response capability, the Department was overwhelmed last week. The Chief responded to an EMS call by himself. They had received three calls at the same time. Tack 4 was on a call, the ambulance was on a call, and the Chief responded to another call.

The Police Department is going to start changing its protocols. They are not going to make entry into any building. They will be waiting for the Cromwell Fire Department to get on scene because of the COVID restrictions.

The Chief is hoping to find more gear so he can hire more people. Out of the thirteen candidates, there were six or seven that were qualified to work for the Fire Department.

The Chief noted that after being the first to respond to a call over the weekend that involved a police officer as well, the Chief would like to get some training in place for fire and police personnel when they are working at a scene together.

The Chief was able to find 7 recruitment and retention signs in the back of the firehouse. He wanted to put one up at all three firehouses. He also wants to use them for other publicity. The Chief and Executive Director will research what is needed for permission to put up the signs in various areas.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability report as presented.

VIII. Old Business

A. Update on Equipment & Apparatus Replacement. Commissioner Hinners is the Chairman of the Apparatus Committee. They have not had a meeting yet, but Chief Balletto has been working with Mechanic Chris Logan and Ass't Chief Brade. They have arranged a visit to the Vernon Fire Department because they just purchased a new Pierce rescue/engine piece. The Chief wanted to see the rescue/engine in Vernon because it was priced at the same amount the Chief had estimated. He wanted to see the bells and whistles associated with it.

The Chief also has a couple of contacts with AME Ambulance. They are planning a visit to look at one of their ambulances coming in. The Chief was also in contact with a sales representative from Firematic. He wanted to look at a couple of things related to their equipment. He also had a couple of prices for ambulances.

The Chief noted he has taken 4C out of service to give it a bit of a rest. He wanted to rotate out the ambulances based on their mileage. If there is an interest in sprinters, the Chief would like to know what type of equipment will be on it, based on what its purpose will be. The Chief's priorities for replacement are to replace Tac 4 and Ambulance 4C.

He wants to revisit the staffing model in January to keep the Department moving forward in the current economy and current events. One of his goals was the strategic plan that he presented to the Fire Operations Committee. He found the old strategic plan to be different in terms of a potential staffing model. This needs to be discussed in an informal workshop to determine if it is what the District is looking for. The Chief wants to have a workshop with all the Commissioners. He will be working to schedule a workshop within the next 2 weeks.

The Chief added in terms of finding ambulances, there are none in the Cromwell area that are available. The one the Chief will be looking at has already been sold. Anything with a Ford chassis on it will not be available for 18 mos. They need to come up with backup plans based on what is best for the needs assessment and risk analysis.

Regarding equipment, the Fire Department is in dire need of SCBA packs. There are 23 right now that need to be replaced. The ones being replaced are all first line SCBA's. The ones that are being replaced will become backup SCBA's. The Chief is trying to reduce the cost by determining how many are needed going forward over the next couple of years. The Chief did submit an invoice for the 23 Scott packs. They will be Scott's SCBA's. There will be bottles on each pack plus additional bottles. There will be a total of 46 bottles to be replaced. They are coming up to their 15-year bottles. The price the Chief received includes a AV3000HT which is the required SVRNE mask that everyone should be wearing.

Right now there are individuals that are wearing very different SCBA masks. One of the issues regarding hiring the 3 candidates is that the volunteer will not be receiving any PPE or SCBA because that person is not qualified or certified in Firefighter I. The Chief only has two meeting masks for the other two individuals. The price was high when he first discussed it with the Fire Operations Committee. The total was \$176,000. He was able to bring that price to \$168,000 by getting rid of a couple of bells and whistles. He was also able to get the cost down by getting rid of the accountability software that was built into the SCBA packs. The accountability system will put a chip in every Scott Pack. Everyone will get a tag so they will have to tag in when they get to a fire. The Chief can check who is at the job and how much air they have. He can also send a message to evacuate. However, the Department does not have the money.

Scott and Shipmans are going up 8.5% on all their SCBA's. If anything is purchased after September 1, the \$168,000 quote will face a \$15,000 to \$17,000 increase on all the SCBA's. That price is beyond what the Fire Department needs. Chief Balletto asked the Commissioners for help. Since the Chief has been here, the Tac 4 Officers' Scott Pack went out the other day for the fourth time. There are no grants out there for that price range. The grants other departments are getting from 2018, 2019, and 2020 are from EMG and EMG Supplemental. Cromwell did not put in for that this year.

The Chief and Assistant Chief Brade wrote a grant to get a 5-gas meter related to confined space in the Chemfeed building and also 4-gas meters to reduce the cost in a 50/50 cost share. That would take the funds the Chief has leftover in the equipment replacement fund to get those meters. He found out today that most likely he is going to get the grant. The Chief also applied for a grant for 3 lucas machines.

The ability to get the SCBA's for the firefighters will help build morale if the Department shows their staff they take very seriously all the life safety requirements in place to protect them as much as possible. The Chief needs help obtaining the funding. The PPE will not be in until the end of December. Morning Pride PPE won't be in until February or March if it is ordered today. Globe will be January if ordered today. The Chief contacted Shipmans discussing the possibility of going with firenecks. That is what the Department originally had. There is a 3 – 4-week turnaround. The price would be \$1,900 each if 3 or more sets of gear are purchased.

The Chief was asked about the Houston/Galveston consortium. He did research them, but they are charging a la carte. The customer has to pick out every single component for the equipment. It is very time consuming. Currently the Department is paying \$6,000 per pack which includes 2 bottles with 2 masks. Houston/Galveston is \$9,627 per Scott pack a la carte.

They priced out MSA's. It is not beneficial for Cromwell. MSA's are completely computerized. Every pack has a battery that has to be charged. The amount of training that would be required to qualify everyone is not for the Chief. Another issue with the MSA's, is that if one of the computer components breaks, the whole Scott pack is taken out of service. One of the things to reduce the repair cost and to losing the SCBA's is to get away from quick connect regulators. The Chief stated that everyone would get their own regulators, but if there is any interruption within the hose, the whole thing needs to be taken out of service and tested over again. Compared to the one regulator that is connected, the Department can replace it at zero cost. They can put it back in service again without being tested.

Currently there are 2 SCBA technicians in the Department. They are Lt. Wolmetz and Lt. Zadrick. The Chief would like to have 2 more, one for each division. That way if one of the Scott packs aren't working, the Fire Department can fix them instead of sending them to Shipmans. They have been losing a lot of down time and money with the SCBA's. Sometimes in other departments the SCBA's are backfilled with regulators. The Chief would like to have 4 on the shelves because they break easily. The Department can fix everything on the SCBA's except the high flow. The training for this is a one-day class. It is held at the Fire Academy, and it would only cost the Department between \$30 -- \$50. Chief Balletto needs a dedicated computer for the SCBA's. With OSHA and NFPA standards, every time a battery is replaced, it has to be documented. It can only be done by a technician.

The Department concentrates on Red Alert which is the system that has been used since the day it was put into service. The Chief has been working with the Communications Manager and Assistant Chief Brade to establish this as part of their procedures. There was a discussion regarding bonding and what items should be included in the bonding. The budget that was passed a few months ago had funds in it for a down payment on a new piece of apparatus. Those funds may need to be repurposed for SCBA equipment. There may need to be a Town meeting to explain the objective of the SCBA equipment. It is becoming more of a priority than originally thought. They may be able to wait on a rescue pumper a few more months, but not wait for SCBA's. They need to have the full Commission agree that this solution makes more sense. Both issues to be addressed are safety components of each item.

Chairman Colligan asked the Chief to bring all of this up for discussion at the Board of Commissioners' meeting tomorrow night. He also asked the Chief to contact Shipman's to see if they will be able to hold the price until the Board can approve the change in mindset. The Chief explained how important it is for him to have the workshop he discussed at the beginning of this meeting. Mr. Neto thought it would be important for the Board meeting tomorrow to discuss repurposing the \$250,000 set aside for an apparatus down payment.

If the Board approves the repurposing of funds, the Chief's goal is to annually allow funding to replace everything that needs replacing. Commissioner Hinners added that the

Chief is doing the right thing. For years the District has kicked the can down the road and made the numbers look good by not spending money they were supposed to spend. The Chief is bringing the issues to the surface where they should be. It is unclear right now if this issue needs to come before a Town meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report on equipment and apparatus.

IX. New Business

- A. Discussion on PFAS. Chief Balletto explained that this is the fire foam. The Department has confirmed that they are on the list with Clean Harbor. They are just waiting to be contacted by them. Chris Logan has had two containers in the back of the Coles Road firehouse. The containers have been there for a couple of years. The Department is registered with the State and Clean Harbors. They verified they were on the list at the last State Chiefs meeting. They are waiting for the State to contact the Fire Department to advise them to come and pick it up.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's report on PFAS.

- B. Discussion and Possible Decision on Unscheduled Personnel "All Call." Chief Balletto had put this on the agenda. One of the concerns he has is the unscheduled, especially when they do "all call". They sporadically report to different areas. They are going to different areas with possibly one driver on the "all calls." One thing the Chief would like to establish is to have all unscheduled personnel for "all calls" report to the West St. firehouse. They will bring Ladder 3 back to West St. to have that manned as well as having an ambulance there. This will reduce the liability to have a single driver respond in an emergency.

The Chief had been looking at the needs analysis and risk analysis. He has identified the problem he is seeing on the "all calls" as having one person responding on a single apparatus. The Chief feels it is better to have everyone show up so they can have more than one person. With one person taking the apparatus out they have nothing else covering the Town during an emergency. During "all call" when they arrive they have to report to Dispatch. They will communicate with Command on how will they need to stand by and cover the rest of the Town.

The Chief is also looking into the highway motor vehicle call response. There are times where a single person is responding to a call on the highway when they have 3 apparatus. There are other calls where there are up to six vehicles there, with nothing else covering the Town. The Chief feels this is the Department's opportunity to think about what can happen going forward. He discussed this with some of the members who agree that rather than having one person respond, they would like to see more members show up.

Mr. Lonergan was involved in a meeting with the Chief and others specifically to discuss other ideas going forward. The Chief's office received input from the Communication side of the calls. Mr. Lonergan thought the plan that was hashed out was a decent plan to help narrow the scope and focus the unscheduled and volunteer staff to be more resourceful.

Chairman Colligan advised the Chief that it is his Department to run. Any decisions that the Chief makes will be supported by the Commissioners provided they are advised ahead of time. Mr. Neto asked how the Commissioners would like to be advised, such as an email, meeting or phone call. Commissioner Epstein noted the Commissioners' job is not micromanage the Fire Department, but rather support the Chief. If Fire Operations meetings are held every month, any new information can be included in the Chief's report. The Executive Director and Chiefs' office are not afraid to make decisions, but they are hesitant of being second guessed when those decisions are not approved by the Board. Commissioner Colligan suggested a workshop to be able to discuss things informally.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's discussion and decision on unscheduled, "all call" personnel.

- C. Discussion and Possible Decision on All PPE. The Chief reported that the PPE that was allocated to West St. needs to be taken out of service. They were thinking about the idea of shipping them to Guatemala. The Fire Chiefs and Executive Director went to Vinal Regional Technical School to check out their public safety program. The Chief was impressed with the program. Some of the topics covered are dispatching, emergency management and EMT training. They cannot do interior firefighting because the students are not 18. However, they do get exposure to apparatus and are allowed to board the apparatus and explore different parts of it. The program has PPE donated to them so the students can see how the PPE feels on them. The Chief would like to have their PPE equipment washed, cleaned and donated to Vinal Tech for their program. Commissioner Colligan asked that this information be reported at the Board of Commissioners' meeting tomorrow. It was noted that the equipment will not have any Cromwell identification on it. There is quite a bit of used equipment that can be used for instruction purposes. Commissioner Colligan suggested that the Committee members come up with a plan for this information to be brought forward to the next meeting for a discussion and vote.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to authorize the Chief to move forward with his program for PPE.

- D. Discussion and Recommendations for Chief's Office Move to Coles Road. Chief Balletto discussed this issue at the last meeting. His goal was to give everyone time to think about his idea. His idea has not changed, nor his idea about his office move. He asked if anyone at this meeting had questions or concerns about his proposal. Chairman Colligan noted that this concept needs to be brought to the full Board of Commissioners. In doing so, he would like to see the Chief produce a plan on how this can be accomplished. He also wanted a report of the cost associated with moving to Coles Road and vacating Court St. Commissioners Hinnners and Donohue had no problem with the Chief's plan.

Commissioner Hinnners asked about the workout equipment. The Chief did not have an answer yet for that. Regarding the telephones, the Chief will not set anything in motion until he has confirmation that the phone system will be in the process of being worked on and phone lines transferred. That and the server will be the biggest hurdle. They do have the space to accommodate the 4 staff members that would work there. The Chief does not think there will be a cost associated with Court St. There may be a cost if COVID

hits again and they will need to put up partitions in the bunk room. If the Department plans on doing the move themselves there will not be a cost. The Executive Director thought that the Chief needs to provide more detail on the move such as who will be working where, location of equipment, etc. The Executive Director agreed with the Chief that the phone system needs to be an important part of the move. He added that the workout equipment should stay where it is right now. The Chief is asking that the Committee approve the potential to move to Coles Road. He would like their approval so that he can start working the numbers to see what is feasible.

Commissioner Colligan wanted to find out how the phone system will work if calls come in when the Chief is not there, and how they will get rolled over. Mr. Lonergan reported that the system he is looking at will have a lot more flexibility and ability to roll over, ring, call different people at different extensions Districtwide. Mr. Neto explained that there will not be any changes made to the Chief's office until the new phone system is active. They are looking at a target date of March of next year. They will need to be researching and getting quotes for the move. They also need to research permits for renovations that may be done. Access controls and security also need to be a part of this. Mr. Neto has looked into these issues and they fall into the criteria of long term borrowing.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved for the Chief to move forward with a study for his office to move to Coles Road, and come back to the Fire Operations Committee with his plan and what it will cost to move.

There was a discussion regarding Mr. Lonergan's research on security and telephones. It has been determined that there is currently not enough funding to provide the system that is required. They are hopeful that there may be opportunities for grant money.

- X. Commissioners' Comments. There were no further Commissioners' comments.
- XI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

David Colligan, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
9-14-21