

# Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE  
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT  
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

## **BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

### **Personnel Committee Meeting**

**Tuesday, January 12, 2021**

**5:30 PM**

**West Street Firehouse**

**1 West Street**

**Cromwell, CT**

Present: Commissioners Jason Hinners (Vice Chair), Roger Rukowicz and David Colligan. Commissioner Mertie Terry (Chair) was absent. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Commissioners Robert Donohue and Charles Epstein and calling in were Dispatcher and Dispatch Union President Andrew Cook, Dispatcher and Secretary of the Dispatchers' Union Brian Petrocelli and Career Firefighter Nick Schenartz.

Per Executive Order No. 7B, Governor Lamont has ordered and directed that in-person open meeting requirements be suspended. Therefore, the Commissioners' Personnel Committee meeting will be held via conference call. Members of the public may send questions or comments to [meetings@cromwellfd.com](mailto:meetings@cromwellfd.com) on any agenda items.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM, by Vice Chairman Hinners.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. Andrew Cook, President of the Dispatchers' Union had some comments and was allowed to dial into the meeting to present his comments. His comments were related to COVID and how it has changed the workplace. The District is comprised of various employment categories. One of the most challenging is the Fire Department employees. There are many part-time employees in Fire and Dispatch who do not receive PTO because they are part-time employees. If they need to be out because of possible virus exposure, they would be out without pay. The Dispatch Union's Executive Board has been meeting and working with the Executive Director to provide the best service to the Town of Cromwell. They have been working to provide time off to the part-time employees who if they are not feeling well can stay home and are able to use sick time to be compensated for staying home and keeping themselves, their families and their colleagues safe. Brian Petrocelli, Secretary of the Dispatcher's Union, was on the call but had no further comments. President Cook expressed the opinions of the Dispatcher's Union Executive Board. Firefighter Nick Schenartz was on the call but had no further comments.

IV. New Business

A. Clarification on Continuity Plan Bonus. The Executive Director explained that the Continuity Plan bonus began approximately one month ago. A motion was made to provide all those individuals who were going to be disrupting their work and family life to meet the objective of the new schedule of part-timers taking on additional hours, a bonus. The discussion at that time was to provide them with a full bonus if they worked 40 + hours a week on this new schedule. The District would provide a prorated bonus to one-half of a full bonus if individuals work 20 or 24 hours. That was the Executive Director's interpretation of the bonus program, and that is what has been instituted over the last few weeks. There have been some questions by certain parts of the membership that this may not have been the intent of the Commissioners. Mr. Neto was looking for clarity from the Personnel Committee who are in charge of benefits and salary. He wanted to make sure his interpretation of the bonus program was correct. If a part-timer works more than 40 hours, they will get a full bonus. If a part-timer works 20 – 24 hours, they will get half a bonus. Again, Mr. Neto wanted to know if that was the intent of the bonus program. Vice Chairman Hinnens stated that he believed that was the intent of the bonus program. Commissioner Colligan agreed that as a member of the Personnel Committee, he was under the impression that the Committee had determined if an individual worked 40 hours or more they would receive a full bonus. If an individual worked 20 – 24 hours, they would receive a half of a bonus. There is a question of what was stated in the minutes for the Special Board meeting of December 3 regarding the bonus program. Those minutes have been reviewed by both the Executive Director and the Union.

Mr. Neto explained the 4 week schedule for an individual which would be 40/48 hours on weeks 1, 2, and 3. Week 4 would be 20/24 hours. He added that time and one half is given after 40 hours. So there is 8 hours of overtime/time and one-half. An individual on this schedule would receive the full bonus on weeks 1 – 3. The 4<sup>th</sup> week they would receive half of a bonus. The question is whether or not the bonus plan is fair. The reason there is a 20/24 hour week in the rotation is because of the schedule. The concern is that there is a week that a full bonus is not given out, but the schedule mimics the full-time schedule. Commissioner Hinnens was in agreement with the way the bonus plan has been implemented. Commissioner Colligan stated that this will be discussed at the next COVID Committee meeting this week. They will be discussing ways to make the plan more economical for the District. The Executive Director appreciated the clarity. It seemed that the District administration was on course in implementing the bonus plan.

B. Possible Decision on Sick Time for Part-Time Staff During COVID. The Executive Director explained that management is trying to keep the District and our employees safe. That is their primary concern. If employees have any symptoms at all, they are being given total flexibility to work with their supervisors or the Chief's office to call in and stay home. They do not want anyone coming into the workplace to potentially spread any potential illness including the virus. Up to this point it has been a liberal policy allowing employees to use sick time. The Cares Act allowed the District to compensate employees until the end of the year. The District is trying to follow the guidelines of the Cares Act because it is the right thing to do. The District now needs to maintain some sense of protecting our employees from a potential illness. However, part-time staff may not have the time in their sick time banks.

