

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, May 16, 2023, 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, May 16, 2023, 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 Roger Rukowicz (President), David Colligan, Mertie Terry, Donald Smith, Robert McIntyre and Chip Darius attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Assistant Fire Chief Karl Neubecker, Finance Manager Michael Lupkas, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes and Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri. Commissioners Charles Epstein and John Sokolowski were absent.

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT

James Rude, 25 Highridge Road; had a copy of the Press Release in front of him related to the 2023/2024 proposed budget. He had a couple of comments, under the Public Safety section that talks about the budget for next year going a little bit over \$6.8 million which is an increase of about \$839,000. He is disappointed that the Board did not identify the fact that it is a 13.9% increase. What was most troubling to Mr. Rude is the first comment, first sentence that talks about the fact that the mil rate is assumed if a budget gets passed to stay at 3 mils. It makes it sound like there will be no increase in taxes. But going back to the detail of the approved budget on page 7, on the detailed budget the property tax line goes from \$4.671 million to \$5.618 million. It is an increase of 20.25%. Although he appreciates that the mil rate is staying the same, that 20.25% increase is due to the overall estimated impact of property re-evaluation in the Town. He is disappointed that the Board did not identify that in the summary of the budget that is available on the website.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
APRIL 18, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved 5 to 0 to accept the Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of April 18, 2023, as submitted. Commissioner Colligan abstained.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
APRIL 25, 2023

The minutes were not available for this meeting. A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to table this item until the next meeting.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS AND WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

A letter was received from Chief Morgan of the Meriden Fire Department to Chief Brade. He thanked Chief Brade for the assistance the Cromwell Fire Department provided to them on May 5. On May 5, 2023, Meriden had a 6-alarm fire involving 10 cities and 20 units. Cromwell provided assistance in covering the City while the Meriden Department tended to their fire emergency.

Also received was a letter from the District Clerk of the Metropolitan District. They passed a resolution on January 24, 2023. "Be it resolved that the District hereby grants permission to the property owners of 145 North Rd, in Rocky Hill to connect to the public water system identified as the Cromwell Fire District as long as MDC does not have water main service to the property." Mr. Neto reminded everyone that the Fire District had an issue that came before the Board a few months back. MDC is now saying they are giving jurisdiction to the Cromwell Fire District to serve as long as they do not have service. Cromwell will be providing mutual aid support for fire and EMS like they do now to Rocky Hill if they meet the criteria that Joe and Environmental Partners require to allow them to tap into it. They will pay a service charge, etc. Any infrastructure improvement will be on their dime.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the letter and resolution received from MDC regarding 145 North Rd.

REPORTS OF STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's report for April had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Neto highlighted that a week from last night, the budget vote will be held at the Coles Road firehouse from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM.

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

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for April had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lupkas stated that April is a slow month as far as tax collection. The Fire District has collected most of its money. There is some that trickles in during the final months of the fiscal year on the

General fund side. To date through April the District has collected a little over \$4.7 million. That is just under 101% of the budgeted amount for the current year. There were 122 EMS calls that were billed out last month. They are running about 5.2% over the prior year. Water has been pretty much on target for the last 7 or 8 months as far as producing the average. There are 3 more accounts than last month that are in collection with balances over \$1,000. There are roughly 71% with collection efforts.

The Executive Director reported that \$628,622 has been collected from delinquent water accounts. Commissioner Terry asked if we had water customers that were in dire straights, and do we help them. The Executive Director shared a couple of stories of customers that have made arrangements with the Water Department.

