

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **Water Operations Committee Meeting**

Tuesday, August 10, 2021

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners Robert Donohue (Vice Chairman), Charles Epstein and Lee Brow (President). Also attending were Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri, Executive Director Julius Neto, Water Dept. Admin. Ass't. Donna Boccuzzi, and Fire Chief Jason Balletto. Commissioners Mertie Terry and Roger Rukowicz were absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:38 PM, by Vice Chairman Donohue.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by President Brow, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. Commissioner Epstein commented that people should pay their water bill.
- IV. New Business
 - A. Update on Pre-Engineering Study for Interconnection Project. The CFD budget that was approved included \$60,000 for this project. The process has begun with Environmental Partners and their lead engineer Chuck Adelsberger. There have been some preliminary meetings in the District Office. The first milestone that was addressed was their first meeting with Berlin Water last week. They are already connected on Berlin Road. They are also looking to tie in at Kirby Road, behind Walmart. Mr. Palmieri explained that when Middletown put in the FedEx building they ran a large water main with a large capacity to the FedEx building. There as an option for the potential interconnection with them. With the current connection with Berlin, there is not enough capacity to supply Cromwell because it is an older system with smaller pipes. It is an advantage for them to purchase water from us. They are also considering an option on Pasco Hill Road. Ultimately there will be 4 options available. This is just the beginning stages. The pre-engineering study will vet all these options to see what is practical.

The Water Division will be looking for grants or low interest loans. All the infrastructure projects could become part of the American Recovery Act, but not necessarily tied to the Town. If the federal government identifies special funds for water, it gives the State the opportunity to earmark those funds. Water companies not for profit will have first dibs at funding. As things progress, the District will need to engage their state representatives as

a way to keep them in the loop. There was a discussion regarding the interconnections, the State's involvement, and financing. Once the pre-engineering study is complete, some key points will be able to be published on the District's website and facebook. It was agreed that there will be information available to be published in the quarterly newsletter.

- B. Update on Water Collections. The Executive Director introduced Donna Boccuzzi who is the part-time Administrative Assistant in the Water Department. Mr. Neto wanted to acknowledge the outstanding job Donna has been doing with the Water Collections project. She has been both professional and consistent in the process and has been educating the customers that have not been compliant. Those are the key variables that have made this project successful. Mr. Palmieri added that Donna is doing a wonderful job communicating with the delinquent customers. She has a good system in place.

Donna has come up with a list of the delinquent accounts. The list starts with the highest amount owed. Since last December the total amount collected is \$225,485.16. She has been sending out letters and getting payment agreements. They started doing shut offs at the beginning of June. So far they have not had to shut anyone off. Those people have made payment arrangements. There were some full payments of delinquent accounts totaling \$56,000. She explained her collection process.

They have run into one caveat which is that there are multi-family residences that cannot be shut off. Ms. Boccuzzi is recommending to Mr. Neto and Mr. Palmieri that a foreclosure process be started in those cases. She distributed generic copies of documentation she has sent to the customers. They are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. President Brow thanked Ms. Boccuzzi on behalf of the Commission for a job well done.

A lien program was started back in September. Another issue was that the District was not charging the customer the lien fees even though we paid the Town Clerk for those liens, to file them and also release them. The Water Department has the right to charge that to the customer. There are 163 active liens.

- C. Discussion and Possible Decision on Foreclosure Process for Non-Payment of Water Bill. Mr. Neto explained that this is the last leg of collections. It started with a list of liens of serious offenders. The District cannot terminate water at any dwelling that is a rental property, where a tenant may not have direct control of the water bill. The Water Department strongly suggests that the District take the next steps to engage an attorney to go through a foreclosure process. They will be sending out letters but need to be able to execute the strategy if necessary. Ms. Boccuzzi explained what can be done. In her other position at New Britain Water, after the notification process (letters) is done, the next step is a letter from the Corporation Council. The Council is comprised of 6 or 7 attorneys that are very well versed in foreclosure. Normally people do not lose their homes. Their mortgage companies are notified, and in most cases they will pay off the lien and put it on the back end of the mortgage. The legal fees are paid by the people with the liens. In most cases people do not lose their homes.

A motion was made by Commissioner Brow, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved that the Water Operations Committee make a recommendation to the full Board to accept the foreclosure process for non-payment of water bills

including the solicitation and retainer for the appropriate attorney(s) for the discussed foreclosure process.

There was another issue to discuss which was an application for financial relief of a water bill. The customer applying for relief was on the agenda for the July Board of Commissioners' meeting. Because that meeting adjourned early due to a lack of quorum, this item was tabled to the August meeting. It was suggested to move this item to this Committee from a timing perspective. The person lives at 2 Gatesville Lane in Cromwell. The detailed information was distributed to the Committee members. The amount was \$505. It was also determined that the person has an irrigation system in the summer months which increases his water bill which he is claiming he cannot afford. It is noted that the hardship includes money owed in back taxes to the Town and the IRS. Commissioner Epstein suggested that the customer come up with a payment plan and make an effort to make some type of initial payment.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Brow and unanimously approved that the Water Operations Committee recommend to the full Board of Commissioners to not provide any relief to this customer but rather have the person make reasonable payment arrangements. The information provided did not justify relief to the customer. A lien had been placed on the account already because the amount owed was substantial and no attempt to make a payment had been made.

- V. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein thanked Mr. Palmieri and Ms. Boccuzzi on their diligence in the Water bill collection process.
- VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Brow, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Donohue, Vice Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
8-25-21