

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

Tuesday, July 20, 2021

5:00 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners Jason Hinnars (Vice Chair), David Colligan and Lee Brow (President). Commissioners Mertie Terry and Roger Rukowicz were absent. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto and Commissioners Charles Epstein and Robert Donohue.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5: 16 PM, by Vice Chairman Hinnars.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by President Brow and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- IV. New Business

- A. Discussion of Water Department Maintainer III Position. The Executive Director explained that this item was on the agenda as a recommendation by the President during budget negotiations. The recommendation was to have the Maintainer III position come before the Personnel Committee for action. It is an approved, budgeted position and is part of the Water Department. It was recommended that the Personnel Committee authorize the Water Operations Manager to proceed with the recruitment for the Maintainer III.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Brow and unanimously approved to give the Water Operations Manager permission to move forward on filling the Maintainer III position for the Water Department.

- B. Discussion of Part-Time HR Assistant. Commissioner Hinnars had put this item on the agenda. He had a few informal conversations with the Executive Director about adding a part-time HR assistant to handle some of the workload. Their discussions included filing and things that could be added to a checklist that someone could run with on a part-time basis. Mr. Neto added that any help on the HR side of things would be greatly appreciated. There was some discussion about an HR Specialist or Generalist. Someone that is aware of those functions related to human resources. An Administrative Assistant

would be helpful, but someone is needed that has more knowledge of human resources' issues. The candidate would be a part-time consultant with knowledge about labor laws, collective bargaining agreements and assisting with Division Heads on employee matters. Currently when there are complicated issues that cannot be resolved by in-house staff, the District would seek legal opinions.

Mr. Neto added there is a position at Town Hall which is an HR coordinator. That function deals with concerns about benefits and other employee issues. The Executive Director's Office deals with HR-related items from the Water Department and Fire Department. It would be more cost effective to have an expert in-house rather than seeking legal advice on every issue that comes up. Currently there is no funding for this type of position, but Mr. Neto has been thinking about this position for a while and has identified a need. There was a discussion about the part-time HR position at Town Hall. It was noted that the candidate filling the position needs to remain objective with management and labor.

A motion was made by President Brow, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to have the Executive Director research the position at Town Hall and see if the person currently in that position would be interested in the District's proposed position.

If that person is not interested in the District's position, there needs to be some discussion on the next steps such as when and where they will find the resources for it. Should it be held until the next budget cycle? Are there funds that could be used? The position is needed, but if it cannot be funded this year, then perhaps next year. Mr. Neto added that he is looking at this issue for the long term. It would be important to get the funding in place for the position as is the plan for the rest of the budget going forward.

- C. Discussion of Outside HR Vendor. Related to the previous topic, Commissioner Hinners wanted to discuss the status of considering an outside HR vendor. A presentation was done on TEAMS and presented to the Board by Blum Shapiro a few months back. Some quotes were given at that time. Commissioner Hinners would like to see some attention given to this. Mr. Neto explained that vendors tend to be a little more expensive because they pay the same person plus a 20% - 25% markup, sometimes even larger. Mr. Neto explained that there was \$18,000 allocated in the budget to do some work in this area. At the time of the presentation, the other issue that a vendor would be responsible for is the Employee Handbook. COVID had taken place shortly after the presentation. There were additional expenses for the District related to payroll and COVID so the funds that were allocated for the HR project were re-appropriated. If the District were to hire an HR Specialist, the Handbook could be one of the responsibilities for that person. There may be other organizations/vendors that are smaller that provide these types of services at a lower cost.

A motion was made by President Brow, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved for the Executive Director to move forward with the exploratory research on all HR options, and continue the process that had already started prior to COVID to come back to the Personnel Committee with recommendations for an HR vendor for the District.

- D. Discussion and Possible Decision on Full-Time Communication Manager Position. The Executive Director explained that through the budget cycle and deliberations, the Board

appropriated some funds to recognize a possible change in Communications from part-time Dispatch Supervisor to full-time Manager. He asked the Personnel Committee if they still are in favor of upgrading the part-time Dispatch Supervisor to a full-time Communications Manager. The Executive Director recommended that the Committee move on the position. The District has spent \$3 million on a sophisticated communication system. This system is going to require more attention. There are also plans to bring more activity into the Communication Center. All of these elements need the attention of a full-time Communications Manager.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Brow and unanimously approved to offer the full-time Communication Manager position to Justin Lonergan. He has been working with the vendors, working on the new communication system as well as the security system, and learning the programming of the new radios. Any MOU's or agreements that Mr. Lonergan works on will go through the Executive Director and the Board. This position is a salary position, and an additional \$27,000 was budgeted for it. There is no overtime associated with this position. This will become effective July 26, 2021 or August 1, 2021, depending on what works for Mr. Lonergan. It was also noted that Mr. Lonergan will have flex time so that he can work with staff on all shifts.

- E. Discussion of Non-CBA Employee Increases. The Executive Director explained that every year the Personnel Committee identifies how much COLA to provide to the non-union employees. This year was different in that originally it was a COLA across the board of 2½ %. This affected the Water budget and General Fund. After the first Town meeting which did not pass the budget, the District was asked to modify the Water Department budget to reduce expenses since that was the reason the first proposed budget was voted down. The District came back with a 2% COLA for the Water Department, and the General Fund stayed the same. With that modification, the budget was passed.

Also in the budget was a salary increase initially developed for the front line laborers in the Water Division to bring them to a more equivalent salary matrix with other laborers at Town Hall doing similar duties. This was done for the Water Division staff two years ago, and it is being done this year. The original plan was to give this increase to the laborers and the Administrative Assistant who has been performing exceptionally well on the delinquent water account program. Through budget deliberations the Personnel Committee included everyone that works for the Water Division to be eligible for the Water equity increase. That included the Accounts Receivable clerk in the Water Division. Two weeks ago the Personnel Committee decided to include the other two Administrative Assistants in the office because they also perform water functions as backup to the other Water Division staff. This presented a challenge because the backup staff were already going to receive a 2 ½ % COLA increase, and get the 1.75% salary bump for water staff equity. This meant that the other two Administrative Assistants were going to receive more than the amount being given to the direct Water Division employees who were only going to receive 2% for a COLA per budget recalculating. This is the reason why this was put on the agenda.

The Executive Director came up with a couple of options. One option would be that everyone gets a 2% COLA which would be the most cost effective and the least problematic option. The other option is the most radical but the best for the budget. It would be to undo some decisions that involve the initial salary program which was for the laborers and one individual. That would mean going back to the initial proposal for

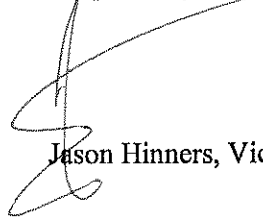
just compensating the laborers and one Administrative Assistant. Commissioner Colligan suggested the 2% COLA across the board and giving the water equity increase of 2% a lower rate so everyone is eligible. The reduced rate was 1.75%.

A motion was made by President Brow, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved that all non-bargaining unit District employees receive a 2% COLA increase.

A motion was made by President Brow, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved that all Water Division employees plus the two Administrative Assistants in the office receive an increase of 1.75% as part of the Water Division salary equity program. It was clarified that this increase includes the Executive Director.

- V. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Donohue asked if the issue of the Communication Manager will be on the Board agenda for this evening. Because the meeting is not a Special meeting, they will be able to act on the recommendation of the Personnel Committee to offer Mr. Lonergan the position of full-time Communication Manager.
- VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Brow, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 5:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Jason Hinnners, Vice Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
8-3-21