

# 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, March 3, 2022**

**5:30 PM**

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

A Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting was held on Thursday, March 3, 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 Jason Hinnners (Vice President), Mertie Terry, David Colligan, Robert Donohue, Chip Darius, Robert McIntyre and Charles Epstein attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto and Fire Chief Jason Balletto. Commissioners LeRoy Brow and Roger Rukowicz were absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:31 PM, by Vice President Hinnners.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- IV. New Business
  - A. Accept Personnel Committee's Decision on Five Names for the Career Firefighter Open Positions. The Executive Director noted that some of the Commissioners present are also members of the Personnel Committee. Therefore, there was not going to be a lot of detailed explanation as to how they got to this point with the hiring list and rankings. The list was approved by the Personnel Committee. It was a lengthy process, but it was very methodical and hands off by the Fire Department/District personnel. 98% of the work was processed by individuals that were not part of the Cromwell Fire District. The Personnel Committee also voted to keep the list active for one year.

It was hoped that the Board would approve the top five names to fill the five open full-time career firefighter positions. The top five names are: Ryan Blaney, Gregory Bannon, Henry Wall, Jason Tomczyk and Joseph Neary. The next five candidates are: Kyle Peck, Mike DePaolo, Jared Fongemie, Griffin Stover and Alex Nevendorf. The reason there is a focus on 10 even though the list has 21 names, is in the event over the next year there

are any open positions, the Department will not have to advertise because they already have an active hiring list.

The Executive Director asked if anyone needed an overview of the process. Everyone understood the process used. It is the same process that was discussed a few months back, and it was flawless. The Executive Director credited the Chief's office for the way the process was handled. Commissioner Colligan added that this process was thorough and handled very professionally because the Chief took the initiative to bring in fire personnel from other municipalities to manage the process. Commissioner Colligan thought the Chief did a fantastic job organizing everything. It was a logistics nightmare trying to get everything accomplished in one day.

The Chief explained that the reason he went with ten names to start was because if there was anyone who was made an offer and said no, he would have other qualified individuals that were next in line on the list. The reason for the 21 names on the list was per the rules of engagement, which means anyone that passes with a 70 has to be on a certified list. The Board of Commissioners will keep the list active for one year, with the opportunity to extend its active status for up to one more year. The Chief noted that this needs to be on the agenda of the Personnel Committee in February or March of 2023, to vote to keep the full-time career firefighter list active for another year.

There was a total of 51 candidates. Ten had to be removed on the closing date. The Chief personally called those 10 candidates to find out if they were planning to complete Fire I, Fire II or EMT. He asked them if they would be able to get those certifications within one year after appointment. They all said no. They had nothing in the process working towards any of those certifications. Out of 41 names that scheduled to take the written exam, two people withdrew from the process. There were also 5 no shows. 34 people took the written exam, and 31 passed it. If someone did not pass the written exam, they did not advance to the oral exam. The Chief has all the scores for the written exam. Those that took the oral exam had that score combined with their score from the written exam to give them their overall score.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Personnel Committee's decision on five names for the career firefighter open positions.

- B. Utilization of Coles Road and Court Street Firehouses. The Executive Director explained that this item is a follow-up to a conversation that started at the last Fire Operations Committee meeting. There has been some discussion and preliminary plans made to renovate the Court Street firehouse. The approximate cost was estimated at \$40,000. The renovations would be on the second floor of Court St. to make improvements and accommodate diverse fire crews working 24/7. Currently at Court Street, both the sleeping quarters and restroom situation are not adequate because the bathrooms are downstairs instead of upstairs, and there are limited showers. There was also some discussion about moving the Chief's office to Coles Road.

In reviewing the NFPA requirements for the second floor of Court Street, the Chief's office realized they did not have sufficient funds to accomplish this. It would cost approximately \$100,000 to make the second floor compliant. This got the Chief thinking about Coles Road because during COVID, there were firefighters residing at Coles Road. Coles Road was designed with lots of accommodations such as male and female showers

and rooms that could be used for sleeping quarters to segregate staff. There is also a De-con room in the back on the other side of the bay.

To add to the renovation dilemma, there will be a new requirement from ISO going forward as a way to protect staff by requiring different levels of de-con after a major fire. At a fire scene there needs to be a closing down of the firefighters before they get into the apparatus. Once they come back to the firehouse, they need to take a shower and take their equipment off and wash it before going out into the population. Since there is limited shower capability at Court Steet, it would take 3 ½ hrs. after coming back from a major fire to go through the de-con process. This means that for 3 ½ hrs., the crews can't go out until the process is completed for everyone.

The Coles Road firehouse was not designed for a 24/7 environment, but rather a community environment. The conference room would still remain a conference room because there are other rooms to use for accommodations. There would be very little financial investment to make Coles Road a 24/7 firehouse. Some of the negative aspects are that Coles Road is on the west side of Town. That is an issue because it is not centrally located in Town. The Chief has researched and confirmed they can still meet the ISO requirements to respond on the east side of Town in the appropriate amount of time.

When Coles Road was built, there was pushback from the Town. Statements were made at that time that Coles Road could never be an active, 24/7 firehouse. However, the property is zoned for business, and if the staff were to move to Coles Road, it would be no different than the way they operated during COVID at Coles Road. There will be appropriate protocol initiated, such as not blasting the sirens at 3:00 AM. At that time of day, sirens would not be required, but lights would be. That can be overcome.

A decision needs to be made whether to invest \$140,000 at Court St. or repurpose the dollars somewhere else. The thought is to leave the Chief's office at Court St. There are still logistics to work out if the decision is made to move forward. There has been an informal complaint already filed. This needs to stay on the radar screen as they look for a solution. This needs to be considered as part of the upcoming budget cycle. If it is decided to use Court Street as the 24/7 firehouse, an additional request will be made under Capital items for infrastructure improvement with a need to meet and exceed the standards for a diverse workforce. There may be a greater need in the future for separating quarters, etc.

Commissioner Colligan had the minutes from the Planning & Zoning meetings held back when they were going to build Coles Road. The issue was not about being a 24/7 facility but rather the issue was not using the sirens in the neighborhood. At that time it was decided not to blow the sirens between the Coles Road firehouse and Evergreen Road, and the Coles Road firehouse and Willowbrook Road. There are four officers in the Fire Department. Their responsibility is to use their best judgement when going out on a call. If any complaints are filed with the Chief regarding sirens, he will go back to the officers involved.

The Chief noted that the move to Coles Road does not have to be permanent. But they do have \$40,000 to put into Capital to start planning for the future. Mr. Neto stated that the conference room at Coles Road will not change physically. The conference room will continue to be utilized for large meeting needs such as the Board of Commissioners?

meeting. Mr. Neto recommended that committee meetings of the Board be held at West St., 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.

What is driving the decision to move is the economics. It would be cheaper to move staff to Coles Road then renovate Court St. The America Cares Act has been able to provide funding to a few towns to help them renovate their firehouses. With the first American Recovery Act, Cromwell received \$4.2 million. There are two projects in line to get some of those funds, but all within the Water Division. There is a second Recovery Act that the Chief was referring to. Mr. Neto is hopeful that the second Recovery Act will buy the District some time. If the District could get \$250,000 to rehab the firehouses, and since the money is not burdening the taxpayer, the Fire Department can recreate Court St. There was a lengthy discussion about work to Coles Road and Court Street.

Commissioner Darius had questions about where things would be located at Coles Road. The Chief explained that the first room on the right when you enter Coles Road will become the male bunk room. The gym will be the room after that. The EMS Captain's room will become the Officers' room. The Association room will become the female bunk. There will be an office next to that room as well. The conference room will get cleaned up with a larger conference table to fit all Commissioners. When the Commissioners are not meeting, everything will get cleaned up, and the room will become a temporary day room. The apparatus floor will stay the same. The radio equipment will go into a secure watch booth. With Justin's approval they are proceeding with that move. That office can also be used by Chris Logan if he needs to use the computer. One of their other concerns is the extractor which is located at Coles Road. There are 1 ½ - 3 ½ calls a day on the west side of Town.

Chief Balletto is part of a Legislative Committee that is working towards a cancer relief bill for all firefighters. One of the requirements will be that each firefighter will need two sets of gear. The second requirement is if they go into any potential carcinogens at a fire, they will have to remove their gear, put it into a bag, put it in the back end of the fire engine, proceed to the Coles Road firehouse and take a shower immediately and also put their gear on. That is an average of 30 min. per shower, per firefighter. At Coles Road there are 4 showers, 2 male and 2 female. They also have to spare a Decon area. Gear also needs to be cleaned immediately. Court Street does not have the extra space to spread out when a firefighter returns from a fire. They have female firefighters who do not feel comfortable sleeping in the bunk room at Court St., so they are sleeping in recliners. At Court St. firefighters coming back from a fire, enter the building through the day room and potentially contaminate it.

The cost to move to Coles Road will be minimal. It is just a cleanup. The Chief is working to get Connex boxes outside so the chairs can go into the Connex boxes and get the tables off the apparatus floor. The Connex boxes can be used for storage. The amount of time to make the move will be approximately 8 - 12 weeks. It may take longer depending on what type of IT is needed.

Chris Logan went to Court St. to examine the area to see if it would be possible for him to relocate there. It was determined that the ceiling is too low. Mr. Neto added the time period for this change needs to be determined based on the District's ability to get grants to add to the budget cycle. The Chief noted that in order to move things to Coles Road from Court Street, the cost would be \$4,000. He already budgeted under Capital equipment for Murphy beds. That cost is \$15,000. The Chief's office was able to talk to

Jordan's furniture who would give Cromwell 8 temperpedic beds, extra long with box springs, frames and mattresses for \$4,000. They will come to the firehouse to deliver them, and remove the old beds which are breaking.

Commissioner Terry commented on the plans the Town is making regarding spending money on schools. She wanted everyone to be aware of the Town's future plans and the impression it will make on the Town's people with regard to both the Town and the Fire Department spending money.

Commissioner Darius gave this his full support. There are very valid health and safety reasons for moving crews to Coles Road; cancer, COVID, ventilation. It was also noted that all the training is done at Coles Road, so having staff move to Coles Road will keep the training location consistent.

*A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to move the day-to-day operations of the career firefighters to the Coles Road firehouse because of the new requirements being placed on career firefighters from ISO and the expense of rehabbing Court Street until the Department can re-evaluate its needs for the future stipulating the relocation of the primary station to be reconsidered in 12 mos.*

Moving operations to Coles Road will also allow the Chief some privacy for his office remaining at Court St. The Chief added that the day room at Court St. would become a conference room. It will have a giant meeting table in it to allow for meetings or workshops. It could also become back up EOC for the Fire Department and the District.

Commissioner Darius added that if the current conference room at Coles Road will be used for crews to be able to eat, then the carpet in that room should be removed as it is the original carpet that was installed when the building was built. He suggested a hard surface floor that is easy to sanitize. In a couple of months they will be following IFC 20-21 which are all the codes that have to be followed. It includes any new ordinances or planning and zoning requirements that have evolved since the last renovation. The goal for a target date would be within 3 – 6 mos.

- V. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Colligan noted that there are a few Commissioners that have been qualified and certified to be Q instructors. They are designees of the Department with DMV. They are: President Brow and Commissioners Hinnens and Colligan.

Commissioner Epstein stated that the Chief did a great job on the hiring making sure there was no way that it could be held to a lower standard. He thought the Chief and his staff deserved a "that a boy" for all his hard work.

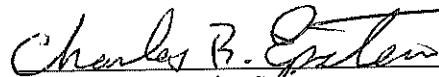
Commissioner Darius thought that these were excellent steps in modernizing the Department and preparing it for the future.

Commissioner Terry stated that they have a member of their family that is going through some health challenges right now. She has asked the Executive Director to send a card to Ryan Donohue from the Commission. If it is all right with Commissioner Donohue, if there is anyone that would like to send a personal card, Commissioner Donohue was all right with

that. The Executive Director and Commissioner Terry had the address. She would like Ryan to know that everyone is thinking about him.

- VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 PM.

ATTEST:

  
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Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Secretary