

# Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE  
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT  
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

## **BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS** **Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting**

**Wednesday, May 5, 2021**

**6:00 PM**

Via Conference Call 1-203-666-2275

ID 688 950 138#

Coles Road Firehouse  
105 Coles Road  
Cromwell, CT

A Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting via conference call was held on Wednesday, May 5, 2021, at 6:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to consider and act upon Special Fire District business. Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Jason Hanners, Roger Rukowicz, Charles Epstein, Robert Donohue, Mertie Terry, David Colligan, Allan Spotts and Robert McIntyre attended. Also attending was Executive Director Julius Neto and Dispatcher/ Dispatcher Union Secretary Brian Petrocelli. Dialed into the meeting were Accountant Mike Alibrio, Dispatcher Chris Bellamo, Lt. William McNight, Dispatcher Mike Alicia, Dispatcher Union President Andy Cooke and Fire Marshal Ray Saracco.

Per Executive Order No. 7B, Governor Lamont has ordered and directed that in-person open meeting requirements be suspended. Therefore, the Special Board of Commissioners' 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 6:00 PM, by President Brow.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hanners and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. Brian Petrocelli, Secretary, AFSCME Local 1303-475 had comments, and he noted that the President of their Local, Andy Cooke, had dialed into the meeting. The Executive Board of the Cromwell Professional Fire Dispatchers, AFSCME Local 1303-475, wanted to take the opportunity to acknowledge all the Fire Commissioners and the Executive Director for their efforts in accord to working with labor to make this place of employment safe and progressive. The Dispatchers' group has had great communication with the Commission and the Executive Director as they move forward. The last 12 – 16 months in the Fire Department and in the Town have been uneasy, unsure and downright frightening, not knowing what the next day would bring. With all the changes being experienced with health, public safety and the Department, communication between labor and management is a key to fulfilling the mission to serving the community. The Dispatchers know that added to this was a search for a new Fire Chief which was not an easy undertaking. They know that

the Commissioners, Executive Director and others have dedicated much of their own, uncompensated time and efforts, and it is truly appreciated. As they move forward over the next few years, they look forward to working with the Commissioners, the Executive Director, their Department head, Fire Marshal's Office and the new Fire Chief in making their response to calls and service one of the best in the central Connecticut area. With the Board's support, they hope to have better training, better equipment and ready to answer all the calls for service in the future. They wanted to thank the Commission from the labor side for all the Board's efforts they put forward that go unappreciated and unmentioned. These comments were from the Executive Board of AFSCME Local 1303-475, Andrew Cooke, Brian Petrocelli, Chris Bellamo and Mike Alicia. The President thanked Mr. Petrocelli and the Executive Board for their comments and support.

The Executive Director had not received any public comments to report.

Commissioner Donohue wanted to echo the comments Commissioner Epstein made in the Fire Operations meeting tonight regarding the ability for the Commissioners not on the Personnel Committee to listen to the interviews for Fire Chief on their computers.

#### IV. New Business

- A. Discussion and Possible Approval of Personnel Committee Recommendation of Top Candidate for Fire Chief Position. The Executive Director stated that he could speak for the Personnel Committee although the Committee members were all present. It would be up to the Chairwoman if she wished to delegate that responsibility. A Committee member can present the name, and those present could entertain any questions from that point on. The Chairwoman has already discussed this with the Committee, and a Committee member will make the recommendation.

Commissioner Colligan announced that the candidate for the Fire Chief position the Personnel Committee is recommending to the full Board of Commissioners is Jason Balletto. President Brow went around the room for discussion. He started with Commissioner McIntyre. Commissioner McIntyre was not able to listen in on the interviews, but he did review all the resumes. He felt that the top two candidates were both qualified with some differentiations. Without having a sense of their personalities on paper they both seemed like good choices. Commissioner Epstein asked Commissioner Terry if she would read the process that was followed as she did in the Special Personnel Committee meeting that was held before this meeting. He felt there may be people present or that have dialed in that were not familiar with the process.

The Chairwoman agreed with Commissioner Epstein and began by saying that the Personnel Committee took the process for hiring the Fire Chief very, very seriously. The Committee did not go into this process with their eyes closed or with any prejudice or bias. She gave an overview of the process. They had both internal and external postings and advertising for the position for 2 weeks. The President of the Commission and the Executive Director, based on the charge given by Personnel, reviewed and selected the appropriate candidates that met the job description qualifications. A total of 8 candidates were identified. Of the 8 candidates, there was one internal candidate and 7 external candidates, of which 2 were from out of state. During a quick background review, 4 of the candidates had significant questionable issues (in the recent past). The President of the Commission and the Executive Director did not have the 4 questionable candidates move forward. A subject matter panel of Chiefs was convened. The 4 candidates were

interviewed and given a numerical score based on their answers. The two candidates with the highest scores were moved to the Personnel Committee. The two top candidates from the subject matter panel were David Prior and Jason Balletto. The Personnel Committee interviewed both finalists. A total of 12 questions were asked, and they were given a numerical score based on their answers. The results were as follows: David Prior was ranked second, and Jason Balletto was ranked as the top candidate. Both panel interviews were accomplished in identical manner and all were recorded visually and orally. The Personnel Committee is recommending Jason Balletto as the next Fire Chief for the Cromwell Fire Department.

Commissioner Epstein again thanked the President and the Board for allowing the process to be open to the other Commissioners, so that even if they were not allowed to participate in the questioning, they were able to watch the forum and hear the answers. They were able to make their own decisions, whether they felt that the candidate the Committee picked was the best candidate for the job. He did feel that the best candidate was chosen.

Commissioner Rukowicz thought that it was a very open and transparent process. He thanked the panel of Chiefs for selecting the final two. The Personnel Committee felt that Mr. Balletto answered all the questions without hesitation and very well. The answers were what they were looking for. The Committee has great expectations for what the new Chief will do. The Committee looks forward to working with him and helping him in any way they can. He thanked the President and Executive Director for their participation.

Commissioner Hinnners stated that he was only involved in the selection of the final 2. He reported that the process was above board, and both candidates had identical questions. It was a clean interview process. Mr. Balletto came across as extremely confident with no hesitation in his answers. Commissioner Hinnners looks forward to working with him and turning the corner.

Commissioner Terry was very pleased about the way the Commission handled this process. It was democratic and supportive. The top two candidates were excellent. It was not an easy decision. They decided on Mr. Balletto and she is confident he will get the support from the Fire Department and the Commission. She was pleased with the outcome.

Commissioner Colligan thanked the President and the Executive Director for the extra work they did outside of the Personnel Committee process. They helped keep the hiring process organized. He reported that this was one of the best processes he has ever been involved with in the Fire Service.

Commissioner Spotts could not attend because of other responsibilities, but he had read both resumes. He fully trusts the Personnel Committee to make the right decision. By reading the resumes, he believes the Committee made the right decision. He thanked everyone for their hard work.

Commissioner Donohue had similar comments as everyone else. It was an experience for him because he had never been involved in the hiring process before. He appreciated being able to hear the questions and answers. Hearing the responses helped him. He looks forward to working with the new Fire Chief.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and approved 8 to 0 to offer the Fire Chief position to Jason Balletto. President Brow abstained.

- B. Discussion and Possible Approval of Executive Committee Recommendation for Cromwell Fire District FY 2021/2022 Budget—Fire and Water Divisions. The President noted that everyone had received copies of the final draft of the budget to review before this meeting. The Executive Director was happy to go over anything the Commissioners wished to review. He was happy to provide an overview if needed. He added this was a tough budget process. There were lots of discussions, some changes to the budget, some strategies were modified, but still there is a deficit on both the water and fire sides. This needs to be highlighted and modified. Mike Alibrio had also dialed in and was available to answer any questions. He would be happy to take any guidance from the President or the Chair of the Executive Committee. The President opened the meeting up to the Chair. Commissioner Rukowicz thanked the members of the Executive Committee that participated in the budget process. At the beginning of the process, it was mentioned that this was going to be a hard with difficult choices. He stated that was an understatement. There was an unprecedented 3 meetings. The first meeting was 3 ½ hrs., the second meeting was 3 ½ hrs., and the third was almost 2 hrs. He commended members of the Committee for their input.

He discussed the Water Division first. There has not been a Water rate increase in 13 yrs. He asked if anyone knew of any other company that hasn't had a rate increase in 13 yrs. (cable, insurance, electric) The Committee discussed a 10% increase in water rates, but by the third meeting it was decided to increase rates by 20%. It sounds like a lot, but it isn't as bad as it sounds. Based on a quarterly \$50 water bill, the increase would add an additional \$10 to a quarterly \$50 bill or an additional \$3 and change per month. He felt that the increase was very reasonable. This increase will not become effective July 1, 2021, but rather January 1, 2022, at the half year mark of the fiscal year. It would give the taxpayer a six month break before taking effect.

Commissioner Rukowicz explained the reason for a water rate increase. Cromwell Water has no back up water system should something contaminate their water supply or the water tank. These types of occurrences are happening more frequently throughout the country. Cromwell needs to have interconnections to Middletown and hopefully to MDC. Down the road, this action will become a State or Federal mandate. It will become a necessity to have a backup water supply plan, the District is not raising rates for no reason, especially after 13 years. All Commissioners obviously live in Town, and they are not exempt from the increase. They carefully looked through the budget to see where they could cut. Commissioner Rukowicz acknowledged that if someone is not involved with the Executive Committee or the Water Operations Committee, some of the budget information is hard to understand. Mr. Palmieri has been keeping up with what needs to be done in the Water Department to comply with State regulations, permitting, water supply plans and collecting on delinquent accounts.

Fire Operations was more difficult on the budget. They were looking to add \$400,000 for the pumper in addition to the \$250,000 that the District already has. They were also looking for a vehicle for the Assistant Chief before the floor falls out of the one he has. He added that 4 years ago the mil rate was increased by one-quarter, and prior to that there was an increase of ¼ mil 10 years ago. They looked at other fire departments in

comparison. They are looking at a mil increase because it is necessary. They need to provide fire protection and EMS service.

He compared Cromwell's budget to South Fire District in Middletown. Their budget passed yesterday. Their overall budget was \$6.2 million. Insurance was \$1.5 million and salaries were \$4.1 million. Cromwell is very compatible with South District. They are 14+ miles in area, Cromwell is the same in area. Population is very close. South District has only one firehouse and no ambulance service. They also do not have a dispatch service. Cromwell has 3 firehouses, 3 ambulances and a communications center that provides extraordinary services to the Town. Cromwell is hurting for equipment. They need more equipment. Amazon has a facility on County Line Road. Wayfair is another vendor that wishes to move here. If there were a fire in either one of those places, the Fire Department would not have enough equipment. Mutual Aid and Statewide Task Force would be needed.

Salary and insurance is a big part of the budget. We have no control over those items. The District also has labor CBA agreements to comply with. We have a good organization and we want to treat the employees well. There is only so much that can be done. Commissioner Rukowicz is asking that everyone support this budget. He asked for comments. Especially if anyone sees anywhere that things can be cut or reduced. He thanked everyone, and stated that this was a difficult budget challenge.

On the Water side of the budget, Commissioner Epstein reminded everyone that the water tank is 50 years old. The State (DPH) is going to make Cromwell drain it and look at it in the next year or so, and if for some reason Cromwell cannot use that water tank, they will have to have hook ups to the north and the south so they can continue to supply water to the Town's people. That is another reason why we need the water rate increase.

On the Fire side of the budget, Commissioner Epstein strongly feels that the District has an obligation to all the taxpayers and visitors in the Town, to watch their money and give them service when they dial 911. The Fire Department comes and provides that service. They hang their sign out there to let everyone know they are the Fire Department and EMS Operation for the Town of Cromwell. He does not believe that if they were to turn EMS over to a commercial provider it would cost less money than what they are asking for from the Town. It would cost a lot more, maybe even double or more. Firefighters and EMS personnel come in every day and put their life on the line to service the people in the Town. That means we have to give them good equipment; not good equipment—the BEST equipment. We have to protect them.

The District knows they have pushed the can down the road on the Fire Apparatus for 4 or 5 years that Commissioner Epstein has been on the Board. One truck was repurposed to become another type of apparatus for the last 3 or 4 years. That repurposed truck has almost become unsafe to operate. The previous rescue truck was taken off the road when someone said it was no longer safe to stay on the road. They have heard for the last 3 years that the ambulances need to be re-chases or replaced. Even though the Department has 3, their call volume is going up. They also see back-to-back calls coming in at multiple times. They have looked and said they need to increase their manpower by one person during certain days and hours of the week to be able to answer those second calls.

Commissioner Epstein knows none of us want taxes to go up. None of us want to take more money out of our pockets. The Commissioners were elected and have an obligation

to do what is best for the people that visit Cromwell and their taxpayers. He reminded everyone that Cromwell has the largest sporting event in the State of CT. It wasn't held last year, but it is coming back this year and next year. The District has an obligation to provide service at that event. Commissioner Epstein feels that the Board has looked long and hard and done their homework this year. It is not pleasant, but the District has not gone up on anything over the past several years. Everyone cares about the taxpayer, but sometimes you have to bite the bullet and say this is what we have to do.

Commissioner Rukowicz added to Commissioner Epstein's comments about the water tank. Commissioner Epstein was correct that the water tank we may need in the future would be a cost of approximately \$1.3 million which would be for 1.3 million gallons of water. The price is relative to how big the tank is. Mr. Neto agreed that the water tank is a single point of failure. The District currently has no backup. The interconnection will allow the District to have some backup especially if there is any rehabilitation that will be required by DPH because it is 50 years old. Some dives have been done for analysis. However, DPH is now requiring a structural analysis. This means the tank needs to be drained, and they need individuals to go in there to measure the effectiveness of the 50 year old concrete to see if there are any long term cracks. Assuming there is no structural damage, the tank needs to be refurbished with an epoxy type of material. The material itself is over \$1 million. Mr. Neto added that the tank is a point of concern, and needs to be part of the District's long term strategy to resolve it, including possibly a secondary tank.

Commissioner Rukowicz added that at the first two Executive Committee meetings the Committee was deadlocked. They were trying to figure out how they were going to get that money. They are looking into bonding. If they consider bonding, they will not have to look at a large mil increase.

Commissioner Donohue referred to the final draft under Additional Highlights, General Fund summary of expenses by category. He asked that everyone look at the bigger pieces of the pie such as Public Safety, Insurance and Benefits. If you take the overall number of the Fire budget, \$5,551,351 and subtract the public safety portion which is \$2,573,006 and insurance and benefits which was \$1,392,520. If you add both together it is \$3,965,526. If you deduct that from the \$5,551,351 it leaves \$1,585,000 for infrastructure, administration and debt services. He stated the budget is tight. It was difficult. Commissioner Donohue was not part of the Committee, but he was allowed to go the meetings. He feels that realistically the budget is as tight as it can be. He doesn't think we can get any more out of this budget unless the infrastructure, administration or debt services are affected. He did not think debt services could be touched. He stated that the Commission is supposed to be fiscally responsible, but also responsible for life safety. There is no price tag that can be put on the fact that if you call 911, the Fire Department is there for that caller. Commissioner Donohue stated he is going to support this budget based on his statements and the numbers.

Commissioner Colligan stated that he has been around for many budget cycles. He also stated that they have kicked the can down the road forever to always have a 0 increase budget, 0 mil rate increase. They have also taken money from other accounts to balance it out, such as tower fund money. In today's world the District can no longer operate this way. The Town is growing, there are 3 convalescent homes, 3 "over 55" developments. There are things the Town has done to force us to where we are right now. There is no Town in the central Connecticut area that offers the services Cromwell offers at the mil

rate the Fire District has. He agreed with Commissioner Rukowicz's comments about South Fire District. Commissioner Colligan is in favor of this budget because he knows what it takes to run the Fire Department and the District as both a former Fire Chief and as a Commissioner now. They have vehicles breaking down that keep costing more money to repair. They are going to reach a point with 2 of the engines where they are not going to be able to buy parts for them anymore. With the ambulance, when it started it paid for the salaries of the career firefighters, but EMS has changed because their call volume has increased so much. He stated that the Water Department is able to use water rates to help them accomplish their initiatives. The Fire and EMS service has to rely on the taxpayer.

Commissioner Rukowicz noted that the mil rate of South Fire District is 5.373. Cromwell presently is 2.5. If an increase is approved, Cromwell's mil rate will be 3.

Commissioner Hinnens stated that all the Commissioners hit on a point that he wanted to mention and he did not want to repeat. He was not a part of the group that put the budget together. He thanked the Committee for the tremendous effort and the 3 hour meetings. Everything that everyone has said so far has been true. We need to increase funding so that the Fire Department can continue to provide the services they already provide. The increase in calls, the increase of equipment needs and the increase of personnel are all requirements due to the increased need of the Town. He is in favor of the budget, and thanked everyone for the work.

Commissioner Rukowicz noted that he has had discussions with the new Fire Chief who plans to review everything in the budget once he is on board. He is also a grant writer. He added that with the American Recovery Act, the Town is due to receive \$640,000. It is specified for certain items. There is a bullet item that the District needs to investigate which is Water and Sewer Projects. Regarding reimbursement of services the District provides, they have NOT been selected to receive any monies from the Federal Government under this Act. At the beginning of the pandemic the District received \$13,000 for EMS support. Going forward the District does not anticipate receiving any funding associated with COVID 19.

Commissioner Spotts hates to be the naysayer, but he was the one that voted no on both budgets after 10 hrs. of negotiations. Not only is Commissioner Spotts on the Board of Commissioners but he is also on the Board of Finance for the Town. When he saw the combination of 2 departments with a budget of a little less than \$9 million, and the Town budget on the government side was \$17 million. He stated that the budget proposed for 2 departments within this Town cannot be possible. The perception of the taxpayer is going to be why is the District going up on taxes when the Town did not. The Town has not gone up in the last 4 or 5 years. He noted that with the pandemic, there are a lot of people that are still unemployed, or underemployed. The Feds are giving stimulus money because people are going to food pantries, etc. to get food. It is bad timing for the District to be talking about an increase on both the fire side and the water side.

The other point is that instead of taking items out of the budget and putting them into bonding, nothing was cut. He brought suggestions to the floor such as closing West Street. It is a money pit. It is a storage house for apparatus. Administrative offices are there, but they could find a rent or lease because there are plenty of vacancies in the Town of Cromwell. The ambulance would be nice to have, but this is not the year to have it. It is \$100,000 that the District does not have. The area that needs to be looked at

seriously is administration. He said they need to have discussions with the Finance Department to see if they can bring the financial function into the Town of Cromwell. It would save \$4,000 to \$6,000 a month. Those are the hard decisions that have to be looked at. It should be looked at now. He understands the District needs certain things, but they can't have them all at once. We have to plan for it. He thinks there will be a big turnout at the public hearing because people are not going to be happy with this budget. He does not support this budget. Commissioner Rukowicz thanked everyone on the Executive Committee. He respected their opinions and honesty.

The Executive Director noted that the budget gap is being filled by three things, the potential mil rate increase, repurposing or realigning some of the capital monies and hitting the General fund for \$176,000. Those things will close the gap. The reason for the increased costs is infrastructure. A couple of years ago the Commission changed the structure of service for the Fire Department. They now rely on paid personnel. Those personnel have labor contracts. They also have part-time employees in the Fire Department that have recently unionized. These are all incremental costs. Cromwell is no longer competitive at \$14 an hour for a fully trained EMS person/firefighter. Whether there is a union contract or not, this Commission decided when it approved the staffing model that they were going to methodically every year increase the starting salary to bring it up to a standard that is more competitive. What the Executive Director did not know was that the whole world of volunteer fire departments were going to follow Cromwell's lead and start paying part-time employees so they would not get into the FLSA situation. This ramped up the payroll expense. They had anticipated being where we are today three years down the road from today as it relates to the expense associated with fire and EMS personnel. They cannot control the market or the labor rates. Lisbon, CT is paying \$22-\$23 an hour for a part-time firefighter. This budget identifies \$16 an hour. Cromwell has had some great firefighters/EMS personnel. As soon as they come onboard, the District embraces them, but then they find a firefighting position that offers more money per hour. The level of service that this Fire Department provides including EMS and communications is a great deal for the taxpayer's dollar. Cromwell is no longer able to be a volunteer fire department. They are relying on paid personnel to meet the growing need of the senior citizens' community which requires more services from EMS. Today alone there were 4 calls at 52 Missionary Rd. It is not unusual to get multiple calls, multiple times. That is not going to change.

The Commissioners can say that the taxpayers cannot afford this, it is their right to decide and vote. However, that would mean that services will not be at the level they should be, and the Board needs to explain that. If the taxpayers want to reduce the level of service, they will vote no for this budget. If the budget is not accepted by the taxpayers, it will be the job of the Commission and District administrators to deal with it effectively. To have 12% year over year is very high. However, the Board and the District have set a standard for service by approving the SAFER grant and approving the staffing model. The standard is to meet the needs of the taxpayers.

It can't be the misperception that lets not give the Fire Department a half million dollars, and nothing changes. That can't be. There will be fallacy that there is \$500,000 of fluff in this budget. Unfortunately, the reality will set in, maybe not at first, but eventually. And then the Department will have to respond to the best of its ability. The Fire Department staff will do their very best whether they have 5 people on shift and one dispatcher, six people on shift or 7 people on shift with 2 dispatchers. They will do their very best, but they cannot perform miracles.



President Brow stated that it is important to remember to look back where we were with the career firefighters and the schedule they were working. It was a rotating scheduled. They were here for days. Pay was OK to start, and we would train them. They would take tests and they would move on. It was a revolving door for the career staff. They run into the same thing now with the part-time scheduled. They receive training and get some experience and then they leave to make more money. It may have worked 10 years ago, but it is not going to work today. We need qualified, predictable, dependable people that are coming in and getting paid a fair wage. The Department has also saved the taxpayer from paying significant DOL fines because people were claiming to be employees and driving with blue lights on but claiming to be a volunteer which was why they had a blue light. The other side of the story was when they were not going out on calls, they were claiming unemployment. If we had not addressed and fixed that issue, it could have been a fineable event. DOL could have gone back 3 years for each person. There is a department in CT that got caught in that and the fines were significant. We saved the taxpayers from that. He discussed volunteerism. He echoed the same comments as the others regarding the level of service the Department provides.

Commissioner Rukowicz added that if we hook up to Middletown or MDC we can sell water at each end. If Cromwell can hook up to Middletown, they would also be able to sell water to Durham. Regarding dispatch, we not only dispatch on our own, but we dispatch the task force. They do major incidents for Berlin. There are a couple of other towns that are also interested in buying water. The Fire Marshal's office is also going to be charging for services. That will be additional revenue coming in. It is hoped that the Department will be able to obtain more federal grants. Commissioner Colligan added that over the last 10-20 years the District has always tried to not use tax dollars and get the money somewhere else. They have always taken into consideration the taxpayer. Now they need to explain to the taxpayer why the District needs their help. He also commented on the closing of West Street. Commissioner Colligan stated that they went out from West Street 6 times last week to major incidents both volunteers and part-time staff. It is not a dead station. The station is being used to take care of the Town of Cromwell. There was a boat emergency recently. The boats are housed at West St. because it is closer to the river. Also noted was when this was a volunteer department, the Annual Drive used to provide money to the Department to buy gear and equipment. They no longer have that fund drive anymore. The taxpayers always supported that drive.

Commissioner Terry had been studying the breakdown. She was pretty pleased. 46% of the District's budget goes to public safety. 25% is fixed cost. That is insurance and benefits. That is not a number we can play with because it is a fixed cost. The same for debt service, 11% which is another fixed cost. The biggest part of the budget is public safety. She felt this was admirable. It is what the Town and the taxpayers would want. She thinks that for the taxes the taxpayer is paying, they are getting a good bang for their buck because the first responders are always there when 911 is called. They are paying attention to the citizens. She was very happy with the budget.

There was some discussion about tax collection because the Town charges the District \$60,000 to collect the District's taxes. If the Town can take over fiscal responsibilities or administrative responsibilities without increasing their cost, it would be worth looking into. However, if for example they can take on 10 hours-worth of work, does that mean that the position does not already have 10 hrs. worth of work. Would it cause that


position to take one 10 hrs. of OT instead. If tasks are transferred the only savings would be whoever makes less money. The District is a lower salary base than the Town. Merging administrative positions would need to be vetted thoroughly. Eliminating work would be a true savings. There was a lengthy discussion regarding Town services vs. District services being absorbed by the Town. If it saves money, the Executive Director said it is worth looking into. They also discussed the efficiency study that the Town had contracted which the District agreed to be part of. This was before COVID, Now CCM is no longer the vendor. A new vendor has taken over the project but the cost of the study has now tripled. That project has been put on hold. This study would identify some of the things being discussed tonight about combining services.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and approved 8 to 1 to accept the FY 2021/2022 Cromwell Fire District Budget as submitted. Commissioner Spotts voted nay.

V. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Rukowicz thanked the Board for their support of this budget. He thanked Mr. Alibrio for putting the numbers together for the Committee and the Board. He also thanked Mr. Neto for all the extra work he put into getting this budget together. The next step is the Town meeting. Commissioner Epstein stated that the Board of Commissioners needs to be prepared at this meeting. They need to get enough information out there so that the Townspeople can make an informed decision. The Board members need to do their homework to answer questions. They should provide some visual aids. They will have to show the Townspeople that they have only gone up on taxes twice in the last 15 years and have kept water rates the same for the last 12 years. Commissioner Rukowicz state that they plan on publishing these facts and make them well known. They will discuss the services being provided, the new senior facility just built on West St., the new Amazon facility and how many people that will bring into Town, how many accidents they are responding to and how many hotels Cromwell has. This all causes more work and calls to respond that we are asking the taxpayers to pay for. They discussed the venue for the Town meeting which will probably be the bay at Coles Road due to COVID meeting requirements from the Governor. There still needs to be social distancing for an indoor gathering. The President and the Executive Director will be discussing when the meeting should be scheduled. It will be published in the Middletown Press, on the website, posted at the fire stations and Town Hall.

VI. Adjournment. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 PM.

ATTEST:

  
Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Secretary  
5-18-21