

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' MEETING

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

6:00 PM

West Street Firehouse

1 West Street

Cromwell, CT

Also via Conference Call

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners' Meeting on Tuesday, January 19, 2021, at 6:00 PM, at the West Street Firehouse, 1 West Street, Cromwell, CT and also available via conference call, to discuss and act upon Fire and Water Division business.

Per Executive Order 7B, Governor Lamont has ordered and directed that in-person open meeting requirements be suspended. Therefore, the Board of Commissioners' Meeting will be held via conference call. Members of the public may send questions or comments to meetings@cromwellfd.com on any agenda items.

Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Jason Hinnens (via conference call), Charles Epstein, David Colligan, Robert McIntyre, Allan Spotts (via conference call) and Roger Rukowicz. Commissioners Mertie Terry and Robert Donohue were absent. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Acting Fire Chief Jason Brade, Michael Alibrio (accountant) of CLA Connect (via conference call), Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri (via conference call) and Justin Lonergan (via conference call). Others dialed into the meeting were Chris Bellamo, Dispatcher; Andrew Cook, President of the Dispatcher's Union; Brian Petrucelli, Secretary of the Dispatcher's Union and Brett Hallden, Firefighter Union President.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:45 PM, by President Brow. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Brow.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted with the following addition: under New Business Item G. Clarification of the Continuity Plan Bonus.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Executive Director had received some public comments submitted via email. He read the comments. They have been submitted for the record with the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. There were comments provided by Andrew Cook, Dispatcher Union President and Douglas Zordan, candidate for the Fire Marshal position.

Brett Hallden, Firefighter Union President, had dialed into this meeting. His comments were regarding the alternates that were identified and wished to make themselves available to be used on the schedule have been used on the schedule over the last 5 weeks. He also had comments regarding the item that was added to the agenda under New Business regarding the continuity plan bonus. He referred to the Special Board meeting of December 3. He noted that in the minutes it clearly states an average of a 42 hour work week which is an average of hours worked per week. He noted that it seems the minutes were interpreted differently, but the minutes are clear. He hoped that they would be read tonight.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
DECEMBER 15, 2020

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of December 15, 2020, as submitted.

SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
DECEMBER 3, 2020

Commissioner Epstein had one correction to the minutes on page 1, under Public Comment, regarding Don Scranton. He was identified as a part-time firefighter/EMT in Cromwell and Chief of the Fire Department/Ambulance Association in East Hampton. Commissioner Epstein noted that the Fire Department and Ambulance Association in East Hampton are two separate entities. Mr. Scranton is Chief of the Ambulance Association.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting of December 3, 2020, as corrected.

READING OF COMMUNICATONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

Commissioner Epstein read a thank you note sent to the Board from Mrs. Pam Colligan, Commissioner Colligan's wife, for the flowers sent by the Fire District for the passing of Mrs. Colligan's mother. The Board extended its best wishes to Commissioner Colligan and his wife.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. In the interest of time, the Executive Director asked if there were any questions on his report. He did not have anything to add to his report.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's report for December as submitted.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for December 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 Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for December as submitted.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Acting Chief Brade tried to keep his comments brief in the interest of time. Local Emergency Management Medical Services Plan was submitted to the Town. The ISO audit was completed and submitted by the Department's auditor. The results should be received by the end of the month. COVID supplies have arrived, but they are having trouble sourcing N-95's. There was a structure fire on 20 Hillside Road. Ambulance 4A was struck by a vehicle that evaded a shots fired scene. Chris Logan did the repairs, and the ambulance is back on line. The State OEMS was notified. The Department will hold a Community Risk Assessment Project from the Fire Marshal's Office which is hosting it. This is a pilot project with them. There will be some valuable information available when they are finished. The service contract was used recently to service the stretchers. 4B had an issue that was taken care of under the contract. 4C is currently out of service. This is the ambulance that keeps having electrical issues. It went to Massachusetts SBI getting looked at again for repairs. They will be getting the vendor and manufacturer involved. They have put in for a smoke detector grant and a camera grant. There was a structure fire at the Super 8 two nights ago.

A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report for December as submitted.

- D. Water Operations. The Water Operations Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri had dialed into the meeting. He had nothing to add to his report. He asked if there were any questions.

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

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He had nothing to add to his report. The Communication Center is fully functional and everything is going well. There is nothing catastrophic to report. There have been some minor issues with the new system. The new consoles are on line. There is still some work to do. The new portables are in and they will be distributed within the next 2 weeks to field personnel. There is some continued work with the infrastructure. There isn't much more to add other than significant work is being put in by Mr. Lonergan and the communications staff to make everything work. They are dealing with the little hiccups as they come up and getting them rectified as soon as possible.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Center report as submitted.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. A meeting was held on Friday, January 15, 2021. Budget issues were discussed. The Committee gave direction to the Executive Committee Chairman, Commissioner Rukowicz, to move forward with the items discussed and put them on the Agenda for the Executive Committee meeting. Commissioner Rukowicz stated that there will be a meeting scheduled of the Executive Committee next month. President Brow noted that he will be scheduling another District Operations Committee meeting soon to address adding Chip Darius to the Safety/Building Committee as the District's Safety Officer/Infection Control officer.
- B. Executive. Commissioner Rukowicz noted there was no meeting this month. There will probably be one scheduled next month.
- C. Fire Operations Committee. A meeting was held on December 15, 2020. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. Commissioner Hinnners chaired the meeting. He had nothing to add to the minutes. He stated that the minutes were submitted and they are accurate.

Because the minutes were tabled at the Fire Operations Committee meeting prior to this meeting, a motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to table the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of December 15, 2020.

- D. Pension Committee. Commissioner Colligan reported that they will be having a meeting in March per the meeting schedule and hopefully the COVID situation will be under control by then.
- E. Personnel Committee. A special meeting was held on January 5, 2021. Minutes had been emailed to the Commissioners rather than included in the packets. They had not been signed. A Personnel Committee meeting was also held on January 12, 2021. Those minutes were not available for review.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to table the minutes for the Special Personnel Committee meeting of January 5, 2021, and the regular Personnel Committee meeting of January 12, 2021.

- F. Water Operations. Commissioner Rukowicz noted that there was no meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 9, 2021, at 5:30 PM.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. Ms. Jennifer Donohue was not able to attend this meeting. She sent an email to the Executive Director. She sent everyone well wishes. She stated that the biggest project with the Town Council right now is the Town's budget for the upcoming fiscal year as well as COVID Task Force Management on regulations, tracing and vaccinations. President Brow asked that the Executive Director relay to Ms. Donohue the Board's wishes for a safe and healthy new year.

B. Reports of Special Committees

1. Public Safety Tower Committee. Commissioner Rukowicz reported there was no meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, March 5, 2021, at 10:00 AM.
2. Safety/Building Committee. A meeting was held January 14, 2021. The minutes were not available to review. President Brow reported that based on the recommendation by Chip Darius at that meeting to have a light switch and a light over the stairs at the Court Street Firehouse, Tuthill Electric did a review of the area, and also reviewed Sovereign Ridge pumphouse and the light at the access gate that is continually on because the photo sensor is out. They will be submitting a quote to replace that. IT was suggested to put in a quick time clock and an outlet so that if some needs to service the electric motor there, they will have power for whatever tools are needed. The quote will include replacing the photo sensor at that pump house with a time clock that has a battery backup. If the power should go out, you would not have to worry about resetting it. For Court Street, they would be happy to put in a light switch and additional light. IN the interest of saving the District money, his suggestion is to take and put another set of tubes above the stairs tied into the existing station lights so the stairway is always lit when the station lights are on. That way they can get up to the top, get the light switch to turn on the light that is inside the cage and the other light that it there he can tie that light that is there with the station lights so the whole area is lit. The light switch will be just for the cage. It will save some money. It will be more expensive than just tying the lights in and putting the light up there. They agreed it was a better solution.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to table the minutes of the Safety/Building Committee for January 14, 2021.

3. Bylaws Committee. Commissioner Epstein stated there has been no meeting, however, there will be a vote later tonight on the amended Bylaws. President Brow asked that the vote be tabled until the Executive Director receives clarification from the District's attorney to make sure the meeting notice posted is legal and meeting protocols are following the current pandemic guidelines ordered by Governor Lamont. Mr. Neto is looking for a legal perspective but has not been able to touch base with Attorney Deneen.

A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to table the Special District Meeting scheduled for this evening at 7:00 PM, to next month.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Colligan had a couple of issues to discuss. The first was electronic signatures. During these times of the pandemic, chair-people of Committees are not signing off on meeting minutes. He stated that in the business world there is something called an electronic signature. He wanted to know if the District could look into the possibility of having electronic signatures on minutes. Minutes are not being approved and filed because they have not been signed. He wanted to know if Angel Alvarado can look into it. President Brow thought that there is also a legal factor to consider. The Executive Director will look into what is acceptable per FOI rules. He will check with Attorney Deneen on this issue as well as the Special District Meeting issue.

The other issue Commissioner Colligan discussed was the Executive Director's work schedule and the time he is putting into the District. He suggested working with the Executive Director to readjust his work time. His work day starts at 7:00/7:30 and for today for example, he is attending late meetings after office hours. This happens more often than not. He would like to see some type of adjustment to his time so that he can be compensated for his extra time worked. President Brow will add it to his District Operations agenda for the meeting he is scheduling for next week.

Commissioner McIntyre had some questions regarding the lighting at Court St. He suggested checking with Chip Darius to make sure the recommendations from the electrician are OSHA compliant.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were not adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report.
- D. Discussion and Possible Decision on Recommendations from the COVID Committee on Next Steps. President Brow suggested tabling this item because there are items on the COVID list that are being clarified.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to table this item until after the next COVID Committee meeting next week.

- E. Discussion and Possible Decision on Non-Career Officer Position in the Fire Department. President Brow asked that this item be tabled as well pending the recommendation from Fire Operations for the meeting with the Chiefs, Fire Operations and the Executive Director to come up with a plan on what the process will be.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to table this item until the next month.

- F. Discussion and Possible Decision on Personnel Committee Recommendations of Ray Saracco for the Fire Marshal's Position. The Executive Director gave a summary of what has happened regarding this position. This position had been posted to replace Todd Gagnon who had passed away last spring. The Personnel Committee identified an interview process. They chose to have an interview panel on the subject matter. They had three Fire Marshals from the State Fire Marshal's Office serve on the panel. Five candidates were selected. They had a series of questions they were given to answer. Each answer was numerically graded. The results were tabulated. The outcome provided two top candidates to be interviewed by the Personnel Committee. The interviewers were Commissioners Hinnens and Terry, President Brow was to serve as an interviewer as well but was not able due to a work emergency. The Executive Director also served as an interviewer. The top candidates met the criteria of the point system with 70% or more on the subject matter experts. The candidates were Ray Saracco and D.J. Zordan. Mr. Zordan is a member of the Cromwell Fire Department. He has been involved with the Fire District for the last 13 years. They had a set of 16 questions that were asked to each candidate. Questions were rated based on the response. The findings were presented to the Personnel Committee. Both candidates were well qualified. The Personnel Committee is recommending Ray Saracco for the Fire Marshal position. President Brow opened the meeting up for discussion.

Commissioner Hinnners brought up the letter submitted by DJ Zordan under Public Comment. He felt very strongly about the hiring and staffing model in place where the District hires from within, and the fact that the District cultivates their own. Credit is given to candidates who are Town residents. Mr. Zordan was given extra points because he is a Cromwell resident. He felt Mr. Zordan did amazingly well and brought additional information to the interview. Commissioner Hinnners felt that it was in the Board's best interest to hire Mr. Zordan for the position.

The President went around the room for comments from the Commissioners. Commissioner Epstein was in agreement with the motion. Commissioner McIntyre was in support of Cromwell resident D.J. Zordan. Commissioner Colligan was in agreement with the motion. Commissioner Hinnners supported his earlier comments. He felt that Mr. Zordan is the best candidate for the position.

A motion was made by Commissioner Rukowicz, seconded by Commissioner Spotts and approved 4 to 2 to hire Ray Saracco as the next Fire Marshal for the Cromwell Fire District. Noted that Commissioners Terry and Donohue were not present to vote. Commissioners Hinnners and McIntyre voted nay.

- G. Clarification of the COVID Stipend. The Executive Director explained that this item was also discussed at the last Personnel Committee meeting. Mr. Neto had put this item on the agenda for clarity because he had heard indirectly that he was not interpreting the meeting minutes or the motion that was made as it relates to the continuity plan bonus program. The Board made a decision to recognize above and beyond individuals who were disrupting their work and personal lives to give the Fire Department the opportunity to schedule a large number of hours so that management could separate or segregate the shifts so that each shift would have the same cohorts to minimize the exposure to COVID. Commissioner Hinnners had proposed a bonus rate of \$175. Also, 42 hours were identified as a work week. The 42 hours is what the present full time work staff averages in the course of a week. They work 48, 48, 48 and 24 for the month. That creates the average of 42. There was also some discussion about the bonus being prorated. Without clarity from the motion, he interpreted it meaning any individual working 40 plus hours receives a full bonus and any individual working 24 hours will get half of a bonus. Mr. Neto explained that is the way the District has been operating over the last 5 or 6 weeks. He gave the same explanation to the Personnel Committee. The Committee had decided at the time that this appeared reasonable, but did not give the Executive Director any direction other than to continue with the same process. After additional discussion with members of the Commission it was identified on this agenda tonight so the whole Commission can make a decision on what the full intent was. Should the bonus be prorated and to what degree? Should it be prorated by quarters, half, 10% increments. The Executive Director needed some direction on what the intent was to prorate this bonus. The District is willing to reconstruct the bonus from week 1 based on what the Commission defines as the continuity plan bonus.

President Brow read the motion from the December 3, 2020, Special Board meeting. Commissioner Hinnners had suggested the rate of \$175 for the bonus since the Fire Department does not have a competitive hourly wage. It was proposed to have the \$175 for a 42 hour week, but that the rate be proportionate for work hours less than 42. It was noted that it creates an unbudgeted expense of \$16,660. It is more than the proposed \$125 per 42 hour work week. This was explained as a bonus for the additional staffing. President Brow opened the meeting up to the floor. The Commissioners will need to decide what direction to give the Executive Director. Commissioner Colligan was under the impression that the bonus

was implemented in the manner that it was explained at the December 3 meeting. He believes the Commission gave the Executive Director permission to implement the bonus the way he interpreted it. There have been a lot of COVID related issues that have come up within the last couple of weeks. Commissioner Colligan felt that the implementation of the bonus was reasonable and equitable. He felt the plan was fair. Commissioner Rukowicz is in full agreement with the Executive Director in the way the bonus was given. Commissioner McIntyre was in agreement with the implementation of the bonus. Commissioner Epstein was in agreement with the others. Commissioner Spotts also agrees with the others on what was voted on December 3. Commissioner Hinners made the motion at the December 3 meeting and stands by it. President Brow did not have an issue with the way the bonus is being implemented. He asked if those working less than 24 hours were receiving a bonus even though they could not work a 24 hour shift.

The Executive Director explained the current process. If a person works 40 plus hours in a week, they will receive the full bonus. A half of a bonus is given if a person works 24 hours or more. There is nowhere in the middle. That was Mr. Neto's way of simply breaking it down without getting into small units of time. Some individuals may not work a clean 24 or 48 hours. If a person works 36 hours, it is close to 40 but it is not 24. Under this plan the person would get half of a bonus. Mr. Neto clarified what the Commission was saying which is currently there are only 2 payouts. One for 40 – 48 hours or 20 – 24 hours. They are only recognizing the hours from 24 to 39 as a half bonus. The full bonus is from 40 hours or more. If the Commission agrees with the process, they will proceed with the full and a half bonuses based on the criteria discussed. That was how Mr. Neto interpreted the Commission's vote at the December 3 meeting. He wanted to make sure his interpretation of the plan was correct. He did not make the decision, the Board voted for this process.

President Brow asked Commissioner Hinners to respond because it was his motion at the December meeting. Commissioner Hinners' understanding of the intention of that motion was that a full bonus was \$175, a half of shift was half of the bonus, a quarter was a quarter, etc. He apologized for the lack of clarity. He added a full shift was \$175, and then proportionate to hours worked. Mr. Neto heard Commissioner Hinners to say there should be more increments delinations for the bonus. If a person works using either 40 or 48, a quarter of that is so many hours, a half is half and three quarters is so many hours. Commissioner Hinners stated that was his intent, but he understands the confusion because it was not broken down into that fine of an increment. He thinks it would be fair to break it into quarters, and round accordingly as needed. He thought halves were too big of an increment and anything below a quarter is a nightmare for accounting. His opinion is that quarters is a fair increment. Mr. Neto asked if they will be using a quarter of 40 hours? Will it be 40 hours, 30 hours, 20 hours and 10 hours. Or will it be a quarter of 48 hours. Mr. Neto needed to know what the variable will be so they can divide it into quarters. If quarters are used, will it be 40, 30, 20 or 10. So anyone that works 10 hours would receive a quarter of a bonus (\$43.75). Anyone working 20 hours will receive \$87.50. Anyone working around 30 hours will get \$131.25. Anyone over 40 hours will get \$175. Mr. Neto just needed clarity. Commissioner McIntyre agreed with the Executive Director that if the bonus is broken down into quarters there needs to be some hourly number assigned to each increment of hours. An hourly threshold needs to be assigned to each quarterly rate. Commissioner Hinners agreed and thought that the first thing to do is assign the high hourly rate—40 or 48. From there it should be divided into 10 hour increments. But anyone who works say 26 hours would receive the quarterly bonus for 24 hours not 36 hours. The President suggested using 12, 24, 36 and 48 for the increments. That follows exactly the hours the career staff is working. That was the intent of this which was to bolster those so that they had those staffing numbers 24/7 during the pandemic.

Commissioner Hinnars agreed and thought the number 48 should be the high number used. He felt that the 12, 24, 36 would apply. IT is the same logic but the top number is higher. The Executive Director stated that if that is the wish of the Commission that is what the District will use. They will use 12, 24, 36, 48. There will be 4 possible payouts. If a person works 12 hours, the payout will be \$43.75. If a person works 8 hours, would they get a bonus? Commissioner Hinnars clarified that the person would have to reach a threshold, 13 hours would be a 12 hour bonus, but 8 hours would not be a bonus. For clarity Mr. Neto stated that a minimum bonus is 12 hours or higher, a half a bonus is 24 or higher, three quarters of a bonus is 36 and 48 gives you a whole bonus. Within those thresholds the hours worked numbers will be rounded up or down depending on where the hours fall within the 12 point threshold. The Executive Director stated that they will go back to day 1 of the continuity plan to correct any inconsistencies according to the clarification.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

There was no Executive Session planned for this meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 PM.

ATTEST:

Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
1-27-21