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

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for April had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.
- There were approximately 241 calls. Call volume is maintaining although it has dropped a little since the beginning of the year.
 - All the Fire Police were certified by the CT Fire Police Assoc. through a training course they participated in. It was a big deal for the Fire Police to have the training to make their roles more official. It was more training that they needed and deserved.
 - The Fire Department also assisted in some road races. Mahoney Disabled 5K race. A standby for the school system and also for the Travelers at the first tee.
 - During the month of May they have been going to schools, doing "Touch a Truck," also at the Bethany Lutheran Church.
 - They are getting ready for the Memorial Day parade on May 30, 2023, and the Memorial Day car show on May 26. They will be doing the flag presentation at the car show.
 - The Firefighter Union President could not be at this meeting tonight. They try to make an effort to attend the Board meetings, however, tonight they were doing training on the boat so they had to be response-ready with some staff on the river and some on land.
 - The Chief announced that effective May 11, 2023, the public health emergency for COVID 19 has ended.
 - The Chief announced that Squad 1 is in service. On the record he wanted to thank Chris Logan. It took a while from the delivery of the truck to get it in service. Mr. Logan did all the mounting and brackets. The Chief asked everyone to take a look at it to see the metal fabrication he did and the custom work for all the placement of the equipment. It took some time for him to do that, but it saved the District a lot of money by doing it themselves.
 - The new ambulance, 4A, is still in the bay. It passed OEMS inspection today. They have an appointment next week for registration.
 - The Chief discussed the 6-alarm fire that occurred in Meriden. They pulled resources from all over including Cromwell. Cromwell covered the City of Meriden.

A while ago the Chief discussed testing and pulling from the internal staff as candidates for career staff. The Chief along with the Assistant Chiefs will be doing an internal career test. There will be a written test first which will take place on June 28. They will also be doing a part-time test. They have some openings and are anticipating more openings as some part-timers apply for full-time ranks. That test will also take place on June 28. The CT Fire Academy is sending some of their staff down to administer the test so it will be a "hands off"

test from the Chief's office. This will avoid any conflict from Cromwell since they do have some of their staff taking the test.

The Chief has attended a lot of meetings lately. One topic was response on the river. He had a meeting with some of the other Chiefs from Towns on the river such as Glastonbury, Portland and Rocky Hill. They all discussed their response and reviewed procedures for water rescue. There was also a meeting with Middlesex County Chiefs and Northern Middlesex County Chiefs. The purpose is to get all the Chiefs together to make sure they are all on the same page. There are a couple of MOU's they are working on regarding response to different locations. He also had a meeting with the Task Force Chiefs. Every year they review policies and procedures for how they respond as a task force. They had a lot of questions on how Cromwell responds. He reaffirmed Cromwell's commitment to the Task Force.

The Chief reported that Police Chief Lamontagne has just announced her resignation. This will be effective just after the Traveler's Tournament. The Town Council has voted, and they will be promoting Capt. Fred Sifodaskalakis. The Chief has had some conversations with Capt. Sifodaskalakis, and he thinks that there will be more joint operations and more joint training efforts between the Fire and Police Departments.

The Chief also discussed the Traveler's Tournament. It is scheduled for the third week of June. There is a lot of pre-planning going on. They are planning for a large turnout this year, back to pre-COVID levels.

Commissioner Terry commented that the Chief and the Fire Department are turning into such good neighbors with the Cromwell community and other towns and organizations. She spoke for the group when she said she is proud of the Chief and the Fire Department, and she really appreciates them.

Chief Brade explained that the new 4A ambulance will be replacing the old 4A which will be taken out of service. There is not a disposal plan in place yet.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Chief's Report for April as presented.

1. Fire Marshal's Office. The Fire Marshal's Report for April had been previously submitted and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Holmes reported that he was on vacation and his staff took care of things while he was gone such as inspections and other things that needed to be addressed. There are about 18 open projects right now.

He spoke a little about the Travelers' tournament. The tents are bigger this year so the capacity in the tents is larger. They are doing some of the infrastructure work and most of the tents are going up. They will be using fireproof material which will increase the flammability rating by half an hour. The groundskeeper is using water on the course. They have hoses that they can plug in all around the course. They have some sprinklers that pump out 2,000 lbs. per square inch.

Commissioner Darius asked if he could have a separate graph showing fractile response time for mutual aid ambulances to Cromwell. This would be the ambulances that come into Town. Commissioner Darius is trying to get a handle on the level of service

provided within Cromwell's PSA. Mr. Holmes will try to generate information for incoming response times.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Marshal's Office report for April as presented.

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for April had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri was available to answer any questions. He added that the Water Division is working with the Fire Marshal regarding all the new projects coming into Town. He has been receiving information from the Fire Marshal before he receives it from the Town.

Mr. Palmieri and staff have been extremely busy. They are working on leak detection, meter replacements and flushing. Commissioner Darius complimented Mr. Palmieri for his creativity in finding interior mounting places for additional equipment on the new truck. They still made it safe on the inside and not having a lot on the outside. They have already used the small lift crane on the back of it to repair a couple of hydrants. President Rukowicz complimented Mr. Palmieri and his crew for the excellent service they do everyday. It is a small but efficient group, and the Board appreciates all their hard work.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Operations Report for April as presented.

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Manager was out this week. His report had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Commissioner Colligan asked about the status of the radio project. Mr. Neto explained it is an ongoing project. The District has agreed to allow the State to proceed with the licensing requirements. Mr. Zito has taken a less than active role at this point in the project. Commissioner Colligan is interested in dissolving the Communication subcommittee once the licensing has been completed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Communication Center Report for April as submitted.

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations. There was no meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 12, 2023, at 5:30 PM.
1. Communications Committee. There was no meeting.
 2. Apparatus Committee. There was no meeting.
- D. Pension. There was no meeting. The next meeting is July 5, 2023.
- E. Personnel. There was no meeting. The next meeting is June 13, 2023.
- F. Water Operations. There was no meeting. The next meeting is August 2, 2023.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was no report.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees.
1. Public Safety Tower Committee. There was no meeting. The next Quarterly meeting is Friday, June 2, 2023.
 2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. A meeting was held on April 5, 2023. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. The minutes had been tabled from last month.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Health & Safety/Building Committee meeting minutes of April 5, 2023, as submitted.
 3. Bylaws Committee. Meetings were held on April 24, 2023 and May 2, 2023. Minutes were not available. The minutes will be tabled until next month.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to table the minutes from the Bylaws Committee meetings of April 24 and May 2, 2023, until the next meeting.
 4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. There was no meeting.
- C. Communication from MDC Regarding North Road. The Executive Director previously discussed the letter under Communications and Written Appeals to the Board.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Terry reported that the Fire Department is supporting the Cromwell Children's Coalition (car show), and they will have a fire truck there. She was very pleased about that. President Rukowicz reminded everyone that the event is scheduled for Friday, May 26, 2023, from 4 PM to 8 PM. President Rukowicz presented Commissioner Terry with a \$100 donation to the Coalition.

Commissioner Darius asked if any cards or letters had been received for Firefighter Bicking. The request was made through the last newsletter. Four were received which also included a note from the Fire District.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. The Executive Director explained the purpose of this resolution to clear up some old accounts that date back to 2008. These are uncollectables from bankruptcies, or people who have passed away. This adjustment is considered a type of clean up. Mr. Lupkas explained also that everyone was told the dollar amount that Donna has collected. In going through the accounts, Donna has come across accounts that are interest only. The majority of them have not had any activity in over 15 years. The financial statements are kept for that long. Although these accounts are still collectable, Mr. Lupkas

would like to take them off the books. The majority of the first group, the highest one is \$400 and is the bulk of the net of that first group that is coming off. There are two other groups. There was a builder or a developer that had a project, closed out the project and then the bill hit. The other two mentioned, there is no meter, they were listed as a shut off. The total of all those is between \$1,200 and \$1,300.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the resolution to clear up inactive accounts.

- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to approve.
- D. Accept Resignation and Plan Special Election for the Open Seat Left by Commissioner Robert Donohue. President Rukowicz stated that Commissioner Donohue had resigned his position as Commissioner a few weeks ago. Commissioner Terry would like the Board to accept his resignation with regret or the fact that they have appreciated his service to the Fire District. President Rukowicz had done something similar 3 hours after he received former Commissioner Donohue's resignation letter. Everyone received a copy of the letter.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept Commissioner Donohue's letter of resignation effective April 28, 2023.

