

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, August 30, 2022

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

A Special Board of Commissioners' meeting was held on Tuesday, August 30, 2022, at 5:30 PM, at the Coles Road firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to consider and act upon Special Fire District business.

Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Jason Hinners, Charles Epstein, Roger Rukowicz, David Colligan, Robert Donohue and Robert McIntyre attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto and Fire Chief Jason Balletto. Commissioners Chip Darius and Mertie Terry were absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM, by President Brow.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. Firefighter Lt. Brett Hallden addressed the group. He discussed a meeting he had with a Fire Chief from a combination fire department in CT. This department's volunteer contingency is averaging two volunteers per call under their Fire/EMS organization. They also have full-time, part-time and per diem employees. Their Chief has been trying to work with their Board of Selectmen to change their salaries to keep pace with what has changed. Over the last couple of years there have been changes to Fire and EMS services. Changes have occurred due to the pandemic, free money from the federal government and/or the new generation of workers who don't want to work. Things are a bit unusual. The Board of Selectmen did not want to increase wages because they believe there is still a big labor pool.

In August of 2011, Mr. Hallden was in the oil fields of North Dakota. One of the McDonald's restaurants out there was looking for part-time and full-time staff starting at \$25 per hour. The unemployment rate outside of Fargo was 0.9% at the time. They could not get anyone to work so they kept increasing the starting hourly rate to recruit people.

When the Chief took the First Selectman out to lunch, they went to a place that was next door to their firehouse. At the bottom of the menu board, they had a sign looking for workers with no experience starting at \$25+ an hour. 80% of List Serve today is jobs, and the labor pool in

CT is too small. Mr. Hallden understands about not spending money, but things are not going to go backwards. This is a wave that has been coming. That is why Mr. Hallden shared the story about North Dakota. These changes are here to stay. It requires a long-term plan. Today is a step in plugging the damn, but there is still a lot of work to do because the Department is competing with other departments hiring part-time people. We are competing with all of them, and CT is a small state. Mr. Hallden thanked everyone for listening.

The President noted that everyone does realize the current situation, and it is now time to start to play catch up, but it is a step-by-step process. They are trying to fix things that were broken by previous administrations. It will take a while but they are confident they will get there.

IV. New Business

- A. Cromwell Fire District EMS Collection Policy. The Executive Director distributed copies of a draft of a proposed EMS Collection Policy. He had sent everyone an electronic copy. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Fire Chief and Executive Director are requesting an official policy so they can give guidance to Shared Response in dealing with delinquent accounts. This policy does not have anything to do with life membership. This policy has to do with individuals who require an ambulance transport. There needs to be something in writing to follow as a guideline. Mr. Neto could not find any policy in place with the previous vendor, Quick Meds. The Commissioners took some time to review the document.

Edits to the document were as follows: pg. 1, Bullet 1, a. adding the word "age" before "of 65." For Bullet 1, c. removing the word "of" at the end of the first line, and adding the word "is" to the second line before the word "approved."

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the three edits to the CFD EMS Collection Policy.

- B. MOA with Local FF Union 4662 Regarding Part-Time/Full-Time Wages & Minimum Part-Time Schedule Requirements. The Executive Director distributed copies of the MOA to everyone to review. He had also sent everyone an electronic copy. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Salaries and competitiveness were discussed earlier in the meeting. This document reflects the necessity to make salaries more competitive with other fire departments. It is the first step in addressing the present staffing challenges. The part-time staff specifically. Based on direction that was given during Executive Session a couple of weeks ago, the Fire Chief had given a full presentation at that time regarding the status of the Fire Department as it relates to staffing, availability of staff and open positions that are not being filled which has led to modification of the starting salary for firefighters/EMS personnel to \$20.50 per hour. The document is also suggesting that single certifications go up to \$19.50 per hour so that EMS personnel along with Fire I & II would also be bumped up to \$19.50. The push is to get to \$20.50 in order to become more marketable.

Part of the MOA deals with a full-time raise that will be implemented on June 30, 2023, two days before the new fiscal year. Any EMS/Firefighter person making \$25 per hour or less, will receive a 4% raise, and a 2% raise for any EMS/Firefighter making \$25 or higher. That will start the baseline for negotiations for the next contract. June 2023 will be the last month of the present contract. They are hoping through the Personnel

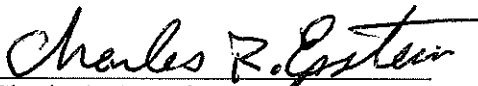
Committee, the Negotiating Committee and the availability of the union that negotiations may start early. This item as well as others will need to be addressed. Some of the legwork can begin now so that the outcome will be a better final product. This work should begin before the start of negotiations to determine what the final salary will be and how competitive the District needs to be. The findings need to be presented to the Personnel Committee with a final recommendation to come before the full Board of Commissioners. They are hoping this is a short-term solution before they can come up with a permanent solution. There was some discussion regarding the budget and what funds would be available to transfer.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Memorandum of Agreement as submitted.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the job postings for Part-time EMT and part-time Firefighter/EMT job posting as submitted.

- V. Commissioners' Comments. There was a question about why the postings were on List Serve before they were approved by the Board. The Executive Director took responsibility for posting on List Serve before approval by the Board because there was a workshop held on this issue, and there was a majority of Commissioners that were in favor of the postings at that time. Mr. Neto made the decision because two weeks had expired without any action on this issue while at the same time dealing with staffing shortages.
- VI. 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 6:00 PM.

ATTEST:


Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary