

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **Subcommittee for Non-Career Staffing Solutions**

Tuesday, January 28, 2019

6:00 PM

**1 West Street
Cromwell, CT**

Present: Julius Neto (Chairman), Curt Anderson, Commissioner Mertie Terry and Nicole LaTerra. Deputy Fire Chief Michael Salonia had an excused absence. Also attending as the public was Commissioner Robert Donohue and Firefighter Brett Hallden.

I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 6:10 PM, by Chairman Neto. A motion was made by Ms. LaTerra, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.

II. Approval of Minutes of January 3, 2019 & January 14, 2019. A motion was made by Mr. Anderson, seconded by Ms. LaTerra and unanimously approved to accept the meeting minutes of January 3, 2019, as submitted.

A motion was made by Ms. LaTerra, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the meeting minutes of January 14, 2019, with corrections. Mr. Anderson abstained.

III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.

IV. New Business. Ms. LaTerra requested that the meeting time be bumped up one hour to a start time of 5:00 PM to accommodate on-call schedules. The rest of the subcommittee was in agreement with the time change.

A. Continue Discussions for Non-Career Staffing Solutions/Possible Approval of Specific Suggestions Related to Solutions. The Chairman noted that the plan for this meeting was to review both Ms. LaTerra's draft model and Deputy Chief Salonia's model. However, due to the absence of the Deputy Chief at this meeting, his model will be reviewed at the next meeting.

Ms. LaTerra had her staffing model in a power point format. She noted that it is a first draft subject to modifications. It could not be projected on an overhead because her MAC program format was not compatible to the system in the West St. conference room. She was asked to give an oral presentation of the model.

She began by stating that her model is volunteer based. The objective is to provide top quality service to the Town of Cromwell and the surrounding towns.

The goals: 1) To serve the community with guaranteed coverage for FIRE and EMS while staying compliant with state and federal laws, 2) To be fair and equitable to all volunteer members who continue to put our community first and 3) To also be budget sensitive for the Cromwell Fire District.

The Volunteer Model: to keep the model as it currently exists with accountability of FLSA issues with our current volunteer members. This can be accomplished by adding scheduled FIRE duty shifts and the current EMS schedule with an addition of a second ambulance for coverage. It is recommended to try this approach first before considering a switch to part-time staffing because once part-time staffing occurs, that situation would be irreversible.

Regarding FLSA compliance, the entry level firefighter salary starts at \$41,134. 20% of that figure would be \$8,226. That is the figure Ms. LaTerra is basing her calculations off of. She feels that is something to be looked at to determine an average cost. The volunteers cannot be paid by the hour, but a nominal fee can be given for a timeframe of service (6 hr. shift) as long as it stays below the FLSA 20% threshold. A volunteer cannot be scheduled for more than 30 hrs. per week because that would be considered part-time status. To note is that the volunteer is getting paid for availability rather than productivity.

Ms. LaTerra is researching special assignments such as high school football games. A nominal fee for coverage could be considered but has not been determined at this time. All these issues of coverage and scheduling would be reviewed at the quarterly officers meetings or by Captains/Lieutenants to assure that FLSA thresholds or limits are not violated.

Ms. LaTerra reviewed a sample of a weekly schedule. There is 8 career staff covering five 12 hour shifts for 60 hours. The volunteer model covers 108 hrs., which is eighteen 6 hour shifts. Deputy Chief Salonia has stated there is adequate coverage during the day to cover. The volunteers still do fill in to cover staff on vacations or with time off. For EMS, they are filling the first ambulance which is the current practice. There are two people at \$75/hr. That is \$150 for a 6 hr. shift at 18 shifts which equals \$2,700 per week. That scenario would remain in compliance with FLSA with no more than 30 hrs./wk.

For Fire Ms. LaTerra is researching doing a guaranteed coverage from home as a duty shift. This would include 4 people at a nominal fee of \$30 for a 6 hr. shift for a total of \$120. Those staff would be able to respond from home with a required timeframe to get to the call. The \$120 figure at 18 shifts equals \$2,160 a week. Annually the totals from 2 EMS would be \$140,400, 4 FIRE would be \$112,320. Annually for 6 guaranteed coverage positions, the cost would be \$252,720. This is what is currently staffed for daytime coverage. That does not exclude people coming out as volunteers to supplement for whatever type of call it is. That would be the guaranteed coverage that would be considered the nominal fee for that shift.

FIRE duty crews would be scheduled for 6 hr. shifts at \$30 for the nominal fee. It would be 4 Fire I Certified at a minimum for that response time. Sign up would be in a red alert type of setting as is done with EMS. They would respond from home to all FIRE calls

during their shift. In addition to any volunteers who come out, the pay per call modeling would drop to \$15 a call. It would provide the personnel who have the initiative to sign up for the shift coverage. They would receive the \$30 whether there was a call or not. Any additional personnel coming out would get the \$15 per call including cross-trained personnel. If cross-trained personnel are on that shift (they recommend at least having one), they would also be responsible for driving/teching the second ambulance. If a FIRE call comes in first, they would take that call. If it is a medical call, they would have a driver or a tech. It can be a driver or a tech because if they are EMT certified they can tech that call, and there can be an EMR driver. An officer or most senior person would be leader of the shift.

Regarding the FIRE duty schedule, personnel would be able to sign up for a maximum of 5 shifts per week. That would be below a 30 hr. work week. An average would be about 4 shifts per week. It would be equivalent to \$6,240 a year with a remainder of \$1,986 for pay per call or a maximum of 548 pay per calls a year or 274 shifts per year.

The EMS duty shifts are 6 hr. shifts at \$75, with two in-house certified crews. The difference in EMS and FIRE duty schedules is that EMS will be held in-house as it currently is, but there will be a maximum number of shifts that can be signed up for. It is different than the current practice because there is no accountability now to say you can do as many shifts as you want. Now that is being scaled back so that they can be in compliance with FLSA. They would be allowed 2 shifts per week so that it would remain below 30 hours. They would still be allowed to do pay-per-call. Two shifts a week would total \$7,800 annually. They can fill a second ambulance shift from home for \$30.

The fire police and auxiliary would respond from home as is current practice. Pay per call would be the same as FIRE and EMS. Pay per call would be different in this situation at \$15. It would be a recommendation that within a two year time frame the individual become EMR certified so they can fill an EMS crew as a driver or Q/CDL license to drive fire apparatus. They would probably not go over the FLSA threshold.

Stipends would remain the same as they currently do. Bylaws may have to be revised for reimbursement of gas, uniforms, mileage, food, etc. Not performance based. Pensions would also remain the same.

The current budget allows for shift coverage, \$148,000. The pay-per-call point system is \$118,000. With this proposed model budget there is a difference of \$18,000. There is a 5% increase for guaranteed coverage with 6 people on duty.

In discussing the budget comparisons with the current budget and model budget there would need to be 15 to 20 part-time staff to be able to fill the positions. That would be equivalent to approximately \$16 an hour. Regarding second ambulance coverage, there is a 36% turnover rate during the day and 38% turnovers at night. That is 40 turnovers for a second ambulance due to no crew. There was a proposed model a few years ago to change that, but it was never implemented.

To staff a second ambulance with two at home, personnel would sign up for 6 hour shifts. The driver would be part of the duty crew (cross trained) and an EMT at home. Either way one of them will get paid the extra \$30 to stay at home and cover second ambulance calls only. As primary they would get \$75 for being in-house. Being at home to staff the

ambulance would be \$30. There are 18 shifts that would equal \$540 a week. A yearly budget to staff the second ambulance to eliminate the turnovers or second ambulance would be \$28,080. That would eliminate turnovers but would also impact the budget. It is in the budget because if turnovers are eliminated, the lost revenue from 2nd ambulance turnovers would cover adding a standby crew at night and weekends and also cover the 5% increase. To be able to man that with one more person, would be 7 people on if that is accepted as part of the model.

Commissioner Terry wanted to know if there are enough ambulance calls to justify that expenditure. She wanted to make sure that whatever is put in place can be subsidized. Ms. LaTerra felt that this was the most doable budget. Adding part-time staff would be a significant increase.

Ms. LaTerra has discussed the numbers with Deputy Chief Salonia. He will be distributing that information to see if it is possible to staff all that. If the Department were to go part-time, it would eliminate the majority of the volunteers because they would have to be trained at a minimum of Fire II and EMT certified. There are only a handful of people that could apply for part-time positions because most of the volunteers already work full-time jobs. Mr. Neto added that reimbursements are hard to predict because the Department does not collect everything that they bill. There needs to be improvement in collections.

Ms. LaTerra added CPR needs to be added to recruitment and retention. She stills needs to input some information into the model such as how many members are cross-trained, how many are EMS, fire police and auxiliary. She is in the process of getting all that information. She stated she is also willing to modify any part of her model.

Commissioner Terry represented all Commissioners in saying they appreciate all the work Ms. LaTerra has done in presenting her model. She has done an excellent job in working to incorporate all concerns.

There are many things the volunteers do that they don't get paid for. There was a discussion regarding part-time vs. volunteer and the assignment of shifts and guaranteeing coverage for service. She also feels the volunteers should have the first opportunity to try and work these issues out before going to other measures. Mr. Anderson noted that his model reflects the use of part-time and volunteer services. He also identified models from Deputy Chief Salonia, and he thought Chief Terenzio. He thought the career staff also had a model.

Mr. Neto also advised the subcommittee that he has reported their progress to the Personnel Committee. The group needs to come to a consensus so they can present their work to the Personnel Committee.

Mr. Anderson asked if there would be other plans to review besides his, Nicole's and the Deputy Chief. Mr. Neto stated that there was one that was submitted by an employee anonymously. They will take a look at that as well. They would not be able to make changes to it or ask questions because it was submitted anonymously. Mr. Neto added that the Subcommittee needs to start coming to some conclusions/decisions.

- V. Public Comments. There was a question regarding how the public can view the plans. Because they are drafts, they have not been published on the website, but they are part of the

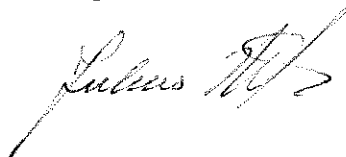
meeting notes. It is a work in progress. Drafts can be given out as long as it is understood they are only drafts.

Firefighter Brett Hallden had some observations that he wished to share:

- What is a nominal fee and what should it cover and reimburse. The Federal Government has already given their definition of a nominal fee which should cover the cost of someone's meals and transportation. The entity providing the nominal fee is allowed to consider mileage. Also uniforms, tuition for applicable classes and training materials. Of those items, three are already covered by the District.
- Is \$75 for a 6 hour shift compliant with FLSA. There are many other bullet points to consider as far as what is compliant with the law. How do you differentiate between fire coverage at home for \$30/shift, pay per call and performing the duties at no cost. This is an issue that other Towns have had problems with.
- He asked if \$15 per call is compliant with FLSA.
- He also noted that part-timers and full timers cannot volunteer.
- He asked what the definition of volunteer is. There seems to be a lot of focus on dollars.
- Regarding giving people stipends from home, what guarantee does the District have that people would show up for calls. There really is no guarantee if something should happen to that individual before they leave their house or on the way to the call.
- Also, he commented on the statement that was made that if there were part-time employees, there would be no existing volunteers. No one has suggested getting rid of the Volunteer Fire Department.
- Someone also made a statement about adequate coverage. He asked what the definition of adequate coverage is. If there were a civil lawsuit, it would come down to NFPA 1720. He suggested NFPA 1720 be reviewed by the Subcommittee.
- He had information on VFS billing and Medicaid numbers. He would supply those to the Chairman after the meeting.

VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Anderson, seconded by Ms. LaTerra and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Julius Neto, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
2-25-19