

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, August 15, 2023, 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, August 15, 2023, 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 Roger Rukowicz (President), David Colligan, Charles Epstein, Robert McIntyre, Mertie Terry and Donald Smith attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Finance Manager Michael Lupkas, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Assistant Fire Chief Karl Neubecker, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri and Communications Manager Justin Lonergan. Commissioners Chip Darius and John Sokolowski were absent.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 PM, by President Rukowicz. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Rukowicz.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 18, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of July 18, 2023, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
JULY 11, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of July 11, 2023, as submitted. Commissioner Terry abstained.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or appeals to report.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's Report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Neto highlighted that he and Mr. Palmieri continue to work with the Town of Berlin. He will provide more details later in this meeting. Also he contacted Attorney Kallor and requested that she review a copy of the Cromwell Fire District handbook. The handbook has not been reviewed in at least 8 years. There are a lot of federal laws and CT statutes changing. He asked that she evaluate and red flag any issues that need to be looked at further and addressed. He discussed the Tower Committee meeting. Some research is being done and there will be a follow up with AT&T. Commissioner Epstein asked the Executive Director to look into the possibility of using the HR Director position that the Town is looking into possibly using the position part-time in conjunction with it being part-time for the Town. Mr. Neto would be willing to speak to the Town Manager if requested by the Board. Commissioner Terry did not feel that the District should get involved with Town administration. Things are in the early stages, and the Town is at least 3 to 6 months out before making an decisions.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's Report for July as submitted.

B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lupkas noted that the report is for the month of July which is the first month of the new fiscal year. Numbers there are very skewed because there is very little data in there. The fiscal year report is still being finalized. He is preparing for the audit and has been in touch with the auditors over the last couple of days. They are going to try to schedule the audit for late September or early October. There are no issues that stand out right now with the audit. Budget modifications will be done after the auditing process in order to "clean up" accounts.

EMS calls for the month were 92 which were less than last year. With the collection process, there are two less accounts over \$1,000. There has been 77% collection efforts. They have discussed putting investments into STIFF accounts. (short term investment fund of the state). Within the next week or so he will be transferring money into those accounts. Mr. Lupkas explained some of the information on the Capital pages. Older projects have the balance available listed. That is what their starting number is. The new items that came into the budget for this year area also listed in a separate column. These changes were done to clarify when someone wants to spend money and the office is unsure where that money is coming from and what the available funds are for it. He asked for input with this new format. Things can certainly go back to its original format if it is confusing. Mr. Lupkas also confirmed the

transfer of funds to Melissa Roming, President of the new Volunteer Association. They now have their official account with their balance that was forwarded. He also thanked everyone for their patience with him as he deals with some medical challenges.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for July as submitted.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Chief was available to answer any questions. The Chief referred to the top of page 2 on his report. He included a breakdown of all calls. There were approximately 255 calls last month. This month they had received 16 calls in a 24 hour period yesterday. The seventh person that was added to the schedule has come in handy on both the Fire and EMS side.

Out in the community the Fire Department helped Middletown with their fireworks. A splashdown was held for the kids at Woodside School. The Department got their EMS license renewed. They received a 10% increase from the State on their billing for EMS charges until January. They submitted their application to get their rate renewal for the 2024 calendar year. The ambulances were inspected, and two minor things were identified. An outlet was not working. They did a flag representation for a cancer bike ride. There was a dedication for the Fire Marshal's Office. There was also a swearing in for the two Assistant Chiefs. There are a few "touch a truck" events coming up. There were 4 mutual aids last month, two for the city of Middletown and two for the Town of Berlin.

Assistant Chief Neubecker gave a brief update on the Health and Wellness Project. He explained that a couple of months ago the Department brought in a company that did ultrasound screenings. It was for cancer and cardiovascular evaluation. The screenings started at the neck and went to the pelvis. It looked at various organ groups for signs of concern. There were 29 participants and 19 findings. It was not specific to one finding per person. There were 19 findings that required further follow up, and 34 other findings that recommended further screening or monitoring. That included: kidney, bladder, prostate, spleen, cardiac concerns, liver and testicular findings.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report for July as submitted.

1. Fire Marshal's Office. The Fire Marshal's Office report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Holmes added that this week they are starting to do the school inspections before school opens. He will be following up with letters. Any violations will be rectified before school starts. Some of the Fire Lieutenants that are trained have helped Mr. Holmes with the inspections.

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

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri added that regarding ongoing projects, the water mains were installed at Carroll Place, McDonald Ave. and Brooks Lane. New Fire Hydrants were installed at Carroll Place and pressure testing was done as well as bacterial testing. Once the results are received the Water

Department will be able to start swapping out services. They started Brooks Lane yesterday. This was a much needed project for this road. It had very old piping. They will be laying piping later this week. They will start McDonald Avenue after that. They are making good progress even though the staff in the Water Department is spread thin this time of year. They have been helping out the Town with projects, and the State with paving. There is flushing also going on as well as "Call Before You Dig." Chief Brade thanked Mr. Palmieri for cooperating with the Fire Department in terms of work the Water Department does that affects the Fire Department when they are out on calls. There is good communication between the Fire and Water Departments. Mr. Palmieri explained some of the reports he is including in his monthly report.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations Report for July as submitted.

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center Report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lonergan added that it has been busy processing calls. It really helps having two dispatchers on. The heat pump A/C unit has been installed in the Dispatch Center. Mr. Alvarado was in Town a couple of weeks ago and worked with Mr. Lonergan on computer replacement. There is a lot of work left to do. In addition to computer replacement it is a decommissioning of computers. There is a backlog of old computers. There were several meetings on the new phone system. They are still waiting on parts and some clarifications on the spec. Regarding radio programming, Mr. Lonergan has a conference call with the Director of DSET and the representative from CTS scheduled. Hopefully all the work can be scheduled at that time. There have been several meetings with vendors for the security system and access control replacement. There are several projects going on but they are all moving forward.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Center Report for July as submitted.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There were no meetings.
- B. Executive. There were no meetings.
- C. Fire Operations. The July 10, 2023 meeting was canceled.
- D. Volunteer Pension. There were no meetings.
- E. Personnel. A meeting was held on August 8, 2023. Minutes were distributed for review. Commissioner Colligan signed the minutes. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and approved 6 to 0 to accept the minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting of August 8, 2023, as submitted. Commissioner Terry abstained.

- F. Water Operations. The quarterly meeting was canceled because there was no quorum. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 1, 2023, 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. A special meeting was held on July 31, 2023. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The next regular meeting is scheduled for September 1, 2023.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Public Safety Tower Committee meeting minutes of July 31, 2023, as submitted.
 2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 5, 2023, at 5:30 PM.
 3. Bylaws Committee. The next meeting is scheduled for September 18, 2023, at 6:00 PM.
 4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. There was nothing new to report. The latest newsletter was published and included with the July water bills.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioners had comments about how busy the Fire Department is and how much their services are appreciated.
- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contract/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report.
- D. Discussion of Executive Director Search Committee Plan – Commissioner Colligan. The job description will be emailed to all the Commissioners tomorrow. They will have two weeks to review. Feedback can be forward to either Commissioner Colligan or President Rukowicz. Mr. Neto has reached out to Mazzotta's Employment Agency to find out what services they provide. He advised the Commissioners that they need to provide some input as to what types of things they are looking for in the next Executive Director in order to give Mazzotta's some guidance on how to conduct their search.

Commissioner Colligan requested to set a date in two weeks, August 30, 2023, for a full Board of Commissioners meeting to discuss and make any decisions on the Executive Director job description. One item on the agenda would be a discussion of the job description and the second will be the hiring process. The meeting will be Wednesday, August 30, 2023, at 5:30 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse. Commissioner McIntyre would also like to get an assessment of the Executive Director position from Mr. Neto.

- E. Discussion and Approval of Firefighters Eligibility List. Chief Brade reported that in cooperation with the Union, the Chief's office did a part-time testing process and a full-time testing process. This item on the agenda is for ratification of the career process that was done. Because the Department is interested in taking care of their own personnel, they did an internal process. Seven staff members applied for career positions. There was a written test that was administered by the CT Fire Academy on Cromwell's behalf to keep the CFD neutral in the testing process. Seven of the internal staff moved on to the oral boards. They had Fire Officers from external departments to serve on the panel. Five of the candidates passed the oral interviews. Their scores were combined with the written scores, and they were ranked accordingly. The whole process was done in cooperation with the Union.

Instead of hiring an external company to do all the testing, it is an expensive process to do. The Department decided to try to do everything internally to try to save the District some money. The Academy was paid a small fee to administer the test, and for the oral boards those on the panel were treated to lunch. In the future in the interest of being transparent, they will try to post every step of the process.

The Chief presented a list of the five candidates that passed both tests and ranked them accordingly. Ranked #1 on the list is John Bicking with a score of 83%. #2 is Anthony Carlson, #3 is Victoria Matlowski, #4 is Brian Farucci and #5 is Ryan Reynolds. President Rukowicz signed and approved the list. The list is good for one year with the right to extend for one year.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the CFD career firefighter eligibility list as presented.

- F. Discussion and Approval of MOA with Local 4662 Regarding Fire Inspection Duties and CEU's. Chief Brade explained that this would be a modification of the MOA between the District and the Union. Secretary of the Firefighters' Union, Cory LaFontaine was present to represent the Union at this meeting. This original MOA had been put into place a few years ago when the FMO faced a staffing shortage then. The Chief's office was looking for Fire Marshal certified members of the career staff to assist the FMO. The MOU currently in place allowed those staff members to do inspections. Currently there is only a part-time Inspector (14 hrs./wk) and the Fire Marshal working in the Fire Marshal's office. After discussion with the Fire Marshal and the Union it was decided to have those certified members provide on-call duties.

Currently Harold covers Monday through Friday every week for the whole year. There is an on-call rotation that was put in place through the office. Mr. Holmes is not only doing every day of the week, but with the shortage, he is responsible for every other weekend for the entire year until they can get a third person in the office. By adding this to the MOU, it will allow them to utilize the staff in the Marshal's office first. They can utilize the Marshal's office so they can split a weekend in half and to also give them a break if a union or certified career staff member is willing to take a weekend on call. They will receive the same rate of compensation which is already in the budget for on-call pay.

Commissioner Colligan noted that this was approved at the last Personnel Committee meeting. Everyone at the meeting was in favor of this. Commissioner McIntyre asked what is being done to replace the outgoing Deputy Fire Marshal, and if it gets refilled will it effect the change being made or give people more options. The Chief has been in discussions with the Executive Director to determine what will be best for the FMO. They will be making a

recommendation in the near future. Going forward, the MOU with fire inspection duties will stay in place. The idea will be to use the office staff first. Commissioner Epstein asked for a timeframe for all of this to be settled. The Chief stated there has already been one meeting, but believes they should be making some recommendations within the next two weeks. It was suggested to add this item to the agenda for the Special Board meeting being scheduled for August 30. The agenda item will be, "Update and Possible Decision on the Fire Marshal's Office position."

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the MOA with Local 4662 Regarding Fire Inspection Duties and CEU's. Draft Copies were distributed for review.

- G. Discussion and Decision on Pasco Hill Road Interconnection with Berlin Water Control. Mr. Neto explained that he briefly discussed this at the last meeting. Berlin approached the Cromwell Water Division to add to the emergency interconnection. The emergency interconnection between Middletown and Berlin is off Kirby Rd. In East Berlin there is a manufacturer that is in need of upgrading their fire suppression system. They presently use the Mattabassett river with pumps out of the river to put out a fire. They need to upgrade their plant. They did not feel comfortable maintaining or upgrading their old system because they may not comply with DEEP. The Water Division in Berlin does not have sufficient pressure or quantity of water to meet their need.

Berlin will be responsible financially for any of this work. Cromwell will be needing a preliminary engineering design, supplemental. Environmental Partners has assessed the Pasco Hill Rd. portion. They can provide the design, the invoice will be processed by CFD and then invoiced to Berlin. Berlin will reimburse Cromwell. He wanted the Commissioners to be aware there will be a financial liability to the District from the preliminary engineering design and final engineering design done by Environmental Partners that will be passed on to Berlin.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to authorize the Water Department to move forward with the interconnection with Berlin Water Control at Pasco Hill Rd. including payment of the engineering design by Enviromental Partners which will be invoiced to Berlin Water control.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

There were no items to come before Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:28 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary

Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

