

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, January 18, 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, January 18, 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 Jason Hinnners (Vice President), Charles Epstein, Robert Donohue, David Colligan, Chip Darius and Robert McIntyre attended. Commissioners Mertie Terry, Roger Rukowicz and Lee Brow (President) were absent. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Assistant Fire Chief/Deputy Fire Marshal Jason Brade, Communications Manager Justin Lonergan and Firefighters Alan Dominy and Lt. William McKnight.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM, by Vice President Hinnners. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Vice President Hinnners.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted with the following change: under Item X. New Business, add item G. Discussion and Decision for Public Hearing on the Fire Marshal Ordinance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 21, 2021

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Darius and approved 5 to 0 to accept the Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of December 21, 2021, as submitted. Commissioner Donohue abstained.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were two pieces of correspondence. One was from the Cromwell Recreation Department thanking the Fire Department for their participation in the Mayor's Tree Lighting ceremony. They personally thanked Lt. McKnight, Barry Wolmetz, Tyler Kosterich, Scott Escales, Henry Wall and Jim Annino.

The second correspondence was addressed to Chief Balletto from Heather Lammers, Trustee of the Dolores Lammers-Padwater Living Trust. Her parents, Dennis & Dolores Padwater, were residents of the TPC River Highlands for a long time. They used Cromwell's emergency services many times and were always treated with kindness, patience, respect and were always professional. The letter had a check attached for \$10,000 made out to the Cromwell Fire District for all the services the Fire Department provided to Mr. & Mrs. Padwater over the years.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He highlighted a couple of items. One was that the District has been contacted by its insurance company about cyber security. It has become problematic with municipalities paying millions of dollars in ransomware. The District was given some information, surveys etc. The company is looking for information and feedback from the District on how our computer system is set up and how information is processed as it relates to cyber security. Over the last few years the District has invested time and money to bring in a new level of security. The District will be in decent shape for cyber security, but it will be up to the insurance company to determine whether or not they will continue to provide services to the District. There will be more to come on this. The goal is to get cyber security insurance at a reasonable rate.

The District Office is working with Citizens Bank and Melissa Roming of the Volunteer Association to modify or recreate the banking information necessary to access the bank account that was previously in the name of the former Cromwell Volunteer Fire Department which will become the new Cromwell Volunteer Association. They are hoping to take care of this within the next couple of weeks.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's report for December as submitted.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Alibrio was not able to attend the meeting. The Executive Director filled in to answer any questions on the financial report. He highlighted the fact that EMS calls have increased substantially. Financially, as it relates to EMS calls, the year-to-date funds collected and deposited compared to last year increased at \$345,000 compared to \$286,000 last year. There was a net increase of revenue close to \$60,000. This also shows that the ESO is submitting more accurate reports on a timely basis.

Commissioner Donohue had a few questions addressed by Mr. Neto. The first question was on Page 5, under Expenses, line #2 Commission Expenses. Commissioner Donohue wanted to know what was spent that totaled almost \$4,000. Mr. Neto did not have all of that information with him, but was willing to send an email to clarify. All items in that account

were approved by the Commission. However, he remembered there was \$1,200 worth of new flags that the Board approved. There was also \$600 for the October newsletter.

Page 6, Misc. Revenue (01 4900), 12th line down, Commissioner Donohue asked why it was noted as -352%. The answer to that was that it is a comparison to last year. Page 12, line 3, under treatments, it was noted that there is only 17% left. He wanted to know if the Water Division was OK with that. Mr. Neto explained that chemicals are purchased at the beginning of the budget year and the Water Division is given discounts by purchasing in large quantities. They do not anticipate any overages or shortages. Commissioner Donohue next asked about property liability insurance. With 7% remaining, Mr. Neto reported it will have a favorable outcome.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for December as submitted.

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for December 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 since it was submitted. Commissioner Darius asked about the volunteer drills. He wanted to know how many volunteers are left. There are 4 or 5.

Commissioner Donohue had a question about Dispatch warnings he is getting. He asked if they were being addressed by the FMO. Assistant Chief Brade explained that it is something they have been doing since they integrated software. The Marshal's office goes to the site and identifies something that could be hazardous. The FMO enters it into the program so any responder will see that in the warnings.

Commissioner Donohue had questions about hording issues that he witnessed at a scene. He noted that the tenant at the property was handicapped as well. He wanted to know if the Fire Department can get involved by speaking with management about their concerns. Chief Balletto responded that the Department has been speaking with both State and local Social Services Departments and also the Director of Public Health. The Chief stated it is a work in progress. They hope to have more solutions going forward. The Executive Director added that the Town does have jurisdiction authority to do certain things, but they are hesitant on certain points because once the Town identified that area to be inhabitable, the Town takes responsibility for its clean up and housing for the displaced person.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report for December as presented.

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for December had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri was not at the meeting. The Executive Director was available to answer any questions. Commissioner Darius asked about leaks detected. Mr. Neto reported there were leaks detected. He added that the investment of \$18,000 made last year for leak detection equipment has been an advantage to stay ahead of large unaccounted for water loss.

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

- E. Communication Center. The Communication Manager was present and apologized for not submitting a report this month. He had been out all of last week. There are a lot of projects

going on. There were a couple of Dispatchers out with COVID-related symptoms. There has been a little bit of overtime to cover shifts, but it seems that everyone is on the mend right now. He has been working on the security project funded by the grant money. He has scheduled a meeting with Associated Security to review what is already in place. One of the Dispatchers is finishing up training. There were no questions for Mr. Lonergan.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Report for December as presented.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations. A Special Meeting was held on December 20, 2021. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Commissioner Colligan reported that the January 2022 meeting has been scheduled for next Monday, January 24, 2022. Because January 17, 2022, was the MLK holiday, the Fire Operations Committee moved their monthly meeting to the following Monday, Jan. 24.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and approved 5 to 0 to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of December 20, 2021, as submitted. Commissioner Donohue abstained.

- 1. Communications Committee. There was no report.
- 2. Apparatus Committee. Chief Balletto provided a couple of updates. He met with Firematic today to review the lettering and color of the apparatus. The new fire engine should be arriving by March 28, 2022. They are hoping that the Fire/Rescue will be arriving in October 2022. They also looked at an ambulance. A contract needs to be drafted with Northeast Fire Apparatus from North Haven. He reported that is status quo right now. He was told that the President of the Board would like to take a look at the ambulance for final approval. They have scheduled Firematic to come to the Fire Operations Committee meeting on Monday night, January 24, 2022, to answer any questions anyone may have. He will be meeting with Shipmen's tomorrow to review and possibly purchase extrication and rescue tools for the apparatus.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the Apparatus Committee reported as presented.

- D. Pension Committee. There was no meeting. The Executive Director spoke to the Chairman of the Pension Committee. There is an item from the Pension Committee under New Business on this meeting's agenda for tonight.
- E. Personnel Committee. A meeting was held on January 11, 2022. Minutes were distributed to the Commissioners at this meeting. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and approved 5 to 0 to accept the Personnel Committee meeting minutes of January 11, 2022, as submitted. Commissioner Darius abstained.

- F. Water Operations Committee. There was no meeting.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. The Liaison was not present. The Executive Director shared that a Town Ordinance was recently passed that goes into effect sometime in February. The ordinance has to do with no smoking in all public buildings. It is not just for the buildings but also the grounds. Smoking will not be allowed at any Fire District facilities, either tobacco or cannabis. Mr. Neto has requested a copy of the ordinance with the effective date. It will be posted at all Fire District facilities accordingly.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
1. Public Safety Tower Committee. There was no meeting.
 2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. A meeting was held on January 6, 2022. Minutes were not available. A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to table the Health & Safety/Bldg. Committee meeting minutes of January 6, 2022, until they are available.
 3. Bylaws Committee. There was no meeting.
 4. Publicity Committee. There was no meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Colligan commented that Chief Balletto is doing a fantastic job communicating to staff and the public getting the word out about the Fire Department and its activities; most recently scheduling a free handout of COVID supplies to the public. Commissioner Epstein concurred with the comments made about call volume increasing; sometimes back-to-back double and triple calls. Staff have been working very hard.
- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to approve.
- D. Discussion and Vote on Resolution to Terminate the CFD Volunteer Pension Plan. The Executive Director explained that included in the packets was a draft of a resolution that is a result of many months of discussions between the Pension Committee, the District's Pension company, FuturePlan, and the full Board of Commissioners. The discussion revolved around eliminating the Pension and providing the option to either cash out or maintain an annuity with another company. If the resolution is passed, the Executive Director will send a copy to

Futureplan. They will initiate a quote for the work they need to do. Each account will be examined including past and future pensioners, and they will provide an action plan rolling it out. It will be a timely process. It will require meetings with the Board as well as future pensioners so that they will be officially informed and have questions addressed. Mr. Neto will be contacting FuturePlan to determine the best process. The District does not have the internal expertise to manage a transition from FuturePlan to something else whether cashing out or maintenance in another plan. Since the District does not have an HR department, this is a unique circumstance. All the rules of engagement must be followed as stipulated by the Government. The Board needs to vote on the resolution to determine what the next steps will be. Secretary Epstein read the resolution. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the resolution to terminate the Cromwell Fire Department's Volunteer Pension Plan.

E. Update and Status of Private Placement Loan. Mr. Neto reported that the District is locked in for a private placement loan of \$2,250,000 with Sterling Bank which is the new old Webster bank. The rate was locked in at 1.75%. The presentation at the public meeting showed a rate of 2.35%. That was the best information at the time. John Healy, financial advisor from Ezro, and Mr. Neto went to 10 different banking institutions, national, regional and local. The loan is a 12 year loan. If they maintain 12 years at the lower rate, \$52,000 will be saved. The money should be available to the District within the next 3 weeks. The District will not be able to receive any apparatus until the vendor receives their money. Mr. Neto reported that the District is on schedule plan, and pleased at the outcome of their efforts.

F. Discussion and Decision on CT State Fire Chiefs' Association Membership. The Executive Director explained that last year the Board voted to have all the Commissioners become members of the CT State Fire Chiefs' Association. An invoice was received recently, so it is assumed that the memberships are good for one year, and membership will be continued upon payment of an annual membership fee. The total of the invoice is \$600. He asked for guidance from the Board on how to proceed. If the Commissioners vote to pay the invoice, the funds will be taken from the Commissioners' account. If approved, the Executive Director will remove this from future agendas until the Board advises the Executive Director they do not wish to continue the membership of the Board of Commissioners as associate members.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to continue the annual membership of the Board of Commissioners as associate members to the CT State Fire Chiefs' Association. The membership provides insight into fire service activities and provides useful information. This item will be carried over as a line item in the budget annually.

G. Discussion and Decision on Fire Marshal Ordinance. A few months ago when the former Fire Marshal was here, he along with Chief Balletto had come up with a list of fees that the FMO would be charging for various services and inspections that were previously provided at no charge. This would be a way to bring in more revenue and offset expenses. There was a question raised regarding who has the authority to implement fees and is an ordinance needed. The Executive Director did not know if the District can draft their own ordinance. After having some discussions with attorneys on this matter, it was determined that the District has the authority to pass an ordinance establishing fees. Prior to that happening, a

Public Hearing needs to be scheduled so the public can vote on the fees and the ordinance. There can be public comment and testimony as to whether they approve or not. After the hearing, it will be up to the Board to decide to pass the ordinance or not. It is not a Town vote. The Board agreed that the District should move forward with the Public Hearing for the Fire Marshal Ordinance regarding FMO Fees. The Executive Director will be looking at the second week of February to establish a public hearing. This is no different than any other Fire Marshal's Office in the State.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the recommendation of the Executive Director to schedule a public hearing to discuss an Ordinance on Fire Marshal fees.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. James Rude, Highridge Rd., Cromwell had comments. He did not know if there had been any thought or conversation by the Commissioners relative to a pending location of the 2022/2023 budget vote. He thought there was thought given to some long range planning for both operations and financial matters. He did not know if there had been any discussion amongst the Commission on that. He thanked the recording secretary for appropriately getting his comments from the last Commission meeting. He wanted to encourage the Commissioners to make sure there are enough resources to get minutes out much quicker than they are currently going out. Minutes were passed out tonight, but there are no minutes from the November 3, 2021, Bylaws Committee meeting. To truly communicate, information has to be available. The financial report continues to have very little in the way of balance sheet information. He continues to suggest that the Commission get some accounts receivable aging statistics included in that document as a minimum. Even though cash receipts may be up, it does not necessarily mean they are actually doing a better job at collecting as the revenue stream increases. There was some conversation at the last meeting that the audit for June 30, 2021 would be available by this meeting. Apparently, it is not available yet, and six plus months to complete an audit after the end of a fiscal year is a very long time. He would encourage the Cromwell Fire District to move that along expeditiously and try to get it done in a much shorter timeframe in the future. He received an advanced copy of the January newsletter. He appreciates that the District is starting to put in some meaningful information in it. There is still no comment about the tax increase coming in July. He hopes to see more about that going forward. If public notices are to be included in the newsletters, it is important to make sure there are very few special meetings. The establishment of a meeting within the next week or two is a very short time frame to provide transparency to the townspeople.

Commissioner Epstein pointed out that in the back of the room, there were a number of pieces of new equipment that had to be purchased for the safety of the firefighters. He does not believe that the townspeople are aware what it costs to supply firefighters with the necessary safety equipment and why it is important that firefighters have the most current and up to date equipment for fighting a fire or being in a hazardous situation where they need an airpack. The Scottpacks displayed came at a cost of approximately \$130,000. This is equipment that cannot be optional. They are necessary tools for the safety of those people doing their job to protect the townspeople.

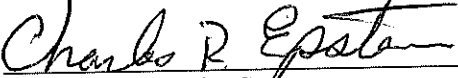
EXECUTIVE SESSION

There were no items to come under Executive Session at this meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 6:55 PM.

ATTEST:


Charles R. Epstein, Secretary

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary