

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS Fire Department Operations Committee

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

5:00 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Also Via Conference Call
1-203-666-2275, ID 673-558-184#

Present: Commissioners David Colligan (Chairman), Charles Epstein and Jason Hinnners. Commissioner Robert Donohue was absent. Assistant Chief William Stacy had an excused absence. Also attending were Acting Fire Chief Jason Brade, Fire Marshal Ray Saracco, Dispatch Supervisor Justin Lonergan, Executive Director Julius Neto, Commissioner Roger Rukowicz and Fire Fighter Union President Brett Hallden had called into the meeting.

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 on any agenda item.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM, by Chairman Colligan. Chairman Colligan noted that Chief Stacy had an excused absence from this meeting.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Approval of Meeting Minutes of March 16, 2021. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes from March 16, 2021, as presented.
- IV. Public Comment. Brett Hallden had called into the owl, but he had no comments at this time. There were no public comments received by the Executive Director.
- V. Communications Report. Chairman Colligan reported there was a drill last night. The radios did well. They sounded good. Fire ground sounded good. People are getting used to how to use the microphone and how to communicate. They operated as they would at a real fire. He was happy with what he heard. Commissioner Hinnners agreed. Once the Nike site is up and running, Commissioner Colligan thought it would help communications a lot.

The Executive Director gave a quick update on the Nike site. All the concrete has been poured. It just needs to be tested which will be done this week. The pole will be delivered and installed one week from Friday. The final reprogramming will be done in the fall, and at that point the Chairman thought the District should have some type of ceremony as an official "grand opening" with a press release. They would like to provide more public awareness of the Communication operations in the District.

There was some discussion about the communications at the TPC. Chief Brade explained that the TPC operates on their own frequencies, and they give the Fire Department and Dispatch a radio. They bring in the civil support team, which is a Federal communications truck that has the capability of interoperability. Regarding Dispatch and the communications project, Mr. Lonergan reported everything is stable. There has been some revamping of the console, moving a few things around. He added that once the Nike site comes on line, it will greatly improve the area in Town where there are communication challenges. Norcom is working on UEM, the finishing touches on the console. They had been out checking all the sites that are online confirming everything is plugged in and working. He will be working with Paul on installing the final template that will be installed in the fall. They are working on another programming to fix some minor issues and the emergency button. That should happen within the next few weeks. He is waiting on confirmation of that from Norcom. Chairman Colligan asked if they should schedule a meeting of the Communications Committee to discuss what Norcom will be doing. Mr. Lonergan explained the three major items that are on the list are: to fix the emergency button, the removal of the scan function and fixing the transmit beep that was removed.

Chief Brade reported that they are in preliminary talks with the school system. The schools had approached the Chief after finding out that the District is doing a new radio system. Since the Department has some programming left, the schools wanted to give the Department their frequencies so they can make a bank. The Fire Department's portables are to communicate with the schools. The Fire Department will be meeting with school officials within the next week or two. The Executive Director added that all of these issues will need to go before the full Board of Commissioners so that they are aware of what the commitments are. Mr. Lonergan noted that interoperability is pretty common within jurisdictions. Mr. Neto added that Norcom was here today, and Angel walked them around to a couple of sites. Norcom did find some tweaking that needed to be done.

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

VI. Reports of Chief Officers. Acting Chief Brade stated that the Chief's report had been submitted. He had a few things to add to his report. He reported that the fit test machine is back on line. They did some research on the safety of using it during a pandemic. They called a couple of experts in the field as well as reached out to the manufacturers of some of the parts to make sure they were operating OK. They ordered a couple of disposable parts, and they are back on line.

The ISO rating has come in. Cromwell will currently remain as a Class III Department. In discussing the report with Mr. Lonergan, the Acting Chief and Justin found some discrepancies in the report. Chief Brade has submitted an informal appeal to get the discrepancies corrected and see if that would make a difference to the Class II. He is waiting to hear back from them. If not, they would have to make some type of formal appeal. They were looking into it and had some questions as well. They did not receive some information from the Police side which may have affected the Fire Department rating. The Chief added that Class III which is the current rating of the Department is still a very respectable rating. ISO also stated that in Cromwell's previous

rating, they found that Cromwell was rated too high. They got credit for a 9-1-1 Center which they did not have. They lost points for not having a physical 9-1-1 Center. They also made points up in other areas. There were a lot of things in Dispatch and Communications, such as the Quality Assurance Program. They did not get any points for it, but Cromwell does have it. They also did not get points for certain training of dispatchers, but they do it. There were a few things the Chief's office challenged on the report, and they are waiting to hear back. The Chief will give an update when he has more information.

A. Fire Marshal's Office Report. Fire Marshal Saracco had submitted his report. In addition to the report he added that his office received a grant for a new camera for investigations with the assistance of Harold Holmes. They purchased an Olympus camera. It is waterproof and durable. It is an excellent camera that they needed for investigations. They also have other grants that are pending. They also did a class with Red Alert a few weeks ago. They are cleaning up the Red Alert platform with the help of Mr. Lonergan. They are organizing it much better than they thought they could. They did do 9 multi-family residential inspections last month. They are moving along on this. They are getting into these properties that have not been investigated in quite some time. Chairman Colligan discussed the link for the Fire Marshal's Office and the excellent job Harold Holmes has been doing in the Fire Marshal's Office. He has also been responsible for obtaining grants for the FMO. The Chairman asked the Fire Marshal to convey the Committee's appreciation for all of Mr. Holmes' hard work and dedication.

VII. Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability. The Chief reported they had 10 people apply for the part-time scheduled positions. They interviewed 5 and hired 4 of them. There were very low numbers of applicants. The Department continues to lose people. The Chief will be advertising on Indeed to see if he can get a bigger candidate pool. It was first advertised on Listserve. They are losing part-time people to other Departments that are paying a higher hourly rate. They are also losing people to career departments. Some departments will allow them to still work for Cromwell part-time, others do not. There are 3 or 4 people on leave right now waiting to find out if they will be able to stay here part-time.

The Acting Chief has had discussions with the Fire Marshal regarding the fee structure that was put out. The Executive Director was going to check with the attorneys to see what is viable and what is not. They reached out to the Police Department for some information on overtime rates.

At the request of the District and the Chief's office, OSHA was invited to the Court Street firehouse. They spent $\frac{3}{4}$ of a day there, and the Chief's office discussed with them how they operate and how they staff. The first day was mostly administrative where they were asked to provide documents or policies. They also asked questions about training policies. They gave the Department a list of several items that they have been working on for the past couple of weeks to rectify. OSHA will be conducting their review in segments. Once the first list of items has been rectified, they will return for another phase of their review. There will be multiple segments scheduled.

Mr. Neto discussed OSHA's objectives. One thing that was mentioned was the fact that the Department needs to have an organizational statement. The Chief did put out a statement. Chairman Colligan asked if the organizational statement needs to be approved by the full Board of Commissioners. Mr. Neto replied that they could, but the statement is more OSHA driven. The District is using OSHA's template for their statement. The Chief stated once it is completed, it will go out to the membership and will go out on the membership site where all the policies are located. It was just finalized today. The Executive Director asked the Chief to send it out to all

the Commissioners. Chairman Colligan asked if this should be put on next month's agenda to be voted on. President Brow was in attendance and stated that the document is OSHA driven so it is what it is. Everyone should receive a copy. It is going to be the Fire Department's organizational statement. It includes history of the Fire/Marshal's Office, communications, department management, SOP's, SOG's, training, fire suppression and EMS. Once it has been approved, it will be published on the website.

The Chief recently had a meeting with EMS staff, specifically Capt. Ferone just trying to see how they can re-engage some of the staff on the EMS side to come out on calls. He also had a meeting with Capt. Donohue and all the fire police staff. They identified some communication issues and some training items. The Acting Chief is trying to make the Fire Department a better place to operate. He will be meeting with the Fire Officers next week.

There was a fire that started on 25 Pleasant Street. It started in shrubbery and expanded into the decking. It was a quick and effective save by the Fire Marshal. He was first on scene. He kept it at bay with a fire extinguisher until help arrived. It was a very old house with bloom frame construction. The fire was stopped before it got into the walls.

The Chief stated he put an email out to the department regarding Ring Public Safety Service. They put out a public service announcement to the residents that utilize the neighbor's application. It was well received. Ring is a public camera system that people keep on their houses. They also have another side called Neighbors. It is a way for neighborhoods to report crimes and thefts. It is a posting site. It is a neighborhood watch type of thing. In the Fire Marshal's office when they go out to do investigations, one of the things they do is check for cameras. They canvas all the neighborhoods for Rings and see if they can utilize their cameras. Ring offers those capabilities through this network. The Police Department has an account and they put out a blast at the time of the dumpster fires for the Fire Department. The Fire Department can request those feeds and can also put out safety announcements.

The Chief also reported that Ambulance 4C was in a very, very minor accident yesterday. It was being backed in at St. Francis yesterday and tapped one of the concrete blocks. There was virtually no damage. Chris Logan will be checking it out to make sure there is no damage. Capt. Ferone is looking into who was operating the vehicle and what happened.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal's reports.

VIII. Old Business

- A. Discussion and Possible Decision on Coverage for Second Ambulance for the Remainder of FY 2020/2021. Acting Chief Brade was asked at the last meeting to make more of a presentation to the Committee to explain and illustrate the 2nd ambulance coverage and when it is needed. He was tasked by the Fire Operations Committee to identify the feasibility of having the seventh person, continuing with a seventh person and some of the statistics and figures that would go along with that. He asked that everyone follow along in the packet he distributed to everyone. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

He discussed a pie chart that illustrated all calls for Fire and EMS in 2021. Three quarters of their calls are mostly rescue EMS calls. Other calls were also noted as a small percentage. The second page looked similar. It showed the 2020 statistics. It looks similar to what is going on this year. It is to show that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the calls are EMS related. The next page showed

alarms by time of day. For 2021 the majority of the calls come in between 8 AM to 8 or 9 PM. The next page showed the same thing for time of day for EMS only for 2020. The times are very similar. This one is clearly defined as 8 AM to 8 PM. The next page showed alarms by day of the week. This shows the days of the week that the calls are coming in on. It shows that there is more call volume during the week. These are EMS only calls during the week. The weekends drop off slightly but are still pretty elevated as far as calls go. The next page showed all the EMS calls for all of 2020. The weekends were slightly higher last year. However, the majority of the calls are still Monday through Friday. This is EMS only, the majority of their calls are Monday through Friday, 8 AM to 8 PM during the week. The weekends are just slightly below that. He had a couple of other sheets that would show all calls.

The seventh person they found has not only helped on EMS response but they have been able to utilize that person on fire calls as well. There were several cases where they took that seventh person because there was a need for fire, staffed another truck and sent it to a different fire call to meet the needs of the call because the first fire truck was out on an incident.

Most shifts have been operating on what is called 3-2-2. There are 3 people on the first line piece of fire apparatus, 2 people on an ambulance which is the first ambulance out the door and their dedicated ambulance piece. When they have the 7th person, they have 2 additional people. Not every shift, most shifts are using this principal. Those two people would be on another fire piece if there was a fire call. If there was an ambulance call it would switch over and take the second ambulance. It allowed flexibility in where they were going.

The Chief wanted to show the statistics about fire and ambulance calls. It basically shows the same times of day as the EMS only calls, 8 AM to 8 PM for 2020. The next page showed the statistics remain the same in both fire and EMS calls for this year. The next page showed the same days of the week that they are getting both fire and EMS calls, Monday through Friday and the weekends drop off. Peak times on the weekend are the same.

He discussed the calls that were left unanswered. From the time they started staffing the seventh person, until now they toned over 20 calls. It sounds like a lot but those numbers are down. There were statistics from previous years. In 2020, there were 138 calls turned over. In previous years those numbers were lower. The thing that changed was the staffing model.

They are not getting the second ambulance out because we are only staffing one ambulance. He also pointed out some data that showed total responses as 598 for the first 3 months of this year. If you multiply that by 4, the Department is on track for 2,400 calls this year. Just below that data where it showed 2,320, the calls last year during the pandemic went down by 100 or so. In 2019 they were almost at 2,500. There was less turnover in previous years than there is now. They are turning over more now based on the staffing model because they are only putting one ambulance out. If the second ambulance were to be added, the turnover number would be drastically reduced. He gave a lot of data by month and days. EMS calls spiked in January.

He also had data on the schedule of maximum allowed billing rates. It showed what can be charged for an ambulance call. \$781 for VLS support is what the Department charges for an ambulance call. There is also a charge of \$19 per mile for every mile that they transport one way to the hospital. Middlesex Hospital is roughly 4 miles. There was 7th person usage during the emergency staffing model. This shows what the District allowed the Fire

Department to do during the emergency period. The period analyzed was between December 14 and March. There were 739 Fire and EMS calls during that period with requests for 81 second ambulances. During that time period from 7 AM to 7 PM when there was a 7th additional person on, they were able to respond to 61 of those calls. 6 were covered by unscheduled staff. When staffing dropped to 6, there were 20 more calls they did not answer. That was mostly evening hours. Potential revenue by the 7th person was \$47,000 of gained revenue by being able to respond to those 61 calls. \$4,636 could be added to that figure for potential mileage cost. There was a loss of approximately \$15,000 based on 20 calls that were left unanswered. The Chief clarified that these figures noted were potential revenue. This is what the Fire department bills. They don't necessarily receive all the money they bill for. He discussed potential revenue from the unanswered calls.

The Chief wanted to propose 3 options. The first is a 7th person Mon. - Fri. 8 AM to 8 PM instead of 7 AM to 7 PM. That is what statistics show where the calls are. Mon - Fri. 8 AM to 8 PM. This would cover the busy times in the department. This is what is staffed during the pandemic. 12 hrs. a day, \$16 an hour, 5 days a week, 52 weeks a year with a total cost of \$49,920.

If they were to staff Sunday to Sunday 7 days a week, 12 hrs. a day, 8 AM to 8 PM it would cover almost all calls. It would cover peak times during the week and weekends. That cost would be \$69,888. This is most beneficial to the residents, and most effective use of the seventh person.

There is also the option of 24 hrs. a day, seven days a week adding the seventh person. This is effective depending on how you interpret effective. The best bang for your buck is the second option. 24 hours a day gives the most coverage. This person is also helping out on the fire side. Call volume could go up or down so you cannot rely on the revenue source. That is an estimate. The part-time staff is in the middle of negotiations. The Chairman noted that he wants to know what the cost is for the District to have the seventh person. The Executive Director noted it is hard to provide that number not knowing what contract negotiations will bring. There would be a 20% - 35% markup for potential benefits. Mr. Neto noted that there are not enough funds to cover the seventh person until the end of the fiscal year. The seventh person is not funded, but the Board has allowed that based on the fact they will be over budget. The seventh person if it is a business decision it is one tract. If it is based on service and effectiveness of the 7th person, Mr. Neto could not argue against that point. When a person is in need of a second ambulance there is no dollar amount that can be put on that. Chairman Colligan wanted the figures. The Chief provided the cost of seventh person. It will cost between \$60,000 and \$90,000 a year depending on the model that is decided on. It would be either option A or B. Option C was 24 hrs. a day, seven days a week which was a lot. The cost is too large, and statistics don't demand it. If Option A is chosen, 5 days, 12 hrs. or Option B 7 days 12 hrs., it will between \$60,000 and \$90,000.

Commissioner Epstein wanted to go on record for his support of the seventh person at least 5 days a week. Whether the District makes money by putting that 7th person on or whether they lose money, the District owes it to the taxpayers because they have put themselves out there as the emergency service. When they dial 911, they should have that second person there during those peak hours. Commissioner Epstein would like to see the collection rate used rather than the billing rate as to what the true value is. He feels that if you are in the fire or EMS market, you cannot expect to make money on what is billed. Right now the Department only collects 45% - 52% of what they bill. They will take what they bill and use that against the cost incurred. The cost incurred is going to have to be borne by a tax rate and a billing

rate, a combination of both. Those figures would be more realistic, but they are going to have to look at a revenue source. It will either be a combination of billing or a tax base.

The President noted that before any action is taken on this or it is sent to the Board for a full vote, several things need to happen. Negotiations need to happen and come to a conclusion so the District knows how that will impact the budget. That will need to be plugged into the budget and work the numbers at that point. When those things are completed, there can then be a discussion on rates. *The meeting was running out of time before the next meeting.

The Chief needed some decisions on the 7th person because that person was due to end tonight. It was noted that this item is on the Agenda for the following Board of Commissioners' meeting after this meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to table New Business on this Agenda. Those items were: Discussion and Update on Nike Site, Discussion on Apparatus Replacement and Update and Discussion on Status of Volunteers and Part-Timers Not Compliant with Training.

- IX. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein stated that he attended the PIO course given by the Fire Academy. He attended the course a couple of weeks ago and completed it. He offered the services he learned to the Chief, the Fire Marshal and the Executive Director for anything he can do to help the District at no charge.
- X. Adjournment. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



David J. Colligan, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
5-10-21