

# Cromwell Fire District

1 West Street  
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Telephone 860-635-4420

FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE  
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT  
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

## **BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

### **Fire and Water Divisions**

**Tuesday, July 19, 2022**

**6:00 PM**

**Coles Road Firehouse**

**105 Coles Road**

**Cromwell, CT**

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners' Meeting on Tuesday, July 19, 2022, at 6:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to discuss and act upon Fire and Water Division business.

Commissioners Charles Epstein (Secretary, Acting Chairman), Robert McIntyre, Roger Rukowicz, Robert Donohue (excused at 6:40 PM), Mertie Terry, Chip Darius and Lee Brow (President arrived at 6:30 PM, and allowed Commissioner Epstein to continue chairing the meeting). Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes, Communications Manager Justin Lonergan, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri and Accountant Michael Alibrio.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM, by Secretary Epstein. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Secretary Epstein.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted with the following addition: under Item X. New Business, Item C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors – Mike Lupkas ADDING Mike Alibrio to Item C.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Bill Gibb, 58R Geer St., had comments about ambulance billing. He has lived at the same address for 72 years. He has been a taxpayer for over 50 years. He was also a member of the Fire Department. He stated that as members they were all told they would not be charged for ambulance calls, and no taxpayer would ever get charged for an ambulance call. The other insurance would pay for it.

It seems as though the past practices went away. Mr. Gibb is being charged \$270 every time the ambulance comes to his house. This year he has made 5 trips to the hospital. He received a bill a

couple of weeks ago for a lift assist at a cost of \$228. He understands that the District needs to charge like other ambulance companies charge, but the taxpayers and people on Medicare are being hurt the most. When he worked, he never saw bills for ambulances. It was all covered by his insurance. Now that he is retired, he is being billed \$270 for every ambulance call. He has been told by some of the Board members that he should not be paying for ambulance calls, but he has been paying them. His spouse is handicapped from a stroke, and he is not always able to lift her if she falls. He doesn't know what to do. He is having a hard time paying these bills. He cannot go back to work to pay them because he also got sick.

Commissioner Epstein requested the Executive Director to forward Bill's comments over to the Operations Committee for discussion purposes at their next meeting. Mr. Neto explained that if the intent of the discussion is for policy change, the discussion should not be with the Fire Operations Committee. The discussion would remain with the Board members. It can be added to next month's Board meeting agenda.

If Mr. Gibb is a life member, it was thought that there would not be an ambulance charge. The Executive Director thought the Board had made a decision in the recent past regarding life members not paying ambulance bills. However, the District Office does not know who the life members are. If life members are identified to the District Office, the Office can notify the billing company about waiving the ambulance charge. If Mr. Gibb was in contact with one of the Commissioners on this, that Commissioner did not follow through by informing Mr. Gibb to notify the District Office of the date and time of the call and advise the office he is a Life member. In turn, the Office will notify Shared Response (Cromwell's ambulance billing company) that the recipient of the ambulance bill is a life member.

Lift assists are acceptable charges by Social Security and Medicare. The Board is the policy maker. Until the policy makers change the policy, the administration will maintain the status quo for processing ambulance bills (case-by-case basis). Mr. Neto cannot speak for a retiree who is struggling to pay ambulance or lift assist bills. If those individuals fit the criteria for financial assistance, they should contact the District Office, submit a request for assistance with documentation to back up the request and forward the request to the Board of Commissioners to be addressed at their next meeting.

Mr. Gibb left the meeting after he made his comments. Therefore, Commissioner Epstein requested that someone from the Office contact Mr. Gibb to make him aware of his options. He would like to move this item to the next Board of Commissioners' meeting. Mr. Neto will follow up with Mr. Gibb to assist him with a request for relief of ambulance bills.

Commissioner Darius requested a concise summary of what the current billing policies and exclusions are. This may also be addressed through the Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to table this item until next month. Commissioner Darius added that someone needs to notify the billing company to withhold any progress toward collection for Mr. Gibb. Mr. Neto will contact Shared Response tomorrow.***

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF  
JUNE 21, 2022

*A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of June 21, 2022, as submitted.*

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

The Executive Director received an email today at 2:15 PM from James Rude, 25 Highridge Rd. He distributed copies to the Commissioners. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The subject matter: Request for Meeting. The correspondence will be passed on to the President for consideration.

The Executive Director responded to Mr. Rude stating that he is always available to meet to discuss any items or issues.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Executive Director had nothing to add to the report. He was available to answer any questions.

*A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's report as submitted.*

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Alibrio noted that in the report is a very preliminary year end financial report for year end June 30, 2022. It highlights the General Fund and the Water Fund. The District is ahead on revenues and a little behind on expenditures meaning both funds did better collecting and not spending as much. Any and all amounts on this report are subject to adjustment. It is looking very good for the month's end.

The Executive Director noted that this would be Mike Alibrio's last financial statement and report since he will not be at the next Board meeting. Mr. Neto just wanted to recognize the partnership the District has had with Mike and his employer over almost the last 10 years. Mr. Neto thanked Mr. Alibrio for being flexible to the way the District does business.

On behalf of the Commission, as the Acting Chair this evening, Commissioner Epstein on behalf of all the Commissioners wanted to thank Mr. Alibrio for all he has done over the years. They know it is not an easy task. It was good news to know that the District is ahead of the game in terms of finances.

*A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for June as submitted.*

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Chief Balletto is on vacation. Assistant Chief Brade was in attendance to go over the Chief's report.

Assistant Chief Brade was available to answer any questions. He reported that the Chief's office has successfully moved to Coles Road. The Chief's office is located on the North side of the building. The other offices such as the Admin. Assistant, Ass't Fire Chief and Megan Petrucelli are located on the south side of the building. They are still unpacking but the move has been made. The crews at Court St. seem pretty happy. They have painted the bunker rooms already. They received new beds which were pre-budgeted. Now that summer is here, the call volume has been picking up. Yesterday was a tragic day for those that went on the motor vehicle calls. The Assistant Chief had been checking on those individuals to make sure they are ok.

Commissioner Rukowicz asked about statistics from the golf tournament. Ass't Chief Brade reported that there were 3 medicals, but St. Francis hospital covered the majority of medicals on the course. There was one runaway golf cart that ended up being on the news. It landed in the pond. Mr. Neto noted that the Chief did a very good job of invoicing and tracking the number of hours that the Department spent supporting the tournament. A bill was submitted and a payment was received all ready. All expenses were paid by the tournament. No taxpayer dollars were spent. Chief Brade stated that they have developed a good working relationship with the PGA staff. They were able to come up with some estimates ahead of time and actual numbers after the fact. Everything worked out well this year. He gave kudos to the crews. It was a busy week that week. They had a full staff in Town covering the Town, and another seven people at the tournament.

Commissioner Epstein suggested that if any Commissioners are interested, they could plan on arriving one hour before the next Board meeting and take a ride over to Court St. to tour Court St. and see the progress that is being made. The work being done is NFPA compliant. Everyone in that firehouse is working towards a common goal.

Commissioner Terry suggested once a year having a "coffee and" for the volunteers and regular employees that says thank you from the Commission. She wanted to make this an annual event, and was looking for support from the Commission. She has Commissioner Terry wanted to add this to the next agenda and see it become something that the Board does. Commissioner Epstein will bring this before the President to review for his opinion. The Executive Director will put this on next month's agenda. The Commission can decide then what it is they wish to do. There is also a Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee to facilitate the recognition.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Chief's Report for June as submitted.***

1. Fire Marshal's Office. The Fire Marshal's Report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Holmes reported that his report was submitted with the packet. He had nothing to add. He was available to answer any questions. He was at the golf tournament most of that week along with Colin Whalen. They checked in daily, and there were no issues to speak of. Mr. Holmes repeated his story about the fire code violation with the grandstand at the 17<sup>th</sup> hole. He spoke about this at the last meeting. The plan is for next year, the TPC will need a different plan for the grandstands. No mechanicals are to be stored underneath where the public is sitting. The equipment was embedded in the framework, and it would not be easy to remove. The grandstand would have to be taken down. Mr. Holmes did not want to enforce it at that point. However,

next year there needs to be a different plan for the grandstand/mechanicals. They ended up having a fire watch there.

Commissioner Darius had a question about food trucks. As it turns out Mr. Holmes has learned that there have been food trucks at various Town events, and they created parking issues. Mr. Holmes has recently started to visit the events. The FMO is not charging any fees for food trucks right now because the ordinance is new, and it was not in the plan. There have been no more surprises for Mr. Holmes. The Park & Rec Department has been keeping the Fire Marshal in the loop. The issue becomes whether or not to adjust policy to include food trucks in the ordinance, and whether or not a billing rate needs to be established.

Commissioner Darius would be all in favor of making it clear that the Fire Marshal has the authority and can charge an appropriate fee. The Executive Director agreed from a process perspective. When the Fire Marshal fees were established, they were non-inclusive. A full assessment was to be done one year after establishing the fees to make sure all fees are included based on the Fire Marshal's experiences over the last year. Mr. Neto explained the process which includes a public meeting introducing all the new fees. There would be a chance for public comment and then it is voted on. Because it is a Town meeting, it needs to be advertised.

Commissioner Rukowicz commented that the Fire Marshal and staff did a great job with the golf tournament. The day-to-day operations were fantastic. The reports are very detailed and informative.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Marshal's Report for June as submitted.***

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for June had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri reported that they have been pumping a lot of water. They are at the height of their high demand season. Everything is running smoothly at the Chemical Feed & Control building. Mr. Palmieri was available to answer any questions. Mr. Palmieri noted that the Department is not implementing any restrictions on water usage at this time. Commissioner Darius asked about the new bobcat/mini excavator the Department received. He wanted to know if there was operator training provided by the vendor. The vendor did go through everything to show the staff where everything was. Commissioner Darius asked about scheduling some training.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Operations Report for June as submitted.***

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center report had been submitted and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He highlighted a couple of things. One thing was having to move the back-up dispatch center at Coles Road to make room for the Chief's office. Union negotiations are ongoing. They interviewed candidates for the full-time Dispatcher position that has opened up. They continue to work on access controls, cameras, lighting and speaker adjustments and upgrades to the pump room. He has been working with Angel on the phone system. They are trying to get everything adjusted to accommodate the Fire Chiefs and office staff at Coles Road.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Center Report as submitted.***

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. A meeting was held on June 29, 2022. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Brow and unanimously approved to accept the District Operations Committee meeting minutes of June 29, 2022, as submitted.***

- B. Executive. There was no meeting.

- C. Fire Operations. A meeting was held on June 20, 2022. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Commissioner Darius had a question on pg. 2 of the report. Item VI., it stated in the first paragraph that all personnel had their physicals for the year. The Commissioner thought that perhaps the career personnel have completed physicals, but not all fire personnel have had physicals. Ass't Chief Brade will follow up with the Chief. Some people need physicals every year, some are every other. The Executive Director thought that the Chief was referring to career personnel when he made that statement.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of June 20, 2022, as submitted.***

1. Communications Committee. There was no meeting.

2. Apparatus Committee. There was no meeting.

- D. Pension Committee. A meeting was held on June 30, 2022. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Executive Director summarized that meeting. Wells Fargo Financial Advisors were invited to give the Committee an update on the financial status of the pension fund. The last 6 months of the bond and stock market have gone south. There was discussion researching the possibility to cash out going forward. Any movement now would guarantee a total loss that the District has experienced over the last 6 months. It is Wells Fargo's recommendation not to do anything. Time is an ally at this point.

Mr. Neto also followed up with Future Plan. There was over \$2 million in the plan at the end of last year. The portfolio has gone down \$300,000. The District needs to get some or all of it back. If not, this issue will become a financial burden for the District. The District has a defined pension plan. The government does not care how the District gets that money. The Executive Director is working with Commissioner Colligan to deal with the issues that were raised about Roger Ambler. Mr. Neto has asked Future Plan for a legal road map to get Mr. Ambler qualified to receive benefits he has worked for knowing that the original investment company had Mr. Ambler on its roster. At some point his name was left off the list of pensioners that were transferred to Future Plan. Records were found for Mr. Ambler back with a previous finance director 10 – 12 years ago with the census that identified Mr. Ambler as being terminated from the plan on the census. That information triggered the present

future plan. If the District inadvertently or otherwise took that person off, Future Plan or anyone else that manages the data would have to go by the information they were given. There was a document identified that the District will need to work with to get Mr. Ambler retirement credit. That document reflects that Mr. Ambler was eligible. The District does not know how many other pensioners are affected. The District will continue to work for a solution.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Pension Committee meeting minutes from June 30, 2022, as submitted.***

- E. Personnel. Meetings were held on June 14, 2022, and July 12, 2022. The minutes from June 14, 2022, had been tabled last month. The minutes from July 12, 2022, were not available for review.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the Personnel Committee meeting minutes of June 14, 2022, as submitted.***

***A motion was made by Commissioner Brow, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to table the Personnel Committee meeting minutes of July 12, 2022, as they were not available for this meeting.***

- F. Water Operations. Commissioner Rukowicz announced that the next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 3, 2022, at 5:30 PM.

#### BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

#### CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was no report.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
1. Public Safety Tower Committee. Commissioner Rukowicz announced that the next Public Safety Tower Committee quarterly meeting is scheduled for Friday, September 2, 2022, at 10 AM, at West St.
  2. Health & Safety Building Committee. The meeting scheduled for July 7, 2022, had been canceled. Commissioner Darius asked if there was an update on the firefighters that were injured in training. Ass't Chief Brade noted that at the County Fire Chiefs' Meeting recently, the training incident was the only topic that was discussed. Everyone was relieved that the injuries were what they were and not any more serious. There were several people with bad blistering like a bad sunburn. They discussed issues with gear. OSHA came in and did their review. The Fire Marshal from Newington is doing an investigation as well. The Cromwell employees that were affected are doing very well. They were interviewed by OSHA and the Fire Marshal. There was a video that was seized for evidence.

3. Bylaws Committee. There was no meeting.
4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. There was no meeting.

#### NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. There were no comments from any Commissioners.
- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors – Mike Lupkas, Mike Alibrio. The Executive Director distributed copies of the resumes of Mike Lupkas and Lisa Sandow. Mr. Lupkas will be the replacement for Mike Alibrio as the District's Finance Manager, and Ms. Sandow will be the replacement for Jane Tosto as the Administrative Ass't/Billing Clerk for the Water Division. The Personnel Committee has approved both candidates for the positions and is forwarding their recommendations to the Board for approval. These individuals are both well suited for their role. If approved, Lisa Sandow will be an employee of the District, and Mike Lupkas will be a consultant/vendor.

Mr. Neto is also requesting through the Chair that Mike Alibrio be considered a vendor. The District would like to keep Mike on as a vendor to consult with while the new staff members are getting familiar with their responsibilities in their positions. This will only be a short-term agreement. Mike Alibrio has institutional knowledge going back 10 years. His expertise is invaluable.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Brow, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to authorize contracts with the following individuals: Michael Lupkas, Michael Alibrio and Lisa Sandow as recommended by the Executive Director and Personnel Committee.***

- D. Preliminary Discussion on the Fire Department's Strategic Plan. The Executive Director distributed copies of samples of other Fire Department's strategic plans for review. He reminded everyone that the Board, through the budget process, allocated \$25,000 for a Fire Department Strategic Plan. The question now is next steps. Is it something that this body still wants to do? The copies he distributed were samples of strategic plans. One was the Greenwich Fire Department and the other was a sample from a vendor. Last year Chief Balletto researched prices for vendors who develop strategic plans. He was quoted a price of \$21,000, and in today's world, that is on the low side in price. The Executive Director wanted to know if the District wants to proceed. He did not know if they should get 3 vendors with an RFQ. Every company has different focuses for their strategic plan. Did the District want to just focus on the Fire Department. There are other divisions within the Fire District. The Water Department through its water supply plan has their strategic plan through the state, DEEP. It isn't called a Strategic Plan for the Water Department. It is called the Water Supply Plan. The Water Department worked with Environmental Partners on their plan.

Commissioner Rukowicz thought there should be a sample of a plan that is more similar to Cromwell. The Greenwich plan has a large population and has 7 fire houses. He felt that the Fire Department does need a five-year plan. An outside vendor would be helpful. He thinks there should be 3 quotes to compare.

Commissioner Darius agreed there should be 3 quotes. He suggested recasting the request for proposal to specifically call for experience with similar operations.

Commissioner Terry wanted time to review the documents. She wanted to know specifically what Cromwell would be getting for their money.

Commissioner McIntyre agreed to seeing 3 quotes. He thinks the Chief should set up the parameters of what the Department is looking for.

Commissioner Epstein suggested setting aside a couple of nights in September for the Commission to get together to discuss just this topic with District managers.

President Brow stated there was an official request by him for a 5-year plan for both the Fire Department and Water Department. There have been several requests by taxpayers. The President agreed there should be 3 quotes. He knows a couple of individuals that work for one of the companies that does 5-year plans. They have the knowledge and expertise. He had requested the information by September. He had requested the information from the division heads to start the process. He would like to see a couple more bids to review before September.

Mr. Neto will have the first company refresh their quote as well as obtain two additional quotes. The District must specify what it is they are looking for. It was clarified by Commissioner Darius that the District needs to advise the vendors of what it is they are looking for. Commissioner Brow suggested tabling this until the September timeframe to review 3 fresh bids. They should have the information needed from the Division heads by then.

Commissioner Darius noted that we need to clarify what we are asking for first. He suggested that the District make it known that they are interested in doing this type of project. Ask the consultants to lay out the types of services they offer.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

***A motion was made by Commissioner Brow, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to adjourn the regular Board meeting at 7:35 PM.***

***A motion was made by Commissioner Brow, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to enter into Executive Session at 7:36 PM inviting all the Commissioners and the Executive Director to discuss the Executive Director's review and raise.***

***A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to give the Executive Director Neto a 4.5% raise retroactive to January 1, 2022, and to give a COLA of 2.5% retroactive to July 1, 2022.***

***A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn Executive Session at 7:57 PM.***

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 8:04 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Secretary

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Charles R. Epstein, Secretary (Acting Chair)

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