

# Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE  
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT  
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

## **BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

### **Personnel Committee Meeting**

**Tuesday, July 12, 2022**

**5:30 PM**

**Coles Road Firehouse**

**105 Coles Road**

**Cromwell, CT**

Present: Commissioners Robert Donohue (Chairman), David Colligan and Jason Hinners. Also attending were Commissioner Charles Epstein, Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade, Communications Manager Justin Lonergan and Firefighter Lt. Barry Wolmetz. Commissioner Mertie Terry was absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM, by Chairman Donohue.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted with the following three items under New Business: Item E. Volunteer Stipend Program, Item F. Water Dept. Program promotions and salary increase for Part-time employee and Item G. John Meigel Dispatcher Promotion from part-time to full-time.
- III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- IV. New Business
  - A. Discussion and Approval of Administrative Assistant/Accounting Clerk. The Executive Director explained that the Commission approved the Executive Director and President of the Board to move some personnel items quickly in order to fill some vacancies created by the retirement of Jane Tosto and the resignation of Mike Alibrio.

Mr. Neto distributed copies of the resume for Lisa Steingold-Sandow. Ms. Steingold-Sandow has been chosen as Mr. Neto's strong recommendation for the Administrative Assistant/Accounting Clerk position in the Water Division office. Her background is with the New Britain Public Library. Her educational background is also aligned with the role. She is the best matched candidate for the job. The salary will start at \$27.50 an hour. It will be part of a salary matrix so there will be room for increases. Mr. Neto chose the middle figure between the range of \$25 and \$30 an hour. He would like to do a performance review on Lisa in 6 mos. Depending on goals and achievements there may be an opportunity for a salary increase up to 4%.

Mr. Neto is a strong believer in recognizing work performance. One of the objectives Mr. Neto had was to find someone that was not so anchored into the job description because the office is a small working group. He was looking for an individual who can recognize a problem and work towards a resolution instead of saying, "that's not my job." Other qualities needed were working on new challenges, working with colleagues and team members and providing backup to those individuals.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to hire Lisa Steingold-Sandow for the position of Administrative Assistant/Accounting Clerk in the Water Department, effective immediately.***

It was noted that the Executive Director meant to include Mr. Alibrio's position as part of Item A. of New Business on the agenda. It was noted that this next discussion comes as Part II of Item A. Mr. Alibrio's position will also be vacated at the end of the month. Part of the reason for rushing through this transition is that the District was given short notice, and Mr. Alibrio plays a vital role on the accounting side of the District.

The Executive Director distributed copies of the candidate's resume. Mr. Alibrio, Mr. Neto and the Principals of ACL have all interviewed the candidate whose name is Michael Lupkas. He is retired but still works short term assignments specializing in governmental accounting and management. He has the exact qualifications the District is looking for. He has over 30 years of experience in a municipality. Most recently he worked for the City of Hartford for one year. He retired from the City of Meriden as Director of Finance and Treasurer. He was also Deputy Director of Finance/Comptroller of the City of Bridgeport. This person is already trained in governmental affairs. He is also a certified Financial Officer. He will not be considered an employee but rather a vendor or a consultant. The contract will stipulate that he will work up to 22 hours a week. There will be an hourly rate associated with it. They have agreed on 22 hours a week, but if that number goes up, the Executive Director will need to re-evaluate where the increase is.

Commissioner Colligan wanted to know if the new person will be attending monthly Board of Commissioners' meetings. If the Board makes that requirement, it will be included in Mr. Lupkas' contract. As cyber security concerns increase, Mr. Neto will be requesting 2 docking stations for Mr. Lupkas so he can work from home and the office. Mr. Neto is going to try this agreement for one year. If the first year is successful, the contract can be extended for another year.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to hire Mr. Michael Lupkas as a vendor/consultant to be the District's Financial Manager. An agreement will be drafted to outline Mr. Lupkas' duties and functions. The agreement will be finalized by the Executive Director.***

- B. Discussion and Approval of Fire Inspector. The Executive Director explained that the reason this item was on the agenda is because the Fire Department was looking to replacing the Fire Inspector position as part of this budget cycle. They have identified that they need an additional part-timer. The Chief and Fire Marshal would like to post sooner rather than later. They are looking at late August, early September to hire. They would like to get the process started by getting approval from the Personnel Committee.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to authorize the Fire Marshal and Fire Chief to begin recruitment efforts to hire an additional part-time Fire Inspector.***

- C. Discussion and Possible Approval of Role of Justin Lonergan and the Tower. One of Angel Alvarado's roles was to manage the Tower. Since Angel has moved out of state and started working part-time for the District, he has been working remotely doing some of the administrative stuff with the attorneys and the Executive Director. There needs to be someone who is physically in Cromwell to monitor the Tower like Mr. Alvarado used to do. Mr. Neto has been taking on those responsibilities for the last 3 months. He could continue to do that, but he thinks it would be best served for the long haul to identify Justin Lonergan to take on that role and get more involved physically to understand the environment. He is also proposing a salary increase because of the additional time and responsibilities put on Justin. He suggested identifying \$8,000/yr. to compensate for the extra duties, and it will come out of the Tower fund. It will be identified as Tower Responsibilities. There is savings in the fund because Angel's role became part time.

Commissioner Colligan thought it was a good idea because Justin has been working with the Communications Committee to get things resolved and has worked with Angel on many other items. He knows the Tower and he knows the Communication issues. With the Executive Director overseeing things, it seemed like a logical solution.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to move forward with Justin Lonergan taking on more responsibilities at the Tower.***

Mr. Lonergan addressed the Committee by thanking them for the trust they put in him. He has learned and worked around the Tower and Communication areas. He has learned a lot and never asked for any compensation for additional responsibilities. He is fine with the compensation figure and has already been doing some of the work with Angel. Commissioner Colligan suggested that for future Board meetings, Mr. Lonergan add another page to his monthly Communication Center report which will be a Tower update.

- D. Executive Director Review and Raise (from January 2022). ***A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to table this item and forward it to the Board of Commissioners meeting agenda under Executive Session.***
- E. Volunteer Stipend Program. About 5 months ago, the Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief Brade and former Acting Assistant Fire Chief Petrucelli made a presentation to the Fire Operations Committee but no action was taken. The issue is resurfacing here to determine what information is needed to keep this concept alive or move it forward because it involves a stipend. The Chiefs want to know what it is they need to do to move this forward at some level.

Chief Balletto confirmed that the proposal was presented at the February Personnel Committee meeting. At that time Commissioner Colligan had suggested scheduling a workshop inviting the volunteers. The workshop was held at Coles Road. Chief Balletto and Commissioner Colligan made the recommendation to get a committee together to discuss the proposal and decide if this is what should be done going forward. The only two people that reached out to the Chief was Eric Roberts and Melissa Roming. They

were in agreement with the program, but they had some suggestions about the requirements for onboarding.

Chief Balletto explained the proposed stipend program. Probationary volunteer firefighters, would receive \$1,000 in January and \$1,000 in July. Volunteer firefighters who are not on probation would receive \$2,000 in January and \$2,000 in July. Volunteer Officers would receive \$2,500 in January and \$2,500 in July. The rates are based on training, associations they have attended and 25% of call volume. An outstanding issue is they have no Bylaws which means they have no officers in place. The Chief wanted to appoint 3 individuals to officer positions if the stipend program is approved. They are Eric Roberts, David Barillaro and Melissa Roming. Melissa would be a Lieutenant for administration purposes. The Chief is eliminating the Captains position. All officers will be Lieutenants across the board.

The Chief would like to see Melissa Roming working with the Chairman of the Community Outreach & Public Relations Committee to promote the volunteers getting into school systems and doing some onboarding by getting some high school students interested.

The Chief added that right now the Department has no volunteers. There are three individuals that respond to calls. They are Melissa Roming, Eric Roberts and David Barillaro. If the stipend program is approved the Chief would like to start from scratch with a new foundation for the volunteer program. That means contacting all those who have signed up but have not been responding. Finding out if there is interest from former volunteer members. They would like to have everyone start with the onboarding process again. Commissioners would not be required to onboard again. They technically are already considered volunteers because of the time commitment they put in for meetings. That represents more than 25% of the call volume. The stipend program would not affect Commissioners because they cannot receive a stipend according to their Bylaws. The Chief's goal is to have this program in place by October 1.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved authorize Chief Balletto to move forward with the Volunteer Stipend program, including the appointment of the three officers as discussed.***

- F. Water Department Program Promotions & Salary Increase for Part-Time Employee. Mr. Palmieri was not at this meeting. The Executive Director explained that this program is part of the budget cycle. Mr. Palmieri has been trying to consistently identify the Water Department salaries with market conditions. The positions identified are: Maintainer I, II and III. There are industry standards with certain certification requirements for these positions. Right now there is one individual that is a Maintainer II that has received certification. They want to move him to Maintainer III. There is another person who is a Maintainer II and has been working towards their certification for Maintainer III. That person will get the salary increase once their certification requirements have been completed. There is also a part-time employee that is an Administrative Assistant that has been doing a phenomenal job related to collections and supporting the transition. That present salary is \$24.95 per hour. This person has facilitated bringing in over \$450,000 over the last 12 to 14 months. That reflects all of her hard work. Mr. Palmieri is requesting that this person's wage be increased to \$27.50 per hour. The Water Department maintainers will be increased as follows: Don Crescimanno will be

increased by 6.4%, Mike Fiddler will be increased by 11% since he is the lowest paid employee. The Water Department staff will not do any work unless they are certified and trained to perform the functions of a Maintainer III. They will all be performing at the same level.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to proceed with the Water Department's salary program.***

- G. John Meigel Dispatcher Promotion from Part-Time to Full-Time. The Executive Director explained that there was a full-time Dispatcher position advertised. They focused on posting internally because there were two qualified candidates internally. There was a process that was used. Mr. Lonergan was at the meeting and was willing to answer any questions anyone had about the process. Out of that process the best matched person for the job was promoting John Meigel to that position. This decision was based on the recommendation from the panel and other variables. Both candidates were seriously qualified to perform the job. Within the next 52 weeks after this decision is made, if there is an open position that is not tested for, since both candidates were qualified, the second person that was qualified on the list will be offered the position. Mr. Lonergan gave his comments about the position. He stated it was a very hard decision to make. The process in place was fair and equitable.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to promote part-time Dispatcher John Meigel to a full-time position. Should a full-time position come up within the next 12 months, the number 2 candidate will be offered that position.***

- V. Commissioners' Comments. There were no comments to report.
- VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Hinners, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:24 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Donohue, Chairman

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Secretary