

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, November 21, 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, November 21, 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), Donald Smith, Charles Epstein, Robert McIntyre, Mertie Terry, John Sokolowski, Donald Goranson, Chip Darius and Steve Wygonowski attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri and Communication Center Manager Justin Lonergan. Finance Manager Michael Lupkas attended via the internet.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 PM, by President Rukowicz. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Rukowicz.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Sokolowski, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as presented with the following additions from the Executive Director: under Item V. Approval of the Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes, the addition of October 17, 2023, was added. Also, under New Business adding an Item H. MOU with Local 1303, Dispatchers' Union Re: the Quality Assurance Program.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. James Rude, 25 Highridge Rd., had comments. He commended the Fire Department for their professionalism and skills on a call in late October that happened to be someone that he knew. His friends had great things to say about the EMS team that responded to the call. He has provided the Executive Director with the names of those individuals.

It has been several months since the Bylaws revisions were approved by the Board. Mr. Rude has not seen any information published about the public hearing or public vote and when that will happen. He hopes there will be information forthcoming.

There was discussion at the last Board meeting on October 17, about the acquisition of a new ambulance. Mr. Rude supports the acquisition of a new ambulance as well as updating other pieces of fire apparatus, but there needs to be discussion involving some continued long-range financial planning so there can also be some discussions about the capital needs of the Fire District.

PRESENTATION TO PAST FIRE CHIEF AND FORMER COMMISSIONER
DAVID COLLIGAN

President Rukowicz presented former Commissioner and Fire Chief David Colligan with a plaque from the Board of Commissioners and Fire District acknowledging his years of public service to the Cromwell Fire Department and Fire District. The President read the plaque. His service to the District and the public has been outstanding. Mr. Colligan accepted the plaque and expressed his appreciation.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
OCTOBER 17, 2023

The minutes had been distributed at the meeting. Commissioners were given a few minutes to review.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of October 17, 2023, as presented. Commissioner Epstein abstained.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or written appeals to report.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's Report for October had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He highlighted a couple of things from his report. Mr. Neto continues to work with the Tax Collector's Office and the Town Manager to get year-end reports and receipts associated with the past fiscal year. The auditors will be at the Fire District next week. Mr. Neto was assured today that the reports are coming. Typically what is received from the Town is what was collected, what was paid out.

There was a hearing scheduled for FOI for November 17, 2023. At the last minute, the District's attorney came down with COVID. He received his test results one hour before the hearing was scheduled. It has been rescheduled for December 21, 2023.

A few hours ago Mr. Neto received a response from the District's attorney regarding their review of the proposed Bylaw changes. Mr. Neto sent the drafts to the Commissioners with the Attorney's comments/questions in the notes. Mr. Neto will be interested what the next steps will be in the process. The attorney advised that the Bylaws were in good shape, and submitted minor suggestions that do not necessarily have to be followed. There will be some action items that Mr. Neto will distribute for review.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's Report for October as presented.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for October had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lupkas was available through Zoom for the meeting. He summarized his report. He noted that they have received \$2 million in tax collection from the Town. Usually he receives the deposits for taxes by the 10th to the 15th of the month. The last \$1 million was received after the October close. Therefore, he cannot report on the status. \$160,000 was received from the State which was to offset the deduction in the mil rate for motor vehicle taxes. There were 136 EMS calls for the month. Receipts to date are 7½% higher than last year at this time. Water production has been below average for this time of year. \$679,000 is the total of the October bills that were sent out, 18% less than last year. Mr. Lupkas gave a brief review of the STIF account. Mr. Lupkas noted that the auditors are scheduled for next Tuesday and Wednesday. He reported the District is going in a good direction with utilities.

A motion was made by Commissioner Goranson, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for October as submitted.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for October had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Last month was Fire Prevention. The Department has been busy in the community with open houses, touch-a-truck, visiting schools and other fire prevention functions coordinated through the FMO and on-duty firefighters. Chief Brade congratulated Commissioner Colligan on behalf of the Fire Department for his years of dedicated service.

There were 268 calls last month. There was an issue with ISO where calls were stuck in the "que." The issue was on the VSO software side. The Chief thanked Chris Logan for all his expertise and hard work keeping apparatus going. There have been a lot of apparatus issues lately. Chris has been able to keep everything running.

There were two accidents. One was a fire truck on the highway. The other was with the newest ambulance. It was on Main St., coming back from the hospital, and someone pulled out of a side street not seeing the ambulance and hit the door. There have been some heating issues in some of the buildings. Mr. Johnson has been working on that.

The Union and volunteers will be working together on holiday projects with the Town such as toy drives, food drives, etc. Commissioner Sokolowski had questions about staffing. The Chief explained how and when the seventh person added to the schedule. He also explained the new part-time personnel in the Fire Marshal's Office. There was a discussion about meeting ISO standards and other training.

Commissioner Goransen asked about the three ambulance bids to be presented at this meeting, but the topic was not on the agenda. The Chief put out an RFP for an ambulance. It was based on a spec used for the previous ambulance. He has only received two bids. He is waiting for a third. One was around \$313,000, which was the company used for the last ambulance purchased, and the other was \$369,000. The second one had an escalation clause based on the time between the order being placed and receipt of the vehicle. It refers to the cost of materials during the waiting period. The Chief was waiting for the third bid to come in before presenting them before the Board.

President Rukowicz asked that the Chief let Mr. Logan know how much he is appreciated. Many thanks for keeping the apparatus on the road. Commissioner Darius asked the Chief to feel free to approach the Board if there are difficulties with staffing and funding.

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

1. Fire Marshal's Office. Mr. Holmes distributed the Fire Marshal's Report for October at the meeting. Commissioners reviewed the report. Mr. Holmes reported there are no surprises. He noted that Texas Roadhouse is going up in place of Ruby Tuesday's. They hope to have the restaurant open at the end of January. The swimming school in the plaza is almost complete. There is a homeless encampment off of 164 West St. Mr. Holmes has been working with the Town and Social Services to get those individuals to move. They are heating their tents with wood and fire. There are fire and safety concerns there. The FMO has done a lot with the kids in Town during Fire Prevention month. They did some day cares as well as the schools. Commissioner Sokolowski asked about the inspection schedules. Inspections are being done as required.

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

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for October had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri reported that the West St. side street project is completed. The only thing left will be a little top soil in the spring. This winter the Water Department will be shifting gears on the GIS data base and the lead and copper service line inventory from the Dept. of Public Health. This has to be completed before the end of next year. The Department has not had the time to start the work but they have located all the piping. Environmental Partners will help to build the inventory data base. The Water Department is doing all the field work.

Commissioner Epstein had questions about water service at the Landon. Mr. Palmieri, the Fire Chief and Executive Director have been working with their representatives. The proposal is to place a pump station halfway up the road. Commissioner Wygonowski asked about the PFAS. There will be an update at next month's meeting. Mr. Palmieri and Mr. Neto have been involved with the Department of Public Health on this issue.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations Report for October as submitted.

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center Report had been previously submitted and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Next month Mr. Lonergan will be working with Norcom on the bi-annual primary maintenance on the radio system. They do upgrades and test connections. He is also working on replacement plans with Norcom. Two new part-time dispatchers have been hired. They start training next week. All major projects are still ongoing.

Commissioner Darius had questions about the Quality Assurance program. The program is just getting established in Cromwell. There is also a financial component that the Dispatch Center did not budget for. It is something that is starting to get more attention. The phone system upgrades are still in progress. The vendor has been working on the engineering side of things regarding the headsets.

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

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations. There was no meeting.
- D. Volunteer Pension. There was no meeting.
- E. Personnel. A meeting was held November 14, 2023. Minutes were distributed for review. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Sokolowski and unanimously approved to accept the Personnel Committee meeting minutes of November 14, 2023, as submitted.

