

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

Monday, January 9, 2023

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners Robert McIntyre (Chairman), David Colligan, Charles Epstein and Robert Donohue. Also attending was Roger Rukowicz (President), Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Communication Manager Justin Lonergan, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes and Acting Firefighter Union President Alan Dominy.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:31 PM.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- IV. Communications Report. Mr. Lonergan reported that he had a very productive meeting with the representative that is leading the project for the State for reprogramming radios. The template is being finalized. Once approval is received, they will be working with Norcom on some test portables. They will then move forward with full reprogramming and access to the State assets including Middletown. Cromwell will be getting a Channel on the State system so they will have a regional State channel on the State trunking system that the ambulances can use when they are out of area. Commissioner Colligan asked if this would be at no cost. That was the promise that Norcom had made from the beginning of the project. Mr. Lonergan noted that the Cromwell Police were having significant problems over the weekend with their radios. He will follow up with the State regarding the no cost issue.

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

- V. Reports of the Chief Officers. Chief Brade reported that his report had been submitted. Some of the events the Department participated in during the month were less than in previous months due to the nature of the month. They participated in the Toys for Tots campaign and Town Tree Lighting. There were a lot of serious calls during the month, from Mutual Aid to structure fires. The Department was also extremely busy servicing Westfield and going out of town. There was not a "Santa Run" this year, but the Department did

participate in collections for the Toys for Tots campaign. They discussed other toy options for next year.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report as presented.

- A. Fire Marshal's Office Report. Mr. Holmes was a little late getting his report out this month, but it will be available for the Commissioners for their meeting next week. There were 265 calls for the month, and 2,811 calls for the year. Over the last few years the totals continue to increase.

Mr. Holmes did a quick overview. There were 14 structure fires investigated, 14 vehicle fires and other fires such as brush or dumpster. 40 fires were extinguished this year. There were lots of inspections this month. Mr. Holmes announced that he has a part-time fire inspector, Brian Mello, starting on Thursday to help catch up. There was a large financial loss for the house on Wexford La. There were 76 mutual aid calls.

Commissioner Epstein suggested that the Fire Marshal contact Commissioner Darius who is co-chair of the Publicity Committee. He would like to see all the statistical information on calls published. Mr. Lonergan reported he has given all of that information to Commissioner Darius already. Mr. Holmes discussed various businesses in Town that are closing or opening. He reported that the old Red Lion hotel will be going before the Economic Development Commission for a tax abatement.

Chairman McIntyre asked about the FMO staffing. Mr. Holmes has a part-time inspector starting this week, Brian Mello. He is expecting to have Colin Whalen back a couple of days a week also as a part-time inspector. Mr. Mello also teaches at the Academy so the District will need to work around that schedule. He helped start and is the Director of the Juvenile Fire Setting Program for the State of CT.

Mr. Holmes added that his secretary is leaving. He has had some discussions with the Executive Director as far as moving forward with that position. The new phone system will be a big help because the FMO could have calls forwarded to their work phone. They are still working out details.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Marshal's Office report as presented.

- VI. Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability. The Chief reported they are still short staffed in the Chief's office. The positions for Assistant Chief of Operations and Assistant Chief of Operations and Training have been posted and will remain posted until the end of January. The Chief has been advised by the vendor that they are receiving applications for both positions. The List Serve will be going out again this Thursday. The Chief was told by the vendor where the positions are being posted other than List Serve including online and Facebook. Day to day operations are doing OK. Lt. McKnight has been assisting with scheduling. Other Lieutenants have been assisting with some of the other tasks. They have been having a lot of sick call outs. It is not unexpected for this time of year.

The Executive Director had a couple of comments to make. The three Lieutenants have stepped up their engagement to fill the void of the fourth Lieutenant being out. Also, the

Cromwell Fire Department leadership from the Chief to the Lieutenant present this evening, did a phenomenal job responding to the double fatality on Rte. 9. This was the type of event that magnifies the importance of first and fire responders. The Chief, Lt. Dominy and their crew did a phenomenal job managing the situation, and also supporting each other in the process. People that have been on scenes like that can appreciate what the Chief, Lieutenants and crews went through. The response time was outstanding. It was a chaotic scene at best. However, those types of calls take its toll. The District is in the process of providing support if people need it. The Fire Marshal was also on scene. Mr. Neto acknowledged them all for what they experienced and saw that day.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the report under Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response capability.

VII. Old Business. There was no old business to report.

VIII. New Business

A. Discussion and Possible Approval of "Moving" the Coles Rd. Gym to Court Street.

Commissioner Epstein felt that this issue should be handled by Management, the Chief and the Executive Director. He did not think it should be discussed at the Committee level unless there is a financial component to it.

Lt. Dominy was present to report to the Board. He began by stating he is now Acting President for Local 4662. He has been working with the Chief and took some photos regarding moving the gym to Court St. When all the changes to the firehouses happened, there was discussion about moving to Coles Road because of the gym and the different aspects of where things are located. Currently with the gym at Coles Road, not everyone utilizes it. However, it is hard trying to mitigate and move crews to come to Coles Road especially when their clothes etc. are at Court St. If they get caught in the middle of working out, there is a lot of jumbling that goes on. It was difficult to come up with a plan so everyone will utilize the gym at Coles Road. They need to come up with a decent plan to be able to move pieces of equipment to Court St.

Firefighters performing their jobs becomes very taxing on them. He reminded everyone of North Haven and the line of duty death they just experienced. Firefighters need to be physically and mentally ready for duty to prevent things like that from happening. Having physical fitness is huge in trying to release tension and anxiety. Having the opportunity to move the gym necessities that they need to the firehouse that they operate out of is going to be huge for the firefighters and members.

He explained all the photos of equipment distributed that will be needed for the gym. It would currently be stored underneath the mezzanine area at Court St. The Department has created a health and wellness committee that helped set up the gym. They suggested moving Engine 3 back to Coles Road from Court St. so they could use the bay for gear. The change would allow them to have a lot more room. He suggested some type of divider wall to separate the gym area since they already have a vent system that is intact.

Lt. Dominy discussed potential code issues with the Fire Marshal. Mr. Holmes discussed the electrical panel which needs to be available and not blocked by anything. The rubber matting can be utilized at Court St. Regarding subflooring they could create some type of

area around the mats to prevent trip hazards. Lt. Dominy stated this is so important to the Department that he is willing to come in on his own time to move the equipment. Chris Logan will be able to provide some type of equipment to help transport.

Commissioner Colligan had concerns about moving the gym again. Lt. Dominy was under the impression that the Fire Department was not allowed to move the gym. Lt. Dominy feels strongly and said with certainty that everyone would like to have the gym at Court St. It would not be moved again. He does not feel it will be an issue going forward.

The Chief has tasked Lt. Dominy, some of the union members and others to come up with a plan. There are a large number of fire department members that would like to see the gym at Court St. They discussed various options such as the day room, the lobby and the bay. The ADA Fire Marshal and Code expert looked into NFPA for the Chief. The exhaust issue in the bay should be addressed by the final head system which is the purpose of that system. Regarding potential off gassing from gear, in the plan the gear would be far enough away from the location of the gym.

The Chief discussed other issues that were planned to make more room. He feels that the gym at Coles Road is nice, and in his opinion to move it to another location would be a downgrade. However, the Chief knows of only 2 people that utilize the gym at Coles Road. If the gym were to move to Court St., he is certain it would get utilized much more that it does at Coles Rd.

The only thing Lt. Dominy could not address was the bird situation at Court St. which still exists. It was also noted that volunteers will also be allowed to use the gym.

The Executive Director felt that the plan in place was a band aid approach with some potential challenges going forward. He suggested for the upcoming budget cycle, identifying the true needs for the gym through the Chief's office and a group of identified firefighters and determine what they can do with the logistics of a bay or half a bay. The objective is to have it be a controlled gym environment fully focused on the health of the individuals that are going to be using it. The group would also be responsible for researching the potential for the second floor and the costs associated with it. It will become an investment in the future of the firefighters' wellbeing.

