

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, October 12, 2021

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners Mertie Terry (Chairwoman), Jason Hinners, David Colligan and Robert Donohue. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, President Lee Brow, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade and Firefighter Union Rep. Brett Hallden. 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 Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted with the following change: to remove "Assistant Fire Chief" from Item B, under New Business. The Chairwoman felt that due to a pending CHRO complaint, this item should not be discussed at this time until a final decision is made about the Assistant Fire Chief position.

President Brow thought that there were things that could be done ahead of time for when the Committee is ready to act on the Ass't Fire Chief position, such as the oral and written exam process. When the Committee is ready to begin the hiring process for that position, it will have everything ready to go to advertise and interview. He reminded the Committee that the full Board had given him and the Executive Director permission to prepare for the recruitment process. At the time the President and E.D. were appointed, an issue was raised by a Commissioner about the process. At that point the President stopped the process.

The Committee agreed that tonight they should decide who will work with the Executive Director to start the process over again for hiring an Assistant Fire Chief.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to keep the agenda as presented.

III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.

IV. New Business

A. Discussion and Possible Decision on Acting Lieutenant Role/Assignment. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously

approved to open up the discussion for the Acting Lieutenant Position. The Executive Director explained that this was on the agenda to give the Committee a quick summary of what the District is doing now and what they will be doing moving forward as it relates to the assignment of non-lieutenants as acting officers.

There are four duty officers now. With the language in the contract related to an SOP written by the former Fire Chief, it states that regarding duty officers, anyone that is willing to act as a duty officer must have Fire Officer I certification. The duty officers that are currently established are only mandated to get Fire Officer I once they get promoted to the position. In reviewing the SOP the way it was written, January 2019 to the present there were 27/29 times where there was an acting officer in the position of the front seat. It violated the SOP that was written and violated everything else that had to do with rules and regulations.

To address this issue the Chief's office is suggesting a lieutenant's test. They requested the CT Fire Academy to create a written exam. It will be certified to NFPA standards for Fire Officer qualifications. It would also include an oral exam that would include a panel of 4 external officers throughout the State of CT.

The cost to administer the exam would be \$500 - \$1,000. Any career personnel that have at least 18 mos. of service are eligible. They will also be considering part-time personnel with at least 24 mos. of service. The Chiefs office will serve as study guides by providing reading material, reviews of SOP's and references in the Fire Officer book.

Another consideration for this plan, is that there may not be many active fire officers left should they retire (some are eligible) or something happens putting them out of work. The end of the recruitment process will provide a list of qualified candidates to work from. If someone does not pass the written test, they will not be eligible to sit for the oral. The Chief would also like to meet with the Union to review the process. The Department will continue with officer development plans.

The Executive Director noted that the process developed is a clean, solid process. They plan to begin the testing process in January or February after the holidays. There will be a 2 week application process. After the two weeks applicants will be given a reading assignment and 6 weeks to study for the written exam. The oral exam will be within one week after that. He welcomed any Commissioner that would like to take part in the process with their experience with the Cromwell Fire District. Commissioner Hinners wanted to make sure there is equal representation between career personnel and part-time. The Chief noted that applicants will have to be dual certified as Firefighter II and EMT.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to authorize the Fire Chief to begin the process of creating a Cromwell Fire Lieutenant's exam in order to fill an Acting Lieutenant role as needed.

- B. Discussion and Possible Decision on Process for Hiring Fire Marshal and Assistant Fire Chief. The first position to discuss was the Fire Marshal. The Executive Director explained that a process for hiring needs to be defined. One process can be just allowing the Executive Director and the Fire Chief to manage it. Or they can decide to duplicate

what was done the last time with the Fire Marshal. That process consisted of testing and subject matter experts for an oral board.

The Executive Director and Fire Chief just want to establish how the Personnel Committee and the Board want them to proceed. If a decision is made to continue with the process that was used for the last Fire Marshal, they already have a process in place. It is considered a front line position associated with labor. The District has another 5 months before a permanent Fire Marshal needs to be permanently hired according to Statute. This needs to happen sooner rather than later. Commissioner Colligan would like to have the qualifications used in the last process reviewed. There were qualified people who could manage that office but did not have all the qualifications required. President Brow felt that the residency requirement needs to be reconsidered. Currently there is no residency requirement for Fire Marshal.

Commissioner Terry commented that she liked the tests and the numbers with the hiring process used the last time. That will keep everything legitimate in case anything is challenged. Commissioner Hinnners agreed with Commission Colligan. He felt the job requirements from the last time were overwhelming. The Chief's recommendation if the Committee were to change the qualifications should be Firefighter I and EMT. Everyone agreed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to fast track the Fire Marshal's position with the changes in qualifications to be: Firefighter I, EMT and Hazmat (NFPA 472 or NFPA 1072) and current Fire Marshal credentials. President Brow made an amendment to the motion defining fast tracking as having the position vetted through the Executive Director and Chief Balletto. A motion on the amendment was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the amendment by President Brow as presented.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to table the discussion on the process for hiring an Assistant Fire Chief and give the fast tracking authority to the President and Executive Director to begin the preliminary steps of the Assistant Fire Chief testing process.

- C. Update on Part-Time Hiring – Chief Balletto. The Chief reported that they have made four conditional offers. Two employees have already started. Two more people are also getting ready to work. They have just gone for their physicals. He is planning to review the job description and job application so that it can be reposted on Indeed.

The Fire Department has been reaching out to anyone that has been put on a leave of absence within the last couple of months. They are trying to find out if those people are interested in submitting letters of resignation with good intentions. This will give them an opportunity to come back should their life status change. The reason they are doing this is to reuse the PPE.

There has been some difficulty staffing certain shifts. Regarding all unscheduled single certs., they no longer have single certs that don't live in Cromwell. All the unscheduled that live in town are single cert. There were about 6 or 7 that lived out of town. Those individuals have not done anything with the Department in 2 – 2 ½ years. They have not made any efforts to improve their status.

President Brow inquired about the Fire Department's efforts to recruit volunteers. The Chief has started to work with the school system to see if they can get an EMT program started next year. They did an open house recently that had about 4 people that expressed interest. They have one person that is starting as a volunteer next week. The person has already been fitted for PPE and has been fit tested. The person has already had a physical, and has been attending the Fire I class. The Chief will be meeting with Melissa Roming to see what her thoughts are about getting people involved. There was a "Meet the Chief" open house. It was not well attended. Ass't Chief Brade is working with Vinal Tech. Cromwell has been donating their expired PPE to Vinal for their Fire program/dispatch program. They are also working with the school on their ride time for the EMT program. The Chief has been trying in the community but would welcome any suggestions. There will be a big Open House in the spring.

- D. Executive Session – Discussion on Future Strategies Involving Sharing of Staff Between Departments. *A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to enter into Executive Session to discuss the sharing of staff between departments. Chief Balletto, Ass't Chief Brade and Commissioner Donohue were invited into the Session.*

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to adjourn Executive Session at 7:35 PM, no action was taken.

- V. Commissioners' Comments. There were no comments to report.
- VI. 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 7:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Mertie Terry, Chairwoman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary