

Cromwell Fire District

1 West Street
Cromwell, CT 06416
Telephone 860-635-4420

FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Personnel Committee Meeting

Thursday, February 27, 2020

Present: Commissioners Jason Hinners (Vice Chairman), David Colligan and Mertie Terry. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Commissioners Roger Rukowicz and Robert Donohue, Fire Chief Michael Terenzio, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade, Dispatch Union Secretary Brian Petrocelli, Firefighter Union President Lt. Brett Hallden, Firefighter Lt. William McKnight and Part-time firefighter Chris Brandt.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:31 PM, by Vice Chairman Hinners.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the agenda with the following additions/changes under New Business: Item A. SAFER Grant Hires, Item B. New Assistant Chief Process and Item C. Fire Chief Old Contract Issue.
- III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- IV. Old Business. There was no old business to discuss.
- V. New Business
 - A. SAFER Grant Hires. Chief Terenzio reported that the funding begins on March 8, 2020. Individuals need to be dressed and hired by that date. Every day after March 8 Cromwell will begin to loose funding. The Chief stated they are ready to make their selections. The candidates have been vetted, and there is a list. Commissioner Terry asked how the rankings were based. Is it a broad scope of qualifications other than just testing well. Chief Terenzio responded that the criteria was based on what the Personnel Committee wanted. It was also based on a written assessment which included 90 questions. That was 50% of the ranking. The test was purchased from a human resources company to test the candidates' cognitive and reasoning abilities. 45% was based on an oral assessment conducted by Chief Terenzio, President Brow, Assistant Chief Brade and one of the career Fire Lieutenants. Also considered was time of service in the Department or community service. A ranking was done based on all of that information. The Chief also included feedback from the four duty officers. That is something the Chief used to do while working at his former Fire Department. He added that they have had the benefit of hiring from within so the duty officers' opinions are valued. He added that Cromwell does not have a civil service hiring rule. A ranking was done, and everyone passed. If individuals were within 2 or 3 points of each other, they were considered the same classification or ranking. Commissioner Terry was interested in making sure the

candidates being considered are team players. That is the type of information about a candidate the Chief learns from the feedback he receives from the officers. The Chief expects to make his recommendations fairly soon. Vice Chairman Hinners requested that the Chief set a date with the Committee for the next meeting so that they can review resumes and make some decisions. They decided on Monday, March 2, 2020, at 6:30 PM, at 1 West Street. Commissioner Colligan asked that the Assistant Chief also be available for that meeting.

- B. New Assistant Chief Process. The Executive Director reported there are four candidates for consideration, but the Committee had indicated that they only wanted to interview 3. Since there are 4 candidates, Mr. Neto asked if the Committee would consider doing 4 interviews at once instead of 3 interviews one night and regrouping for the 4th one. He noted the Chief would be a part of the interview panel. The Executive Director could be available if his input or feedback is required. Chief Terenzio will bring all the information on the 4 candidates with him to next Monday's meeting. The Committee discussed what other dates next week they could meet to resolve the Assistant Chief vacancy issue. They discussed the possibility of meeting on Thursday, March 5, 2020, at 5:15 PM. Each candidate will be scheduled within a half hour of each other. The Chief has prepared questions for the Committee, and has also set up a matrix for scoring. The time was adjusted to begin the meeting at 5:30 PM.
- C. Fire Chief Old Contract Issue. Chief Terenzio stated that he appreciated the meeting from last month where his contract was discussed. He appreciates the contract that was forwarded to him, and they are still in negotiations. There is still an issue with his old contract that was not honored. He is finding it difficult to agree to any new successor agreement due to the fact that his old contract was not honored in the first place and has the same verbiage in it as the new one. He wanted to have a discussion about the fact that his merit increase was never honored with the previous Executive Director prior to Mr. Neto. He has submitted a self-evaluation as requested, but before he agrees to any new contract, he would like to have the old one honored.

The Executive Director explained that the timeframe being referred to is 2018. The Chief's 2 year contract went from September 2016 to September 2018. In 2016/2017 he received an annual review and salary increase. For 2017/2018, there was no review or increase. When the former Executive Director was still with the District, at the end of 2017/beginning of 2018, Mr. Neto did not think there were any issues with the Chief's performance. Mr. Neto was a Commissioner during that time. He did not think there were any issues in anyone's personnel file, however, there were some challenges at the beginning of 2018. The Commissioners did investigate those challenges. The Commissioners tried to get data on a significant event that happened between the former Executive Director and the Chief. After many phone calls, emails, etc. that event was considered a "confrontation." After that event, the ED got sick, had surgery and was out for 8 to 10 weeks. He was medically unable to perform his duties. When he did come back, it was on a part-time basis. Although there was an open issue regarding the confrontation, when the ED did come back to work, based on the former ED's medical condition, the Personnel Committee did not think it was right to try to investigate the confrontation issue, and eventually the issue timed out.

The Executive Director continued to report to work on a part-time basis. Also during that time the Chief was not reporting directly to the Executive Director, but to the President of the Board of Commissioners. The Commissioners put the great divide

between the Executive Director and the Chief because there was an unresolved issue. There was serious conflict and some personality challenges.

Mr. Neto's explanation was to give some of the Committee members background on the situation to understand that there was no management available to give the Chief a review. He added that if the former Executive Director were to have come back when fully operational and told to give the Chief his review, the result would not have been in a positive light because of the unresolved issue. At that point the former ED was moving on to other opportunities. The confrontation issue never got dealt with. Therefore, an assessment of the Chief's performance was never done, so he did not have an opportunity for a merit increase.

Mr. Neto attested that when he came on board as a part-time Executive Director, he never had any issues with the Chief's job performance. Mr. Neto never had any issues or challenges with the Chief. He has always done what Mr. Neto has asked of him. He felt the Chief was doing his job per the job description. The Personnel Committee never evaluated the facts from both sides of the conflict with the former ED and the Chief, so it was never determined if someone was at fault, or if there was a victim or an aggressor? Nothing was determined, so it remains an open question.

The question was whether or not the Personnel Committee should evaluate the Chief based on the Commissioners' perspective and not the ED's perspective and make an assessment. It was thought that maybe at the time, the President of the Commission should have done a review because at that point the Chief was reporting directly to the Board.

Commissioner Colligan suggested that a meeting be set up in Executive Session to review the files and facts. Vice Chairman Hinnners thought it was too big of an issue to decide with two statements and no public involvement. The Chief was agreeable to meet in Executive Session with the Committee. The Session will be to discuss his contract and merit raise. There will be no guarantee of a motion or a vote. It was agreed to schedule a meeting for Wednesday, March 11, 2020, at 5:30 PM, at 1 West St.

- VI. Commissioners' Comments. There were no comments to report.
- VII. Public Comment. Lt. Brett Hallden, President of the Firefighters Union, thanked the Committee for scheduling a meeting with the Chief on his contract. He hoped that all the Commissioners, especially those that were not around when the former Executive Director was here, take into account that the former ED had a history of confrontation and had a lot of unfounded negative comments about a lot of different employees. He asked them as they review the files and related information to take it all with a grain of salt or in this case a truckload.
- VIII. Executive Session. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to enter into Executive Session at 6:02 PM, inviting Executive Director Neto, Chief Terenzio, Assistant Chief Brade and Acting Commission President Roger Rukowicz into the session to discuss the Career Firefighter Status based on the Union response. Firefighter Union President Brett Hallden was invited for the first 3 minutes of the session. Lt. McKnight was also invited into the session for 3 minutes after Lt. Hallden in order to read a statement. Also to be discussed is Part-time Firefighter Employment status based on outside professional report.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to adjourn Executive Session at 6:58 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved that based on the Firefighter Unions's inability to negotiate a probationary extension of six months for Firefighter Marrotta, the final decision is to terminate Frank Marrotta's employment by March 2, 2020, giving the firefighter the opportunity to resign prior to the date of March 2, 2020.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved that based on the final written disciplinary notice, dated February 4, 2020, regarding serious policy violations by Firefighter Peter Boin and the fit for duty assessment, the employment of Firefighter Peter Boin will be terminated by March 2, 2020, giving Firefighter Boin the opportunity to resign prior to the date of March 2, 2020.

- IX. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Terry, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason Hidders, Vice Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
3-30-20