He suggested the Committee implement something similar to the bonus program. Identify those employees that work 1,000 hours. Allocate 20 hours of sick time to them up front. If they work 40 hours, allow them 40 hours of sick time up front. It is a known fact that part-time staff without any type of safety net like this will come in to work sick. This could be a suggested strategy to use to recognize the part-time staff and show their service is valued. They have stepped up to meet the need. The sick time will be put in their sick bank, but it does not mean it will be used. They may or may not use it in which case it will cycle out at the end of the year. This will provide some protection for our employees. Vice-Chairman Hinners agreed that this is appropriate as long as there is some type of sunset date.

The Executive Director noted that management will be in negotiations with the part-timers. This issue could become part of the negotiations. If the District is classified as a large employer by law, there are State Statutes that would require the District to provide each employee one sick hour for every 40 hours-worth of work. If a part-timer works 20 hours a week, every two weeks they will get one hour put into their sick bank. Once the District is classified as a large employer, they have no choice but to be mandated, and of course follow the law. Mr. Neto reported that the District is not in that category yet. They are close, but the definition of a large employer is 50 full-time equivalents or higher. Currently the District has 48 ½ FTE's.

Mr. Neto thought the sunset date might be the end of the year. Any upcoming CBA could supersede that. Whatever is considered should be applicable to all part-time staff. Commissioner Hinners thought that because of the sick bank, a sunset date would not be as necessary. Commissioner Colligan suggested that until negotiations are done, there should be a time limit after which the process will be revisited. He would like to see this policy revisited in 90 days or whenever the Committee decides. He added that money is getting tight. He is the Treasurer of the Board, and has been trying to monitor where the Board is financially. The information he is getting will have to be shared with the Board and the various committees that are affected. He agrees that there should be something done to compensate the part-timers. Mr. Neto stated there is no issue with the 90 day review. The challenge would be requesting that the time be put up front or include in the motion "if there is a need." The suggested plan was to allocate 20 hours to individuals who have limited part-time work and 40 hours for the heavy part-timers to be put into the bank. This would be through the end of the year. Regarding the Fire Department, if something different is negotiated, that will supersede the original plan. The objective is to mitigate the need to have people out. Educating and enforcement to staff to do the right thing to limit people from getting exposed or getting the virus.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to grant a sick time bank of 20 to 40 hours as needed for the part-timers to be available until the end of the year. Commissioner Colligan asked if this also needs to come before the full Board of Commissioners because it is a financial issue. Vice Chairman Hinners stated that he thought that the Personnel Committee had the authority to set policy regarding benefits and salary. The Executive Director suggested that this be presented to the full Board of Commissioners at their next meeting either through the meeting notes or as an FYI informing them of the Personnel Committee decisions recently made.

- C. Approval of Posting for Fire Chief. The Executive Director distributed copies of the most recent draft for the suggested job posting for the Fire Chief position. Mr. Neto had

given copies of a rough draft of the posting to the Chairwoman of the Personnel Committee and the President of the Board approximately 3 weeks ago. At that time he did not have the 2020 numbers. Before posting, they will have some true, accurate 2020 numbers. There is one number missing on the document that is the total number for the year. Mr. Neto will be getting that from the Chief's office soon to be inserted in the document.

The Executive Director also emailed the committee members the job description for Fire Chief. The President of the Board had requested the addition of the following: "State of Connecticut Fire Marshal Certification or obtain within 12 months of hire date." This requirement was added to the job description. He asked the Committee if they had any comments or suggestions to the job description. Commissioner Colligan discussed the CPAT requirement. He did not think this had been a requirement in the past. He wanted to know if a candidate needs a current CPAT or just has had one during their career in fire service. Commissioner Epstein was present and Chairman of the Personnel Committee when the last Fire Chief was hired. He asked the Executive Director what the differences are between that posting and the current one. Mr. Neto responded that approximately 10% of the document has been modified from the last recruitment of Fire Chief. There was discussion that it may be asking too much to expect the next Fire Chief to be CPAT qualified. They are more interested in a candidate with good management skills. Mr. Neto added that they will be requiring the new Chief to have a physical exam. He reported that CPAT was not a requirement for the previous Fire Chief. This issue was an add on by one of the Commissioners. However, the Personnel Committee has the authority to accept or reject this job description. Mr. Neto asked the Vice Chair if he would like to change "CPAT qualified" to "Air Pack qualified."

Commissioner Epstein added that the last time they recruited for a Fire Chief, no one met the original qualifications that were posted. The Personnel Committee then had to repost with modifications to the posting. He suggested the Committee review the current posting carefully so they only have to go through the recruitment process once. Commissioner Colligan stated that he believed during the last recruitment for Chief the CPAT requirement was removed. He had received feedback from the CT Chief's Assoc. and other Fire Service Chiefs who also did not agree with the requirement. Commissioner Colligan thought that the Committee needs to find out what was done for the last Fire Chief recruitment so no time is wasted in the recruitment process this time.

