

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **Fire Operations Committee Meeting**

Monday, May 16, 2022

5:30 PM

**Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT**

Present: Commissioners David Colligan (Chairman), Robert Donohue and Charles Epstein. Also attending was Executive Director Julius Neto, Melissa Roming, Fire Inspector Colin Whalen, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Communications Manager Justin Lonergan and Firefighter Lt. Brett Hallden. Commissioner Jason Hinners was absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Chairman Colligan.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Approval of Meeting Minutes of April 18, 2022. A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee Meeting minutes of April 18, 2022, as presented.
- IV. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- V. Communications Report. Mr. Lonergan reported that he and Chief Balletto attended the Navigator Conference in Nashville, TN. Also attending were two staff members that work in Dispatch. It was the National Telecommunicator Conference by the National Academy. They attended a lot of seminars where they learned a lot and worked with other centers as well as amongst themselves. They met a lot of interesting people. It was a great experience. They were able to see a lot of the new technology that will be coming out. It was a learning experience for the Chief.

Mr. Lonergan also discussed the radio reprogramming. He spoke with Mr. Zito a couple of weeks ago before Mr. Zito's vacation. Mr. Zito had not heard anything after multiple requests for an update from the State. He is waiting for Mr. Zito to return from vacation, but Mr. Lonergan is hearing that the State has been totally backed up with requests.

Commissioner Epstein asked if the Communications Center has given any thought to becoming an accredited center. Mr. Lonergan stated that there has been some discussion about it because Cromwell does meet accreditation levels pretty regularly in terms of the QA

program. To become accredited involves a cost as well as setting up various teams that need to meet on a regular basis. Attendees need to be paid to attend if they are attending on their days off. It is something Mr. Lonergan has on his radar.

Commissioner Colligan asked Mr. Lonergan to start the next step of looking into what would be required for Cromwell to become an accredited Communication Center. One of the requirements is to have various committees in place to meet regularly. All of which needs to be documented. The committees consist of Dispatchers or QA people and high-ranking individuals that sit on the committees to discuss protocol changes, upgrades, etc. The challenge is keeping those committees meeting on a regular basis.

The financial component should also be discussed. They will need to pay overtime to individuals coming in for meetings. Commissioner Epstein stated that an individual will need to be appointed as a Medical Director for EMD and EFD. There is also a review period at the national level. The accreditation level follows after that. Mr. Lonergan will prepare a draft plan for the next Fire Ops Mtg. The Chairman would like to have the Committee review the information when presented to see if it is something that is feasible for the Communications Center.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Communications Report as presented.

- VI. Reports of Chief Officers. Chief Balletto reported that he had submitted his report, and there have been no changes. It was a very busy month for the Fire Department. The Chief attended the Navigator Conference and had also come down with COVID which sidelined him for a couple of weeks. They are doing a lot of fire prevention and community outreach. The Chief reported that the new apparatus has been received. It is currently in Rocky Hill. The chassis should be received in a couple of weeks. They should be going to build with their rescue truck within the next couple of weeks.

Commissioner Epstein asked the Chief to make sure the Commissioners know what they are signing off on at every phase of the process with the new rescue truck,. Next Wednesday night the Chief, the career Officers, Dave Barillaro, Eric Roberts and Chris Logan will be getting together to review all the specs. The following month the information will be presented to the Apparatus Committee.

The Chief did not know why there was so much confusion with the Truck 1 specs. He had looked at the specs, and the black tires were part of the specifications. The telescope lighting and rear bumper were not part of the specifications. The lettering or stenciling was identified the night the Apparatus Committee met. The Chief reported they fixed the decal at a cost of \$2,300. Firematic was going to paint the tire rims red, interior and exterior as requested. The Chief does not want to do telescope lighting, because they can use the telescope and lighting that was bought for the Fire Marshal's Office. It is portable, can be mounted inside the piece and is battery operated. The cost is \$1,500 each. Regarding the rear bumper for stoppage, the Chief thought it was ludicrous at a cost of \$7,000 because the Department has a Spotting and Backup Policy that the Chief has enforced with positive and progressive discipline. It is a one-time use bumper meaning that if the bumper hits something, the whole bumper will have to be replaced.

- A. Fire Marshal's Office Report. Colin Whalen attended the meeting for Harold Holmes. Mr. Whalen discussed the youth fire program he has been working on along with the Fire

Marshal and Fire Chief. They have been working with the Town Board of Education, Human Services, Youth Services and the Police Department. They will be scheduling a final meeting to review the program. There will also be a legal review to make sure they have done everything that needs to be done on the curriculum.

The program includes a Youth Fire Intervention program working in conjunction with the school system. If there are any reports of children with fire setting, fire interest or fire starting, the Fire Department would do an intervention. There is a juvenile review board within the Town. Youth can complete the program to get back into good standing. They would receive a certificate from the program upon completion. The requirements are attending class and turning in homework assignments on fire education. Another part of the curriculum is getting inside the home and doing a home safety check. The whole program is based off a National Standard through the Oregon Fire Marshal's Office. Mr. Whalen has information available that explains the program. There are interviews with the youth, and the parents. There is a scoring process based on the interviews. That is how they determine the intervention level.

Mr. Whalen explained that the FMO has invested in a new web-based reporting system. Any time they do a service for an occupancy in Town a report is generated and sent into this system. The FMO can log on and go into the address into the dashboard. They will be able to see reports on Fire Alarms, Sprinklers, extinguishers and all other types of fire safety features. They can see compliances and deficiencies within the system. They are sent directly to the FMO. It was noted this system is at no cost to the FMO.

Mr. Whalen reported that they have designated a room in the basement of West St., as the Fire Prevention room. They cleaned out all the plans and are now looking to scan a lot of their files. They are trying to go more digital rather than paper. The FMO is looking for a spot for evidence on the training grounds at Coles Road. They need a place to appropriately secure evidence. Commissioner Colligan has discussed this with the Fire Marshal. There were a couple of areas where they could find space for storage that could be secured. He suggested that the FMO provide an estimate of cost to fence in the area. Commissioner Colligan also noted there were partitions left in the training area. He did not know who might be able to use them.

Commissioner Donohue asked if people from surrounding towns could contact Mr. Whalen about the Cromwell Youth program. There was a time when East Hampton and Portland were also trying to start a youth program when Cromwell was starting theirs. Not only did Cromwell lose support but Portland and East Hampton also lost interest and support. Mr. Whalen welcomed the supporters and stated it will take a group to get things going again.

Chairman Colligan asked if there was a cost to this program. The Chief explained that the cost is they have to come in on their own time. It is going to be a universal program. The requirements from the FMO to DCF are to work with other departments so the FMO is not the municipality in charge of this. They want to use resources from other municipalities. Mr. Whalen was just looking for some support from the Fire Operations Committee as well as the Board.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to support the initiative of the FMO to create a Youth Fire

Prevention Program for the Town of Cromwell and look forward to the FMO bringing back more information to move forward.

Commissioner Epstein added that the Board does support this project but they also have to pay attention to cost. This program if approved by DCF and the State should be up and running by July. They will be working with the Police Dept, Human Svcs., Board of Education, Social Services and others. The Chief noted they have put funds in the budget for this program.

In conjunction with this new program, they have also developed a new curriculum for fire prevention for the schools. It will be started in October. It is through the NFPA which sets the national standards. It will be called, "Learn Not To Burn." These programs have been set up so that instruction in the schools would be done during the day with no overtime being incurred by anyone.

- VII. Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability. The Chief reported that they onboarded 4 individuals last week. He is interviewing another person tomorrow. That person will be starting by the end of the week. They are all part-time and have their CPAT. They are all on the list for career firefighter positions. The Chief sent out an email announcing that Ryan Blaney received his CPAT. Also Kyle Peck received his CPAT again this year even though he had received it last year. They have been responding to calls and getting very busy.

The Chief wanted to discuss how to come up with a plan that allows certain individuals to respond to certain calls within the Department. They have individuals doing self response to some of their calls. The Chief does not think that is needed. This has to do with certain members that are no longer exterior firefighting or interior firefighting but hold a safety position. They fill in the gaps when responding.

The Chief has concerns with responding on the highways for MVA.'s, especially since Tack 4 was hit on the highway. There are vehicles going on the highway responding that should not be responding. It is day to day operation but is also going to have to become a policy that is enforced by the Fire Operations Committee. He would like to discuss this more at length with the Committee offline. Chairman Colligan noted that these types of issues have always been operational with the Chief overseeing the operations. The Committee does not have to set policy for Fire Operations. The Chief noted that this has been going on for years, and this is what the policy was prior to this discussion. He felt it would be beneficial to talk about this with the Committee to come up with a solution. He felt that this originated with this Committee since it had established policy that the Committee approved of.

VIII. Old Business

- A. Update on Utilization of Court Street and Coles Road Firehouses. The Chief has been invited to a meeting being held on Friday. Attending will be the President of the Board and the President of the Firefighter's Union. He did not have any details about the meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to table this item until the Chief receives more information.

IX. New Business

- A. Update on Volunteers' Association – Melissa Roming. Ms. Roming noted that the Association doesn't exist, but she did want to speak about volunteering. She has been a volunteer in Cromwell for 22 years. She has been in fire and emergency services for 27 years. She was also Commander of the State Honor Guard for 18 years in combination with her other services. She has also been exposed to other organizations across the United States that were combination in nature.

She wanted to discuss recruitment and retention and how to better build up the volunteer side. She reported that regarding the Association, The Secretary of State's Office has the submission for a corporation. In order to move forward to become incorporated, the Association needs to furnish their first meeting minutes. That is happening currently. They are submitting their second draft. The Secretary of State's Office would then approve the organization as a nonprofit, nonstock organization. Also for submission is filing their EIN and obtaining an SS-4. They will go for their 501-C status. At this time they are not completely organized. They have been working very hard. They have had meetings to change some of the Bylaws because the original intent was too large. The numbers for membership has decreased, so they have had to modify that in order to get the program off the ground. They had a committee of 5 people which has been reduced to 3. Each of those people are involved in business matters during the day. They are pulling together and working very hard. They had a dinner meeting last week. They are receiving input from an Accountant who is providing services free of charge. This person has assisted with all of the organization's filings. She explained that with the State of CT, creating a business from scratch takes some time.

Chairman Colligan thanked Ms. Roming for all her and the group's hard work. He encouraged her to keep on going. The Fire Operations Committee is willing to help in any way. He would like to keep tabs on their activities. She explained that once all the applications are accepted, they will be doing an inquiry among all members. She received numbers today from the Chief regarding how many volunteers still exist, as well as part-time and career staff. This will give them a better idea of starting numbers and assist in program development. There are a lot of ideas and a lot of people that are interested.

Ms. Roming discussed recruitment and retention across the board. The organization is structured in such a way that they have career, part-time and volunteers. There has been a struggle the last couple of years with the work/life balance. Since COVID there has been a dramatic shift in the workforce. More people are working from home now. This might be something that the organization can tap into and take advantage of. Years ago members were recruiting their own children. That is no longer the case. The question is how can they keep folks on board and how can they strike interest among new candidates.

Chief Balletto and Ms. Roming attended a Dynamic and Energizing Class on collaboration of career and volunteer workers in the fire service. It addressed all issues regarding change of culture in terms of volunteering. They are looking to build that collaborative culture within the CFD. It will take strong coordination and leadership. Her ideas involve how to reset the Department, build back trust, develop leadership that is not necessarily ranking officers. They need to improve attitudes and recognize

people's assets and how that value will drive pride again. Pride is one of the organization's core values. To get that back they will need to emphasize who they are and what they are doing out there.

They need to discuss retention first. They are down to 8 volunteers. They have 35 part-time, scheduled and unscheduled. There are 16 career. For retention there are 4 criteria: 1) Meet their individual needs, 2) Provide reward and recognition incentives, 3) have good supervision and leadership focusing on accountability and 4) maintain a challenging yet supportive collaborative culture. Changing culture will be a big deal in Cromwell. Pride develops through that direction of progressive ideas and a good coordination of effort. They need education on all levels. There have been past issues with FLSA, but the membership needs to move on. They need to research outside their comfort zone and their State. Take a field trip, go to other counties with combination departments to see how they work and see what they are using to attract folks. There needs to be a strategic plan with a needs assessment by an outside organization. They need to look at their standards of coverage. Any suggestions need to be looked at with a little bit of optimism, and a little less resistance. They know it is going to take funding. To hear things through an outside party might open some minds up and highlight the good things that are going on.

They need to explore the Department and the community's expectations. They never talk about community awareness on the exceptional service highlights provided by the Fire Department. Questions should be asked if we communicate how many saves they have during a month, or how many fires have been extinguished. Another item is school programs. The FMO is working to reconstruct that. It will not take a lot of money. There are facebook posts that happen all the time. This should be used to the organization's advantage. Ask the community what they may want and if it supports the strategic plan. There may be people out there that may want to be a part of Cromwell.

From that point they create a policy and procure or allocate funding through that. It helps to develop and boost the volunteer service side. There should be a membership blind survey. From there they should focus on volunteer coordination. There is a county in Virginia that is paying \$48,000 -- \$65,000 for a paid position for just their volunteer coordinator. That person is in charge of recruitment and retention, training and upkeep of the training program. It also takes the work off of the Chiefs. Volunteer standards should be established before people are hired. There should be a discussion about how volunteers would improve that situation. She suggested getting to know people within the community and doing a small blurb on Facebook.

She discussed things that have been done in the past that need to be highlighted, such as the smoke detector program, installing AED's in the buildings, selling Christmas trees. All that information needs to get out there. That is what Melissa calls the reset button. They need to evaluate the current program and determine what they would like to see for the future. They also need to do attitude and motivation research. For a while the focus was income and money. There is so much more that meets the hierarchy of needs that the Department needs to work on. They need to collaborate efforts to get back in order. They need to train together, share maintenance duties, involve family and spouses and resolve the ongoing conflicts and get closure. They need to close it down and start over. That is going to improve morale through either workshops, committees, etc. There are other people within the organization that have the passion and we need to tap into them. She is willing to go out there and learn more to bring back to this organization. There are

a lot of certification programs out there. Once the foundation has been established, recruitment can begin.

The recruitment will have to define the new vision. The SOP's and SOG's will be built based on identifying issues and assessing what they have. They are going to assess what they have, and then plan and advocate via a committee. It cannot land on one or two people. It is good for everyone to have a voice. Committee members should include career and part-timers. She suggested tables set up at Expos, events, social outings. Look for discounts from various retailers and look at it as perks for joining the organization. There are fitness clubs that would offer a discount to firefighters for joining and could help address health concerns of firefighters. There are also grants out there, such as SAFER grants. They need to bring the public back in. What are they going to do to be welcoming and inclusive? What are they going to do to make volunteering for CFD more achievable? Melissa looks forward to more ideas and suggestions from people listening.

Chairman Colligan thanked the Chief and Melissa Roming for taking the class and bringing all the information to the Committee. He suggested having a subcommittee put together with himself, Melissa and the Chief along with a couple of other Commissioners. The proper procedure would be to ask the President and the Executive Committee about forming a subcommittee. He wanted to move this forward and have the subcommittee answer to the Operations Committee. There should be an initial meeting to discuss ideas and goals.

He wanted to approach the President and the Executive Committee to ask to form a subcommittee for Recruitment and Retention. It is also stipulated in the Strategic Plan. Commissioner Epstein felt that the Board has too many committees already. You just need to find people that want to put the effort into it. The Chief stated they already had a committee put together and initially had a workshop where they reviewed the policy. At the time there were only 4 people that wanted to get involved. The only people at the time were the Chief, Melissa, Eric Roberts and David Barillaro. He also sent an email to CFD members. No one replied.

The Chief suggested that those 4 people review the current policy, come up with some type of update at the next firehouse meeting to see if it is something everyone can agreed upon so they can continue to move forward. Chairman Colligan wanted to add an item to Old Business, which is recruitment and retention report for future agendas.

- B. Discussion on Field Training Officers for EMS. The Chief noted that for the last couple of months, Local 4662, the Chief, and EMS Coordinator Petrucelli were looking into a way to start doing onboarding, education remediation and counseling for firefighters especially when it comes to EMS. They have been doing very well with QA'ing most of their reports. There are three individuals working on that; the Chief, Lt. Wolmetz and EMS Coordinator Megan Petrucelli. They are seeing that it is difficult getting people onboarded, and to do continuous education and remediation for some of the firefighters relying on the EMS component which is creating some confusion.

The Chief, Lt. Wolmetz and Megan worked with the Executive Director and Local 4662 to come up with an MOA regarding Field Training Officers for EMS. It will be an increase of .50 an hour for an acting position only when they are in that role. They would do QA for at least the last 2 hours of their shift. The QA work is kept separate from EMS

billing. Everything will fall on the Chief and Megan Petrucelli. It will also allow them to do EMS training that needs to be done. Especially the mandatory ones. The goal is to be consistent. This is a proposal that the Chief wanted to bring up at the Personnel Committee meeting, but it was canceled.

The Chief distributed copies of the MOA. The President of Local 4662 was present at this meeting and did not have any objections to the MOA. If it is agreed upon, the Chief will need at least a week to review FTO policy to identify exactly who it is. Their goal is to put one or two individuals per shift on the career side. They are going to start with career personnel because they are the individuals that are working more consistently. It is hoped that this Agreement will go into effect on July 1. Funding will be available July 1.

Chairman Colligan asked if this item can be forwarded to the Board of Commissioners for their meeting being held tomorrow night. The Executive Director explained the reason this was presented at this meeting was for discussion purposes. Normally this draft MOA would fall under the Personnel Committee's jurisdiction and would have been presented at the next Personnel Committee meeting which was canceled in May. If the Personnel Committee Chair would like to forward this to the Board of Commissioners and bypass the Personnel Committee, that would be up to the Chair of the Personnel Committee. It was thought that this should be on the Personnel Committee agenda for their next monthly meeting in June.

The first time this was introduced was 2018. A verbal agreement was made with Chief Terenzio. Due to a lot of interference from COVID, this policy never advanced or was approved by the Board. Mrs. Petrucelli has created an onboard and tracking system. The Chief is trying to come up with a solution to start the onboarding process. They are trying to avoid any negligence on their part. Commissioner Epstein thought it might be better to try the program on a trial basis and then evaluate after 3 or 6 months. Chairman Colligan agreed that there should be an evaluation period of 3 or 6 months. This policy is a long time in the making. They need to address whether or not there is a need for an FTO in the Fire Department.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to move the proposed MOA regarding FTO's to the Personnel Committee at their next meeting in June.

- X. Commissioners' Comments. Chairman Colligan thanked the Chief and Melissa for the discussion about volunteerism. There will now be a commitment from the Board to move this forward. He also commented on the class the Chief ran recently that he attended on fire operations. There have been a lot of changes in operations since he was a firefighter and Chief. He complimented the Chief on his program.
- XI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:16 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Deegan, Rec. Sec'ty

David J. Colligan, Chairman