Lt. Dominy would like to have something in place until a permanent decision can be made about a renovated gym area. Chairman McIntyre didn't think they had enough of a developed plan in place to vote on this. Commissioner Donohue explained some of the ways a gym can be built up.

The Executive Director wanted to add this issue to the agenda he is preparing for a meeting with the Chief in a couple of weeks. He is asking that the Fire Department come up with two viable options with some rough costs. They can review this with one of the Commissioners who does this type of work for a living. The Executive Director and the Fire Operations Committee is interested in focusing on a long-term solution.

Commissioner Epstein stressed the importance of physical fitness for firefighters and being prepared financially to do the necessary improvements to the gym. Commissioner Colligan made some suggestions for using the gym at Coles Rd. Lt. Dominy could only

speak for the shift that he supervises which utilizes the Coles Road gym. That opportunity is not afforded to everyone for whatever reason.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to table this item until more information is made available.

- B. Discussion on Green Lights on the New Squad 1 Apparatus. Mr. Logan reported to the Chief today that the new Squad 1 has been delivered to Rocky Hill. When the apparatus was reviewed, Commissioner Darius asked about the legality of the green lights in back of the Squad 1 apparatus.

The Chief sent an email to the Apparatus Committee consisting of Commissioners Epstein, Colligan, Sokolowski, Chris Logan, the Executive Director, Union President and Joe Palmieri. There is something with NFPA that states you can put rear facing green on the back of an engine or fire apparatus. However, CT law supersedes NFPA requirements.

The Chief reached out to DMV and DOT. He did hear back from DMV, but received a lot of feedback from DOT. Running green lights is OK or legal under 14-96(q). Red lights, white lights, amber lights and blue lights can be run on a fire apparatus. Under the same law, different section, it states that green lights can be used by a volunteer, EMS organization. They were added recently to the DOT maintenance vehicles. There was a Public Act that was put in place in 2019. The Act gave the DOT money for funding to do research and a couple of other things. DOT opted to join in on a pilot program to identify and determine the effectiveness of green lights on plow trucks and how it may or may not reduce crashes on plow trucks in snowstorms. That is the reason why people are starting to see green lights on DOT vehicles. New vehicles that are cycled in are given the green lights.

The Department also reached out to Whalen. There are Fire Departments that are starting to put green lights on their apparatus and running them. Now that Cromwell is aware of what the laws are, they are not deliberately willing to go against the laws. Mr. Logan can change out the lights to green, but it would be an additional cost because it is an addition to the original order. They have the option of putting on more red lights which would defeat the purpose. The Chief feels they have enough red lights. They can use either amber or blue.

Commissioner Colligan said there are two options. One is to run the green lights until someone says something. But in doing that the Department sets itself up for liability should someone hit the back of the apparatus. He suggested using one amber and one blue because the State Police still use blue. He would like to alternate amber then blue.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to use one amber and one blue light alternating.

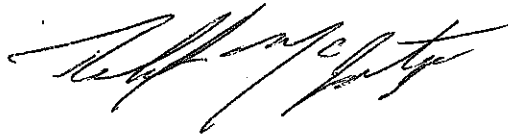
- IX. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Colligan commended the Fire Chief for an outstanding job done for the two major incidents that have happened over the last couple of weeks. He also reminded the fire staff to constantly check their people. Mental health is a very important factor in the Fire and Police services. He suggested forming some type of committee on mental health that would include union and non-union fire department members as well as managers as support in those types of stressful environments.

Lt. Dominy is working on a drill with his guys after receiving some information from Bristol Pierce support group. He is hoping to pass along the information to the Chief and the other lieutenants. They plan on putting mental health issues in their annual training. The firefighters need to know they can talk to people. The Chief has learned that there is a law about providing resiliency training. He will be working with them to institute training that needs to be done.

Chairman McIntyre commended the Lieutenant on not only his job performance but also taking care of his crew. Lt. Dominy has been doing a fantastic job ever since he has been promoted.

- X. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert McIntyre".

Robert McIntyre, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary