

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting**

Thursday, May 5, 2022

5:30 PM

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

A Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting was held on Thursday, May 5, 2022, at 5:30 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Road, Cromwell, CT to consider and act upon Special Fire District business.

Commissioners Lee Brow (President), Roger Rukowicz, Charles Epstein, Robert Donohue, Mertie Terry, David Colligan and Robert McIntyre attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri, Accountant Michael Alibrio and Firefighter Lt. Barry Wolmetz. Commissioners Chip Darius and Jason Hinnars were absent. Commissioner Donohue was excused at 6:36 PM.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by President Brow.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. Mr. James Rude, Highridge Rd., commented as the Commission puts forth a budget for consideration and approval by the Town, he trusts that the acquisition of any Capital items such as fire trucks, other utility vehicles and related items that were not included in last year's budget vote will be included in this year's budget vote so the Town knows going into the budget year what the Capital items are.
- IV. New Business
 - A. Discussion and Decision on Cromwell Fire District General Fund Budget 2022/2023 (Fire Department & Communications) Including Debt Service. The Executive Director referred to the Chairman of the Executive Committee, Commissioner Rukowicz, for any comments he might have about the budget process with the Executive Committee. Commissioner Rukowicz thanked all the Department heads, Executive Director and the Executive Committee for their hard work and assistance on the budget. This budget was different from last year because this year was a clean, transparent budget. Tonight will be the fourth set of eyes that have looked at the budget. The Town will be voting on this budget on Monday, May 23, 2022, and it represents a 0 tax increase. The President

thanked the Executive Committee for their hard work and welcomed Commissioner Rukowicz back after a long absence.

The Executive Director explained the handouts that were distributed. One was the highlights of both the General Fund budget and the Water Division Enterprise fund in bullet format. The other document was the final draft worksheet/spreadsheet for both the General Fund budget and Water Division Enterprise fund. Copies are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

This budget is based on the decisions made by the Executive Committee during their budget meetings. There is a zero tax increase, but it will require going to the Tower Fund or Fund balance if needed to keep this budget at a zero tax increase.

The final number for the General Fund budget was \$5,957,861. It represents a 7% increase year over year. The big driver was the 4 new career firefighters that were hired at the beginning of the year. The Fire Department is also in the life cycle of the SAFER grant which expires this year. The other additional expense was the Board appropriated 60 hrs per week to cover the second ambulance. This budget increases the weekend to cover 12 additional hours each day. They will be going from 60 hrs. part-time/full-time to 84 hours. Hopefully there will be additional revenue to cover that expense. By hiring 4 additional full-time career firefighters, this budget took away some of the need for part-timers. The Chief's office has been missing a part-time assistant Chief for the last 2 months. They know there is need but from a budget perspective and operationally, the numbers reflect that a replacement be hired in January 2023. The same decision was made about the Fire Marshal's Office. They had plans to hire a part-time inspector, but are postponing that for 6 mos. The Chief will serve as backup if needed.

Mr. Neto explained that administrative costs in his office were reduced by \$28,800. There were other areas of increases such as paramedic fees, physicals, supply chain increases. FMO operating expenses increased by \$7,000. That was based on new software, a new code book and a new camera for fire investigations. This is the summary for Fire Operations including the Fire Marshal. The objective was not to increase the mill rate.

Commissioner Colligan discussed the issues facing the EMS system in the State. There are things that are beyond the District's control, but the District still needs to service the people. The Fire District budget has been kept at a minimum for the last ten years. The Executive Committee has worked hard to keep it under control, but due to all the changes in the world, at some point in the future the District will have to address the changes and adjust their budget accordingly.

Mr. Neto discussed the Communications budget. Year over year there is a slight increase of \$9,780. The unknown factor this year is contract negotiations for the Dispatchers. In Signals & Alarms there has been an incremental increase of \$120,420 year over year. The big component in this budget is the service agreement with Motorola and expenses related to the new voting sites. Buildings and Grounds for all 3 firehouses year over year with vendors and supplies shows an increase of \$21,356. That was the operational budget.

The Executive Director was willing to answer any questions as well as the Managers and Executive Committee.

The next portion of the budget to be discussed was Capital. It includes any and all purchases associated with the Fire Department, FMO and Communications. They started this process with requests totaling \$800,000. That was the true need that came from the Department heads. There was also discussion of starting a process of creating seed money for critical items that are very costly. This budget does not include that. It started that way, but they had to reconsider. This budget has Capital of \$176,809 Mr. Neto reviewed the items in the Equipment Reserve Fund. Copies are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District office.

Mr. Neto reminded everyone that if Truck 1 remains in the fleet, there must be money allocated to outfit it to go back online. If it is decided to remove Truck 1 from the fleet, there is an opportunity to sell it. The proceeds of that sale could be used for seed money for apparatus replacement.

Mr. Neto discussed revenue. They anticipate with the transfers from the Tower fund and Fund balance the total amount of the General Fund budget to be \$5,957,816. The District is seeing some benefits of the Fire Marshal fees this year. The TPC will also be bringing in some dollars.

Mr. Neto added that this year they are treating the General Fund and Water Enterprise Fund as two separate budgets.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to table the vote on Item A. until discussions have been completed on Item B. Both items will be voted on together.

- B. Discussion and Decision on Cromwell Fire District Water Division Budget 2022/2023 Including Debt Service. The Executive Director began the discussion by reporting the Water Division Budget for 2022/2023 to be \$2,650,500. This included Capital requests and debit service. It is a \$155,233 increase year over year. Payroll was reduced by \$6,000. The big driver year over year is supplies and power. There is a new pump station at Cromwell Landing which needs fiber and electricity. It is now up to the District to manage it. There is a Capital increase of \$241,000. It includes 2/3 of the final engineering design for the emergency interconnection project. Mr. Neto explained that the Water Division Budget is fully balanced. They do not need to go into the Water Enterprise fund to pull any monies out.

Commissioner Terry asked about any plans for maintaining the old pipes on Main St. Mr. Palmieri reported that plans are in their 10 year water supply plan. Lead and copper needs to be tracked and replaced in all water service connections. \$40,000 is in the budget to start that project this year with their Engineering firm.

Mr. Neto added that labor agreements are taken into consideration in the budget as well as COLA raises for non-CBA employees. There are slight increases in insurance and cyber security. Worker's Comp was also positive this year. The amount of events were low. There was a discussion regarding the tax decrease that will go into effect with this year's State budget. That will instruct the District to only collect 2.1 mils of the 3 mil rate that the Fire District administers. The reimbursement from the State should be forwarded directly to the District, not the Town. Mr. Neto has already had conversations with the Town Manager.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Cromwell Fire District General Fund Budget 2022/2023 including debt service as presented (Fire Department, FMO & Communications) at \$5,957,816.

A motion was made by Commission Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to accept the Cromwell Fire District Water Division Budget 2022/2023 including debt service as presented with the amount of \$2,650,500.

- V. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Rukowicz thanked the Board for supporting the decisions made by the Executive Committee. He thanked the Executive Director for the outstanding job on his presentation. Now that the budget was passed by the full Board of Commissioners, it will be moved on to the Town at the Town meeting on May 23.

Commissioner Epstein discussed the fact the hospitals have been buying out ambulance services. Cromwell will have a harder time providing emergency services especially when receiving back-to-back calls or triple calls. It is not a money maker but rather an expense. It is a necessity not a luxury. He agreed with Commissioner Colligan's comments. Commissioner Colligan explained some of the ways the District is trying to move forward and make improvements to operations.

Commissioner McIntyre thanked the other Executive Committee members, the Executive Director and the Managers for all their hard work. Some of the wants for the budget were sacrificed for the needs. Everyone did a fantastic job. Commissioner Terry was very impressed with the budget.

The President thanked the Executive Committee, the Division heads and the Executive Director for all their hard work. It was a great job to present a budget without a tax increase. The Executive Director will proceed to publish a legal notice in the newspaper regarding May 23, 2022. Part of the information in the notice will be the amount of the Water Enterprise fund and the General Fund as well as the fact there will be no tax increase. This will be the transparency the public is looking for.

- VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Rukowicz and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:50 PM.

ATTEST:

Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary