

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 Personnel Committee Meeting**

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners Mertie Terry (Chairwoman), Jason Hinnners and David Colligan. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Acting Fire Marshal Harold Holmes, Acting Ass't Fire Chief Brian Petrucelli and Commissioner Charles Epstein. Commissioner Roger Rukowicz was absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM, by Chairwoman Terry.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. Commissioner Charles Epstein, 19 Crest Dr., was present at the meeting to listen to discussion on items A., B. and C. as they are important issues that need to be moved forward.
- IV. Old Business. There was no old business to report.
- V. New Business
 - A. Discussion and Possible Decision on Reassignment of Fire Marshal Staff After Present Fire Marshal Resignation. The Executive Director explained that Fire Marshal Sarracco has resigned, and his last day is at the end of this week. The Executive Director and Fire Chief are waiting for the Personnel Committee to approve an interim plan until they go through the process to hire a permanent Fire Marshal. It was noted that Mr. Sarracco leaves the District on good terms. He received a better employment opportunity. The Executive Director accepted Mr. Sarracco's resignation with regret. This Fire Marshal worked well in the community, and with the Chief and Executive Director. Chief Balletto has known Fire Marshal Sarracco since they began together in New Haven in 1997 and have been good friends since 1992.

Chief Balletto was asked to come up with a succession plan and has come up with options for the Fire Marshal's Office moving forward. The Chief's office wants to maintain the functionality of that office. They started to make headway when Mr. Holmes came on board per diem. There has been a lot of transition in that office. It is an

important office and is the enforcement arm of the Fire Department/Fire District. They are looking for a transition period with the least amount of disruption.

Chief Balletto came up with 4 options. This plan will be a short-term plan. They don't want any plans going forward to interfere with the progress that office has been making. They are currently working on implementing fees for some of the services they provide. That is one of the biggest priorities for that office. He distributed copies of his plan with 4 options. He was available to answer any questions.

Commissioner Colligan reviewed all the options and liked Option 1. He thinks that the District should revisit their hiring process for the Fire Marshal's Office. There are a lot of talented people that don't have all the certifications, but they have the ability to run the Fire Marshal's Office very well. There is one individual that is there now that has been doing a great job even before Mr. Sarracco was hired. He wanted to make sure that everyone is aware of the staff working in that office and what they are capable of.

It was suggested the Committee re-evaluate the qualifications listed in the job description that was used last time. If things were revised in the job description, there may be a bigger pool of candidates. One of the requirements in question is the Fire II class. At the time Fire Marshal Sarracco was hired, it was thought that a person with Fire II could assist at a fire scene if there is a need. The Chief noted Fire investigators and Fire Marshals are not responsible for firefighting. Their responsibilities are to go on scene, evaluate what is going on and start their fire investigation. They begin their investigation from the unburn side to the burn side. If they enter a building as a firefighter, they are unable to see what is going on. The qualifications needed for the Fire Marshal's Office is Fire Marshal certification and Fire Inspection certification.

One of the Chief's goals going forward, is to have the major job qualifications for a Cromwell Fire Marshal to be Fire Marshal certification and Fire Inspection certification. The Chief would also like to post the position internally and externally. He does not want to "fast track" the Fire Marshal hiring process. He would like to take more time to figure out exactly what needs to be done and how to present it so they can pick the best person for the District.

In discussions with Fire Marshal Sarracco and Fire Inspector Harold Holmes they feel the best option is Option 1, and would take effect on Monday, Sept. 27, 2021. Option 1 is to make Harold Holmes interim Fire Marshal for 180 days per CT General Statute. If Harold Holmes fills the Fire Marshal role, someone needs to fill in for Mr. Holmes as Fire Inspector. The Chief was recommending Colin Whalen who has been an employee, a resident of the Town for many years and has worked in Newington as a Fire Inspector. Mr. Whalen would be interested in filling in as a Fire Inspector for Cromwell for 3 - 9 mos. at the most because he still would be working in New Haven.

The Chief would also like to fill the position vacated by DJ Zordan. That would give Mr. Holmes a per diem person one day a week and would assist with on call. They also have Fire Inspector Duff. This will give the Chief's Office enough time to come up with a plan and do a Fire Marshal's test. If Harold Holmes becomes a Fire Marshal, they have an opportunity to hire a Fire Inspector to fill Harold's Fire Inspector position. The Chief believes this is a progressive plan set forth with no obstacles.

The Executive Director believes that Harold Holmes gives them the option of being able to do Option 1 because of his knowledge base and expertise. Mr. Neto also knows Mr. Whalen and thinks of him as a very responsible Fire Inspector, professional Firefighter and EMT. The Executive Director is in total agreement with Chief Balletto to appoint Harold Holmes as Acting Fire Marshal for 6 months if it is needed. This will allow the District and Chief's office to take their time in the hiring process for a Fire Marshal. Commissioner Hinnners also liked Option 1, although he considered Option 4. Commissioner Epstein has known Mr. Holmes for many years, and he has worked for Commissioner Epstein in the past. Mr. Holmes has shown his ability to step up and get things accomplished in the Fire Marshal's Office in any way he can.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to go with Option 1 in the Chief's recommendations for filling the Fire Marshal position with the understanding that during the 6 months Mr. Holmes is appointed, the hiring process for the Fire Marshal be revisited, specifically the qualifications for the position. Option 1 will take effect on Monday, September 27, 2021.

- B. Discussion and Possible Decision on EMS Coordinator Replacing EMS Captain Position Including Job Description. The Executive Director explained that Captain Ferone has resigned his position as EMS Captain and has taken a part-time position in Dispatch. Mr. Neto thought that it was a good move. Mr. Ferone is a part-time Dispatcher with the State Police. He had been doing EMS work under Capt. McIntyre. When Capt. McIntyre became a Commissioner, Mr. Ferone became a Capt. in EMS to fill the role of Capt. McIntyre.

There is a staff member, Meghan Petrucelli, who has been working with Capt. Ferone over the last few months. The Chief took that opportunity to evaluate that position. After review, the Chief has identified an EMS Coordinator to replace the function of the Captain or Ass't Chief of EMS. The Chief distributed a job description for the Coordinator position. Mr. Neto feels this is the right approach at the right time. The individual in that position has been carrying the documentation and accountability part of the position and doing an outstanding job in clarifying the role. The position has been taken to another level both with the State and the District. The first thing the Chief's office would like to do is eliminate the role of Captain in EMS. It will become EMS Coordinator. Since Meghan is already doing the job because Capt. Ferone was not always available during the last few months, they have identified Meghan to already be functioning in that role.

Some Commissioners wanted to know the difference between a Captain and a Coordinator in EMS. The Chief noted that there are no longer Bylaws for the Captain's position in EMS. There are no longer Bylaws in place and no progression plans to replace any officers that leave. When it comes to EMS Coordinator, there was a similar position when the Chief worked in New Haven FD. That person was an EMS Supervisor. That person performed the duties the job description outlined. The Chief brought Meghan Petrucelli on in July as a liaison to assist Capt. Ferone. The Department was falling behind in their QA'ing of EMS reports which was giving them the ability to submit to the billing company. They were seeing a lack of education and significant issues with personnel regarding EMS response. The Chief came up with the EMS Coordinator position because that is what he knows as working in the field.

A person in this position is in charge of all the EMS components. 90% – 92% of the Department's call volume is EMS. Cromwell is lacking in skills with EMS such as report writing and documentation for many years. Since the Chief has brought Meghan on, she has addressed many issues. She came out with at least 4 EMS SOP's and has done education with the firefighters in terms of their documentation. She is finding things in the QA reports that the Department is finally addressing. She has also helped the Chief with the Emergency Management component and has been a great resource to the Chief. With this position in place, it reduces the liability and responsibility of the Department. Meghan is going above and beyond to address everything that is needed when it comes to EMS. Her role is not a supervisory role, but rather a teaching role.

The Executive Director recommends that the position be similar to Capt. Ferone in terms of pay. He is suggesting \$18 per hour similar to Capt. Ferone. Meghan is at a \$15 an hour rate as a part-time employee of the District. Based on the level of responsibility in this role, \$18 an hour is the rate that is recommended. Hours will range between 20 – 25 per week.

The Chief noted that any SOP or administrative directive that come out of the Chief's office, instead of having the words "prepared by" at the bottom of the directive, it will read, "approved by" the Chief of the Department. Everything goes through the Chief because he is the Chief of the Department. Anything that comes before the Chief such as disciplinary actions, SOP's or directives, will go up the chain of command as always and the Chief will have the final say when it comes to disciplinary actions or enforcement. Even if Meghan were to write an SOP, the Chief will still review and put his name on it if he approves it.

The Chief distributed the job description for the EMS Coordinator and explained what the job entails. The description shows what Meghan does on a daily basis. It is a very aggressive description that raises the bar for the betterment of the community and the protection of the District. This will become the new standard.

Chairwoman Terry asked why the decision to call the position a coordinator and not a Captain's position. Acting Ass't Chief Petrucelli explained that giving someone a rank can sometimes create a power struggle. The EMS coordinator is responsible for all things related to EMS. It does not matter if a person has rank attached to their name. The coordinator has a job to do regardless of the fact the person in question may be a Chief or a Captain, etc. The term EMS coordinator is now being used statewide and regionally. People aren't being judged by others if their rank is only a sergeant or lieutenant. It is a title of authority within the State hierarchy. He feels we need to change our ranks and titles as we move ahead. Credentials go along with this title rather than rank. The new normal for EMS response agencies is EMS Coordinator.

Commissioner Colligan complimented the Fire Department and Meghan Petrucelli for the work they are doing regarding EMS coordinator duties. He agrees with the Chief's recommendation to make the EMS coordinator a role and not a rank. The EMS coordinator role will get the respect of the hospitals and state agencies they are working with as well as recognition to be taken seriously. Meghan will be considered a part of the Chief's administrative staff.

Commissioner Colligan thought that the amount of hours per week may be more than 20 – 25. He thought it might be more like 30. It should be at the discretion of the Chief.

The Chief's office is also helping with Q and A's. The Chief is being careful not to burn out the EMS Coordinator. If that were to happen, the Department will be behind in EMS billing and workers' comp. requirements.

A motion was made by Commissioners Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to replace the position of EMS Captain with that of EMS Coordinator, and the Board appoint Ms. Meghan Petrucelli to the position effective Monday, September 27, 2021. The hours for the position to be determined by the Chief, and the rate of pay determined by the Personnel Committee at \$18 per hour.

- C. Discussion and Possible Decision on Acting Lieutenant Role Assignment. The Chief explained that they were having an issue with the Acting Lieutenant role. There were a couple of SOP's and directives that were created by past leadership and certain members of the Department. They have determined that many of the SOP's and directives had been violated repeatedly. A past practice procedure was set up in this area. What they have decided to do was to set up a Lieutenant's test. They will have the CT Fire Academy administer a Lieutenant's exam. They want to keep the results good for two years.

This idea is just in preliminary discussions. The Chief's office will be meeting with the Union officials next week. The Chief's office and the Union identified the problem, and think this may be the way to proceed. The Executive Director supports the Chief's idea. The Chief wants to have something in place in case any of the officers retire. He wants to be prepared by having a succession plan in place. Commissioner Colligan agreed with the Chief. Three are officers now that are eligible to retire. The acting role allows the Chief to find out if a person is capable of doing the job or not. The Chief reminded everyone this is just preliminary. He has started to talk to the Union and the Executive Director about this. The Chief added that this will fit into his training budget.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to table this item until the Chief has more information to provide an update.

- VI. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Hinnners congratulated everyone in their new roles and those that are stepping up. Commissioner Epstein stated that as the Chairman of the Bylaws Committee, they will be meeting in October. They will be looking at some of the issues being discussed. Eventually there may be a third Town meeting to approve Bylaw changes. This has been done twice previously over the last few years. He discussed the importance of the EMS component and the conflict between career and volunteer staff. He also stressed the importance of being able to fill in for any role. Anyone of a particular rank deserves the respect that goes along with the training and the knowledge.
- VII. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Deegan, Recording Secretary

Mertie Terry, Chairwoman