

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS Special By-Laws Committee Meeting

Tuesday, February 25, 2020

5:00 PM

**1 West Street
Cromwell, CT**

Present: Commissioners Charles Epstein (Chairman), Robert Donohue and Jason Hinners. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto and Commissioner Roger Rukowicz.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM, by Chairman Epstein.
- II. Approval of the Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- IV. New Business
 - A. Review/Discussion/Possible Decision on By-Law Revisions. Copies of the current By-Laws with recommendations in red ink were distributed to the Committee members. The recommendations are items the President of the Board would like the Committee to consider. They began with Article XII. Uniforms, Item b. the recommendation reads, "Commissioners who are members of the fire service, either active or past, may purchase a Class A uniform with Chiefs rank insignias and markings at their own cost for use in official fire service related functions. There was some confusion regarding the copies the committee members had. The Executive Director noted that the official working copy should be the one that he received from the President. It was noted that in Item b. the word "members" was spelled incorrectly. The revised copy will reflect the correct spelling. There was a discussion regarding the rank of Chief for the insignias.

The discussion went back to Item A.a. under Article XII which addressed Commissioners having two types of uniforms; one a Dress Uniform and one an Emergency Scene Response uniform. Chairman Epstein discussed the idea of the Commissioners having bunker coats at fire scenes for Winter weather. There was disagreement on that point due to the confusion this might cause at a fire scene in terms of identifying those who are firefighters at a fire scene. Chairman Epstein reported that there are bunker coats in the basement of West St. that aren't being used. There was a difference of opinion between Committee members. EMS bunker jackets were considered.

The Executive Director noted that under Article XII, Item A.c. addresses the Emergency Scene Response attire. Item A.d. notes that a 3 season jacket can be purchased by a Commissioner if they so desire. Comments regarding bunker jackets were tabled. Commissioner Epstein asked about the suggested change to add Item A.b. Chairman Epstein questioned why there would be a rank of Chief as the insignia. Commissioner Hinnners thought if it is decided to use the Chief insignia, it should be identified differently, i.e., a different colored stripe or something. The Committee wanted to know why this change from the President of the Board was suggested. The Executive Director advised the Committee of what their responsibilities are on this committee, and reminded them they are the deciding authority on the By-Law changes.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to table the revision of Article XII, proposed Item A.b. until input can be provided by President Brow who recommended the addition. They are looking for clarification of "Chiefs insignia."

The next item to be discussed was Article XIII, Item A.c.iv. This item has to do with the agenda/order of business at regular monthly meetings; specifically, having the Public Comment item listed at the beginning of the agenda as well as the end of the agenda. It has been proposed to omit the first Public Comment item listed on the agenda. Commissioner Hinnners asked what the procedures are for Town meetings. The Executive Director noted that the Board of Education has it listed twice on their agenda, but Town Council has it listed once. Mr. Neto advised that if it is decided there will be only one Public Comment, he would suggest it be at the beginning of the meeting. There are discussions and perspectives, but if the public addresses the Board at the beginning of the meeting they can provide comments on the items to be discussed. The second public comment is more of a safety valve and allows the public to blow off steam on anything discussed and/or voted on during the meeting.

Commissioner Hinnners was of the opinion that both items should remain on the agenda. Commissioner Donohue felt that if one of the items was removed it would send the wrong message to the public about their voices not being heard. Chairman Epstein would be in favor of removing one of the items, but would rather see the item at the beginning of the agenda removed. He would rather have the public be able to sit through a meeting and realize all the District business done during the month and really be able to comment on what they have listened to and learned. It was also suggested to make the public comment time limit 5 or 6 min. instead of the current 3 min if public comments are reduced to once on the agenda. The majority felt that the agenda should stay the same to include 2 Public Comment items at the 3 minute time limit.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and approved 2 to 1 that Article XIII, Item A.c.iv. remain unchanged which allows two Public Comment items on the Board meeting agenda; one at the beginning of the meeting and one at the end of the meeting. Chairman Epstein voted nay.

The next item to be discussed was Article XV, item C. replaced by item D. This item addresses the appointments of the Ass't. Fire Chief--Operations, Ass't. Fire Chief--Training and Administration and the Deputy Chief--Public Information and Safety. There was a discussion regarding the Board recently voting to have two Assistant Fire Chiefs and one Chief, but no Deputy Chief was ever discussed before. The Executive Director explained that his understanding of the proposed change adds a Deputy Chief

position to the Table of Organization, but the position would be left vacant. The Committee did not understand why a vacant position would be proposed. This was another issue that was proposed by President Brow. Mr. Neto thought the reason for this proposal would be if there is a need to fill that vacancy, a By-laws change would not be necessary because the position is already in the By-Laws. That is the only reason Mr. Neto knew of to justify this change. The By-Laws should reflect the discussion of two months ago which was to eliminate an Assistant Chief of EMS and have two Assistant Fire Chiefs; one for training and administration and the other for fire operations. The Committee wanted to table this item in order to get clarification from the Fire Chief and President of the Commission.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to table this item until the Committee receives more information from the Fire Chief and the President of the Board.

The next item was Article XV, Item E.a., c., and d. For item a. it reads the following with the addition highlighted: All Fire Department Officers shall be appointed for a two (2) year term by the Personnel Committee with input from the Chiefs of the Fire Department. In the past the appointments were made by the Fire Chief, but the change would make the appointments go through the Personnel Committee. Commissioner Donohue added that when he received appointments in the Fire Department they were always handled through the Assistant Fire Chief's office with no input from the Board of Commissioners.

Article XV, Item E.c. and E.d. were not challenged. Item c. shall remain the same but replacing "Department By-Laws" with "Department rules and regulations." Item E.d. shall remain the same with the addition highlighted: Any officer may be removed at any time for any reason by action of the Chiefs of the Department through the Personnel Committee.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the recommended changes to Article XV, Item E.a.,c. and d.

There was a brief discussion regarding the absentee ballot process that will be instituted this year. This process was added to the By-Laws during its last revision. The Executive Director has had preliminary discussions with the Town Clerk Joan Doyle. Ms. Doyle has stated she would be happy to educate the District on the absentee ballot process. There will be more to come in a couple of months.

Commissioner Epstein discussed Article XIV, Item C.a. regarding the five Standing Committees. He does not think that any one Commissioner should be Chairman of more than one of the five Standing Committees. That would spread around the Chairmanship of the Committees amongst the other Board members. He feels that when the same person is Chairman of both Fire Operations and Personnel, there is an awful lot of power put into one person's hands. He asked for feedback from the Committee members. The Committee members did not disagree with Commissioner Epstein's point.

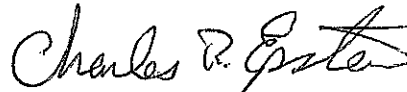
A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to allow any of the Commissioners to serve as Chairman of no

more than one Standing Committee. The wording of the change will be drafted and inserted into the document after the other issues that were tabled are resolved.

There was another discussion regarding the turnout gear/bunker gear that Chairman Epstein discussed earlier in the meeting. It was noted that in the past any gear that was left in storage would be donated to a third world country. Chairman Epstein thought it was a good idea to donate it if that is what is being done. He understood that all that gear had been sitting around for years with no purpose. It was noted that the gear is sometimes also repurposed for training.

- V. Commissioners' Comments/Public Comments. Commissioner Roger Rukowicz commented on the discussion about Standing Committees. He noted there are only 6 Commissioners to choose from for the 5 Standing Committees. There was a discussion regarding Commissioners being qualified to Chair certain committees, and Board officers are not supposed to chair any of the Standing Committees. It was noted that a Chairman's role is to run the meeting and manage the Committee's meeting agendas. Commissioner Rukowicz added that he had suggested to all Commissioners that they try to attend a committee meeting once in while even if they are not on the committee. It helps to get a better understanding of the Committees, their purpose and the whole process of the Board and its committees.
- VI. Adjournment. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:26 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Charles R. Epstein, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
3-26-20