

# 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 Fire Department Operations Committee**

**Tuesday, March 16, 2021**

**5:00 PM**

**Coles Road Firehouse**

**105 Coles Road**

**Cromwell, CT**

**Also Via Conference Call**

**1-203-666-2275, ID 771-491-738#**

Present: Commissioners David Colligan (Chairman), Charles Epstein, Robert Donohue and Lee Brow (President). Also attending were Commissioner Roger Rukowicz, Acting Fire Chief Jason Brade, Dispatch Supervisor Justin Lonergan and Fire Marshal Ray Saracco. Fire Lt. William McKnight dialed into the meeting. Commissioner Hinners was absent.

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

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM, by Chairman Colligan.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted with the following additions to Item III: Approval of Special Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of February 3, 2021 and February 22, 2021; along with the regular Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of February 16, 2021.
- III. Approval of Meeting Minutes of February 16, 2021, Special Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of February 3, 2021, and February 22, 2021. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the regular Fire Department Operations Committee meeting minutes of February 16, 2021, and the Special Fire Operations Committee Meeting minutes of February 3, 2021, and February 22, 2021, as submitted.
- IV. Public Comment. The Executive Director did not receive any public comments for the group. There were no public comments from anyone in attendance or that dialed in.
- V. Communications Report. Chairman Colligan reported that the crossover for the radios is scheduled for next week on March 23, 2021. He received an email from Justin Lonergan reporting some issues with the drill that was held last night. The issues had to do with

microphones. He also had communications with the Clerk of the Works, Paul Zito and the Acting Fire Chief. He has not had an opportunity to speak with the Executive Director about what he has learned about all of this. Chairman Colligan would like to have a meeting with Norcom, the Executive Director, Paul Zito, the Acting Fire Chief, the Dispatch Supervisor and the other members of the Communications Subcommittee. Commissioner Colligan would like to get a crew working inside the structure again, and have a re-enactment with Norcom. The District wants to know what is happening and why. The system is not performing in the way it was explained that it would. When all the testing was done prior to this incident, everything was working. The Chairman wants to know what is causing the system to malfunction. He will be working on a date to schedule this meeting. He explained the issue as being background noises coming through the microphones on the P-25 system.

He asked Mr. Lonergan if they had a chance to transfer to the other analog fire ground. Mr. Lonergan stated they did not get a chance to test the similar environment on the analog side. They ran out of time. The Acting Chief reported that the audio was less than desirable. Mr. Lonergan confirmed that they are still going live on Tuesday, March 23, as long as everything goes smoothly. The issue being discussed tonight is the P-25 fire ground channel. Those issues have been discussed before, and that should not stop the system from going online and moving forward. They do need to have some additional testing, and Justin is working with Norcom on that. Mr. Lonergan added that the audio quality they experienced last night does not have to do with equipment per say, it has to do with the use of a digital processing of voice in a high noise environment. There are adjustable settings that can be changed in the radios to correct some of that stuff. It does not have to do with fixed network infrastructure or the equipment itself. It has to do with the processing of the audio through the P-25 digital system.

The Executive Director gave an update on the Nike site. Things have been moving along. They will be pulling the fiber into the pump station. It will eventually feed the communication system next week. They will also be pouring concrete next week. There is a lot of activity going on there with contractors. They are getting ready to install the flag pole. That should be happening within the next couple of weeks. They will need to wait until the concrete is poured and settled. Mr. Neto has been communicating with the Project Manager about getting lighting for that area since it will have a flag flying there 24 hours a day. The flag will be raised and lowered every day so he doesn't want it to be forgotten that it needs to be illuminated. It will be available shortly after the cutover is completed which is scheduled for March 23. This is pending any last minute civil work that has to be done.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Communications Report as presented.

- VI. Reports of Chief Officers. Acting Chief Brade had submitted his monthly Chief's Report, and had a few additions to report. He is working with the Executive Director to identify staff that has not been around and lacking mandatory training, inspections, etc. The Fire Department will be sending out letters of intent shortly. He has also been working with the Executive Director on preparing the 21/22 budget. He has been working with the division heads; Ray Saracco, Chris Logan and Russ Johnson to identify capital expenditures. Chief Brade was happy to report that the NFIRS reporting system is up to date. It had been backlogged with some older reporting from 2018, 2019 and 2020. He was happy to report that the system is all up to date. He added that the radio cutover is postponed until March 23. The Chief has also been working with the new Fire Marshal. Mr. Saracco put together a new PPE policy for the Chief that is still under review. There is another item on the agenda under

New Business regarding the FMO, and that is a new fee structure. The Chief also reported a water meter was installed at Court St., and carpets were also done there. The last issue to report was the fire at 19 Botelle Manor. The fire started on the exterior of the property. There were multiple calls into the Communication Center. The Dispatcher on duty did an excellent job. It was a good fire, no one was hurt. There was one missing cat. Lt. McKnight was in charge at the scene. When the Acting Chief arrived on scene everything was under control. The fire was knocked down really quickly. They identified some points of change for the future. There were some training issues identified on the roof. The Chief added that the investigation is complete and it went pretty well.

- A. Fire Marshal's Office Report. Mr. Saracco noted that the FMO is planning to increase the amount of inspections being done monthly. They want to make sure the residents of Cromwell are safe, businesses meet the fire code, etc. They have a fee table proposal to present to this Committee later in the meeting. He stated they will be adding some more graphs and charts to their reports to be more transparent. He discussed a fire investigation log which they will be doing every month. They are pushing for an October date for a showcase for life safety. It will probably be in the firehouse and showcase things like fire prevention or fire awareness. Hopefully they will be able to give out smoke alarms. They applied for a FM global grant today to try to get some money for smoke alarms. That has been submitted and is under review. The Health Department is also willing to do a community project with the Fire Marshal's Office. Chairman Colligan pointed out that the Fire Marshal is planning to do more inspections of multi-family homes and homes that have more than one meter. They are supposed to be inspected. Mr. Saracco noted that sometimes landlords don't show up around their properties that they rent out, and the FMO wants to make sure people living in those houses are safe.

Acting Chief Brade mentioned that Harold Holmes took on a project on his own. It is the Risk Mitigation Program. Cromwell is one of the few Fire Marshal offices in the country to participate. The program is moving forward. They are starting to collect statistical data. As the Department gets more input within a couple of months the FMO should be able to provide an in-depth statistical analysis. The Fire Marshal is planning to share what Harold has done. It is very good, and Harold deserves the credit for initiating this project. Chairman Colligan suggested that Mr. Saracco reach out to Lt. McKnight who had done a similar project with smoke alarms and had smoke alarms donated from Lowe's.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal's Reports as presented.

- VII. Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability. Chief Brade reported that applications for the Fire Chief position have been coming in. They have been forwarded directly to the District Office. The application deadline was last week. Regarding hiring of scheduled staff, the position was posted on the State's list serve. There was a two week window on applications. They received 9 applications for scheduled part-time positions. Five of the nine were qualified. The Department has nine openings to bring them to full capacity. They plan on doing interviews for those five. The Chief will advise who they may hire from those five. The number of applicants is a lot lower than what they anticipated. The Chief noted that other departments have jumped on the bandwagon following Cromwell's lead on part-time staff. Unfortunately, those other departments pay a lot more. He saw a lot of comments on social media, and most of the comments had to do with the fact that

Cromwell's rate of pay was lower than the other towns. Based on recent information from the CDC and Cromwell's Health Director, the Chief reported that the crews are all back at Court St. and so is apparatus. They are not split between two firehouses anymore.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Firefighter/EMT staffing, hiring and response capability report as presented.

VIII. Old Business. There was no old business to discuss.

IX. New Business

A. Discussion and Possible Decision on FMO Fee Structure. Mr. Saracco distributed copies of a draft of an FMO fee structure and revenue chart to illustrate the types of revenue the District could be receiving from the Fire Marshal's Office. Chief Brade explained the FMO tries to mitigate expenditures as much as possible when it comes to working within their budget. This sometimes means not getting the things that they need or want to have. They have been lacking some investigation tools for a while. There were some finances available to purchase some of those things. Some of things the Fire Marshal pointed out to the Chief were items from that list that the FMO should be charging for. That would help financially sustain the FMO going forward. Roughly, an estimation of potential revenue per year would be about \$18,000 - \$20,000. Mr. Saracco said that is an estimated amount. It could be more or less depending on building plans, etc. The fee structure is nothing new. Ray had some comparable data to see what is being charged in other towns. He explained that services aren't free anymore. Services cost money. The best thing about charging for services is that it doesn't hit the taxpayer. Most people coming in for plan reviews are coming in from out of state, or out of town. It won't affect the taxpayer getting double charged. He used an example of the Town charging for plan reviews which the Fire Marshal signs off on, but receives no money for because the FMO charges no fees. He asked the Committee to review. Items can be added or subtracted off the list especially if they would affect the taxpayer.

Commissioner Colligan suggested forming some type of committee to look into an FMO fee structure. He pointed out the fact that New Haven charges \$40 for a water permit for fire hydrant use. He thought that the Water Operations Committee should be aware of this as part of the Water Department's operation of fire hydrant water. Chief Brade and the Fire Marshal are proposing a two phase roll-in of FMO fees. If a subcommittee were formed, the FMO would introduce their Phase I and Phase II roll out. Mr. Saracco added they did a Phase II because they do not want to kill people because of COVID right now. The restaurants are already taking a real hit. The FMO does not want to start with more Fire Marshal fees as they try to recover their businesses from the pandemic. The FMO does have compassion, so they are going to phase in fees for those types of situations. There is no set date or time to implement the fees. It can be at the Board's discretion.

President Brow stated that he will discuss the matter with the Executive Director. It needs to be clarified whether this should be addressed by a special committee, an existing standing committee, the Executive level or District Operation level. The Executive Director believed that having a special committee will be an extra committee taking up people's time when eventually the whole Commission will need to vote on this. Mr. Neto asked what information the full Commission would need that administration can provide without creating another committee. They will need to let the Executive Director

know what type of information they would like for the presentation. After the presentation, if there is homework to be done, let him know what that is instead of having another committee assignment. Everyone's time is valuable. They can save time getting to the end result if they let the Executive Director know what they need that would make them more comfortable moving forward to implement FMO fees. The District Operations Committee is the Executive Board of the full Commission. They could take on the role of overseeing the FMO fee structure. Another consideration is a start date so the FMO and District can alert the public and publicize the new fee structure. Mr. Saracco added that they also need a process for collection.

Mr. Saracco explained that they plan on sending out letters. If it is a hood inspection, they would send out letters to everyone that has a hood. After the letters are mailed out, the recipient would forward a check. As long as a check is received during the annual timeframe, the FMO will go out and do the inspection. Once inspected, they will get their certificate. Mr. Lonergan noted that the Alpine Fire Marshal's Module has a permitting module and in the report section there are reports that print out exact dollar amounts based on the category. We may need to upgrade to another module but the capability within the Alpine system is there. The Executive Director noted that is a great point, and the infrastructure or responsibility is going to be with the FMO for collections. They will also need to figure out if they should use Munis. They have the capability of using Munis as a way to build. These are some of the details they need to work with on the administrative side with the Commission for not only compliance but once the fee structure is established they can go into a mode of collection. He also discussed other ways of payment such as online payments. There is some upfront work to be done, but overall it is the right thing to do over the right time. He believes that Phase II after COVID is the right approach.

Commissioner Rukowicz who is also the Chairman of the Water Operations Committee stated that this has been discussed for years, but went nowhere. The Chief and Commissioner Rukowicz had discussed this last year and the previous year, now that Ray has come on board a few weeks ago, he has finally started the initiative. He commends the FMO for coming up with this. He agrees it has to be done and it should be done. It is just a matter of when. The details will be left up to the Fire Marshal's office. This is overdue, and he agrees that nothing is free anymore. The services the Fire Marshal's Office provides cost money. He thinks the taxpayers will understand it. He stated that the FMO is doing a good job as well as Dispatch.

Commissioner Colligan wanted to set a target date to have this up and running and suggested July 1 to coincide with the new fiscal year. The first year will help determine what the revenue will be the first year. He doesn't know what the hurdles may be. We also need to come up with a system for collection. Once it is reviewed by the President or District Operations, it can be brought back to a Board of Commissioners' meeting for a vote.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved that the FMO fee structure introduced at the Fire Operations Committee meeting of March 16, 2021, was supported by the Fire Operations Committee, and the Committee agreed to implement the structure no later than July 1, 2021. The fee structure proposal will be forwarded to the full Board of Commissioners for a vote. Upon adoption by the full Board of Commissioners, the Executive Director

will meet with the Town Manager and Town Building Department to discuss publishing the fee schedule.

- B. Discussion and Possible Decision on Coverage for Second Ambulance. The Executive Director explained that at the last Fire Operations Committee meeting it was decided under Executive Order that they would continue coverage for a second ambulance until the Fire Operations Committee and full Commission determined its next phase. The Committee needs to decide if it can support this financially, and ultimately if the Board of Commissioners can support it and for how long. There needs to be a discussion about the parameters of the second ambulance coverage. It needs to move forward and then be budgeted accordingly. Currently this is an unbudgeted item all the way to the end of the fiscal year.

Commissioner Colligan noted that no one has come up with a proposal. The Committee needs some time of proposal or plan to make a decision going forward. The Chief had some statistics they gathered over the last couple of months. Some feedback from the field was also obtained. When the temporary emergency staffing started, the seventh person had come in very handy when on duty. That person is used not just for medical calls, but also utilizing on fire calls. It gave the fire staff an additional body to utilize for suppression and investigation purposes while on a scene. Since the 7<sup>th</sup> person was instituted back in November when the continuity plan was instituted, there were about 68 calls for a second ambulance during that period. They were able to cover 49 calls with a seventh person with a billing collection potential of \$37,142 based on 7 AM to 7 PM coverage. If a seventh person was on all the time, it would be potential revenue of \$14,000. The Chief is willing to write up a formal proposal regarding a 7<sup>th</sup> person.

Commissioner Colligan suggested that a motion be made that the Chief come back with a complete proposal for the next meeting that can be voted on by the Committee and brought before the full Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Epstein thought we should continue with the seventh person while the Chief is putting together an alternate proposal.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to allow the Fire Chief to come back with a proposal consistent with the Executive Order regarding a 7<sup>th</sup> person for coverage for a second ambulance. Once the Committee has reviewed and voted on the proposal, it will need to come before the full Board of Commissioners for discussion and a vote.

- X. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Donohue commented about the structure fire. Brett called in to say he would be at the fire by 3:30, but he had just been coming off a 24 hour shift. Between Noon and 8:00 he fit tested half of the Police Department. The next day whoever the on-duty officer was, fit tested the rest of the Department. The Police Department was very appreciative of the Fire Department's efforts for fit testing. Commissioner Donohue asked if the District has a plan going forward with public access to buildings. He asked about social distancing and meeting room capacities while easing COVID restrictions. He asked about the new date of March 19 for implementing fewer restrictions. The Executive Director reported that the District will be following the Governor's and CDC guidelines. He added that the maximum number of people in the conference room at Coles Road is 15. If they want more people to attend the Commission meetings, they will need to change the venue. Mr. Neto was planning on bringing this up at the Commission meeting level. He is interested in feedback about opening the District Office

again. With things being changed on March 19, the District Office should be able to open for at least 4 hours as was done during the pandemic. This would allow the Offices to be open to the public from 10 AM to 2 PM. If there are fewer restrictions and others will be allowed into the buildings, social distancing must still be practiced. Another issue to consider is whether or not to use Coles Road as a training facility. Acting Chief Brade has been receiving requests. If it is opened up for training, there must not be more than 15 individuals in the room at a time. There will be new restrictions on facilities based on the Executive Orders in place.

Commissioner Colligan was not at the fire at Botelle Manor but seeing the pictures and talking to staff and the Fire Marshal, it sounded like the Fire Department did a fantastic job. They did everything that needed to be done. He gave kudos to everyone that was there. Commissioner Epstein was at the fire, and stated that the crew did a great job. They took care of everyone that came out of the house. He gave kudos to the Chief and Fire Marshal who were both there. The fire was put out quickly. Lt. McKnight did an excellent job of coordinating the fire scene.

- XI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 5:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



David Colligan, Chairman

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Secretary  
3-23-21