- F. Water Operations. There was no meeting.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was no report. The Town has appointed a liaison that should begin for the next Board mtg. (Brian Bonneau?)
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
 - 1. Public Safety Tower Committee. The meeting scheduled for December 1, 2023, has been canceled due to the Chairman being out of state as well as a lack of agenda items.
 - 2. Health & Safety Building Committee. There was no meeting
 - 3. Bylaws Committee. The District was notified by their attorney that they have completed their review of the Bylaws. The Bylaw Committee has been disbanded because they had completed the task of reviewing and making proposals for certain changes which just completed a legal review. Commissioners will be sent an electronic copy of the document for a final review. A Special Board Meeting can be scheduled the first week of December for just the Bylaws. Any last minute issues can be discussed at that time. A date is forthcoming.
 - 4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. The next newsletter will be published for the January water bills. Commissioner Darius encouraged everyone to reach out to him with input for the newsletter.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein asked the President to consider before it becomes budget time, the possibility of forming a committee to explore solar panels for the firehouses and pumping stations. Mr. Loneragan has been looking into this with a company he is familiar with. He gave them the specifications for some of the buildings and is waiting for an industrial/commercial system quote. He will forward all his findings to the Board for review.

Commissioner Darius reminded the President that the Scout Hut funding issue will be coming up in December. It needs to be on the Agenda for the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Goranson suggested the idea of using old equipment vehicles such as an old dump truck to block oncoming traffic at a highway accident. Chief Brade explained their trial of a new procedure where they are using an old ladder truck to block with the Squad 1 as the operational apparatus. One of the old engines has now become the blocking piece.

Commissioner Terry commended the Firemen and the Union because they are working hand-in-hand with the Cromwell Children's Coalition to have toys and food for members of the community. Rodney Bitgood from Cromwell Automotive is sponsoring an event that if a person brings an unwrapped toy they will receive free pizza and other free things from Nostalgia and ABC Pizza.

President Rukowicz did not know when the Bylaws will be going before the towns people for a vote. He did mention that until the revised Bylaws go into effect, the Committee memberships will still be in place as revised by the President. The Board and any committee wishing to establish a meeting schedule will need to report that to the District office so that the information can be forwarded to the Town Clerk's office. The District is required by Statute to report such meeting schedules the beginning of every calendar year.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report. The roof work on Coles Road should start next week.
- D. Update on the Executive Director Search. Last month, the Board contracted with A.R. Mazzotta, in Middletown. The Executive Director's job description had been approved and forwarded to them. It was a slow applicant process. There were a total of five applicants. The interview committee will consist of the President, Vice President, Secretary and the Chairman of the Personnel Committee. So far, only two individuals have responded to the request for an interview. The tentative schedule is to have interviews on December 12 and 13 at Coles Road. Two candidates each day. One at 10 AM, and the other at 11:15 AM. The Committee is in the process of drafting questions. He asked the Committee to think about next steps in the process.
- E. Discussion and Approval of Personnel Committee's Recommendation on Water Division and Communication Manager Salary Changes. Mr. Neto had distributed information in the packets on the employees effected and what the changes are. All the information presented was brought before the Personnel Committee at their meeting of November 14, 2023. Those meeting minutes were approved by the Board earlier at this meeting. The driving force for

these recommendations is to make the Water Department employees market equivalent with other Water Department employees within the State.

The second part of the recommendation is to compensate the Communications Center Manager for taking on more of the IT components of the District due to the previous IT Manager going to a remote part-time schedule. Mr. Lonergan will be compensated retroactive to July 1.

A motion was made by Commissioner Sokolowski, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the salary adjustments as proposed and accepted by the Personnel Committee at their meeting on Nov. 14, 2023. This will include adjustments for Water Division employees and the Communication Manager.

- F. Discussion and Approval of Personnel Committee's Recommendation for Chief Brade Annual Review and Raise. Copies of the Chief's review had been distributed to the Commissioners.

A motion was made by Commissioner Sokolowski, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to move this item to Executive Session after this meeting.

- G. Discussion and Decision on 2024 Holiday Calendar. Two copies of the holiday calendar were given to the Board members. One copy has 12 holidays on it. The other has 13 holidays on it including Juneteenth. It was noted the additional cost to the District to add Juneteenth to the holiday schedule is \$5,500 - \$5,600. The Board had put the funds in this year's budget. The Firefighters' Union negotiated the 13th holiday. It was noted that the Town exchanged Juneteenth for another holiday on their schedule. It has been designated a Federal holiday, and is a State holiday in 28 states including CT.

Commissioner McIntyre noted that a way to make up for salary inequities is benefits such as adding this holiday. The money has been budgeted. Commissioner Sokolowski suggested negotiating this holiday with the Dispatchers' Union so that everyone in the District will have the same holiday schedule.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Sokolowski and unanimously approved to adopt the Juneteenth holiday into next year's holiday schedule for all Cromwell Fire District employees.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Sokolowski to authorize the Executive Director to approach the Dispatchers' Union to negotiate the Juneteenth holiday into their contract.

- H. MOU with Local 1303, Dispatchers' Union, Regarding Quality Assurance Program. The Executive Director distributed copies of the MOU for review. What the MOU states is that the Fire District will pay out \$5,000 annually to the Quality Assurance Program as compensation to be distributed fairly based on the number of calls reviewed by each team member. Calls will be reviewed annually. This MOU was an oversight in the current contract. It was agreed upon and budgeted for, but the language never made it into the document. Mr. Lonergan explained the process.

Commissioner Wygonowski made a correction to item #3 of the document. It should read "no later than 12/15," NOT "now later than 12/15." Commissioner Epstein explained the

level of accreditation achieved is not only national, but international. Mr. Lonergan reported that the dispatch center operates at accreditation levels now. It was agreed to add the following language: No more than 12 months of calls ending 10/31 will be tabulated by Nov. 30.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Goransen and unanimously approved to amend Item 2 on the MOU adding, "No more than 12 months of calls ending 10/31 will be tabulated by Nov. 30." Mr. Lonergan will prepare the new draft for signature and forward it to the Executive Director tomorrow morning.

PUBLIC COMMENT

James Rude, 25 Highridge Rd., commented it is both incredulous and disappointing that they are sitting there in the middle of November without the tax information from the Town of Cromwell for the year that ended June 30. Commissioner Wygonowski asked a very good question about the time value of money. Since the District is waiting for well over a million dollars from the Town to make the Commission whole. He suggested thinking about having some formal correspondence from the Commission to the Town of Cromwell that identifies the lack of performance by the Town on the information that is supposed to be provided to the organization, and lay out some of the things that would be helpful to the Fire District. Whatever the problem is that they are having with the Town is not the District's problem, but they are currently suffering from it. It is very disappointing that the audit is awaiting this bit of information considering how far past the end of the fiscal year we are.

It is good to hear that the District is making progress on interviewing the replacement of the Executive Director. His retirement date is only 2½ months away. The interview dates are only 1½ months away from his retirement date. He hopes the Commission is going to be able to come to conclusion on all these issues relative to a new Executive Director so that Mr. Neto can retire on his designated date. He thinks its important to check references before offering a candidate a job. There is also time involved for contract negotiations if the person will be hired with a contract. The individual may have to give some notice to their current employer. He asked that they please be thoughtful of Mr. Neto and his preferred retirement date. It is January 31, 2024.

David Colligan, 30 Winthrop Blvd., commented that he wanted to thank everyone for the plaque. He appreciated it. He also mentioned his reasons for not using a dump truck at a highway accident scene. The reason old fire equipment is used is because they can provide more water, equipment and personnel at the scene if needed. He asked the Board to rethink the thoughts about dump trucks at highway accident scenes.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Sokolowski and unanimously approved to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:11 PM, take a 5 min. break, and enter into Executive Session at 8:16 PM.

Executive Session

Went to Executive at 8:15 PM, invited in was the Executive Director, motion made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Terry.

Bd. Of Cmsr.'s 11-21-23

Out of Executive session at 9:12 PM. Regular meeting in session at 9:13 PM. Motion “ In recognition of Chief Brade’s positive and exceeding expectations work performance a 3.75% merit raise, an in recognition of the extraordinary efforts in the past year, a one-time \$1000 dollar bonus to be given” motion by Commissioner Sokolowski second by Commissioner Darius. All were in favor.

Adjournment at 9:14 PM. Motion made by Commissioner Sith and second by Commissioner Darius.

Attest:

Roger Rukowicz
President of the Fire Commission

