

APR 25 2023  
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**CROMWELL FIRE DISTRICT  
SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING**

Tuesday, April 25, 2023

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse

105 Coles Road

Cromwell, CT

--- A G E N D A ---

- I. Call to Order
- II. Approval of Agenda
- III. Public Comment\*
- IV. New Business
  - A. Discussion and Decision on Cromwell Fire District General Fund Budget 2023/2024 (Fire, EMS & Communications) Including Debt Service
- V. Commissioners' Comments
- VI. Adjournment

\*Rules for Public Comment: 1) Each speaker will have a total of 3 minutes to speak; 2) the President of the Commission or Board Committee Chairs shall recognize only one speaker at a time; 3) Citizen's comment period is to provide the public the opportunity to make comments regarding matters of public concern. All questions and comments shall be directed to the President or Committee Chairs and will be taken under advisement. There will be no open debate with the Commissioners and 4) the President or Board Committee Chairs shall have the right to discontinue recognition of any speaker whom they believe is not using proper decorum for a public meeting, is verbally abusive towards anyone, becomes belligerent or uses profanity.

## Julius Neto

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**From:** James Robert <highridge25@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 25, 2023 9:31 AM  
**To:** Julius Neto  
**Subject:** Public Comment for Special CFD Board of Commissioners meeting of April 25, 2023

Good evening. Comments from James Rude, Highridge Road

As discussions and deliberation concerning the fiscal 2023-2024 Fire-EMS-Communications budget continue, I want to remind the Commission that the proposal to keep the tax rate at its current 3.0 mil level actually represents an approximate tax increase of 20% to the taxpayers of the Town of Cromwell. While a level mil rate sounds good, the most recent property revaluation increasing the overall grand list by about 20% will result in CFD taxes going up by the same percentage. And while there was no increase in the tax rate last year, please remember that the mil rate increased from 2.5 to 3.0 mils (20%) just two years ago. A combined tax increase of 40% over a 3-year period is **substantial**. And while some may believe that this scenario is not controversial, I trust the Commission will be honest and forthcoming in its upcoming communications prior to the budget vote about what the final budget proposals will mean to Cromwell taxpayers. I sincerely hope that the Commission will tell the history of why such an increase is truly needed by the CFD- not just numbers but the improvements to public service to Town residents and the related benefits to the quality of life in Cromwell that such incremental expenditures will provide.

I continue to believe that the Commission needs to significantly improve its dialogue with Town residents. The scheduling of Executive Committee and Special Board of Commissioners meetings on annual budget matters just a few days before such meetings portrays a "fire fighting" mentality. With an annual budget required every year, I do not understand why the schedule for such meetings (as well as the date of the annual budget vote) are not determined and publicized many months in advance. And while the most recent CFD newsletter (Issue #2023-02 April 2023) contains useful information, there is **not one word** about the budget process or the upcoming budget vote. This truly represents a missed opportunity. Certainly the advance scheduling of CFD meetings to prepare and review the budget and the advance setting the date of the budget vote would improve communication immensely!

Thank you.



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# Cromwell Fire District

1 West Street  
Cromwell, CT 06416  
Telephone 860-635-4420

FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE  
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT  
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

## **BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS** **Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting**

Tuesday, April 25, 2023

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse  
105 Coles Road  
Cromwell, CT

A Special Board of Commissioners' meeting was held on Tuesday, April 25, 2023, at 5:30 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to consider and act upon Special Fire District business.

Commissioners Roger Rukowicz (President), Robert Donohue, Donald Smith, John Sokolowski, Chip Darius and Robert McIntyre attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Firefighter Union President Alan Dominy, Communications Manager Justin Lonergan and Fire Chief Jason Brade. Commissioners Mertie Terry, David Colligan and Charles Epstein were absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM, by President Rukowicz.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. An email was received from Mr. James Rude, 25 Highridge Rd., at 9:30 AM today. A copy was submitted as part of the meeting minutes. Mr. Neto read the email which discussed the District's mil rate, tax rates, recent property re-evaluations and meeting notices for special meetings.

Al Dominy, President of Local 4662, had comments regarding the seventh person being added to the ambulance on the weekends. He stated how extremely important it is to have the seventh person on the weekends. Currently trying to run 6 people after 7 PM, has not been working and has resulted in turnovers. There have been occasions where Cromwell residents have had to wait up to 40 minutes for help to arrive while they are waiting with the Tack truck. He asked the Commission to seriously consider adding the seventh person on the weekends. The crews are struggling, and it is important for their safety as well as the Town residents to have the seventh person.

#### IV. New Business

- A. Discussion and Decision on Cromwell Fire District General Fund Budget 2023/2024 (Fire, EMS & Communications) Including Debt Service. President Rukowicz reminded

everyone that the sticking point last week in the approval of the budget was ambulance service. The numbers have not changed since the last meeting as it relates to this package. Mr. Neto removed the seventh position from the numbers before the numbers were submitted to the Executive Committee.

The Chief had also put in his request to add the seventh person. The seventh person was funded, and they attempted to fill it seven days a week, 7 AM to 7 PM. This will mean 3 on the engine, two on the first ambulance out the door and the second two flip flop based on the need of the Department. They cannot cover the whole Town with 6 people. The Chief is asking to extend the seventh person overnight. It is budget time, and he thinks it's the appropriate time to bring this issue forward to discuss.

Mr. Neto has an obligation to do what he feels is financially responsible. The Chief is responsible for providing service to the community. The cost to add the seventh person is approximately \$120,000 per year, but it will provide a better level of service. The original staffing model relied on volunteers to help with staffing numbers, but that is not happening. There are 5 fire volunteers and 3 EMS volunteers. They cannot rely on the volunteer staff to provide that same level of service.

The Chief noted that a second line item was taken out of the budget. The Secretary in the Marshal's Office at first had been a full-time position. In recent years it became a part-time position. The person in the position recently retired. They decided to reallocate those dollars and use them for a part-time inspector position.

Commissioner Darius commented about the staffing issue which he had brought up at a previous meeting. The discussion was his perception of the issue from his side of the pager and not the side of the budget. His concerns about Saturday and Sunday coverage is actually available in the budget. The funding is there for the staffing for the weekend that he had expressed concern about. The issue has been the availability of staff to actually fill those slots without incurring overtime. It is a logistical personnel issue not a funding issue for Saturday/Sunday days.

Commissioner Darius spoke in full support of what the Chief has just mentioned. They do not have depth on the bench to go outside this agency and count on Hunters. There are no more outside resources available such as Hunter's, New Britain or Aetna. They are pulling ambulances from other towns. If the Commission cannot find the resources to fund a 7<sup>th</sup> person 7 days a week, he would suggest providing at least 50% of the funding for this budget cycle. He would be willing to put on paper to fully fund that position because the Department now has additional command staff that can focus on networking, getting more part-timers and minimizing the overtime impact. There are only 2 EMT's coming out of the volunteer ranks. They cannot be available 24/7.

President Rukowicz suggested taking the \$120,000 figure and breaking it down by the month and finding ways to meet that monthly cost. There are multiple options for funding this. They could find it somewhere in the budget by moving money around. There is also the possibility of using the Fund Balance.

Commissioner Sokolowski was in favor of funding the 7th person, and thinks the Board should find the funds in other parts of the budget. They discussed the reserve fund that has been put in place to fund a new piece of apparatus in the future.

Commissioner McIntyre thought that the Commission should go with funding the position at the \$120,000 mark. Taking from the apparatus reserve fund has not worked well for the District in the past.

There will be \$1,018,000 available in the Fund Balance. That is about 15% of the budget. If they were to take \$200,000 as originally planned, they would not have an adequate amount to be considered over the safety threshold. Another strategy for the 120,000 could be the Fund Balance. That would bring is down to \$898,000.

Commissioner Darius supported everything the Executive Director explained. He proposed that the District encumber \$125,000 from the General Fund. The second thing to note is there is a new command staff since the last budget cycle. They are very smart, capable people. He suggested that the District challenge them to do more grants, go to the ambulance billing company and increase the ambulance rate and recover as much as possible to put back in the General fund. The Executive Director will be taking \$125,000 from the General fund and will be adding that to payroll for Fire and EMS. The new total will be \$622,894.

*A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to encumber \$125,000 from the General Fund to be used for the 7<sup>th</sup> person on the ambulance on the weekends.*

Chief Brade did not want to forget about the second line item which was the part-time inspector position in the FMO. This position would help to relieve the other inspectors that are on call. The Executive director noted that there are two lieutenants and a fire fighter that have received training as fire inspectors. He thinks that something can be negotiated with the union to activate their ability to perform inspector duties based on the demand of the FMO. The details can be worked out.

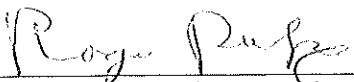
*A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Sokolowski and unanimously approved to approve the budget as proposed with the adjustments made tonight with no mil increase.*

- V. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Darius commented there was an outstanding job done at the crash on Main St. today. Command staff did a superb job taking control of a multi-vehicle, multi-patient incident, mobilizing resources primarily from out of town because Cromwell's ambulances were already tied up.

President Rukowicz thanked Lieutenant and Union President Alan Dominy for his comments. He also thanked the Fire Chief and Mr. Neto for their help. He thought there was excellent input tonight with everyone expressing their thoughts.

- VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Sokolowski, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Sec'ty

  
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Roger Rukowicz, President (Acting Sec'ty)

**CROMWELL FIRE  
DISTRICT 2023 - 2024**

Julius Neto

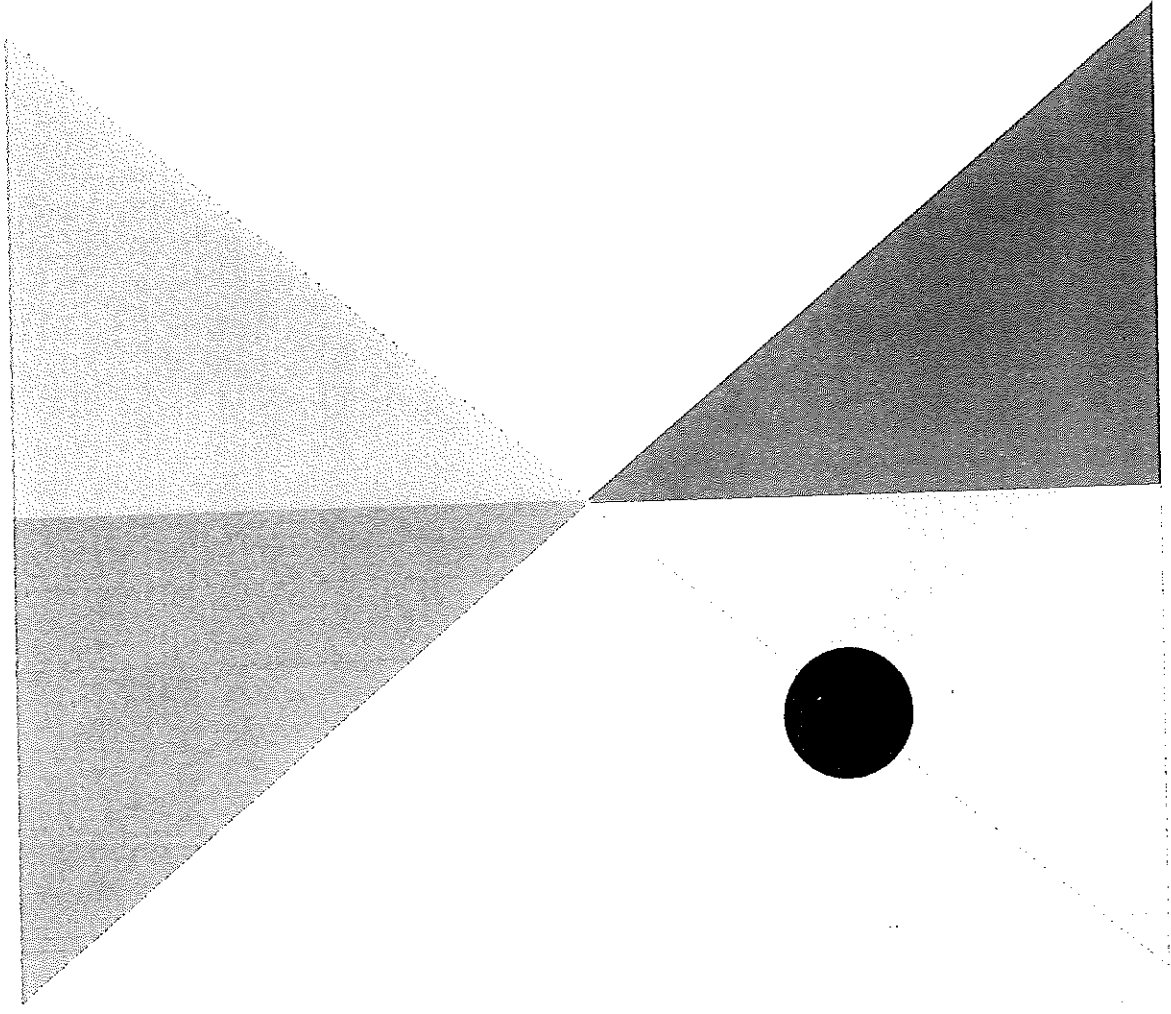
# **AGENDA**

Introduction

Fire Department

Water Department

Summary



# INTRODUCTION

This years' budget process was similar to past years. All Divisions heads and staff provide input and the financial requests, assessments and vendor information for the operational and public safety needs of each Division.

A complete review of all line items is done with the Executive Director and Financial Director. Modifications to the budgets are accomplished at this point and a final document is agreed to be presented to the Executive Committee for its complete review. Modifications can and are made, they get voted on line items and them the complete budget is voted on and moved to the full commission.

**This budget does not request an increase in the 3 Mill rate or an increase to the water rates.**



## **NOTICEABLE POINTS FOR THE OVERALL DISTRICTS 2023 -2024 BUDGET**

\*Revenues increased by 20% due to the new reevaluation of all properties as mandate by State Statutes.

\*Debt Service increased by 9.35%.

\*Insurance and Benefits increased by 9.91%.



## **NOTICEABLE POINTS IN THIS YEARS FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET - YEAR OVER YEAR**

- \*Administrative Account increase by 3.30%.
- \*Office of the Chief - 17.37% Both Assistant Chiefs are fully funded for the complete year.
- \*EMS/Fire Operations -7.22% The payroll portion including part time staff, reflects 14.28 % increase. Hourly rates increases and the SAFER grant has fully expired for the 4 new firefighters.
- \*Signals and Alarms – 7.22% vendors increase in pricing.
- \*Fire Marshall – decrease of -1.79%



## **NOTICEABLE POINTS IN THIS YEARS' COMMUNICATIONS' BUDGET YEAR OVER YEAR**

- \* Payroll – Increase in 17.41 % This represents new union contract obligations.
- \* Part of the new negotiated contract is financial recognition for the Quality Assurance. There will additional compensation for Dispatchers that perform Q. A. for our EMD and EFD programs.
- \* Overall Communications increase is 20.13%



## **NOTICEABLE POINTS IN THIS YEARS' BUDGET WATER DIVISION BUDGET - YEAR OVER YEAR**

\*Water Divisions' Payroll- 10.56% increase. Staff at a higher step and dollars for the possible promotion of a supervisor. Half of the salary for the finance director assigned to the payroll (same dollar amount being reduced in professional fees)

\*Power and Pumping- 57.67 % increase. All vendor driven price increases.

\*Transmission and Distribution- 4.14 % increase.

# SUMMARY

This budget was put together with public safety, with a high level of service, great quality in our drinking water in focus.

The present budget has it stands does not reflect an increase to the present 3 mill tax rate or a water rate increase.

It does show an increase in increase in taxes by the mere fact that we will be taxing more dollars due to the increase in the property values.

This budget does have capital items need for the long term success of all Departments. Fire Department & Dispatch \$379,500.

Water capital \$622,700. This includes regulatory required items

**CROMWELL FIRE  
DISTRICT 2023 - 2024**

Julius Neto

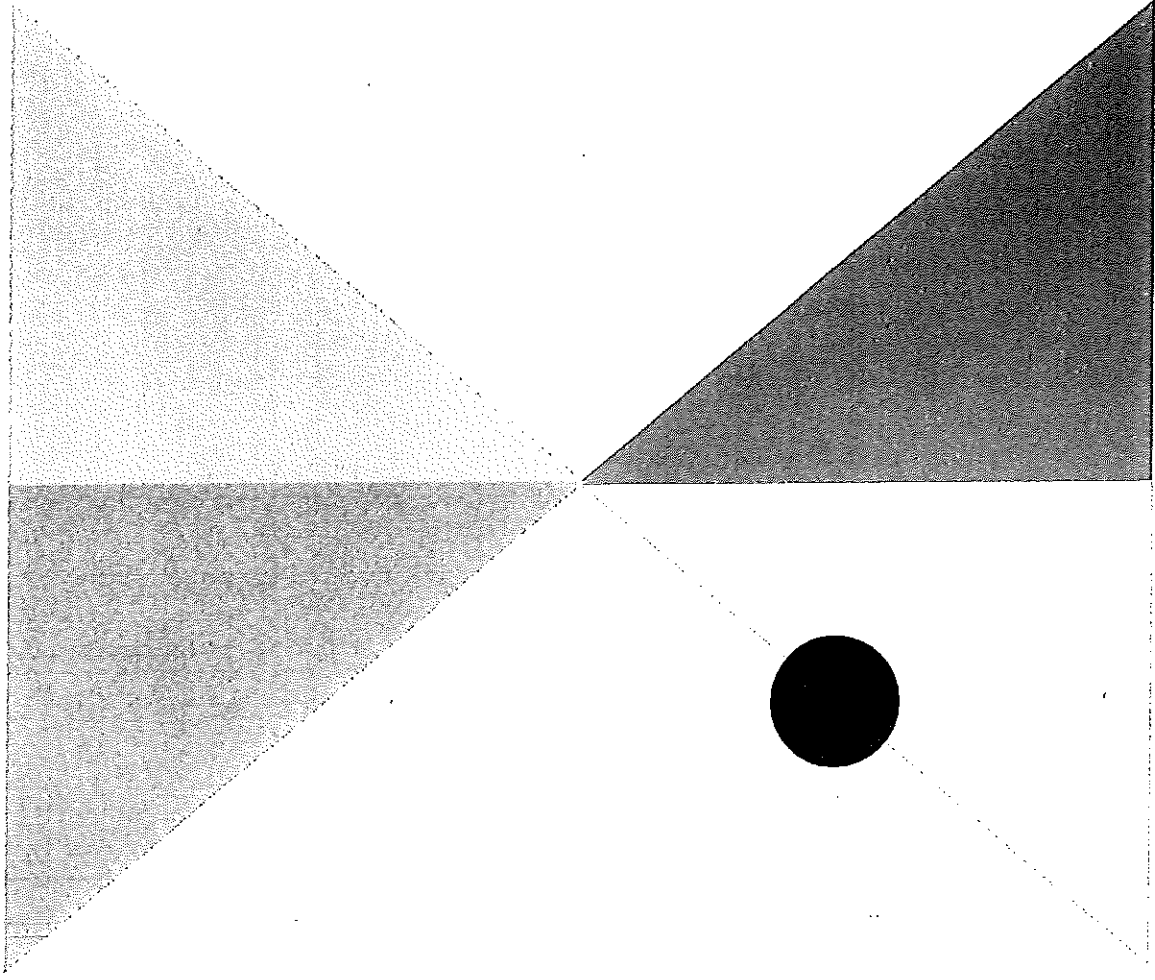
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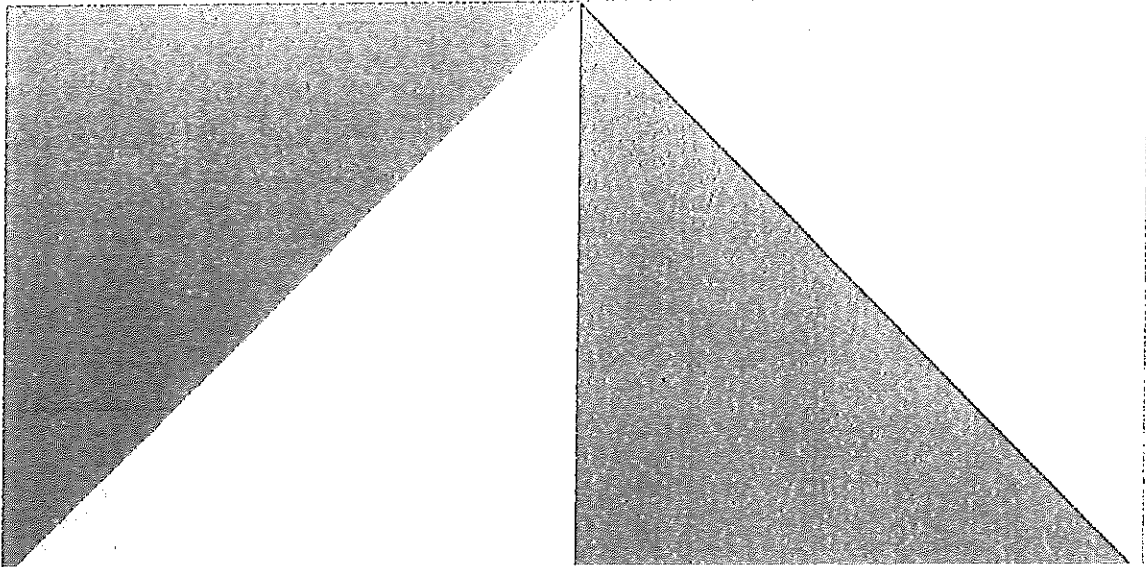


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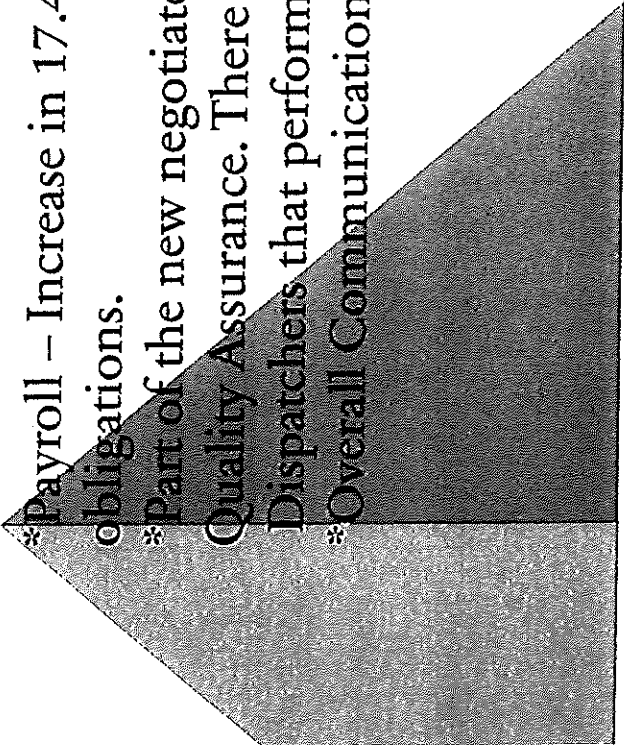


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