President Rukowicz noted that the Board now needs to set a date for a special election to fill the seat of Commissioner Donohue for the remainder of his term which is due to expire October of 2024. The Board has 60 days in which to schedule the special election. The process according to the Bylaws would require potential candidates to submit their letter of intent with a letter from a Cromwell resident nominating an individual along with a letter from another Cromwell resident seconding that nomination. Those letters need to be submitted to the District Office no later than 30 days prior to the special election date.

The President also mentioned there will be a Special Bylaws Committee on Wednesday, June 7, 2023, at 5:30 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse. Any issues or questions on the Bylaws will be discussed at that time. He also noted that back in December Commissioner Epstein and the President distributed copies of the Bylaws to everyone, and they were asked to review them. The Bylaws Committee met on Jan. 26, Mar. 1, Apr. 19 (workshop), Apr. 24 and May 2. There were 5 opportunities for Commissioners and Bylaw Committee members to provide input. There are still opportunities for those who have suggestions or feedback. By now everyone should have taken the opportunity to read them.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to set the date for the Special Election as Tuesday, June 27, 2023, from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM, at the Coles Road Firehouse.

- E. Discussion and Decision on Cromwell Scout Lodge Exemption Request. The Executive Director explained that the District received a letter from Steve Wygonowski who is the Executive Director for a Cromwell group of citizens that are non-profit and sponsor the Boy Scouts of America and Cub Scouts of Cromwell. For the record it was noted that Mr. Wygonowski is also on the Board of Finance in Cromwell. Copies of his letter were distributed to Board members for review.

Mr. Wygonowski explained that his letter was to request an exemption from the water bill for the scout lodge in Town. He gave a brief background on the lodge. It was built in 1999 to support the scouting program in town. The scouting program has continued to flourish all these years. This non-profit group also supports the Cubs in town who used to be supported by a local church that is no longer. It is approximately 7 families in Town that support these programs. They are hoping to expand. The Girl Scouts also use the lodge as well so they are hoping to expand on that. They have also given permission to the Knights of Columbus to use the lodge for a food drive as well. This is all about providing support for the community. It is entirely funded by individual donations and other fundraising they may do. They take managing the lodge very seriously. The non-profit group does most of the work themselves. They are low maintenance. They do as much energy conservation as possible. They watch every penny they spend on the lodge. They will continue to pay the water bills, but there is very little water used every quarter. This past month a reading was done, and it was determined that only 17 gallons of water were used in 2 months. The only thing the water is used for is flushing a toilet or washing hands. Commissioner McIntyre did not want to set a precedent for other non-profits to say they also need a water bill exemption.

It was explained that the minimum charge of \$45.54 per quarter covers the water meter hookup or connection plus 4,500 gallons of water. Consumption of up to 4,500 gallons of water is covered under the minimum charge of \$45.54.

Commissioner Terry was in full support of that exemption and made a motion to that effect. Commissioner McIntyre felt that some type of procedure or guideline should be in place. The only thing Mr. Wygonowski thought could be used as criteria would be a "hardship" case. The hardship would be that the water bill is 4% of the budget. Commissioner Colligan noted that all water usage needs to be accounted for and reported to the State of CT. Even the firehouses are metered including training exercises. He suggested tabling this issue until people have a chance to come up with some procedures or a policy for guidance on this.

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to table this issue until the next meeting.

- F. Roberts Rules of Order Document. A "cheat sheet" handout was distributed to all the Commissioners as an FYI.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Steve Wygonowski, Chelsea Dr., commented about the financial report. He saw some of the numbers on some of the accounts. He asked how much of the cash flow needs to be readily available. How much needs to be in the bank. And how much could be in something else that every organization for the last 10 years didn't have to work a muscle to make money on their money safely. Now it can be done safely. He suggested various ways the District could be making money on their money to possibly help fund an exemption in this case.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

There were no items for Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:18 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary

Roger Rukowicz, President (Acting Secretary)

DRAFT