

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting
Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 5:30 PM
Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

A Special Board of Commissioners' meeting of the Cromwell Fire District was held on Tuesday, February 6, 2024, at 5:30 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT, to conduct and act upon special Fire District business.

Commissioners Roger Rukowicz (President), Donald Smith, Charles Epstein, Robert McIntyre, Mertie Terry, Steve Wygonowski, John Sokolowski and Donald Goranson attended. Commissioner Chip Darius was on Zoom.

- 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 Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Sokolowski and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. James Rude, 25 Highridge Rd., commented the following:
"Congratulations to the Commission, as the District is on the verge of hiring a new Executive Director for the organization. I hope that the candidate is truly qualified, the District is able to come to reasonable employment terms with the candidate, the candidate will be able to start in the near future, and that the newly hired Executive Director will be a good fit and have a successful career in this important position for the Town of Cromwell. I want to reemphasize my recommendation to the Board of Commissioners to increase the sense of urgency to move District matters forward. The search for the new Executive Director is one of many examples of the lack of strong and effective leadership at the District. The same is true for the astonishingly long time it took for the most recent Bylaws revision. Action is needed on many still pending items—the June 30, 2023 audit results; the development of a meaningful capital acquisitions plan (for replacement EMS & fire apparatus as well as for water service interconnection with other towns); the development of a meaningful grants writing plan; and the planning for and implementation of the termination of the volunteer pension plan. I again want to thank Mr. Neto for his service to the District and the residents and water customers of the Town of Cromwell. And I appreciate his willingness to stay on in a reduced capacity to help the District with the transition to a new Executive Director. Thank you."

IV. New Business

- A. Discussion and Decision on the Recommendation from the Hiring Committee to Fill the Open Position of Executive Director for the Cromwell Fire District. President Rukowicz noted that all the Commissioners have been kept updated on the selection process for the new Executive Director. He reported they have found a candidate. Resumes had been sent to the Commissioners for some of the candidates under consideration. President Rukowicz began the discussion and had Commissioners Smith, Epstein and Sokolowski comment as well.

The person selected is Roger Hart. He lives in Middletown and primarily has a law enforcement background. He has worked in Wallingford and East Windsor serving as Deputy Chief and Interim Chief of their Police Departments. He has a Master's Degree in Public Administration and a degree in Criminal Justice. His background also includes the FBI academy, budget preparations, Human Resource issues, training, collective bargaining, labor negotiations, conflict resolution, Emergency Management, grant writing and accreditation for Police Departments.

The Committee conducted the initial interviews. The selection was narrowed down to two individuals from 15 at the beginning of the process. The three Department Heads also interviewed the finalists. There were discussions with the Committee and the Department Heads on the candidates.

Commissioner Smith felt that Mr. Hart would be an effective public face for the District. He is organized and speaks clearly on familiar subjects. His work as Deputy Chief for East Windsor Police was in the areas of administration including Human Resources, preparation and presentations of budgets and labor negotiations. He interacted regularly with the Town and its various departments. The 3 managers have responded positively to him.

Commissioner Epstein stated that the reposting of the Executive Director position brought some really good candidates. The final two candidates were very close in their qualifications. The District will be lucky to have the person they chose. He appears to be a good leader. He had the experience mentioned by the other Commissioners. He is able to start employment immediately, and it is hopeful he will accept the District's offer.

Commissioner Sokolowski had the same comments. He believes this person is the best candidate for the District. He has many of the qualifications the District was looking for. He appreciated the Executive Committee allowing him to provide some insight for the search. The Department Heads were very helpful and honest in the process.

Chief Brade was in attendance and spoke for the Department heads by saying they were appreciative to be included in the hiring process. They believe Mr. Hart is a good choice and they look forward to working with him. President Rukowicz noted that the interviews were conducted on Zoom for anyone that wanted to observe.

Commissioner Goranson asked about the candidate being the public face of the District and how the Board felt about that. How was this person's interaction with the media in the past? President Rukowicz commented that Mr. Hart impressed them very much. Mr. Hart also had positive comments about the staff he interviewed with.

President Rukowicz intends to call the employment agency to advise Mr. Hart has been considered and selected as the primary candidate for the Executive Director position. Mr. Hart has also advised he is available to begin working immediately. The President plans to speak with him Thursday or Friday of this week if he accepts the offer. President Rukowicz plans to keep all Board members informed every step in this process. Commissioners Epstein and Smith both confirmed his background as being an advantage to being a public face for the District.

Commissioner Wygonowski watched some of the interviews on Zoom. He complimented the Committee on a job well done.

Commissioner McIntyre is happy that the Department Heads have met someone they can work with. He also watched some of the interviews. The process was consistent with each candidate which was important.

Commissioner Terry asked about the candidate and whether or not he will have an employment contract. The President noted that the candidate will have a 6 month probationary period when he is hired. Since the Executive Director reports to the President of the Board, the President intends to conduct a review after he has been on board for 3 months. Any issues that may occur will be documented. After 6 months a second review will be conducted.

Commissioner Darius commented that the initial job offer needs to be in writing even if it is not a contract. If the person is an "at will" employee for the first 6 months how does that tie in with his benefits and salary. He suggested Commissioner Terry providing some guidance on putting the terms of the job offer in writing. He was encouraged by the comments from everyone around the table, the involvement of management and the quick results.

President Rukowicz stated that they will forward electronically a cover letter and a job offer letter to the employment agency. The salary advertised was \$110,000 - \$120,000. Mr. Hart will be offered \$115,000. It is not clear if Mr. Hart will want medical benefits. He is retired from two other places.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to authorize the President to offer Mr. Hart the position of Executive Director of the Cromwell Fire District with an annual salary of \$115,000, commencing his employment will be a 6 month probationary period and two 3-month evaluations during that period with documentation of same.

- B. Discuss and Decision on What Type of Employment Will Be Offered to the New Executive Director, At-Will or Contract, as well as the Starting Salary. The President discussed the details of the job offer that will be made. The starting salary will be \$115,000/yr., 6 month probationary period, medical and life insurance will be an option. Mr. Hart will have the option of being an at-will employee or a contracted employee. If a contracted employee, the President does not want to negotiate a multi-year contract. A one-year contract would be suggested based on how Mr. Hart's job performance. They have also discussed the possibility of giving Mr. Hart an increase in salary after his six-month probationary period is completed. The increase would be up to \$5,000. He would also be eligible for the Town pension. Commissioner Darius commented that there

should be documentation of all orientation information in case this process needs to be repeated for some unknown reason.

A motion was made by Commissioner Sokolowski, seconded by Commissioner Goranson and unanimously approved to authorize President Rukowicz to negotiate a job offer and terms of employment with Mr. Roger Hart for the Executive Director position at the Cromwell Fire District with an annual salary of \$115,000, subject to a salary increase of up to \$5,000 at the end of the 6-month probationary period.

President Rukowicz thanked the Commissioners and Department Heads for all their input and cooperation.

- V. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:03 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary

Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

