

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

Executive Committee Meeting

Friday, April 16, 2021

5:00 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners Roger Rukowicz (Chairman), Mertie Terry, Allan Spotts and Robert McIntyre. Also attending was Executive Director Julius Neto, Accountant Michael Alibrio, Acting Fire Chief Jason Brade and Commissioner Robert Donohue.

Per Executive Order No. 7B, Governor Lamont has ordered and directed that in-person open meeting requirements be suspended. Therefore, the Executive Committee Meeting will be held via conference call. Members of the public may send questions or comments to meetings@cromwellfd.com on any agenda item.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:01 PM, by Chairman Rukowicz.
- II. Approval of the Agenda. Chairman Rukowicz had a change to make to the Agenda. He asked to delete Item V., Public Comment. He stated that the Committee will be making changes to the budget based on input from the public in the first "Public Comment" which is Item III. To have a second public comment at the end of the agenda would not be helpful to the Committee because decisions will be finalized during this meeting and a second public comment would be too late for consideration.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to eliminate Item V. on the Agenda and to modify it so that Adjournment is Item V.
- III. Public Comment. The Executive Director did not receive any public comments to report. There were individuals that had dialed into the meeting. Mr. Alibrio was one of them.
- IV. New Business
 - A. Fire Department Budget, FY 2021/2022. The Executive Director had distributed a packet of budget information to each Committee member earlier in the day to prepare them for tonight's meeting. The packet was the overall budget of the District. The highlights were identified as the "burden" on the Budget. The Executive Director was available to provide a review or answer questions. The Chairman asked for an overview.

Commissioner McIntyre received some last minute information from Assistant Chief Stacy regarding the **stairs at the training building** which had been submitted after the Chief's initial budget talks with the Executive Director. Commissioner McIntyre wanted to know if that item could be added to the budget requests for the Fire Department. Chief Brade noted that the item should go under Capital Expenditures. It is an additional "burden" on the Capital requests, but it is not to say it is not needed. The Executive Director did not want to add any additional items to the Capital requests, but stated it will be up to the Committee to determine if it should be added. He felt that the budget is already burdened with many expenses, but it could be discussed under Capital Expenses tonight. Mr. Neto felt this item should be added to next year's budget.

Commissioner McIntyre distributed copies of the information and pricing regarding the stairs. The cost for the fabrication of the stairs is \$5,722 and the cost for cutting holes and doing the framing is \$1,563. The Chairman felt that this item was submitted too late to be considered for this budget. He suggested waiting on it until next year. If there is any money available at the end of the year, this item could be considered at that point. Commissioner Spotts agreed with the Chairman.

Commissioner Terry asked if there would be a safety issue at the Training Tower if they did not accept this last minute budget item. Chief Brade explained what is at the Training Tower. They do some ladder training but there is no staircase there so they can't reach the top 2 stories. Since those 2 stories are not being used, there is no safety issue at this point.

The Chair asked if this could be absorbed by the Health & Safety/Building Committee. The Executive Director noted that the Committee does not have a line item budget. Already, Repairs & Maintenance at Court St. are outrageous regarding spending. They have had some expenses that were unavoidable. Repairs and maintenance that were not done over the last couple of years is now catching up with the Department.

The Executive Director also noted that there are already some unbudgeted items in payroll that were part of the continuity plan, and were voted on by the Board. The Executive Director noted that because the proposal to add stairs to the 3rd and 4th floors of the Training Room was not on this agenda, it did not have to be voted on. Some in the group thought this item should be carried over to next year's budget.

A motion was made by Chairman Rukowicz, seconded by Chairman Spotts and unanimously approved to table the request for stairs at the Training Tower until next year.

Mr. Neto went on to explain the **General Fund**. It is a \$6.2 million budget all inclusive. The Water Division is \$2.6 million all inclusive; 33% of that is related to benefits and wages. The MERS retirement is becoming a financial hit to employers getting larger every year. Right now only full time firefighters are eligible for MERS, but the District is entering negotiations with the Union for the part-time firefighters to become eligible for the plan. It will be a big ticket item. Insurance costs have also gone up. In the public forum it was difficult for the Executive Director to explain things in more detail because the part-time firefighters represented by Local 4662 are currently in negotiations with the District. The confidential information if made public would take away from those negotiations.

Mr. Neto noted that Mr. Palmieri is interested in utilizing an open **Maintainer III** position which is part of his **Water Division** staff structure. There needs to be dollars allocated before decisions can be made by the Personnel Committee. That goes for salary increases as well. These items need to be submitted, but the Personnel Committee needs to have the opportunity to ask about the COLA's or other programs. If there is no funding to support some of these items, they will need to be rolled over into the following budget year.

Mr. Neto announced that **property insurance** also went up. The pump house at the **Nike site** is a \$250,000 system that needs to be insured as well as the **communications tower/flag pole**. The **generator** is also a part of that. These items are all expensive to insure. **Fiber** is also very expensive and adds more additional cost to the budget.

Adding the **second ambulance** was also not included in the budget. The budget is so overburdened already that Mr. Neto did not add second ambulance coverage for 365 days/7 days/wk. because it would be too expensive. The proposed budget is a continuation of what is being done in the budget today with second ambulance coverage for 5 days a wk./12 hrs./day based on analysis. The hourly rate for part-timers will go from \$15/hr. to \$16/hr. There is also the Safer Grant to add into the mix. The grant allowed the Fire Department to hire 4 full-time career firefighters. There is an assumption that the District pays 25% of their cost, and gets reimbursed 75%. However, when the grant was approved, the salary structure was a low wage. Next year the District will be reimbursed 35% by the Feds. There is \$211,000 in additional cost to the District from what is being reimbursed.

The Executive Director moved on to **Capital requests**. There is a need to replace the apparatus. The Fire Department lost the rescue truck a couple of years ago. They are repurposing an engine to make it a rescue pumper. Last year there was \$100,000 that was put in the kitty. For this year's budget there is \$250,000 because the Executive Director asked the Board when they thought they wanted to replace the rescue truck. The response was 12 – 18 months which puts that request in this fiscal year. There is now \$450,000 in that account.

Mr. Neto also discussed the **Ass't Chief's vehicle** which needs to be replaced because it is rusting. The other item is an \$80,000 estimate to replace the **concrete apron at West St.** It is an estimate but there are alternatives. Three or four years ago Commissioner Donohue did a patch which was thought to be temporary. By now it should have been replaced. A decision needs to be made to either appropriate \$80,000 or appropriate another patch job.

Also there is \$25,000 for **radios for Fire Police**. This is related to the new communication system. The old system Hyterra's do not work with the new system which is digitized. If it is decided to provide communication to Fire Police, that is the cost.

Mr. Neto briefly discussed the items for the Water Dept. The **Water Main Truck** requested is \$85,000. There is \$35,000 allocated for the **SCADA System**, Phase I. The total cost of the system is \$90,000. This system links alarms and controls. There is \$60,000 for the **pre-engineering study** for the **interconnection project**. The District has to front the money, and then be reimbursed by the State which will roll it into a \$1.5 or \$2 million grant or low interest rate loan.

A pie chart was also included in the budget packet which was self-explanatory. The Executive Director added supporting documentation on the financial impact to taxpayers if the District were to increase the mil rate either by one-quarter, one-half, three-quarters or one mil. The last page indicates \$1,096, 929 in the Fund Balance. A portion of it could be used but there needs to be some dollars left in there in case of an emergency.

Chairman Rukowicz thanked the Executive Director and all staff involved in putting together the budget packets. The packets will help the Committee members understand what the budget requests are for. The Executive Director, Fire Chief and Accountant were present and available to answer any questions.

The Water Department information will be set aside until Monday night's meeting.

There was a lengthy discussion on the **Fire Department budget**. The first section was the **General Fund**. It showed the 20/21 budget, the 21/22 requests, the money that was approved for this year and what was requested for next year.

Mr. Neto explained that the first category starting with "01" is identified to show where the income, taxes and money are coming in as it relates to the expenses following that. The District is anticipating 3.7% less revenue year over year. This was determined based on history. There is less billing on the medical side. There has not been any money identified from the General Fund that was transferred from the Fund Balance. Last year some money was moved in. The revenue side is weaker year over year which puts pressure on the negative number at the end. The District is using a 99% collectable rate which is a little more than the tax collector.

Commissioner Terry had questions regarding the **employees' insurance contribution**. She wanted more information about the numbers. Mr. Neto explained that in the budget there are non-contractual individuals and contractual individuals. The non-contracted individuals pay 7.5% of their insurance. It is increasing to 9%. Most individuals with contracts pay 15% (firefighters). The Dispatcher Union members will go up to 10%. From a market place, it is relatively inexpensive, but they will be asked to pay a little more. The Personnel Committee will have to make the final decision. Management will bill the amount, but the Board needs to approve it, same as the COLA's. Insurance charges to the District have also increased. The District's insurance rates are based on a calendar year, not a fiscal year. The first 6 mos. of the year the District knows what their insurance rates are, but the last 6 months we do not know what they will be. Part-time employees do not have medical, and/or pension benefits. If negotiations with the part-time firefighters dictate that some pension and medical will be provided, then for every dollar the District pays the employee, they also have to give to the State to pay for pension costs. These figures are a big driver year over year. Every dollar increase to the hourly rate for the part-timers costs the District an additional \$33,000 even though the salary is low. That includes MERS and insurance.

Commissioner Spotts questioned the operating transfers for \$100,000. Mr. Neto explained it is coming out of the Tower fund. Every year the District gets income from the Tower to help offset some communication initiative. Instead of depositing some of those funds into the bank, they are put into the Communication budget to help pay for some of the services or equipment. The Town also gets the same amount of money. Commissioner Spotts asked about funding coming from the Federal Government for COVID relief. The Executive Director noted that the money coming from the Federal

Government is going directly to the Town. The District does not receive any of those funds. The Town can but does not have to share any of it with the District unless there are projects down the road that require a combination of services under the Town and the District. The items noted on the federal funding that were given to the town identified "water" as one of the entities. Sewer and water were identified as categories by the Feds. The Fire Department in Cromwell is where the first responders are, yet the Federal Government gave the money to the Town and not the District. Most of that funding will go to the Board of Education. Most of the items identified were for the Board of Ed.

Chairman Rukowicz had a question under the **FMO revenue**. The FMO is planning to establish a fee schedule for their services. He asked if those fees were included in this budget worksheet. The Chief noted that the estimated amount of revenue is \$10,000. They are estimating that amount because they don't know what kind of infrastructure is going to be proposed. A lot of the income will be from plan reviews which are new projects coming into town. The estimates come from items that can be inspected or permitted.

Mr. Neto added that the Town attorney is under the impression that the FMO is going to need ordinances to implement these fees. He received information from the District's attorney who is under the impression that if the services are performed by District staff, ordinances are not needed. Mr. Neto advised the District's attorney that he needs to contact the Town attorney to come to an agreement on what the District's requirements will be to implement fees. If the District needs an ordinance, it needs to be drafted and presented to the Town Council for permission to provide a fee. One is for fire hydrants and the other is collecting for false alarms. The District will have until July 1 to provide a fee schedule. The other issue is Fire Watch. They were charging \$25 for that service. The labor rates to support that have doubled or tripled combined with insurance and MERS. It is no different than private police duty. The Chief has had discussions with the Police Chief and they have compared services and fees. He has also done the same by comparing fees in other towns. Mr. Neto stated we need to develop true cost for services and combine it with labor costs.

The next item was the annual fee of the **Tax Collector**. The fee is \$60,000. It will be the same next year. The District does not have its own Tax Collector. In the future they may consider it, but there are other costs associated with it that need to be looked into.

The next item was the **Commission expense**. In the past it had been \$16,000 but recently it was reduced to \$10,000. Mr. Neto added that those funds are used to support the Commission in areas like morale, recognition plaques, ceremonial things, polo shirts, badges, costs associated with the election, advertising for meetings or bids, nameplates or mailing packets. This item includes anything associated with running the Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Spotts discussed the fact that there needs to be some serious cuts to this budget. It is 27% higher than last year, and there is no way he will vote for it. He stated that all of this information should have been given to the Committee members a week ago. Instead it was given to them on the same day as the meeting. They needed more time to review it. The Chairman noted that they are not finished reviewing, and it will be up to the Committee to come up with cuts. The Executive Director noted that the District has until mid-May to finalize a budget. Right now they are about 4 weeks behind the normal timeline. Chairman Rukowicz added that he understood the cost of everything in

the budget including the Fire Truck. There are a few options on how that can be accomplished, but the decision will be left to the whole Committee.

Computer operations was the next item. Commissioner Spotts asked why the operating expenses went up 12%. Mr. Neto explained that the District is getting a new server to replace the old server. It is part of infrastructure improvements so that cyber security is maintained. Mr. Alvarado is very focused on cyber security. However, there is a \$5,000 difference year after year. Mr. Alibrio added that the IT capital requests are in Capital. The main driver to the increase for the IT budget which is split between the General Fund and the Water fund are the added security measures such as software and other backup contingencies for the network. The added cost is for added security. The added security was implemented partway through this fiscal year. It was unbudgeted, but Mr. Alvarado saved money on other items he had planned for this year. Some of those funds were reallocated to cover those increases.

Next year will be a full year so there will be a full year increase. The fees include a security piece of software that monitors everyone's computer and will shut down and isolate if a virus gets into that computer. That is a new monthly cost that was implemented this year. Commissioner Spotts was looking for more detail about the added expenses. The Executive Director explained that one of the things he has been discussing with Mr. Alvarado is cyber security being a major threat and typically there would be a safety net surrounding the servers. They needed to go to the next level so that data can be protected. If a virus is detected, it will shut down a computer at the desktop. These systems are critical for first responders and utilities. The SCADA System can keep monitoring devices under control.

Also, **Service Agreements** are more costly every year. Mr. Alibrio added that the IT budget went up \$3,000 for network antivirus hardware and software license renewals. Mr. Alibrio noted that when a new employee is added, there is cost to add a new email account. The District has more employees, and Microsoft also increased their rates. Mr. Alibrio suggested making little cuts anywhere possible.

The next item to review was **administrative accounts**. There are only six items under it. It did increase by 2.1%. The Chairman thought that was reasonable.

Office of the Fire Chief. Commissioner Rukowicz asked about payroll. The office consists of a Chief, 2 Ass't Chiefs and an Administrative Assistant. Chief Brade moved his payroll from the Fire Marshal's Office to the Chief's office so there was a decrease in Marshal's salary from payroll. The \$63,000 increase is not all the Fire Marshal. There was a good savings with the Fire Marshal salary because the new Fire Marshal did not need benefits. This offset the costs for FMO. There was an increase on the Fire side. Lisa is now under a union contract, and the Assistant Chief will not play a role in the FMO. Jason Brade has split his time in the past, but the FMO now has Harold Holmes as a backup to the Fire Marshal. The Fire Department does need 2 Assistant Chiefs to focus on all current issues.

Mr. Neto discussed the staff structure needed in the Fire Chief's office and the Fire Marshal's Office. Operating expenses in the Chief's office went up \$3,500. Items include the Chief's memberships, supplies, training, cell phone and postage. They discussed possible new training once the new Chief arrives. There are certifications and training that have to be maintained to remain certified and licensed. \$15,000 was

requested for next year. The account has been about \$18,000 for the last 3 years. Mr. Alibrio thought it should be increased slightly because historically they have spent slightly more in that category.

EMS Fire Operations. They discussed the large jump in payroll. Commissioner Rukowicz reported they have no control over that. Every category went up which includes utilities. Mr. Alibrio stated that the second ambulance coverage falls under the Part-time staff. Commissioner Spotts asked if the second ambulance coverage was for one person or a full crew included in the \$865,494 request. Mr. Alibrio explained that right now there is \$50,000 for one shift, 12 hrs/day, 5 days a week @\$16 per hr. He added that the \$50,000 is just payroll; nothing is included with it, not taxes, insurance or anything else. It is just paying someone for a shift at \$16 an hour.

The Chairman noted that it is expensive to staff the **second ambulance**, and in discussions with the Executive Director and Mr. Alibrio, the need for a second ambulance could be declining. The Chief will be making a presentation at the next Fire Operations Committee meeting regarding second ambulance coverage. The Chair stated that the second ambulance is not a permanent thing. The ED stated that the Commission has been very vocal about keeping the second ambulance going because it is about service. That is the reason to have this item in the budget. This coverage continues today, but it is unbudgeted.

The original proposal was for seven days a week which was not affordable. This item was budgeted because it is what the Commissioners also want. Looking at the data, it seems that the EMS calls are decreasing, but they are capturing the second call. There has been the thought that there is increased revenue. However, there is no increased revenue. When covering the second call, the data shows they are losing less money, but not getting any more money to pay for the additional person for coverage, but they are providing a service. From a business perspective, it doesn't work; but they are not a business, they are a service provider.

There are items in the budget that are driven by the Commissioners' requests over the last 6 months. Chief Brade explained that in discussing the second ambulance coverage with the other officers and Union the thought was it would be OK because they would be providing a better service. Chief Brade explained the staffing process. The challenge is service vs. cost. Ambulance service is not a profitable environment. The majority of Fire Departments do not transport.

Consumable supplies. Operating expense went up 53%. The Chief stated that was due to increased cost. I-pads are now in all the apparatus. That includes a monthly fee for each one for service. They have connectivity wherever they are. They no longer have to come back to the station to upload. Mr. Alibrio reported that this wasn't a budgeted line item until this current year. I-pads were also put into the ambulances. That is the reason for the increased cost. The Chief explained that the I-pads in the apparatus have mobile data terminals. That funding comes out of the Dispatch budget. Prior to the I-pads, they had Toughbooks, and they were very expensive. They would save significant cost over time by purchasing 3 I-pads @\$350/pc. They are saving \$50/month times each I-pad. The operational duty officer was upgraded from a flip phone to an I-Phone. They can now research from the field. Tough books were about \$4,500 each.

Signals & Alarms. There is a 129.6% increase in operating expenses. This is not part of the Fire Chief's budget, but has to do with the new communication system. The Executive Director explained that the District has to provide \$40,000 in fiber. All voting sites need to have fiber. These extra costs are the price to have the new communication system. Commissioner Spotts felt that the communication upgrades were necessary. However, he felt that some of the other requested items were unbelievable.

Fire Marshal. There is a 7.1% reduction. It was noted that the Fire Marshal that was hired is very knowledgeable and savvy. He has been very helpful to the Department. He retired from the New Haven Fire Department so he was hired without the District having to provide any benefits for him. The District is very fortunate to have the optimum level of service they are receiving compared to the salary being paid to the Fire Marshal.

Communications will be discussed Monday.

Building & Grounds. 5.2% increase. This category includes the firehouses and the other buildings owned by the District for maintenance, repairs and utilities. It is a reasonable request.

Training. 57% increase. Mr. Alibrio added that in the Fire Marshal's budget there was \$2,500 in training. He moved that item into this one so all the training line items are in one place. That is part of the \$10,000 increase. \$2,500 is from the Fire Marshal request. Career training at \$5,000 remains the same. The Department took on approximately 30 part-time staff. This is the training cost for EMT's and to get their licenses renewed. It is an easy place to cut, but staff has to be trained, and funding is needed to train them. \$2,500 was added to the FMO because they are the ones who need to keep their certifications and memberships current. They did not get money in the past so they were using money from Operating Expenses. The Fire Department now has a Training Officer who will be responsible for training of all department members in all divisions. The increase in this item is to cover the cost of additional staff training. Costs for classes and certifications are also getting more expensive. Mr. Alibrio added that the item used to be around \$20,000 to \$25,000. That has gone down in recent years, but it always has been up in the \$20,000 range. During staffing changes things were getting cut to accommodate the changes. The Chief is trying to get the training budget back to where it used to be.

Mr. Neto added that the OSHA consultation that was recently done had provided guidance in terms of training requirements and levels of training. The level of training needs to be the same whether it is a full time career firefighter or a part-time or volunteer staff member. We have to pay staff for mandatory training as well. It is the labor law. There is also a cost for officers. They need to have mandatory and special training. That training account also pays for training materials and supplies.

Insurance and benefits. Life insurance went up 47.1%, and the Pension/MERS went up 77%. The only way to cut this category is to cut staff. Mr. Alibrio was researching the increase in premiums. They had to build in some assumptions to these costs. Regarding hiring a Fire Chief, they needed to assume that the person is going to need medical coverage. That is an additional \$33,000 to the person's salary. The union members have to have medical insurance. If money is not budgeted, it will not be spent. This budget was built on known costs for medical, dental and MERS. The increase to medical and dental costs is done on a calendar year not fiscal year. Mr. Alibrio added

that the increase was 8% for 2020 premiums over 2019. The Executive Director noted that the District is in a new phase, and it has to be budgeted accordingly. It is known what the cost for the next 6 mos. of the next fiscal year will be. Those costs are in effect until Dec 31, 2021. Mr. Alibrio and Mr. Neto have to assume there will be an increase in 2022. It could be a 15% increase. The increase from 2020/2021 was 8%.

Debt service. Mr. Alibrio stated it is what it is. It is based on current bonding. There will be significant drop offs in debt service over the next couple of fiscal years. That is something to keep in mind if considering an increase in the mil rate, water rates or bonding. All the different factors need to be considered when deciding on a mil rate.

Apparatus and Equipment. Increase of 73.7% on maintenance and equipment. Repairs & Maintenance covers: Scott inspections and repairs, annual pump testing, hose testing, ladder testing, Hearst tool checks, repairs, engineers' supplies for Hearst tool maintenance, the meter maintenance increase due to getting a service contract for the stretcher and power load systems and maintenance for the stretcher. This last fiscal year there was a repair that needed to be done on the stretcher. The repair was \$8,000. The service reps worked out a deal to purchase a maintenance contract. The cost of this contract was only \$500 over the cost of the repair. That repair was more or less a wash in terms of money paid out for the repair and the maintenance contract itself. This repair made the Department realize the importance of maintaining their stretcher systems. They could be held liable if stretchers are not maintained and not working. The repairs are not cheap on that equipment. This item had been removed from the last 2 budgets. This item covers maintenance of the batteries, stretchers, power loaders and stair chairs. Commissioner McIntyre stated you get a lot out of the maintenance contract for the price considering what the alternative is.

Repair and Maintenance of Vehicles. Went up 34%. There are more repairs because the apparatus is aging.

Fuel oil went up 31%. Gas prices at the pumps are higher. They do receive fuel on a State bid.

Non-Capital Equipment. Up 59.6%. This item consists of hose fittings, nozzles and valves. It is all replacement of things due to aging equipment. The Fire Department is presently over-budget in this category. They are trying to revert back to the 2019/2020 budget. This item was cut by several thousand dollars over the last year or two, and equipment did not get repaired. They are trying to get things back to the way they were.

Apparatus & Equipment. 27.7% increase. No one had any questions. It seemed like a large increase, but there were no suggestions for improvement.

Capital Operating Transfers Total Revenue Expenses. Capital is a separate line item. Mr. Neto did not put any money from the fund balance to offset any of the expenses. He wanted the Committee to see the numbers. Monies can be moved to remove some expenses. Capital requests may need to be evaluated.

Turnout gear, \$25,000. This figure will cover 8 sets of gear. Last year there were 2 sets. Contractually, the career staff should receive 2 sets of gear. The new sets recommended by NFPA have a life of 10 years. The Department tries to issue each career staff member with one new set and then a slightly used set. They also have

expirations on them. In addition, they hired 4 people from the Safer Grant which required outfitting them with gear. Most did not get new sets of gear. They also hired some part-time scheduled staff under the new staffing model. It was difficult to find gear that fits. It is not one size fits all. The Department is legally obligated to give them a set of gear that is fit for them.

There are some staff that have not been participating much that have gear. The Department has also received gear from other fire departments as a favor to Cromwell because Cromwell does not have the gear to outfit some of the part time staff. Each person has a cost associated with them. The Chief has discussed sending out letters to all those not participating. Gear is a safety component. As an employer the District is supposed to provide them with personal protective equipment. The Chief noted they are also short on part-time staff. From a recent employment ad, there were 10 applicants, 5 were interviewed and 4 were hired.

\$25,000 for SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus). This is a firefighter's life line next to the panic button on the radio. Every year the Department tries to do upgrades. There is a little money in there now for upgrades. Inspections were done recently, and some had to be pulled offline. The Chief wants to hold off any purchasing for this year to next year so they can buy in bulk and save some money. The Chair discussed some of the grants being awarded to surrounding Departments. The Chief added that hopefully the new Chief coming in has grantwriting experience to pursue grants. Mr. Alibrio added that there is some money available in the Trust Fund. **There is \$47,000 available in the trust fund. It can be transferred to pay for some of this equipment.**

Network server upgrade is \$20,000 for the facilities maintenance program. The line item for that is based on the OSHA volunteer compliance consultation. The Department is anticipating spending money to bring the facilities up to OSHA standards. Once OSHA provides their recommendations, there needs to be compliance in order to avoid fines and additional repair costs. The Department is trying to budget some monies in preparation for any recommendations. Currently, there are no items to be addressed. The \$20,000 is an insurance policy. Mr. Alibrio added that there is \$27,000 in the Equipment Reserve Fund for the facilities maintenance program. There is \$27,000 available on this line item. **Adding the \$20,000 that is already in there, it would leave \$47,000 available if nothing gets spent between now and then.**

Bunker room door window modifications. \$4,000 had been appropriated, and the money is still there. This is part of the second floor rehabilitation to accommodate sleeping quarters at Court St. Chief Terenzio initially started this request. Murphy beds, bunker room and plumbing facilities are roughly \$30,000 in this year's budget which will be used. There is an additional \$10,000 needed to do the project right. It is one project covering two budget years. They will be looking to modify the second floor Chief's office, Assistant's office and a bathroom. **If the extra funds are not appropriated, they will work within the \$30,000 that is already there and eliminate the bathroom.**

Ambulance rechasis. The Chairman asked where the \$100,000 went. There was \$30,000 added to this account. There is a total of \$130,000 for this item. Currently there are some challenges with the vendor using that quote and doing the work. A new quote was provided today that was much higher. **The Chief will be following up on this, but anything over \$130,000 to rechasis does not make sense.**

Website redesign \$2,000. Mr. Neto stated that the website is less than user friendly. It does not have the ability to use the website to connect. The Water Department's focus is going to be an online payment system on a safe network. This allows the redesign to be user friendly with the ability to pay a water bill on line. There is a big difference between the Town's website and the District's. The redesign figure is 50% of the cost. The Water Division has \$2,000 in their capital budget.

The next two items are split between **Water and General Fund** for a total of \$8,000.

8 Gas Meters. 6 are for Fire and 2 for FMO. Last month 6 of the meters failed their calibration testing. All at once they are coming due. There is one or two that are still operational. The sensors are going bad and need to be replaced on the others. Their life expectancy is not that great. The Chair thought this was a necessity. The cost is roughly \$800 per meter. The total cost would be \$6,500. Commissioner Spotts questioned the Switch up redundancy. Mr. Neto explained it is the ability to have the network fully redundant so it does not go down. Mr. Alibrio explained the website redesign, switches and UPS redundancy on the General fund are \$2,000 and \$6,000. The same amount will be on the Water Capital. Total cost \$4,000 and \$12,000. Because the District has first responders and a utility they need redundancy.

Ass't Chief Vehicle Replacement, \$35,000. The Chairman wanted to table this until next year. There has never really been Assistant Chief vehicles in the past, but there are three older utility vehicles. One is the second fire marshal vehicle, the staff truck and the red Ass't Chief vehicle. The Chief had Chris Logan evaluate all 3 vehicles. The one with the most rust and body rot is the red Assistant Chief's vehicle. This vehicle has frame rot. According to Chris that vehicle should be replaced first. It is a front line response piece. The staff truck has been repurposed to the Fire Marshal's office because that office does not have a second vehicle. The Fire Marshal's office always had 2 vehicles. Ford is building the replacement vehicle. In order to get a state bid price, it has to be a new vehicle. \$26,000 has been appropriated for the vehicle without any bells and whistles. The ED is going to challenge the Chief to find the funds somewhere. The frustration with this is that a plan was made, but the plan keeps changing every time there is some type of meeting. The Department needs to stick with the plan and the appropriation. If not, it forces spending from somewhere else. Decisions should not be made unless there are finances appropriated to back up the decision. Certain parts of the Commission keep making decisions without the financial resources to support it.

The Chairman went around the room to get the Committee's input on whether or not to wait on the red Assistant Chief's vehicle. Commissioner Terry did not want to wait to replace the vehicle because of the safety factor. Commissioner Spotts would rather wait if it is possible and no one is at risk. He also asked if one of the Police Department vehicles can be repurposed as a fire inspection vehicle. There are two that are being taken off line, and they are SUV's. In order to repurpose a Police vehicle, the Town would have to put it up for sale and the District would have to be one of the bidders.

Commissioner McIntyre thought that the District should not wait to do one of these smaller projects such as a replacement vehicle. It seems that the Board has put off some of these larger initiatives, and now everything is coming due all at once. He would like to take care of one thing now. The Committee needs time to digest the numbers. They decided to put this item on hold to discuss at the end of this meeting.

FMO Permit Software, \$3,000. This was explained as part of the package for billing some services and issuing permits. The software ties into the Red Alert program as well. It will help entering and generating permit information and print it out. **This initiative will produce revenue coming into the FMO.**

FMO Red Alert Investigation. Funds for the software were budgeted a couple of years ago. The inspection module was moved over and purchased to integrate all the FMO information into it. It is working well. This item is the other side to that which are investigations. There are not a lot of them, so it is something that could be put off. **This item would help with paperwork, but they have been used to doing without for many years, so it will be considered to put this off until next budget.**

Knox Box System Repair Upgrade, \$13,000. The Chief explained that on the apparatus there is a key system. On all commercial businesses in Town there is a lock box. A fire dept. box in the box holds the keys to the business the box is on. The Fire Dept. has a master key to open the box, take their keys and go into their business. They do not want to lose those master keys. Because of aging equipment on the apparatus and with one apparatus left in operation, the key is left on the apparatus or on a ring there. If that key is lost, the District would be on the hook for replacing the locks for every box in the entire District. That one key can open every business in Town. The boxes the key is put into and lock the key actually locks into the box on the apparatus. You have to punch in a security code that identifies who is taking the key out. Punch in your code. It records who has the key. Take key out and go back into the building and it records when the key goes back in. It re-secures itself. Each front line apparatus has that key in it. **Over time those boxes have not been updated.** They have been breaking and are no longer upgradeable. Technology has exceeded their lifetime. They considered buying real estate lock boxes and attach them to something just to secure the key, but there is only one code for everyone so it is not known who is taking the key out of that box. They do not know what can be done at this point. Other than repair them. They have tried to repair, upgrade and replace. This has been a project between Justin Lonergan and the Chief. They can't issue new employee codes because it does not work anymore. It is difficult to track the key if it is not put back in its place. All they can do is repair them. The Chair asked if the Chief thought this was a need. **The Committee agreed that the risk outweighs the liability. This item will be left in the budget.**

Front Apron at West St. The Chairman stated that a couple of years ago, Commissioner Donohue had done a patch job for a repair and it was a good job. After a couple of years, the apron needs to either be patched again or fixed permanently. A patch job would cost about \$10,000 and to fix the apron would cost \$80,000. The repair would last about a year or so. Commissioner Terry asked if the repair can be done for \$10,000. Commissioner Donohue stated that the previous repair he did was under \$1,500. He has a quote but did not have it at this meeting. Commissioner Spotts asked how old the building was. There was a discussion about the less than stellar construction of the West Street firehouse. They discussed the issues with water in the elevator shaft. There will need to be a significant amount of dollars put aside in the future to correct some of the problematic issues with that building. The building was built on a wetland. Currently, the repair can be done for approximately \$10,000 and 2 or 3 years will last. There was a discussion about the serious cost of maintaining 3 firehouses. Some tough choices will have to be made to try to control or contain expenditures. \$6 million fire related service expenses. There are ways to control or arrest these major expenses but they are tough choices. Need to figure out long term how to manage the resources. Commissioner

Spotts discussed the fact that maybe one of the tough decisions down the road will be to close West St. There have been issues with that building since day one. With times changing, the cost to keep all three firehouses keeps rising. Mr. Neto compared Cromwell to South Fire District in Middletown that has the same population, same area to cover and only one station. What it takes to keep a station open today compared to 20 years ago is tenfold. **The Committee agreed to have a \$10,000 repair done to the West St. apron instead of the \$80,000 repair.**

Life Pack Replacement. The Chairman asked if this was an AED. The Chief reported that this request is for a replacement for \$6,500 which is a discount. They planned on replacing three and turning in the old ones for credit. The cost came way down by trading in the old ones. **The Chair stated that after having been trained on one, it is definitely a life safety measure. It is worth the \$6,500.** It was noted that these are located on the apparatus.

Radios for Fire Police and Fire Inspectors. \$2,500. The request is for 10 radios @ \$2,500 each. The Chair noted that the Fire Police were forgotten when the new radios were assigned. The Chair thought that 8 fire police radios were alot. Commissioner Donohue noted that the number 8 represents the amount of fire police members, but he did not think 8 were needed. He explained that if any one of the 8 come to a call they are initiated into the scene. If they are initiated, they have to have telecommunications. Right now they have the hand-me-down radios. They are not on the P-25 system. They are on the low band. The P-25 system will not work on the yellow radios. This means that the Fire Police have no communication with Dispatch or the Incident Commander.

There would be three plus Commissioner Donohue that would be at a scene. He suggested issuing 4 with another 2 for those that might show up at a big incident. The other two could be one at Court St. and one at West St. charging until they are needed. Based on operational decisions, the question was: what is the bare minimum to get away with to be functionally safe. From the Chiefs' or Officers' aspect, having the Fire Police go directly to the scene may or may not be good. The Chiefs and Officers don't want the Fire Police on scene before the fire apparatus get there. If they show up first, the person that made the call is going to want whoever shows up first to begin doing some type of assistance for the patient. The Department does not want to misrepresent by having the Fire Police show up first on the scene because they are not trained to do that. They discussed having the Fire Police come to Coles Road first to pick up the utility truck and then go to the scene. That is what was done in the past. The Fire Police serve a viable role on the scene so the Chief does not want to discount their presence. He feels it is vital that the Fire Police have some radios but not all. A couple can be left at Coles Road or Court St. in a charging bank where they can be picked up on the way to a scene. The Chief would like them to be marked because they are a different radio.

Fire Inspectors. The Fire Marshal's office has 2 vehicles. One is assigned to the Fire Marshal. The good radio is assigned to that vehicle. The Inspector's vehicle which is also the on-call vehicle has a portable assigned to it. The Chief wanted to follow up with Justin to find out if they should assign a portable to the other two Inspectors. He was not able to follow up with Justin because Justin was on vacation. The vehicles have radios now, both mobile and portable. The Executive Director responded for Justin to the Chief stating that portables do not need to be assigned to the other two Inspectors. The Chairman did not think 8 radios were needed for Fire Police. He left it up to the Chief to decide what is best. The Chief thought that 3 radios could be taken off the list of 8. The

Chairman suggested 4 or possibly 6 is all that is needed. Two can be put at the station. He suggested saving the other 2 if they are not given to the other Inspectors. The Chief agreed to cut the two for the Inspectors. For the remaining 8, he thought to cut 2 and leave them with 5. Commissioner Donohue suggested having 4 for his crew. The Chief thought to give 2 to the officers and keep 3 in a bank wherever. **They decided to cut the amount of radios from 10 to 5, saving \$12,500.** The Executive Director noted that this savings makes the total amount eliminated \$82,500.

The Chairman moved on to discuss the **\$450,000 for the truck fund.** The Chair stated that the figure is astronomical. Three years ago there was no money in the truck fund so \$50,000 was put into that fund. The second year \$100,000 was put in that fund. The following year another \$100,000 was put in which is where the \$250,000 came from. The Chair has discussed this with the Executive Director and thought about putting in another \$150,000. The Chair stated there is no way \$450,000 is going to be appropriated. It would cause some type of mil increase. They could put \$150,000 or \$200,000 in that fund and postpone ordering a new truck until next year. The Chair thought of putting in \$200,000 or \$250,000 to give them \$450,000 or \$500,000 for next year. The Chairman wanted to know if with the savings they made on the big truck item and other items, will there be a mil increase. Mr. Neto stated there would be a mil increase, but other items would need to be ironed out before that can be determined. If they continue to put \$100,000 or \$150,000 in every year it will be a couple of years before they would have enough in the truck fund for a new piece of equipment. The Executive Director noted that the savings of \$82,500 out of \$1.4 million is minor. **A different strategy might be to not burden the operating budget with large capital items. Pull the big capital items and obtain a loan and borrow for it and pay it off in 10 years.** As in discussions about the Chief's vehicle, the ambulance, the apparatus, if those items are removed out of this budget that would total approximately \$1.3 million, the District could borrow that amount with a 2% interest rate. Instead of adding different amounts every year, a large bundled request would hit the budget hard in one year only. Unless there are significant changes, there is going to be a tax increase as this budget stands right now. There are significant increases in benefits, staff costs, salaries. It would be less of a hit. **To come up with that kind of money, significant cuts need to be made. Mr. Neto explained some of the cuts that would need to be made to not have a tax increase.**

Commissioner Terry's thought was "how long can we kick the can down the road." She does not think the District is way out of line with what the mil rate is right now. For services the District provides, the mil rate is more than reasonable. The level and quality of response is at the lowest possible price. It is no longer sustainable with a pay rate of \$15 an hour. When citizens call 911, Cromwell is there effectively and efficiently. It is a service that the citizens take for granted over the years. They have stabilized their response and there is a cost. Other Fire Departments are taking our fully trained staff away because the other towns are offering a higher rate of pay. Instead of gradually increasing the pay rate every year, the Department is now getting hit hard unless they are going to be competitive. The revenue is not coming in to meet the demand of the cost. To hold a tax increase at this point, there needs to be serious, serious cutting. That would mean reducing firefighters, operational staff, maintainer, rechanneling the office staff, the ED position. **This is a \$1.4 million deficit. Even if \$400,000 was taken out of fund balance, it still leaves a hole.** Commissioner Terry stated the taxpayer is getting their money's worth in Cromwell for what is provided by the District. She did not think that they should be going crazy to cut things out of the budget for the sake of saying they cut things out. If anyone honestly thinks they can cut a lot out, she wanted to know what that

was. The Chair thinks the truck is the key. It is a high number. They need to figure out how they want to finance it. **The Chair wanted to defer until next year, and thought about again setting aside some funds to add to that truck fund such as \$150,000 or \$200,000.** That would help the mil rate increase. The Executive Director noted that a home worth \$250,000 in the Town of Cromwell would have a tax bill increase of \$250. That reflects an increase of 1 mil. How many people will break this down and think the FD is requesting too much money this year.

The Acting Chief said he would be having a meeting on Tuesday about adding the seventh person for a more permanent tenure because of the services they are trying to provide in the Town. This allows them to not have to wait for Hunters or someone else to back them up. The Town is expanding, Amazon, is here. There is an entire community going up at the Nike Site, Missionary Road has more housing, Springhill Suites by Marriott is open. There are more buildings, residences and hotels coming into Cromwell. The Town is growing, but some of the cuts on the table would decrease staff to serve the increased population in the same way they do now. Some of the new communities which are senior, will have increased need with new residents. They respond to Covenant Village on an almost daily basis. There will be a lot of tough choices made. The question is what is the mission, and how can it be supported financially. The level of support dictates how we respond to the community.

Monday night this Committee will be meeting again to review **Water and Communications**. The Chair suggested continuing where they left off with this truck and the other vehicle due to the fact they have been meeting for the last 2 ½ hrs.

Commissioner Spotts noted that they are talking about a \$1.3 million increase. Capital is 36%. EMS and Fire Ops is 24%. He reminded everyone about what is going to happen with the State in the next year in terms of taxes which will put a further burden on the local tax payers. The Fire District budget is almost half the budget of the Town. The Town is \$1.6, the District is \$1.3. There needs to be significant cuts that will not be easy decisions to make. The budget should be "I would like to have, but I know I am not going to get it all." A \$1.3 million increase is out of the question. The Town administration will not be accepting. He stated that we not only should be looking at the needs of the District but what is also happening statewide and how that also affects local taxpayers. Mr. Alibrio suggested the Committee think about bonding, bundle and bond.

- V. Adjournment. A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Roger Rukowicz, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
4-11-21