

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

6:00 PM

Coles Road Firehouse

105 Coles Road

Cromwell, CT

The Commissioners of the Cromwell Fire District held their monthly Board of Commissioners' Meeting on Tuesday, March 15, 2022, at 6:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to discuss and act upon Fire and Water Division business.

Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Jason Hinnners, Charles Epstein, Robert Donohue, Mertie Terry, Chip Darius and Robert McIntyre attended. Commissioners Roger Rukowicz and David Colligan were absent. Also attending were Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Communication Manager Justin Lonergan, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri and Account Manager Michael Alibrio.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 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 Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 15, 2022

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of February 15, 2022, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 17, 2022

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved 6 to 0 to accept the Special Board of Commissioners Meeting minutes of February 17, 2022, as submitted. Commissioner Epstein abstained.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 3, 2022

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of March 3, 2022, as submitted.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or appeals to report.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's Report for February had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District office. Mr. Neto was available to answer any questions.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's Report for February as submitted.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for February had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District office. Mr. Alibrio added that the District closed on their Bond in February. The audit has been completed. The budget process for next fiscal year has also begun. Mr. Alibrio was available to answer any questions.

Commissioner Epstein asked how the new medical billing company was working out. Chief Balletto reported that things have been working out very well. Shared Response began their contract with the District on March 1. There was a small gap with the changeovers. It took approximately one week to straighten it out. As of Friday there was 132 billings that were sent out.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and approved 6 to 0 to accept the Financial Report for February as submitted. Commissioner McIntyre abstained.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for February had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. There have been no changes. The Chief was available to answer any questions.

The Chief gave an update on the Fire Marshal's Report. There is a meeting scheduled for Thursday with the Board of Education. Colin Whalen is creating a Youth Fire Center Program with the Town of Cromwell. They have been in constant contact with the State of Connecticut, Department of Children & Families. They are planning to present their program to the Board of Education on Thursday at 11 AM. They are looking for the Board's approval as well as determining what next steps need to be taken. They are trying to get all Divisions

involved in youth services in Town. They are looking for support from the Police Department, Fire Chief's Office, FMO, Board of Education and Social Services to get the program up and running.

Commissioner Donohue asked the Chief to pass along to the Marshal's office that a lot of his property management associates were notified of the charges being imposed on them for inspections and other FMO services. Those associates were asked if they wanted to get an inspection in before the fees are imposed. He felt this was a great gesture. Commissioner Donohue helped get the word out, and it was well received.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report for February as submitted.

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for February had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri was available to answer any questions. President Brow asked about any updates on the interconnection project. Mr. Palmieri reported the project is ongoing. They are in the early stages of it. There was a meeting to discuss the financial component. The meeting included Mr. Neto, Mr. Palmieri, Mr. Alibrio and the consultant from the State. The options are low interest rate loans, grants. The grant component is not emphasized as much as loans. The original estimate from \$1.5 million to \$2 million has now jumped to \$3.5 million. Prices are totally out of control. The architectural engineering will be an expensive component. That cost can become part of the loan or grant, or the payment made up front to be reimbursed.

There will be more to come on this. Mr. Neto is planning to schedule Environmental Partners to come in to discuss all the components of the project so the Board can feel more comfortable in making decisions about next steps. Mr. Neto noted the Town has received \$2.4 million from the Recovery Act. Mr. Neto identified \$1.2 million to the Town for two major projects in the District. One was the Interconnection Project with a price of \$1.5 million. He also identified some replacement of water mains around the West Street Heights/West Street Terrace area where some sewer work will be required over the next year. The District is on the list, and they do have a chance to get something. The entities eligible for funds are: Water Infrastructure and Sewer Infrastructure.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations Report for February as submitted.

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center report for February had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lonergan reported there are a couple of ongoing things. They are still finishing up the radio project. Mr. Lonergan was available to answer any questions. He has been working with the Town and Everbridge at the EOC level. They are trying to establish a citizen's alert system in Cromwell. Emergency management and the Police Department along with the Communication Center will work as a team to bring the Everbridge program back online to launch it on all division and department levels. It will be a massive launch on the Everbridge platform. It will be on sign boards, newsletters and newspapers as a conjoined effort between the Town of Cromwell, Emergency Management, Police Department and Fire District. It will benefit the citizens of Cromwell with good information.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations. There was a Special Meeting on January 24, 2022, and February 22, 2022. Minutes from the January 24, 2022, meeting had been distributed at last month's Board meeting. They were tabled because the Fire Operations Committee had not approved them at that time.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Special Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of January 24, 2022, and February 22, 2022.

- 1. Communications Committee. No meeting. The Executive Director gave a brief update. The reprogramming is still in the hands of the State. They will probably be looking for more clarification, so this could cause a delay of a week. Whatever the concerns are, they will be addressed. He thinks there may be some concerns with MOU's, but there will be more to come on this.
 - 2. Apparatus Committee. Regarding the apparatus and the Chief's vehicle, there has not been any bad news about the order. They assume that the delivery schedule may be closer to the beginning of April rather than the end of March.
- D. Pension. There was no meeting. The Executive Director is meeting with a company out of Boston to start the process of understanding what it will take to get the District to the next level. He is still waiting for Future Plan to provide some information. In the meantime the District is in the process of information gathering. The new company has done a lot of work in CT and was referred by Mr. Jim Rude. Mr. Rude had some experience with pension pay outs.
 - E. Personnel. There was a Special Meeting on March 1, 2022. Minutes 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 Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Special Personnel Committee meeting minutes of March 1, 2022, as submitted.

- F. Water Operations. There was no meeting.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was no report.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees

1. Public Safety Tower Committee. A meeting was held on March 4, 2022. Minutes were not available for review. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to table the Public Safety Tower Committee meeting minutes of March 4, 2022, until the next meeting.
2. Health & Safety Building Committee. There was no meeting. The next quarterly meeting is in April.
3. Bylaws Committee. There was no meeting.
4. Publicity Committee. There was no meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. President Brow discussed contract negotiations coming up between the District and the Dispatchers' Union, AFSCME Local. Those involved with negotiations will be President Brow, Vice President Hinnners, Executive Director Neto, the Chairman of the Personnel Committee--Commissioner Donohue and the Communications Manager—Justin Lonergan. They will be meeting amongst themselves before scheduling the negotiation sessions.

Commissioner Donohue recognized the Recording Secretary for the work she has be doing. Meetings have a lot of people engaging in discussions, and it is hard work keeping information organized and up to date. The other Commissioners agreed and thanked the Recording Secretary for all she does.

Commissioner Terry asked Commissioner Donohue to relay the information he had regarding Easter. The Cromwell Police Benevolence Association is sponsoring a Easter Bunny Meet and Greet. It is scheduled for April 9, 2022, 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM. Rain or shine at Pierson Park Pavilion. There will be a bag of treats given out to each child by the Easter Bunny. Everyone must be pre-registered. It will be \$5 per bag of treats. The treats will be packaged by the Cromwell Police Department. Registration is at: cromwellpdeaster2022@gmail.com.

The other item from Commissioner Donohue was March 21 – April 15, 2022, donations will be accepted for non-perishable food items to help benefit those in need. All donations will go to the Cromwell Food Pantry. The drop off location is at the Cromwell Police Department in the front lobby.

It was also noted that April 9, 2022, has been designated as the official District "Swearing In" ceremony for all new hires in the Fire Department, and will also be a chance for photo ops. However, after Commissioner Donohue's announcement it sounds like the Easter Bunny activity conflicts with the Swearing In ceremony.

Commissioner Terry suggested making a donation to the Easter Bunny activity from the Board of Commissioners. The Executive Director needed direction for making the donation, but would do so on behalf of the Board. The Executive Director was directed to donate \$50 from the Commissioners' account to the Easter Meet and Greet event. The Police Union will also be subsidizing the event.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to donate \$50 to the Easter Bunny Meet and Greet event as described.

Commissioner Darius also added that he sent information to the Personnel Chair and the Executive Director regarding an IAFC Volunteer Work Force Solutions 2-Day Seminar on building a collaborative team to be held at the CT Fire Academy April 2 and 3. He encouraged everyone to try to get someone there to gather information and bring it back to share. The Executive Director noted that the District will be sending the Fire Chief and Melissa Roming.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no budgetary adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to approve.
- D. Presentation of the Audit. Hard copies of the audit were given to all the Commissioners as well as electronic copies via an email attachment. Jason from Hoyt, Filleppetti & Malaghan, LLC, was on the phone as a conference call to the Board to review the audit. He began by reviewing the "report card" of the audit which was a Clean Opinion. He explained that is the best opinion to receive. They were happy with the internal controls, their record keeping and the way transactions are handled. There were no audit findings. The financials that are seen during the year are consistent with what happens at the end of the year. There is a great financial reporting system in place. They hardly make any adjustments to the numbers they are given to audit.

In terms of the financial condition of the District, he referred everyone to page 19. That page has the governmental balance sheet. That is where the General fund is located. The District ended the year with a fund balance of \$1.1 million. Of that \$1.1 million, over \$1 million is unassigned. That means there are no encumbrances or any kind of attachments to that fund balance. At the end of June, out of the \$1.56 million there is almost 3 months of expenditures. There is a 25% fund balance. There are also healthy balances in the Capital Projects funds. It is a committed fund balance which means it is spoken for on various projects. It can either be recommitted or decommitted if the need arises.

He reported there is nothing new in the way of accounting this year. There is a little change in names. What used to be an agency fund is now a custodial fund. A majority of the notes are pension related. There is nothing else Jason needed to draw their attention to. They were very pleased with the fund balance.

Commissioner Donohue commented that his son is an Accountant and he has had nothing but positive feedback about the audits done on the District. Commissioner Donohue asked if the auditors had come across anything that needs improvement. The auditors were very happy with the way things are with the audits. There is nothing they don't like. Cromwell is one of the few Fire Districts that they know of that has the accounting expertise in house. They feel that is important. You don't need to wait for an audit to figure out what is going on.

Commissioner Terry was pleased with what the auditors had to say. Commissioner Darius had a question on Page 4, the financial highlights. The 6th bullet down. Ambulance billing amounted to \$5973.23. He wanted to know if that was gross billings, collected billings, or something more specific. Jason responded that it represents gross revenue. What has been invoiced, but not necessarily what is collected. Commissioner Darius wanted to know billings vs. collections. The \$5973.23 is what was collected and not billed. There is an adjustment to work into the outstanding receivable balance which is done at the end of the year. Revenue is covering half of the expense.

Commissioner Darius clarified that it is costing the District \$1.4 million to run the ambulances, and recouping a little less than half of that in the current billing model. On the Fire side, nothing is being re-cooped as of yet.

President Brow thanked Jason and the team at Hoyt, Filippetti & Malaghan, LLC, for all their hard work on the audit. He hoped that next year, the audit will be placed at the beginning of the Board meeting agenda so that the auditors would not have to sit through the whole meeting waiting for their turn. The Executive Director also thanked Jason and his team, and challenged the auditors to have a target date to complete the audit by the end of December 2022.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnars, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Audit for 2019, completed by Hoyt, Filippetti & Malaghan, LLC, as presented.

- E. Update on Court Street/Coles Road Firehouses. The Executive Director reported that they are still in the process of gathering more information. They have received a couple of quotes. One of the issues he and the Fire Chief shared with the Fire Operations Committee is that they are still at the nuts and bolts of how to do this move effectively. One of the big obstacles they discovered is the generator at Coles Road. That generator was not designed to support the whole Court Street facility. They brought in some people to do an assessment. Mr. Neto has a meeting this Friday with another vendor for an assessment. He requested leaving this item on the agenda for next month for updates.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. James Rude, Highridge Road, began by stating there are minutes in the meeting packet tonight for a Special Commissioner meeting dated March 3, 2022. This meeting was never published on the website of the Cromwell Fire District. He stated it is hard to attend when information is not available.

The second item is the Pension. The voluntary pension was frozen back on June 30, 2019. It was formally terminated on January 18, 2022. He understood that in the recent past, the plan was more than fully funded. The Dow has fallen 9% or 10% since the market high premiered in January. From what he understands more than half of the assets of that pension plan are still exposed to market exposure on the equity side. He strongly encouraged the Commission to think about the risk. Once the pension plan is frozen, the liabilities are fixed. Once your pension plan is more than fully funded, it would be great to lock in that fully funded position. If the market changes, it could go back to being underfunded if the market were to take a significant correction. He would not want to see the Commission lose the opportunity to have the assets that are available be underfunded.

Regarding the Audit Report, Mr. Rude fully supported the challenge the Executive Director gave with speeding up the completion of the audit. It is embarrassing to be sitting in the audience almost 9 months after the end of the fiscal year with the public not being able to see the results of the audit for the year ending June 30, 2021. December is better, but still pretty slow.

Regarding financial matters, he understood budget preparation is beginning. He still supports strongly the creation of a multi-year financial plan so the Commission and the District can look further than just a few months from one year ahead to see what kind of organization they look like. He continues to encourage the organization to work with the Town to figure how to spend

the tax dollars being collected from the taxpayers of the Town of Cromwell in the most efficient manner. He was glad to hear that the District is working on some minor things with the Town, but there are some major things they can also be working with the Town on. He would like to see that moved forward.

He would also like to see some balance sheet information in the monthly financial report. There is still no information on accounts receivable, aging and some other things that would be very helpful not only for the Commissioners, but also for the public.

EXECUTIVE SESSION


There were no items up for discussion under Executive Session.

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 7:00 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary


Charles R. Epstein, Secretary