

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS Fire Operations Committee Meeting

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

5:30 PM

**Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT**

Present: Commissioners David Colligan (Chairman), Jason Hinners, Robert Donohue and Charles Epstein. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Communication Manager Justin Lonergan, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade, Acting Assistant Chief of Training Brian Petrucelli and LeRoy Brow, President of the Board of Commissioners.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM, by Chairman Colligan.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Approval of Meeting Minutes of January 24, 2022. The minutes from January 24, 2022, had been distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of January 24, 2022, as submitted.

- IV. Public Comment. Brian Petrucelli had comments although he thought that tonight's meeting was a full Commission meeting. The opportunity to serve as the interim Assistant Chief has been a privilege for Brian. The bargaining unit for the Dispatchers had been asked several times during COVID to provide manpower to the office of the Assistant Chief of Training. Mr. Petrucelli thanked the Board for the opportunity to assist and serve.

However, he was saddened that the Fire Department found themselves behind the eight ball. His term will expire on Sunday, Feb. 27, 2022, and nothing has been done regarding filling the position or a plan for succession of power. He was very passionate about making this Department a professional environment. Under the direction of Chief Balletto and working with Ass't Chief Brade, the Commission and the EMS coordinator, he felt that a lot of progress has been made in the last six months. He is afraid that the Fire Chief, Ass't Fire Chief and EMS Coordinator will be burdened with an extra load. He doesn't want things to be forgotten. Through lack of communication or ineffectiveness the Department is letting

something go again. Something that is important when it comes to training and safety. He would be remis if he did not speak to that. He hopes the Commission will take this seriously at the next Commission meeting. He is aware of outstanding circumstances that affect the Personnel Committee moving forward, but they had presented several times options. Two months ago they met with the Executive Director Neto they extended the contract for two months. No one has approached them regarding extending it. He hopes that they will not let anything go that they have started. He complimented Chief Balletto, his staff and the Commission on trying to make this into a truly professional department. A lot of progress has been made specifically the way the interview process and testing was conducted. It was a step in the right direction.

- V. Communications Report. The Communications Manager gave a report on the Communications Project. The status of the project is in the hands of Norcom and the State. He had a discussion with Paul Zito at the end of last week. The Executive Director had received some correspondence on the issue as well. Mr. Lonergan had been away over the weekend, but plans on following up tomorrow with the Executive Director and Mr. Zito. It was thought that there are loose ends that need to be addressed. He plans to review the programming template to make sure all MOU's are in line. There should be a test programming coming very shortly.

Mr. Neto added that there was a week or two delay on the template. Motorola and the State had a conflict of interest. They pulled all the programmable keys not only out of Norcom but also for anyone that had the capability of programming radios on their behalf. The District will make sure to have Norcom's attention until all is resolved. Mr. Lonergan explained the ISSI connection to the State. Whenever you program anything into the radios that has anything to do with the State of CT, interop channel or anything on the State trunking system because it is ISSI, the State has to approve it. It has to be programmed and the State has to approve it. It is very, very complicated. Mr. Lonergan does not want to get involved in any of those issues. That is why Norcom was hired. They are trying to make sure that everything is in line so that when they do this program, they will be good for a while. Mr. Lonergan plans on budgeting one programming every year. This will help them stay current with their Mutual Aid partners. He will budget for it even if it is not needed.

The President asked how much it would cost to purchase their own radio management suite. Mr. Lonergan thought that because they signed an MOU with the State, they have the ability to program on their own radios. It was discussed briefly in the process of planning to purchase the radio management suite. Mr. Lonergan thought it had been shut down. He did not have a problem doing that as long as it is not part of the ISSI and the trunking system.

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

- VI. Reports of the Chief Officers. Chief Balletto reported that his report had been submitted to the Board of Commissioners at their monthly meeting last week. There have been no changes to the report. He was available to answer any questions. Chairman Colligan asked when Truck 1 would be back in service. The Chief reported they are still waiting for the air leak to be repaired. The Chief is using the Scott packs as back up SCBA packs. They had to take 12 of the SCBA 50's out of service because they were on front line pieces. Chris Logan is getting the parts right now to repair the air leak. Also, the ladder has be certified which Mr. Logan is also scheduling. Ass't Chief Brade had nothing to add from what was reported

at the Board meeting. Acting Assistant Chief Petrucelli had nothing to add to the report submitted to the Board.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the Reports of the Chief Officers as presented.

- A. Fire Marshal's Office Report. Mr. Holmes had submitted the Fire Marshal's Report at the Board of Commissioners' meeting. He had nothing to add and was available to answer any questions. Chairman Colligan asked about the Ordinance/fee schedule getting passed by the Board. Commissioner Colligan was not able to attend the meeting. Mr. Holmes reported that the ordinance passed and should go into effect 30 days after the notice is published in the newspaper. The newspaper could not guarantee when the ad would be published so Mr. Neto had to use the date of March 25, 2022, as a date for implementation.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding motor vehicle taxes and how that could effect Fire Marshal fees. The Chief reminded the Committee that when the Special meeting was held to decide on an ambulance billing company, it had been documented what the Fire Department would bill for all emergency calls. The bottom line was that the insurance company would be the only party to be billed. Every department is following the same plan. It will be put into the narrative for ESO reports. They will also get access to all the NIFRS reports. The billing for emergency calls will be added as Old Business to the Fire Operations Committee meeting agenda.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Marshal's Report for January as submitted.

- VII. Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability. Chief Balletto discussed the interview process for full-time firefighters that was held today. They are in the process of tabulating the scoring. It was very successful. There were 51 applicants. 34 proceeded to the written exam, and 31 proceeded to the oral exam. He is working with the Executive Director and President of the Board to have a Special Personnel Committee meeting within the week. All scores will be distributed to the Executive Director by tomorrow the latest.

VIII. Old Business

- A. Firehouse "Safe Haven" Discussion. The Chief reported he has made numerous phone calls to DCF to learn what the procedures are for this type of classification or identification of the firehouse. They will be doing upgrades on their cameras so that doors and access to the building is visible. There are working phones at West St. and Coles Rd. The Chief is trying to get Cromwell designated as a "Safe Haven" as well as receiving a designated "Safe Haven" phone number. This will also remain on Old Business for the Fire Operations Committee agenda.

IX. New Business

- A. Discussion on Utilization of Court Steet and Coles Road Firehouses. The Executive Director distributed some information as talking points regarding the two firehouses. There has been lots of discussion over the last few months about moving the Chief's office to Coles Road. There are pro's and con's to all of that. In addition, as we

begin the next budget process, we already know it is going to be a tough budget year. There is the addition of 4 new firefighters, maintenance fees for the new communication system, electricity to name a few.

The plan being presented tonight does not advise the Chief moving to Coles Road, however, the Fire Department still needs to maintain new requirements for sleeping quarters and housekeeping while meeting all the needs of a diverse staff 24/7.

Historically they had been thinking about the renovation of Court St. They would need approximately \$35,000 for the basic things they need to do. It is not nearly enough to meet the new standards that are coming. There are bathroom requirements that will be costly. Trying to defer renovation costs at Court St., the idea was to reallocate to Coles Road for 24/7 firefighters.

There are some advantages in relocating the crews to Coles Road. In looking at the objectives, if staff were relocated to Coles Road, they would not have to repurpose or look for \$100,000 on any renovation. There might be some painting at Court St., and Coles Road is self-sufficient. Proposed changes and other information is identified on the last page of the document distributed.

The Chief noted that when he was hired, he was asked to fix the Fire Department from the way it is. He received two informal complaints regarding the structure of the firehouse regarding the way it is with the intermingling of the males and females and the inability to take showers going forward. Originally \$40,000 was put aside to renovate the bathroom at Court St. A 23-page RFP was submitted to the Executive Director. He noted that to remodel the bathroom at Court St., the flooring on the second floor would have to be ripped out. In the first floor bathroom, the ceiling would have to be ripped out because they would have to connect into the sewer pipes for complete drainage and to have the plumbing run upstairs. That is a critical component in the process, and it will not be cheap to repair. During COVID the Department already had the Coles Road firehouse, and everything operated smoothly. At the Coles Road firehouse there already is a shower structure in place. There are four showers within the building, two for males and two for females. They also already have separate locker room facilities for males and females. There is enough room to store equipment and secure PPE. They also have enough room to do complete separation of males and females and the officers.

There is a drastic change in operating procedures moving forward, and the Cromwell Fire Department is not ready for it. Between the career Fire Chiefs and the UPFFA, there is a push for a cancer relief measure for all firefighters. This will be going into legislation and most likely it will pass. This means that every firefighter will have two sets of PPE and two sets of other equipment items.

An example of a situation would be if a crew goes to a structure fire, their PPE has to come out of service. The crew would need to come back to Coles Road for extraction which is already located at Coles Road. Everyone coming from that structure fire also has to take a shower. If a crew of 6 has to take a shower at Court St. and everyone is taking a shower at 30 min. per shower, that means the companies would be out of service for 3 hrs. At Coles Road, there are four showers, four people can shower all at the same time.

The Chief was not trying to make this a permanent move. It can be temporary until they figure out what they are going to do going to Court St. He thought that Commission meetings could still be held at Coles Road. The Committees can meet either at West St. or Court St. There needs to be a plan because if one formal complaint is filed, the Chief doesn't know what the Department is going to do.

Regarding the ISO rating, even if Court St. was located at Coles Road, there is between 3 and 7 minutes from Coles Road to the west side and east side of Town. The Chief heard there was something in writing about running fire engines out of Coles Road. That is not true. The Chief and the Fire Marshal went to Planning and Zoning and asked for all the documents regarding the issue of operating out of Coles Road. Plans were pulled for Coles Road. The Coles Road firehouse falls under the category of "Business Occupancy."

Chairman Colligan was at the Planning and Zoning meeting years ago where the issues were discussed. Those operating conditions were that coming out of the Coles Road firehouse, they could not blow the sirens coming out of the building to go to Evergreen and Willowbrook Road. The Chief noted that those conditions were never documented. They have already come up with a policy to use common sense with the siren in the neighborhood. It would cost the Department nothing to move to Coles Road. They would just need the server and the phones. It would cost a significant amount of money to keep those operations at Court St.

The Chairman suggested that the Chief document a plan that can be forwarded to the Board of Commissioners for consideration. The Chief added that this is the best solution for this situation. When there was discussion about moving the Chief's office to Coles Road, there were individuals going to other individuals seeing if it was OK with them if we move. The Chief feels this is the best solution. He found it insulting that some individuals are going to other individuals and not trusting the Chief to do the day to day operations. The District hired the Chief to accomplish this objective. He is protecting the District going forward by coming up with a permanent solution.

The President asked that accommodations be made for the Association. The Chief had planned to put offices at Court St. for Russ Johnson, Chris Logan and the Association. Everything will be running out of Court St. such as supplies and equipment so they can keep track of everything, plus protect and store everything from the Association. It is not clear right now if the mechanic can be moved to Court St. because of his equipment. They are still looking into that. It was also suggested that Mr. Logan and Mr. Johnson be part of the conversation. The Chief has started some conversations with them. The Executive Director noted that it is one thing to receive input from the parties involved, but the Board members are the decision makers. Decisions should not be led by those that are not the policy makers. Mr. Neto added that the original intent of Court St. was to house the volunteers and communications. It was never built for the Chief's Office.


The Chief added that when the staffing model was created and the Department went to 24/72, the firehouses could not hold up. Right now 20% of the Fire Department staffing is females. Chairman Colligan requested a documented plan to review at the next meeting. The Chief requested that this process move forward, and not be taken slowly. He would like to have another meeting in two weeks to discuss before

something happens. The President asked the Chief to send him email with all the specifics to schedule a meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's report regarding the utilization of the Court St. firehouse vs. Coles Road firehouse.

- X. Commissioners' Comments. There were no comments to report.
- XI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



David J. Colligan, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary