

Cromwell Fire District

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Cromwell, CT 06416
Telephone 860-635-4420

FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, August 16, 2022

6:00 PM

Coles Road Firehouse

105 Coles Road

Cromwell, CT

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners' Meeting on Tuesday, August 16, 2022, 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 Lee Brow (President), Jason Hinners, Charles Epstein, Robert McIntyre, Robert Donohue, Chip Darius and Roger Rukowicz attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri, Communications Manager Justin Lonergan and Finance Manager Michael Lupkas. Commissioners Mertie Terry and David Colligan were absent.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM, by President Brow. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Brow.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted with the following changes: to add before Public Comment, Swearing-In of Firefighter Griffin Stover; and Item XII. Under Executive Session, the correct wording for that item is, "Strategy on Managing Staffing Challenges." The wording on the agenda was incorrect.

SWEARING IN OF GRIFFIN STOVER

At 6:05 PM, Firefighter Griffin Stover was sworn in as a new career firefighter. The President read the oath, and Mr. Stover repeated the oath after the President. Mr. Stover's mother, Eileen, pinned his badge.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. James Rude, 25 Highridge Rd., 1) at the last meeting a letter was read to the Commission requesting a meeting between himself and various parties here at the commission regarding an

issue that has been under discussion for several months. He was approached this evening by the Executive Director, and Mr. Rude understands they will be trying to schedule that meeting here within the coming weeks. He was surprised it took 4 weeks for that conversation to begin, but thank you very much for moving it forward; 2) he received in his bill last month a notice saying that there was no newsletter for the month of July, and that there was something new coming in the next go around. He was disappointed in the fact that you did not think there was anything important enough to communicate with the taxpayers and the ratepayers in the Town of Cromwell.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
JULY 19, 2022

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of July 19, 2022, as submitted.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

A letter was read by Commissioner Epstein from Maureen Lozinski, Sponsorship Coordinator of the Cromwell Creative District. The letter thanked the Fire District for its sponsorship for the Summer Fest.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's Report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Executive Director was available to answer any questions. Mr. Neto added that regarding the State of CT budget where the State capped the motor vehicle tax, the District received \$117,000 as part of the reimbursement. The District was capped at 2.12% for 3 mils.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinnars and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's report for July as submitted.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Executive Director took the opportunity to introduce Mike Lupkas, as the new Finance Manager replacing Mike Alibrio. He and Mr. Neto were available to answer any questions. Commissioner Darius had a question on page 6, total number of gallons produced was 99,291,000 during the month of July vs. 66,479,000 in the previous year. It shows an increase of 66,000. It is a increase of 33,000,000 gallons. Mr. Palmieri explained that this was the highest they have ever pumped. It was a very dry month, and the usage is increasing every year due to the expansion of the Town. He added they have stopped flushing this month because of the high usage and dry conditions.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for July as presented.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's report and Fire Marshal's Office report for July had been previously submitted and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Chief was available to answer any questions.

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

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. President Brow had a question regarding how many gallons Cromwell is allowed to pump per day according to the State. Mr. Palmieri confirmed that Cromwell is approved for the same amount of 10.5 million gallons per day. The amount did not change.

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

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center report for July had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The only addition to the report was a Tower summary. Mr. Lonergan has taken over a portion of managing the Tower so there will be an added tower section to his report. He was available to answer any questions. The next Tower Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday, September 2, 2022, at 10 AM, at 1 West Street.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Center Report as presented.

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.
1. Communications Committee. There was no meeting.
 2. Apparatus Committee. A meeting was held August 2, 2022. Draft minutes 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 Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to table the Apparatus Committee meeting minutes of August 2, 2022, until Commissioner Colligan is in attendance at this meeting.

- D. Pension. There was no meeting. The Executive Director has requested that a meeting be scheduled through the Chair of the Committee as there is some committee business that needs to be addressed. A special meeting will be scheduled within the next couple of weeks.
- E. Personnel Committee. A meeting was held on July 12, 2022. The minutes were tabled from last month.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Personnel Committee meeting minutes of July 12, 2022, as submitted.

- F. Water Operations. The quarterly meeting scheduled for August 3, 2022, was canceled because the Water Operations Manager was not available. It will be rescheduled within the next week or two.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was no one present to give a report.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
1. Public Safety Tower Committee. Commissioner Rukowicz reported that the next meeting is scheduled for Friday, September 2, 2022, at 10:00 AM, at 1 West Street.
 2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. There was no meeting.
 3. Bylaws Committee. There was no meeting.
 4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. Commissioner Darius reported that the Committee has developed a mission/vision/strategy statement in draft form. It was reviewed by the President and the Executive Director and was given approval. The next step is to have a Committee meeting. This month there are 5 articles and two photos going into the Cromwell Chronicle. They should appear in the September edition. There are a number of things coming up as publicity opportunities such as showcasing the new Engine 1. There is also a new water service truck which is in the parking lot tonight. Fire Safety Week and Fire Safety month are coming up in October. There are many opportunities for publicity. Things are in motion. Commissioner Epstein added that they have made arrangement to show off the new truck at the Cromwell Farmer's Market on Friday, August 26. They plan on promoting volunteer and recruitment efforts while they are there.
- C. Approval of Cromwell Fire District EMS Billing Policy for Life Members. Mr. Neto explained that this item surfaced about 3 or 4 months ago. There was some discussion at that time. A workshop was to be scheduled to draft a policy, but never happened. Last month a life member came before the Board to express his concerns. It was decided to give that life member some relief of his EMS invoices. There was a total of \$398 owed from charges imposed in March and May of 2022. The number represents the patient's portion owed after all other sources for payment have expired.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hanners, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to forgive the \$398 outstanding balance for ambulance services by Mrs. William Gibb.

There was discussion regarding the draft EMS billing policy for life members. Commissioner Darius had some comments regarding the policy. The first thing Commissioner Darius noticed was that what should be included with the billing cycle included is collection. It needs to say something about after 3 rounds of bills, "before this

goes to collection" there needs to be a clear stopping point at which the policy will be invoked. Also, the phrase, "all avenues have been exhausted" to pay the bill which would include private pay. He suggested it should say, "all insurance avenues have been exhausted." There was also a concern with the dollar amount of \$50 or less. There was a suggestion to include a life member's spouse in the policy.

Commissioner Donohue was in favor of keeping the policy for life members only. Commissioners Hinnners, McIntyre, Darius, Rukowicz were in favor of adding spouses to the policy as was Commissioner Hinnners. Commissioner Darius also agreed. Commissioner Rukowicz also agreed. The President will have the Executive Director amend the policy. It will be reviewed at the next Board meeting.

The amendment will be in the first paragraph to add Life members' "and spouses only" to that sentence as part of the policy. The sentence continues "that have gone through the entire billing cycle, established by the Cromwell Fire District's Billing company adding, "before it goes to collections." In the first bullet item to insert "after all insurance avenues have been exhausted to pay for the bills." The word insurance being added to that sentence.

There was discussion about the language in the policy regarding a \$50 account balance or less. It was decided to remove the last bullet item regarding the \$50 because the purpose of the policy was to financially assist life members and their spouses.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to table approval of this policy until the next Board of Commissioners' meeting. It was noted that the Executive Director will contact Mr. Gibb to advise him of the policy regarding ambulance bills for life members.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein thanked the Fire Department for the assistance they provided to the Election Day staff. He was told that the Fire Department showed up with fans to make the high school gymnasium more tolerable. Alice Kelly brought this to Commissioner Epstein's attention and wanted to thank the Chief and the firefighters. The Chief credited Russ Johnson for helping out the election crew.

The President thanked the Chief and Fire Department for all their hard work getting engine 1 up and ready. The new equipment that was purchased which brings the Department up to date with fire equipment bringing them into the 21st century. He thanked them for the grant for car seats which was authored by Alan Dominy. The Chief is hoping to start car seat installation on October 1, at the Coles Road firehouse. The Fire Department will also be doing a class for Habitat for Humanity at no charge. They want to certify their employees so if they get deployed they have CPR and First Aid. Commissioner Epstein wanted to advertise the car seat initiative at the Farmers' Market. He asked for a sign or poster to display on the new Truck 1 which will be at the Farmers' Market. The Chief explained that Alan Dominy received 2 grants. One was for posters and extra details to display such as banners and baby dolls to use as models or examples of how to place a child in the seat. There are 25 - 30 car seats. National Car Seat Awareness Week is the week before October 1, but because the Durham Fair will be running, it was decided to hold off a week.

The Chief spoke about Active Shooter Training. The Board of Education has not had Active Shooter training. Fire Marshal Holmes worked with Security with the Board of Education.

The Fire Department will be doing training for all the nurses in the school system within the next week or two. The Department never had stop the bleed equipment before. The Chief purchased \$750 worth of stop the bleed equipment to use for training. He is waiting for the Board to get back to the Department. The details will be worked out tomorrow when the Chief meets with the Superintendent of Schools.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report.
- D. Discussion and Approval to Give Two Union Firefighters from Local 4662 Two Days Off with Pay for the Line of Duty Death Ceremony in Colorado. The Chief stated that this is considered Union business. Lt. McKnight and Firefighter Mike DePaolo have been designated to attend the ceremony. The Union will be paying the travel expenses, and the District will pay for one work day each. The Chief has no problem with this arrangement. He can fill the shifts with overtime. It is a good opportunity for Local 4662 to represent their former member at the ceremony. Commissioner Epstein agreed with allowing union members to attend the ceremony to honor one of their own and show that the District supports and respects their firefighters.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to support the Fire Department by having two firefighters to go to the line of duty death ceremony in Colorado Springs for one day to honor former Fire Marshal Todd Gagnon. That is going to be two Fire Department members paying one 24 hour shift each. Commissioner Darius requested that the individuals attending bring back some photos of our members there as well as photos of the event, and a description of what was done to honor Todd. Lt. McKnight will have a report prepared for the October Board meeting.

- E. Discussion and Approval for Fire Chief's Action Plan with Non-Participating Part-Timers and Volunteers. The Chief has been looking at the inactivity of certain part-timers and volunteers since he started in Cromwell. Currently he has 9 people that have 0% to 10% participation with the Department for the last year and a half. He requested that he be able to send those individuals correspondence requesting a resignation or to contact the Fire Chief to communicate their status within the Department. This would be a good opportunity to break free from these individuals. The District is paying workers' comp. for some of these individuals. There is also gear and equipment set aside that has been designated for each of those individuals that could be used somewhere else. The Chief also has to include them as part of training numbers since they are part of the need. The inactivity is defined as zero participation. They are not picking up shifts, not doing any volunteer work or standby's, no all fire or EMS calls either. At the most these individuals are averaging 10%. There is the potential of those individuals coming back if they are interested, but only if they resign in good standing. If people ignore the communication that will be sent to them, they will be resigning, but NOT in good standing. The Chief is having a hard time filling shifts and asking for volunteers. There are only 4 dedicated volunteers that are responding all the time. The Chief has tried to have meetings, but only have a couple people show up.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to approve the Chief's elimination of individuals who have not been responsive at all to their Department responsibilities since Chief Balletto took office.

- F. Discussion and Approval of the Process for Reviewing Contested Pensions. The Executive Director explained that the District does not have a process for reviewing contested pensions. Mr. Neto has worked with Future Plan. They are suggesting the District take this approach to formalize a process. There needs to be a way to consistently reviewing any and all concerns if they surface at this level. Based on the length of time the records have been kept, there could be some gaps. The Commission has full authority to review and address the facts that are presented. They need to be realistic in realizing they may not have all the data correctly. This process and policy is focused on facts not emotion. It will require individuals to produce documents they may have as evidence, or individuals providing an affidavit of statement as evidence. Those things will be presented to the Board. The Board will determine whether any evidence produced is valid or not. Future Plan will take direction from the Board. If it is not factually or evidence-based, there could be additional liability involved that they may not be able to support. The President was in agreement. It was noted that Commissioner Colligan has started to research records of members whose pensions cannot be confirmed. Mr. Neto is not sure the status of Commissioner Colligan's work. Commissioner McIntyre suggested coming up with a list of things that would qualify as proof of membership to qualify for a pension.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to task the Pension Committee with receiving inquiries from people who have concerns about their pension, and with clarifying at the pension Committee level whether the inquirer has met the criteria or not before they bring disputed pension requests to the full Board of Commissioners.

There was a question as to whether or not the Pension Committee should approve the draft that was presented. The only addition to the draft the President had was to add the word "during" after the word "under" in the third paragraph of the document towards the end of that sentence. Commissioner Darius added "with rationale" in paragraph 4, the end of the first sentence. The draft document will become the framework for the Pension Committee to follow.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to have the draft document of the Pension Review Process become the framework for the Pension Committee to follow with the two additions discussed added to the document.

PUBLIC COMMENT

James Rude, 25 Highridge Road, commented that the Commission has talked at length this evening about some of the detailed things that are involved in the defined benefit pension plan for the volunteers. As of June 30, 2021, a year ago, that this pension plan was \$260,000 overfunded. The assets were in excess of the liabilities. The termination and cash out of the pension plan is a very complicated thing. Fortunately there is only about 115 members from the audit statement from last year. However, it is very important to make sure that everything the Commission does is in coordination with the employees retirement income security act and rules and regulations that go along with that as it relates to determining what to do. The Board is discussing one of the very small elements that are involved in the total termination and cash out process. He strongly encouraged the Board get in contact with the real experts that know how to manage both the assets side of the termination, the liability side of the termination, the communication side of the termination and how to make it happen because once the Board decides to do something, it takes a long time. To make sure all the rules are followed is extremely important. He strongly

encouraged the commission to make sure in the very near future consider hiring an expert that knows how to do all these things. He does not believe that it is possible internally given the nature of this organization to have all that expertise in house. The size of this organization is just not big enough.

There was discussion at the last meeting about the development for consideration of a strategic plan. He continues to suggest that the Commission consider the development of an operational financial plan. Because of the nature of the major capital needs related to fire trucks and other things, the pending work that needs to get done to inspect the water tank and the tie in to the other systems, he truly believes that a financial plan that documents what folks think is going to happen over the next 5 or 10 years is going to be extremely important.

You're meeting in Executive Session tonight to talk about the staffing problems that are being encountered. When you are doing a financial plan, you can talk about what you think is going to happen to staffing levels, salary levels, benefit levels. It would be very prudent for the organization to consider doing a long-range financial plan to avoid surprises. A year ago in the fall, there was approval for a fire truck of an urgent nature. He was told that a fire truck generally lasts 15 years. He had a conversation with a couple of firemen in the parking lot at Stop & Shop the other day. The truck they were riding in was a 20 year old fire truck. Making sure there is adequate planning for the updating of the fleet and doing all the other kinds of things that you need to do to make sure that the citizens of Cromwell are well served and well protected. It would be a worthwhile venture.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:17 PM to enter into Executive Session after a 5 min. recess, inviting the Fire Chief and Executive Director into the session.

Executive Session convened at 7:21 PM. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to allow the Fire Chief and Executive Director to negotiate with Local 4662 for part-time employee compensation increases.

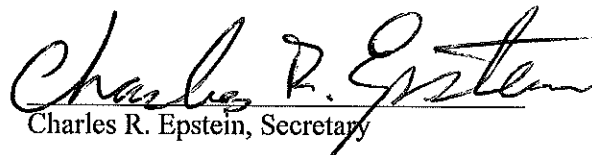
A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to adjourn Executive Session at 8:25 PM and resume the regular Board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 8:29 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary


Charles R. Epstein, Secretary