

# **Cromwell Fire District**

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE  
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT  
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

## **BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING**

### **Fire and Water Divisions**

**Tuesday, February 16, 2016**

**7:00 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, February 16, 2016, at 7:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to discuss and act upon Fire and Water Division business.

Commissioners Frank Seidl (President), Craig Murphy, John Hamlin, Donald Swanson, Charles Epstein, David Colligan, James Bellamo, Mark Langton and Julius Neto attended. Also attending were Executive Director Michael Dagostino, Operations Director S. William Jarzavek, Acting Fire Chief Michael Salonia, Fire Marshal Todd Gagnon, Assistant Fire Chief EMS William Clare, Assistant Fire Chief Tom Duff, Communications Manager Rick Andersen and Premier Accounting staff Michael Alibrio and Bob Davis.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM, by President Seidl. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Seidl.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted with the following change under Item VII. Reports of the Standing Committees, Item E.2. will be Executive Session to discuss the recommendation to Act on a Request for Life Membership.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Before speaking each member of the public was asked to state their name and address, and they were given a time limit of two minutes. Also, it was requested that comments remain civil and to the point.

Lt. Jim Pandolfo, Cromwell Fire Department, 291 Berlin St., East Berlin, CT. Lt. Pandolfo stated, "Let the minutes of this meeting reflect that a formal declaration is being communicated that a protective, concertive activity will be sought against the Executive Director, the Fire Commissioners, Senior Fire Officers or any other person or persons creating a hostile work environment, discrimination, retaliation or the prevention of such from occurring for taking this opportunity to enact our rights under the National Labor Relations Board to act together to fix the problems that are being presented to you this evening." He stated, "This is in no way a threat, however, unfortunately having to state the obvious due to some of the perceived actions, inactions and/or conversations that have occurred. Some of the presenters are messengers this evening as original authors are in fear of retaliation."

Tom Franklin, 1 Woodside Road, Cromwell, CT. Mr. Franklin stated, "He was concerned, very concerned. Not only has the District lost a hardworking, dedicated public servant Steve Pendl, but we have also lost a lot of hard-earned taxpayer dollars." After reading about the investigative report in the paper, Mr. Franklin came to the conclusion that the punishment does not fit the crime. If it did, he asked why weren't the others involved let go. He asked what the motive was for this expense, wasting taxpayer money? He stated the amount was \$15,000 to \$20,000. He asked, "Who are you kidding?" All the public is told is that it is a personnel matter. Mr. Franklin stated, "That is not good enough." The public has a right to know what is going on. Mr. Franklin also heard there was a separation agreement for another \$85,000. A total of \$105,000 of taxpayer money is basically being wasted. Mr. Franklin asked, "If someone resigns from a position for personal reasons, why do they get paid for it?" He thinks the District owes the public an answer to that question. The investigative report comes out and basically ruins this person's chances for getting a job. He stated that the person has no way of defending himself. Mr. Franklin further stated that the Board cannot explain it to the public because they cannot say anything. The money would have been better spent for new equipment for our EMS and Firefighters. He stated that the Board knows this. Mr. Franklin was told at the last meeting to go to FOI for information. He heard back from the District and learned it would cost him in excess of \$100 to get the information he requested. He stated that was ridiculous for someone like him. He could not afford to pay that amount of money. He stated he thinks this information should be free, and requested that the District waive the fee so that Mr. Franklin could review the information and see how much taxpayer money the District has wasted. This incident has cost the taxpayers enough already. Mr. Franklin's solution to this problem is simple. He stated that the Commissioners need to admit they are wrong, tear up the separation agreement, reinstate Chief Pendl immediately and show the public and Chief Pendl some humility and human decency and give the Chief and the public the respect they deserve and get this District back to where it belongs, which is number one in the State of CT.

Chief Thomas Farr, East Berlin Fire Department, 80 Main St., East Berlin, CT. The Chief stated he was there to represent Task Force 51. Task Force 51 includes Chief Chris Schroeder, Newington Fire Department; Assistant Chief Thomas Lapierre, Newington Fire Department; Chief Michael Garrahy, Rocky Hill Fire Department; Chief Richard Bailey, Wethersfield Fire Department; and Chief Robert Shea, Portland Fire Department. Chief Farr was also representing the Town of Berlin. He requested to submit letters of support and character reference for Stephen Pendl from all the Chiefs noted and asked that the documents be put into the meeting minutes. Some of the words used to describe Stephen Pendl were: "professionalism, courtesy, dedicated, true leader, trusted leader, inspiration, demonstrates integrity, positive relationships, relationships with others, true friend, compassion, educator." These letters are from Chiefs of the surrounding towns that provide mutual aid to the Town of Cromwell. Cromwell also supplies mutual aid to these towns. These Chiefs have worked on many projects in emergency modes, non-emergency situations and on a personal level with Stephen Pendl.

Cheryl Chadsey, 26 Oakwood Manor, Cromwell, CT. She was at the meeting on behalf of herself and another resident. She read the letter from the other resident first. The first letter was from Geri Gasior, 15 Oakwood Manor, Cromwell, CT. She wrote a letter in the matter of Stephen Pendl's forced resignation. Ms. Gasior has known Stephen and his family since they moved into the neighborhood. She believes that Mr. Pendl's reputation has been tarnished by the Commission. She does not understand why Mr. Pendl is taking the heat for the incident that occurred. Why aren't those involved stepping up and taking ownership of their own actions. She has known Stephen to be an honorable man, kind, humble and a man of his word. She sees a man who is totally dedicated to his job and duties as Chief. When she had to call 9-1-1 for her husband, Stephen was the first person there on the scene, and saved her husband's life. She stated that the Commission is making a grave mistake by not reinstating Stephen Pendl as Chief of the Cromwell Fire Department. She is sure that the residents of Cromwell will agree.

Ms. Chadsey then spoke on behalf of herself. She had read the article in the newspaper. She knows Stephen as being an honest and ethical worker. Her concern or question is why the

people who originally found left out documents were not investigated and dealt with. She doesn't understand, and the way she sees the situation shows that Mr. Pendl was set up by someone who could not handle the Chief's honesty and good work ethic, and chose to do this to an outstanding Chief. Ms. Chadsey is hoping that the Commission will consider reinvestigating the errors that were made. People should take into consideration their own actions for what has gone on.

Nancy Berryman, 20 Oakwood Manor, Cromwell, CT. She is a neighbor of Steve Pendl. She wanted to read a letter composed by herself and some of her neighbors. The letter had been sent to one of the newspapers (she did not indicate which paper), and they were hoping that they would be able to submit it to one or two other newspapers. The letter is specifically geared to the residents in Cromwell who don't know Steve Pendl personally. She read, "In light of the ugly fiasco that recently caused Steve Pendl, Cromwell's 18 yr. veteran Fire Chief to resign, we as his neighbors feel compelled to write to the residents of Cromwell who do not know Steve personally. Those who know Steve don't need to be told anything. They know firsthand that he is as honest, ethical and kind as a man could be. Those living in the Oakwood Manor neighborhood feel very fortunate to have the Pendl's as their neighbors. Steve is not an ordinary nice guy who helps his neighbors once in a while, when he has the time. He is always, she meant always ready to help. Whenever a neighbor has had a problem or a need, Steve is inevitably the first one there. He has been seen many times running down the street, helping an elderly neighbor with health problems. He is always there before the Fire Department or ambulance arrives. He has been seen leaving his house at all hours of the day and night to protect residents of this Town.

A couple of months ago a firefighter photographed confidential employee information from a binder that auditors left in a conference room. Another firefighter took the document and gave it to the Chief and asked him not to reveal where it came from. The Chief immediately gave the document to his supervisor only saying that it was left on his desk. Steve has been accused of allegedly lying and behaving unethically for not revealing how he got the document. Steve Pendl is an honest, ethical and caring individual. He was on call 24/7 protecting the residents of Cromwell. He recently said that after his family, he loves his job, his firefighters and the Cromwell community. His major crime was in not revealing the name of the individual who gave him the document. He had given his word that he would not. He did, however, keep his word until the situation warranted otherwise. She asked if this was the behavior of a liar displaying unethical behavior. It appears that Steve's actions have been completely blown out of proportion by those in charge. Shortly after Steve's resignation became public, he wanted the truth to be told, but was not able to talk about it. Why would he want the truth to be made public, if he had behaved unethically. What would he gain by those actions? There are some disturbing facts and questions that the group had: Why did Steve Pendl become the fall guy for an incident he had no part in until the whistle blowing firefighter involved him? Steve did what he thought was right under the circumstances by attempting to give his word to that fireman who trusted him. Another question was why haven't the firefighters involved been reprimanded for their actions. A newspaper article stated that the firefighters involved were suspended without pay. However, the residents learned that the pay was given back to them. They had no legal right to look at a photograph of a confidential employee document. In essence, their offense is being overlooked. High school students get longer suspensions for lesser crimes, and they don't get paid. Another question why hasn't the employee who gave the confidential binder to the auditors at least share in the responsibility of its safe return. If he had checked, the incident would never have happened and the binder would have been locked up safely. Nothing has ever been said about this employee, who he is and whether he has gotten away scot free. It appears to Steven's neighbors that everyone involved has been exonerated except for Steve Pendl. Steve may have been mistaken in what he said to protect the firefighter, but haven't we all said things we later regret. If Steve was unethical, would he ever do something to put himself and his career in jeopardy for someone who trusted him. He may have made a mistake, but that was one incident for a guy who for 18 years was never written up and was respected by everyone. They believe that more discretion should have been practiced, and the punishments given out by the Fire Commissioners should have matched the offenses. If the above-mentioned facts are correct, the

previous decisions the Fire Commissioners made are way off track regarding where the guilt and punishment should be placed. Steve has been dealt a terrible injustice by the Commissioners. They wanted to suggest that the Fire Commissioners re-examine the facts and do whatever is necessary to fix all the mistakes that were made.

Nicole Laterra, 13 Hicksville Road, Cromwell, CT. She stated that she was there to voice her concerns and outrage at the decisions and actions of the Board in regards to the breach of privacy and termination of the Fire Chief Steve Pendl. She realized that the Board was under a gag order and could not comment. She went on to state her concerns and why the Commission does not have their best interests as taxpayers, District employees or members of the Fire Department. Her concern is the actual investigation and the document itself which she has read. The purpose was to shed light on what happened the day of the breach and who was responsible. At no time was it looked at the responsible party's roll in the books being left out for the public to see on the third floor of West Street which is open to the public. It was her understanding that it was Mike Dagostino as the person responsible for leaving the financial books out in question to the auditing company and was also responsible for securing the books at the end of the night when the auditors were through. The Commissioners and Mr. Dagostino hired a firm to investigate the breach, and because the document is lacking any investigation on the securing of the books, her concern was that the investigation was fed regarding what and who was being looked into. Some points and people were overlooked. This needs to be addressed so that the District can move forward, so it doesn't happen again and learn from our mistakes for the betterment of the District. She realizes this is a mute point since what is done has been done, and we need to figure out how to move on from this void. She was disgusted by the decisions and actions against the Fire Chief including not being able to come back as a volunteer. It appeared to her very clear that some Commissioners were slighted and voted with hard feelings and possible vendettas against Steve. Steve was asked by one of the career staff to hold his anonymity in exchange for important information regarding the financial documents, and he was acting in the best interest of the District. It is believed that he lied to Mr. Dagostino, and was it taken more as a betrayal. The majority of the focus has remained not on the financial book being left out or the breach itself, and not even on the actions of the other parties and their disciplinary action or lack thereof. All that is heard about is that Steve lied, his moral integrity and how he cannot be trusted. If he lied, he should be disciplined, maybe a letter in his file a few weeks later. But we was backed into a corner and left with the option to resign with a great severance package. The question is why. Why wasn't he given fair and equal discipline? Is there a disciplinary policy? The public puts its trust in the Commission to have their best interests at hand and to do just and what is right for the District in any matter. The next question is does the Commission have the public's best interest at hand? Have they represented you justly? She asked for a show of hands if they cared to participate on whether people thought that the public was represented. There were no hands of members of the public in the room to show support for the Commission. Ms. Laterra reminded everyone how important their vote is every October, and who people would want representing them as taxpayers. She urged those to voice their concerns if they disagree with the Chief's termination. She noted there were other questions from citizens who can't or won't voice their concerns due to retaliation.

Matt Shumann, 505 Main St., Cromwell, CT. Mr. Shumann stated after asking Commissioners what was going on and not being told anything except to FOI the report, he did FOI the report and received a copy. He paid \$101 for it. He had questions he wanted the Commissioners to address. He asked why the report was done in the first place. He thought it sounded ridiculous but explained on October 20, a police investigation found nothing criminal, everyone involved in the District was investigated and questioned. Why did the District feel that another investigation was necessary? President Seidl had no comment. Mr. Shumann asked why there were only 5 people investigated. The report highlighted the people that found the documents, Chief Pendl and his secretary. The report had nothing to do with the data that was left out or what has happened to that data. Mr. Shumann asked why the report is just focused on 5 people. President Seidl had no comment. Mr. Shumann also asked why Mike Dagostino was not involved. He supervised all the people that were involved. He also found the binders out on Oct.

8 as noted in the report. He is the one that began a criminal investigation. Mr. Shuman wanted to know why Mr. Dagostino was not interviewed in the report. President Seidl had no comment. Mr. Shuman asked how much the report has cost the taxpayers in the Town of Cromwell. Commissioner Murphy commented that the cost including legal fees was approximately \$20,000. Mr. Shuman thought \$20,000 was spent for answers they already knew.

Jeff Polke, 12 Pondview Dr., Cromwell, CT. He had listened to what people had to say tonight as well as reading things in the newspaper about this. He stated that Steve Pendl is a well respected part of the community. If he ever needed to do team building, he would start with Steve. He did many things for the kids in the schools, he would be at any event. He has also seen him fighting fires. He knows Steve's children. They sometimes hung out with his children. They are active in the community. He is a great father. All the things you look for in a person, and then to read something like this about the guy you think is all those things. Mr. Polke runs a business himself and is familiar with tax and audit procedures. There should be a procedure in place that there is one person responsible for these documents while they are issued to the auditors every day. He stated that in his office a person is responsible for retrieval and lock down of those documents every day during an audit. This type of inadequacy makes the residents of Cromwell ask how you are handling their money. What are you doing with it? Are you treating people the right way? Is our water money paying for legal fees that are going on for this? \$20,000 for a report? It is disappointing to hear these types of things when Cromwell was just getting out of the rut of bad information over the last ten years from the old regimen in the Town Hall. We need good information to be distributed about Cromwell, not controversial. We can't treat people like Steven Pendl like he doesn't matter. He matters. He was a part of the community for a long time, and did all the right things. Was he perfect? Absolutely not, but neither is anyone else in the room. We have to do the right thing here. As a Town, we have to give this guy an appeal process. To at least be heard by an outside panel that does not make up anyone else on the Board to give a decision as to whether or not this situation was handled in the proper way. Mr. Polke has been a proud resident of Cromwell for 47 years. He hopes we don't do anything else to residents like Steve Pendl.

Mr. Franklin added that he could not remember an instance of a Fire Chief in this Town being removed from office by this Commission. He has been around for a long time. No one has ever been treated by this Commission the way Steve Pendl was treated.

Stephanie Webber, 8 Lancaster Rd., Cromwell, CT. She stated that she is a member of the Fire Department. She stated that she is very concerned about the amount of money that has been spent on this investigation which did not cover the breach or the people responsible for securing the documents at all. To give an example of how this has affected the Department, they were all given new uniform shirts to wear, but were only issued one. They were told that they are going to see if they can obtain more t-shirts. The staff has to question whether they can get uniform shirts for the techs on the ambulance. They question whether there is enough stock to supply the ambulance after calls. There should be enough stock for 3 ambulances. She stated it is getting ridiculous. Then to hear \$20,000 was spent on an investigation that did not cover all the issues that needed to be investigated and brought nothing to bear for the people responsible for the breach. It is shameful and disgusting. She stated the District needed to hold the people responsible for it, responsible for it. She further stated that over several Commission meetings the Town is very unhappy with the decisions that were made as so is the membership. She stated that the Commission should have expected this because it was not handled very well. She hopes it is uncomfortable for the Commission. She hopes it is uncomfortable enough that the Commission finds the people at fault, bringing them to bear, so that the community can have confidence in its Commission again, because they are rapidly losing its confidence. It is an uncomfortable position to be in. She stated that the community needs its Commission. They need to know that the Commission supports them. Right now there is no faith in that.

Lt. Pandolfo added that at the January membership meeting, the Commission addressed the membership regarding this issue. At that time it was such a significant event, with people being

disciplined and a resignation, he asked what has been done to prevent reoccurrence? He stated the response at the time was, "that's a good question." He asked if the Board could shed any light on a second breach that has occurred, and is there an investigation going on? Is there another member of the Fire Department that may be gone? President Seidl responded that he could not comment at this time.

Ernest Blaney, 4 Ryan Ct., Cromwell, CT. He stated he had been a firefighter in Cromwell from 2005 - 2010. He stated it is "BS" what happened to Steve. He stated he will start a petition if he has to and have people sign it to get him his job back. He added what happened to him, he doesn't deserve it.

Mertie Terrie, 589 Main St., Cromwell, CT. She stated she spent 25 years in Human Resources, and the reason she is here tonight is because it seems the District has moved rather rapidly to having a gentleman lose his job. Did the Commission consider the disciplinary steps, oral warning, written warning, suspension and then termination? She stated she is getting mixed signals and doesn't understand if the Commission really considered what discipline is set up to do; to train, aside from punishing. Although she knows they cannot answer, she asked if they honestly thought you as a Commission did do diligence and considered all of those avenues.

Curtis Anderson, 15 Ridge Rd., Cromwell, CT. He took a moment to address the Pendl family. He thanked them for sharing Steve with the community for all these years. He stated they should be very proud of him as a husband and father. There was a round of applause for the Pendl family.

David Visconti, 45 Hicksville Rd., Cromwell, CT. Mr. Visconti stated that he has been a resident of Cromwell for over 60 years. He sat on many commissions in the Town of Cromwell. He has a member of the Cromwell Fire Department in his family who has voiced their concerns about the actions that were taken against Chief Pendl. Mr. Visconti did not know what the next step in this process would be. He is here tonight to listen to residents as far as what happened and what process was taken in order for Chief Pendl to lose his job. He does not know if the Commission can reinstate him, or if there is an appeal process. He was attending tonight to find out the facts. From what he understood, due process was not followed, and progressive discipline was not followed in this case. The issue was taken to the level of resignation and a severance package. Mr. Visconti has been retired after 20 years with the Middletown Police Department. He has seen situations in Middletown that have gone to this extreme. It does not make it easy to swallow. Taxpayers are not happy with severance packages. They pay a person that has left the Department, and they also have to hire another person to fill the position. Mr. Visconti knows people on the Commission, and also sat here tonight and listened to everyone's concerns. He does not feel the Commission took the right process. He asked if Steven could be reinstated, or is there an appeal process. Is there a way that the Commission can review this to see if there is any way the Chief can get his job back. He stated he has sat on many commissions and public forums where crowds had to be moved to larger venues to accommodate the large crowd. These meetings showed the Town the huge outcry from the public sending a message to the Town that the Town was wrong. After hearing everyone tonight, Mr. Visconti stated that it sounded like the Chief was railroaded. He stated he knows he does not know the whole story from the beginning, but is at this meeting as a concerned citizen. He wanted to know if he could get an answer or not. Is there an appeal process? He thinks the comments today from the public and members of the Department indicate that they feel something was done wrong in this process. The residents deserve an answer or to have their questions answered.

Nancy Berryman added that after listening to everyone making comments about Steve and knowing his family very, very personally, she feels very badly for Steve. It hurts. Knowing Steve Pendl and his family as well as she does, she stated if either Cromwell reinstates him or he finds another job somewhere else, it will probably be better than here. His family will be all right. She feels sorry for everyone involved in his resignation whether the votes were for the

Commissioner's own personal agendas or what. She doesn't know how people that do things like this are able to sleep at night.

President Seidl thanked everyone for expressing their views.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF  
JANUARY 19, 2016

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Neto and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Board of Commissioners' Meeting of January 19, 2016, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF  
JANUARY 6, 2016

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting of January 6, 2016, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF  
JANUARY 12, 2016

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Neto and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting of January 12, 2016, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL DISTRICT MEETING MINUTES OF  
FEBRUARY 9, 2016

A motion was made by Commissioner Neto, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Special District Meeting of February 9, 2016, as submitted. Commissioner Swanson abstained.

READING OF COMMUNICATONS & 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 January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Neto and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's report for January as submitted.

- B. Financial Report/Treasurer's Report. The Financial Report/Treasurer's Report for January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Swanson and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report/Treasurer's Report for January as submitted.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Assistant Chief EMS Clare discussed the Middlesex Hospital Paramedic Program. He stated he attended a

meeting last evening at Middlesex Hospital regarding the Middlesex Hospital Intersect Program which participates with 35 towns and communities sponsored by Middlesex Hospital services of paramedic intercepts. They have been losing lots of money operating their service because of a reduction in payments done by Medicare, Medicaid and others. They also had a \$9 million tax increase over the last year by the State of CT. Therefore, the hospital is proposing a surcharge on a per capita basis for the towns they service that will escalate over the next 5 years. For the upcoming budget year the increase will be \$1 per person the first year, \$2 per person the second year, \$3 per person the third year, \$4 per person the fourth year and \$5 on the fifth year. To oversee this process the Board of Directors which is made up of town and district officials, Fire Department personnel, etc. will check to make sure the process is running smoothly. They are willing to make a presentation to the Town or the District by appointment with Assistant Chief Clare, the President, Vice President and Director of Paramedic Services to come to Cromwell to explain everything, Assistant Chief Clare offered to help coordinate the presentation. Currently they are losing \$2 million a year, but yet it is a required service. What the District would be paying for is a "state of readiness." It is the least expensive option. They have not done anything to funding since 1987. Commissioner Neto asked what other options the Town might have? Ass't Chief Clare responded that he cannot answer that question but knows that the Town is required to have these services available to protect the Town of Cromwell. Commissioner Neto is interested in what the next steps would be and the cost. Ass't Chief Clare was asked to find out the Hospital's availability within the next couple of weeks to provide a presentation to the Board. Commissioner Langton asked Acting Chief Salonia about the breakdown for the last fire. The Acting Chief responded that it will be discussed at the Department's next meeting. Acting Chief Salonia recognized members of the Department as well as Cromwell's mutual aid partners for their efforts in the fire late Saturday, Feb. 13 into Sunday, Feb. 14 and also the fire at Skyview Drive that same weekend. He complimented everyone for all their help. Commissioner Swanson stated that the Fire Department has been totally taxed out in the month of February between two snow storms and two major fires. The Commission owes the Fire Department a debt of gratitude with a letter of commendation for the job they have done this month.

A motion was made by Commissioner Swanson, seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report for January as submitted.

- D. Fire Marshal's Report. The Fire Marshal's Report for January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Fire Marshal noted a correction should be made on the bottom of page 1. Regarding mandated inspection goals, the figure reads 85.81%, but should be 14.18%. Commissioner Langton asked what happened with the response time of the last call. Commissioner Langton stated that the Fire Marshal was on duty the other night during the fire call on Feb. 13. Commissioner Langton stated that the Fire Marshal did not respond. The Fire Marshal stated he did respond. He arrived at the scene the same time as the State Fire Marshal's Office. Commissioner Langton asked if that was after the State Fire Marshal got there. The Fire Marshal stated that the Department and the State Fire Marshal were there when he was there.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Neto and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Marshal's Report for January as submitted.

- E. Water Operations. The Operations Report for January had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Neto, seconded by Commissioner Swanson and unanimously approved to accept the Operations Report for January as submitted.



- F. Communications Report. The Communications Report for January had been previously submitted and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Neto, seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and unanimously approved to accept the Communications Report for January as submitted.

#### REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations Committee. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive Committee. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations Committee. There was no meeting.
- D. Pension Committee. There was no meeting.
- E. Personnel Committee. A meeting was held on January 28, 2016. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Commissioner Murphy explained that one of the reasons for the meeting was to discuss compensatory time for managers; i.e., Fire Marshal, Fire Chief and Operations Director to try to have some consistency in the compensatory policy. The Committee approved a policy that all exempt employees/managers will be compensated with comp time hour for hour, excluding monthly Commission meetings, for any additional time they spend for their job requirements beyond the regular work week of 40 hours per week and at the same time to increase the salary of the Operations Director to \$85,000 per year to bring the salary within the same range as other managers in order to adjust to the change in the compensatory policy.

A motion was made by Commissioner Neto, seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Personnel Committee Meeting of January 28, 2016, as submitted.

1. Recommendation to Change Compensatory Time for Managers. A motion was made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Neto and unanimously approved to accept the recommendation of the Personnel Committee regarding compensatory time for managers. Specifically, all exempt employees/managers will be compensated with comp time hour for hour excluding monthly Commissioner meetings, for any additional time they spend for their job requirements beyond the regular work week of 40 hours per week, and at the same time to increase the salary of the Operations Director to \$85,000 per year to bring that salary within the same range as other managers in order to adjust to the change in the compensatory policy.
2. Recommendation to Act on Request for Life Membership. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Neto and unanimously approved to enter into Executive Session at 7:57 PM to discuss the request for life membership.

A motion was made by Commissioner Neto, seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and unanimously approved to adjourn Executive Session at 8:10 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Swanson, seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and unanimously approved to act on the request for life membership as discussed in Executive Session.

#### BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

### CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was no report. Ms. Slade was not in attendance.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
  - 1. Public Safety Tower Committee. There was no meeting.
  - 2. Building Committee. There was no report.
  - 3. Safety Committee. There was no report.

### NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein commented that he was around over the weekend. Being a new Commissioner he got up in the middle of the night so that he could observe what the staff does at a call. He was at the Court St. station for one of the fires and was at the scene for the second one. The dispatchers, fire fighters, auxiliary, everyone did a fantastic job. We should be proud of the job they are doing. They go above and beyond in this type of weather and environment.

Commissioner Langton stated that as a Commission we have heard from the citizens and members of the Department. The Commission made a decision, the Chief has given us his resignation and we have moved on. He thinks there are concerns from the citizens that the Commission needs consider and discuss. He feels we need to address their concerns. He feels that we should consider his character and what he did for us and this Town and outside the Town. The Town's people have brought us to this point. They have voiced their concerns and he feels we should look into it and address it. We should reflect and see if what the Commission has done is the right thing. Commissioner Bellamo thanked everyone for coming out this evening as well as those who attended last month's meeting. He stated that their comments on not falling on deaf ears. It is a frustrating situation, and he wished the Commission could be more open.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report.
- D. Hardship Letters. A motion was made by Commissioner Swanson, seconded by Commissioner Bellamo and unanimously approved to refer the hardship letters submitted to the Executive Committee.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Cindy Hamlin, 72 Evergreen Rd., Cromwell, CT. Ms. Hamlin came late but wanted to make a comment about the documents left out on the table this evening regarding 1) setting the record straight and 2) the facts are as follows. She asked who drafted the documents, the taxpayers? The Commissioners responded that they were not aware of those documents. She had read them over, and from what she had seen on the news, as a taxpayer she felt that the severance package offered was very generous. If she were to lie at her job, she would not have received such a generous offer. She is not part of the majority that have concerns. She thinks the situation should be laid to rest, let our tax dollars pay wisely and move on.

Nicole Laterra added she doesn't believe it should be laid to rest. Something awful happened, it was not right and people are outraged. People need to be held accountable and actions taken. She urged the Commissioners that voted and the decision that went forward to make a radical stand. They need to address the concerns of the citizens and not let it go in one ear and out the

other. Maybe there needs to be something on next month's agenda to show that something is happening to make a difference. There is a lack of trust because of what happened, and rightfully so. She urged this to be on the agenda next month to address the concerns of all present. She asked if someone on the Board could make a stand. What is right, is right. They need to make it better to have the trust from the citizens.

Stephanie Webber added that after the situation with Chief Pendl and how it was handled, she doesn't understand how a second security breach in the same building could have happened. This involves the general citizenship of the Town. She doesn't know if they have been informed yet, but she does know it occurred. The same people that are in place are responsible for security of that building. The efforts didn't work and it needs to be addressed. She would like to see this issue added to the next agenda as well.

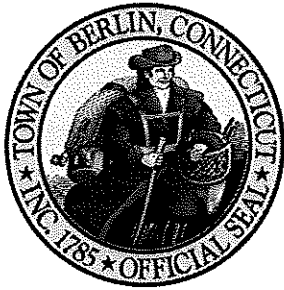
ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Neto, seconded by Commissioner Swanson and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 PM.

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Julius Neto, Secretary

Nancy Deegan'  
Recording Secretary  
3-4-16



# Town Of Berlin

## *Fire Department*

240 Kensington Road  
Berlin, CT 06037

Consisting of  
Berlin, East Berlin, Kensington, South Kensington  
Volunteer Fire Departments

February 16, 2016

Dear Madam or Sir:

Please accept this letter of support and character reference for Stephen Pendl.

I have known and worked alongside with Stephen in many different venues. These include but are not limited to emergency scenes, non-emergency events and Task Force 51. Stephen has always shown professionalism and courtesy to myself, officers and members from the Town of Berlin Fire Departments.

There has been numerous fire scenes in the Town of Berlin where Stephen has represented Cromwell Fire Department and/or Task Force 51. There has never been hesitation from him when asked to assist with incident command roles. He takes these roles serious and performs the duty as if he was protecting the firefighters and citizens from his own town, the Town of Cromwell.

I have not always worked with Stephen as Chief of the East Berlin Fire Department. As I worked my way up the ranks as Lieutenant, Captain and Assistant Chief, I had the pleasure to work with Stephen at many different scenes and in different roles. He always treated me with the same respect as he would any other Chief Officer. Also, during the times of working up the ranks I have learned positive lessons from his actions and continued to learn as Chief.

Stephen is the type of person that I was able to call upon for assistance no matter the day or time. If he was not able to personally help with the situation at hand, he would be able to guide me in the right direction of who to contact. There were also instances where he was offering his assistance or the assistance of the Cromwell Fire Department before assistance was asked for. When he would assist, there was no worry that the task at hand would be handled in a professional manner and to the best of his ability.

In conclusion, Stephen Pendl has always shown Professionalism, Courtesy, True Leadership and Dedication to the fire service in the past, today and in the future.

Please feel free to contact me at 860-883-3717 if I can offer any further assistance.

Respectfully,

Thomas R Farr II, Chief  
East Berlin Fire Department  
80 Main St  
East Berlin, CT 06023



Tanya D. Lane  
Acting Town Manager

# TOWN OF NEWINGTON

1485 Main Street Newington, Connecticut 06111

## Newington Volunteer Fire Department



Chris R. Schroeder  
Fire Chief

February 15, 2016

Dear Madam or Sir

Please accept this letter, in support of Stephen Pendl.

As Assistant Chief of the Newington Fire Department for the past 11 years, I have had the pleasure of working with Stephen in many different venues. I have much respect for Stephen finding him to be very professional, and caring for all under his command. As a Chief Officer, I find these qualities to be a priority for all leadership positions in the fire service.

I have worked side by side with Stephen at many calls, being part of Task Force 51, and have come to find comfort in his arrival at incidents. Stephen was always willing to step up and do what was needed for whatever community he was serving. Task Force 51, is the model to which the State used for the Regional Task Force plan. Stephen often brought fresh ideas and forward thinking to any problems, our communities were facing.

I am also the Secretary/Treasurer for the Capitol Region Fire Chiefs Association. Stephen was actively involved in this group and often brought members of his command staff to also get involved. He took pride in representing the Cromwell Fire Department, and developed many positive relationships within the organization. Stephen was always about being involved and expecting positive and professional results to anything he did.

In closing, I consider Stephen to be a strong positive leader, and one who demonstrates integrity and was always working to overcome the challenges of today's changing fire service.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at 860-883-5014 if I can offer any further assistance.

Phone: (860) 667-5900 Fax: (860) 667-5914  
nvfd@newingtonct.gov  
www.newingtonct.gov

Respectfully,

Thomas J. Lapierre  
Assistant Chief-Training  
Newington Fire Department  
1435 Main Street  
Newington, CT 06111



Tanya D. Lane  
Acting Town Manager

# TOWN OF NEWINGTON

1485 Main Street Newington, Connecticut 06111

## Newington Volunteer Fire Department



Chris R. Schroeder  
Fire Chief

February 16, 2016

Board of Fire Commissioners  
Cromwell Fire Department  
1 West Street  
Cromwell, Ct 06416

Cromwell Fire Commission and all Department Members,

I have known Steven Pendl since his appointment as Cromwell's Fire Chief and have worked closely with him at countless incidents throughout the Capital Region. During this time Chief Pendl has proven his effectiveness as an Incident Commander and trusted fire service leader.

I consider Chief Pendl to be an asset to the Cromwell Fire Department and Task Force- 51; his professional abilities and his devotion to maintaining the highest fire service standards and traditions is an inspiration to all. With my over forty years in the fire service I can think of no one who can better serve your community as its Fire Chief.

The members of the Newington Fire Department and Task Force- 51 stand behind Steve and urge you to fight for what is right and help reinstate him to his position.

Respectfully,

Chris R. Schroeder  
Task Force-51 Leader





# Portland Fire Department

Office of the Fire Chief

33 East Main Street / P.O. Box 71

Portland, CT 06480-0071

Phone: (860) 342-6750

Fax: (860) 342-4236

[www.portlandct.org](http://www.portlandct.org)

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of past Cromwell Chief Steve Pendl who has been forced to resign from the Cromwell Fire Department. As Chief of the Portland Fire Department, past President of the Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association as well as the Middlesex Fire Chiefs Association, I have had the honor of working closely with Chief Pendl over the past 10 years. During this time, we have developed a working relationship which has greatly benefited my Department, as well as many others. This includes areas of pre-planning for mutual aid response, planning committees for Regional Task Force Response as well as unified command assistance which is an imperative resource in complex situations that arise during emergency situations

After reading the latest FOI documents made available to the public by the Middletown press I felt it necessary to have this letter read into the record supporting the work of Chief Pendl for, not only the citizens of Cromwell but our entire fire service community. During my tenure as President of the Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association, Chief Pendl was not only elected to the 2nd Vice President position, but also to the EMS Advisory Board for the State of Connecticut. Again, these are *elected* positions, Chief Pendl was elected by his fellow Chiefs throughout the state for his tireless commitment to fire service and his department. These are not frivolous elections, but rather illustrate the respect he has earned from his broader colleagues. His record exemplifies the highest of work ethics and While on the board he has worked together to secure and produce training opportunities as well as secure funding for the 2nd phase of a recruitment and retention grant which will benefit all departments. During his time on the EMS advisory board he has opened communication related to the fire service and the ongoing concerns related to EMS response and critical care procedures. His record exemplified the highest work ethics and standards and proved to have a great impact on our service. Chief Pendl has show great ability to coordinate and establish working relationships with all departments. His education and experience have proved to be valuable when leading his peers. His ability to work with others and create a team approach to incident mitigation has resulted in great success on many incidents he has been in command of.

It is with great concern that a Chief of service was removed from office who had an unblemished personnel file and the overwhelming support to represent Cromwell and the fire service by his fellow Chiefs throughout Connecticut through an investigation that seems far from independent. Ten years of passionate work for the fire service completely halted.

Unfortunately Chief Pendl is now unable to defend himself due to an agreement or "gag" order. Therefore it's up to the those who support a fair method of investigation with a "Just Cause" reason for dismissal and to have read into record Chief Pendl's accomplishments and the important part he has played in the our fire service and those important benefits that have been received from his leadership.

Currently the fire service has proposed a "Just Cause" bill to protect Fire Chiefs in the State. Your Current Town Manager Chief Salvatore was protected under the same type of bill passed for Police Chiefs years ago when he was removed from office "unjustly" and quickly returned to duty. A Fire Chief deserves the same protection and due process.

Chief Pendl's ability and compassion for our service will be a great loss to its members.

Sincerely,

*Robert J Shea*

Robert J. Shea  
Chief

# ROCKY HILL FIRE DEPARTMENT

MICHAEL P. GARRAHY  
CHIEF



Tel: (860) 258-7605  
Fax: (860) 258-7609

3050 Main Street  
Rocky Hill, Connecticut 06067-3712

February 12, 2016

Dear Madam or Sir:

Please accept this letter of recommendation and support for Stephen Pendl.

I have worked alongside Mr. Pendl in countless joint activities between the Rocky Hill and Cromwell Fire Departments and have no hesitation in providing this letter. In fact, I welcome this opportunity as it is my pleasure and honor to submit this recommendation.

I have always found Stephen to be an extremely conscientious individual who acts not only in a totally professional manner but has impeccable integrity, which this writer considers a prerequisite for any leadership position in the fire service.

Two words come to mind when I think of Stephen, professionalism and empathy. The response to and mitigation of incidents can take a toll on any member of the fire service, it can be especially difficult for an incident commander as he has the weight of the entire incident on his shoulders. I've witnessed the professional and empathic demeanor which he exhibits in all his endeavors.

In addition to his commitment to excellence, you will find that Stephen has the unique ability to readily assess situations and formulate creative and effective solutions to the emergency incidents that we face on a daily basis.

This is exemplified in all the projects that Stephen has been part of, specifically by the entire restructuring of the Cromwell Fire Department.

I also want to mention that Stephen took a leadership role in the management of Task Force 51, his ability to maintain positive relationship with all involved has been a big factor in the success of the State's first organized Task Force. His congenial personality

had a big effect on all involved and was a huge part in the seamless interaction of the five towns.

I am proud to say that Task Force 51 was and still is the model for which all other Connecticut task forces are based and a great deal of credit for that belongs to Stephen Pendl.

I also consider Stephen to be a great asset to the fire service and his level of devotion is an inspiration to all of us. His efforts consistently demonstrate a sincere intention to perform his duties to the highest standards possible. This is best exemplified by his efforts in state-wide volunteer staffing and recruitment.

Stephen, as part of his leadership role in the Connecticut Fire Chief's Association was instrumental in negotiating and securing phases one and two of the Volunteer Workforce Solutions manpower grant through the International Association of Fire Chiefs. This grant has allowed the selected departments throughout the state to enjoy a great deal of success in recruiting and retaining new members

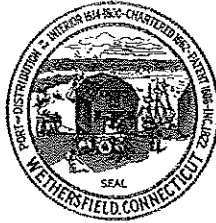
In summary, Stephen Pendl is a results-orientated individual who is prepared to meet and overcome the challenges of the fire service today and in the future.

Please feel free to contact me at 860-883-6054, if I can be of further assistance.

Respectfully yours,

Michael P. Garrahy, Chief  
Rocky Hill Fire Department.  
3050 Main Street  
Rocky Hill, CT. 06067

Town of Wethersfield  
505 SILAS DEANE HIGHWAY  
WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT 06109



Sir or Madam;

Please accept this as a letter of recommendation and character reference for Steven Pendl. I have known and worked along Steve for over 10 years and can say his dedication and professionalism to the fire service stands among the best around. Steve's participation in the Ct. Chief's, County Chief's, Task force, and EMS Advo Board is a true sign of his admiration and respect he not only has for the fire service, but also from his peers he serves with on a daily basis.

Steve has always been a hands on, front of the line leader. Always willing to help and assist. I have always looked upon Steve as a true gentleman, family man, and inspiring force in my career as Chief. This of course is mirrored by his accomplishments and leadership within the Cromwell Fire Dept for the past several years. Steve is not only a peer, but a true friend.

If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to call anytime 860-818-0414.

Chief Richard Bailey

Wethersfield Fire Department