Commissioner Epstein noted there are a few Fire Chief postings on the CT State Fire website for towns looking for Fire Chiefs. He suggested going on the website to find out what those towns were looking for in their postings and does it compare to Cromwell. Commissioner Colligan recommended that the first thing to do is get the information that was used last time and have committee members review them. The second thing would be to go back to review what was done last time so the same mistakes are not made. Mr. Neto noted that the Committee already has the current job description that was sent to them earlier today. The previous job description Mr. Neto will retrieve and get it out to the Committee members tomorrow. Everyone will have time to review, and Mr. Neto will put this item on the agenda for next week's Board of Commissioners meeting. The Vice Chair thought that the Personnel Committee should meet again to discuss their findings before the proposal is brought before the full Board of Commissioners. The Executive Director noted that the full Personnel Committee needs to take ownership of this document. It should not be the responsibility of one or two Commissioners. The Committee needs to come to the conclusion that these are the most critical parts of that

job description. The Committee then votes on it, and it becomes the final word in terms of the posting. The posting only narrowly defines the qualifications. The substance of the actual job that the Commission wants is in the job description. In researching other Fire Chief positions, the Executive Director stated that Cromwell is looking for a lot from a Fire Chief. The bar has been set quite high. Mr. Neto will get the former job description to the Personnel Committee members tomorrow.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to table this item until more information is received by the Committee members as requested, and a full Personnel Committee meeting will be scheduled to review. Commissioner Rukowicz suggested changing the mileage requirement from 20 miles to 10 miles meaning that any Fire Chief candidate must live within a 10 mile radius of Cromwell. He added regarding the requirement for Fire Marshal certification, he believed the class for that is only given once a year. If someone is hired that needs the certification, they would have to wait until the second half of the class gets started. It was agreed to insert the requirement to say "until the next available class." Commissioner Colligan added that he would like to see language inserted that indicates the candidate will also work with the volunteers to build that group back up. The Executive Director stated that if after review of the job description anyone on the Committee has any other feedback or input, they are welcome to email the Executive Director and he will introduce the additional language for review and discussion. When Mr. Neto does the modifications, he will red line the document similar to what had been done with the Bylaw drafts. Commissioner Colligan would like it worded, "to increase volunteer participation within the community." Vice Chairman Hinners agreed that Cromwell is a combination Fire Departments and volunteers are important. The Department should do as much for volunteers as they can. He would like this requirement in the job description categorized as essential. The language suggested was, "Develop plans to increase volunteer participation and create a culture to promote volunteerism within the Fire Department." Commissioner Colligan requested that the posting be advertised with the International Association of Fire Chiefs. The Executive Director stated he would take direction from the Personnel Committee as to when and where the position will be advertised. Commissioner Colligan suggested that the Executive Director come up with a process or check list of what should be done for recruitment. Mr. Neto will work on this for the next meeting.

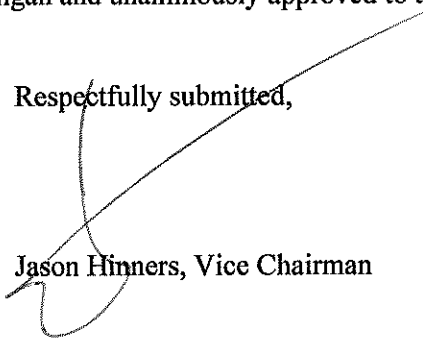
- V. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Colligan reported that the next COVID workshop meeting will be Thursday, January 14, 2021. They are trying to look at all aspects of how COVID is affecting the District. They will be looking at the whole operation and looking at ways to come back to "normal" operation. They will probably be looking at procedures and mandates that have to be done. Staff that do not follow protocol will have to be disciplined.

Regarding sick time for part-timers, Commissioner Donohue asked if there would be an effective date, or would those affected prior would be able to put in for the benefit retroactive. The Executive Director thought that it should go into effect January 1 and backdated if there is a need. Currently there are individuals that have tested positive for COVID. That could be a workers' compensation claim if it can be proven that the infection was here. January 1 was when the Cares Act ended. Sick time will not be used if it is a Workers' Compensation claim. If the claim gets kicked back, it will give the District the flexibility to use 20 hrs. of sick time.

Commissioner Epstein reminded everyone that it is really important that everyone keep in mind and stress to everyone how important it is wearing a mask, socially distancing 6 feet. The State is in the middle of another spike. We don't want anyone sick. It is a serious pandemic.

- VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Jason Hanners, Vice Chairman

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Secretary  
1-26-21