

Cromwell Fire District

1 West Street
Cromwell, CT 06416
Telephone 860-635-4420

FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Fire and Water Divisions

Tuesday, June 20, 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, June 20, 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), Charles Epstein, Mertie Terry, Robert McIntyre, Donald Smith and Chip Darius attended. Also in attendance were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Communications Manager Justin Lonergan, Finance Manager Michael Lupkas, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri and Melissa Roming, President of the CFD Volunteer Organization. Commissioners David Colligan 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 Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. James Rude, 25 Highridge Rd., had public comments which had been emailed to the Executive Director. The Executive Director read Mr. Rude's public comments. A copy of the email is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 16, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the Board of Commissioners' meeting of May 16, 2023, as submitted.

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

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Special Board of Commissioners' meeting minutes of April 25, 2023, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE BUDGET VOTE MINUTES OF MAY 22, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Darius and approved 5 to 0 to accept the minutes of the Budget vote on May 22, 2023, as submitted. Commissioner Epstein abstained.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
JUNE 8, 2023

The minutes were not available for this meeting. *A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to table the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of June 8, 2023, until the next meeting.*

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS & WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

Commissioner Epstein read a letter from the President of the Cromwell Children's Coalition, Rodney Bitgood, thanking the Fire District for the \$100 donation and their participation in the Car Show with fire trucks and flags. A copy of the letter is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District office.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's report for May had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He added that the mandatory sexual harassment training has started but has not been completed. He continues to work on the interconnection project with Mr. Palmieri. They are scheduled to meet with the Town of Berlin this week to discuss interconnection possibilities. The final engineering design by Environmental Partners will be completed within a few months. The Town will be informed about the project once the design has been finalized. The State will be providing a low interest loan to the District to support this project. Once the parameters of the financial component have been established, the project will be presented to the Town for a vote. There will be more to come.

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

B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for May had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Regarding revenues such as taxes collected and interest, it is the same as last month. There was a late posting of a cash receipt from the prior month. Overall they will be running about 101½% of the budgeted amount for taxes, penalties and interest. There were 142 EMS calls that were billed last month. Receipts year to date are 4.3% over, year over year. Regarding water produced, after having several months of equivalent numbers from the prior year, last month was down about 7.8 million gallons. On Pg. 5, regarding the accounts that are under

collection process, there are seven less than the prior month. Mr. Lupkas apologized for the length of his report. He had included some additional background information that usually does not get submitted with the report. His report consists of pgs. 1 – 24. Any additional pages were submitted in error. He also apologized for Pg. 4. The scale on the lefthand side converted when the chart was made. The bottom number should be at 0 and the top number should be 300,000 with equal increments in between there. He will make the changes before it is posted to the website.

The fiscal year ends for the District on June 30. There have already been discussions with the auditors so they are engaged for this year. Last year the field work began in October. He is not sure what the timeline will be for this year. They will be anxious for the work to start as soon as possible. Mr. Lupkas addressed the public comments made last week regarding switching banks, the interest rate and the amount of savings made by switching banks.

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

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for May had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Chief Brade was in attendance later at this meeting due to coverage at the TPC for the golf tournament. President Rukowicz commented that he had a chance to go over the fire and EMS plans for the tournament with the Chief. Very well written. He was impressed. He thanked the career staff, part-time staff and volunteers for all they are doing for the tournament. It is very much appreciated.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Chief's report as submitted.

1. Fire Marshal's Office. The Fire Marshal's Report for May had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. President Rukowicz was impressed by all the work the Fire Marshal's Office did prior to the start of the tournament. There were a lot of pre-inspections that were done. Commissioner Darius stated that it looked like the fractile response time reports had not been broken down the way it was discussed. The Executive Director will follow up with the Fire Marshal.

- D. Water Operations. Mr. Palmieri distributed his report this evening for review. He was unable to provide it sooner because of the work they have been doing to repair a water service leak on Nooks Hill Road. A copy of his report is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Palmieri discussed the extent of the leak and the customers affected. President Rukowicz thanked Joe and his group for all the hard work they did.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations report for May as submitted.

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center Report for May had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lonergan reported on the reprogramming with the State system. He was involved in an email chain today with CTS. Progress is beginning. There should be some improvement within the next couple of weeks. The phone system is on hold waiting for routers. The camera system is on hold until Justin meets with the vendors. Mr. Lonergan lost

two part-time dispatchers to resignations. They are working to bring in a part-time dispatcher to help fill some of those roles.

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

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive Committee. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations. A meeting was scheduled for June 12, 2023. There was no quorum.
 - 1. Communications Committee. President Rukowicz asked the Executive Director if they could disband this Committee. Mr. Neto explained that it would be up to the Board as the policy makers. It was explained that the Committee was established three years ago when the District worked on upgrading communications. The Committee has done a great job shepherding that process. They are in the final phase of the project which is working with the State to reprogram the radios.

A motion was made by Commissioner Terry, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to disband the Communications Subcommittee under the Fire Operations Committee.

- 2. Apparatus Committee. President Rukowicz requested to also disband this Committee. Apparatus needs have been met for the next few years. Commissioner Epstein noted that another ambulance will need to be ordered in the near future. He also noted that the makeup of the Committee was very different than what they anticipate for the next Apparatus Committee. The Executive Director was in agreement that the Committee should be disbanded at this time. If an ambulance needs to be ordered it will take about a year a half to receive it once it is ordered. The Committee when active encompasses not only fire apparatus but also Water Division vehicles.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to disband the Apparatus Committee at this time. Membership will be revisited when there is a need to form another Apparatus Committee.

- D. Pension Committee. The next Pension Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 5, 2023.
- E. Personnel Committee. A meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, June 13, 2023, but that was canceled. A Special Personnel Committee meeting has been scheduled for tomorrow, Wednesday, June 21, 2023, at 5:30 PM.
- F. Water Operations Committee. The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 2, 2023, at 5:30 PM.

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. A meeting was held June 2, 2023. Minutes had been previously distributed for review. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Public Safety Tower Committee meeting minutes of June 2, 2023, as submitted.

2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. The next quarterly meeting of the Committee is scheduled for Thursday, July 6, 2023, at 5:30 PM.
3. Bylaws Committee. Meetings were held on April 24, 2023, and May 2, 2023. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. Copies are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Bylaws Committee meeting minutes of April 24, 2023, as submitted.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Bylaws Committee meeting minutes of May 2, 2023, as submitted.

Commissioner Epstein noted that the next meeting will be a Special Board of Commissioners' meeting to finalize the Bylaws on July 11, 2023. He encouraged all Commissioners to attend to have their input heard.

4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. There was no meeting. Commissioner Darius noted that the next newsletter will be going out with the July water bills. Anyone that has anything they would like to include in the newsletter, can reach out to Commissioner Darius.

Commissioner Epstein commented about his experience assisting the Water Dept. crew with the break that occurred the other day. They were dealing with a road that was one way in and one way out so they could not shut down the road. Commissioner Epstein was impressed with how well the crew worked, and what a good job they did. He asked Commissioner Darius if he could do an article on the TPC in the upcoming newsletter. The golf tournament is the largest, single sporting event in the State of CT. It requires a lot planning and coordination to implement with many volunteers working long hours to make it a success.

Commissioner Terry discussed reaching out into the community for Commissioners because there is an election coming up in October. She thinks the Board needs to do a better job of letting people know what the role of a Commissioner is and what the role of the Fire District is. She suggested that maybe the Executive Director would be able to

come up with some information to provide to the public. She believes there are enough younger adults in the community that may be interested if they knew more about the Fire District. The Board is a good group that cares about its people and the community.

The Executive Director read an email from Commissioner Sokolowski who could not attend this meeting. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District office. It was an update to the Board regarding the dedication of the Fire Marshal's Office to Todd Gagnon. All of Todd's family is available to be in the State on August 5, 2023. Commissioner Sokolowski is planning to schedule the ceremony for that day. He asked the Board if there were any conflicts for that day to please let him know. He will also be reaching out to Melissa Roming to have the honor guard present at the ceremony. He would like to meet with the Executive Director, President of the Board, the Fire Marshal and President of the Firefighters Union to put a plan together.

- B. Budgetary Adjustments. There were no adjustments to report.
- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. There were no contracts or contractors to report.
- D. Discussion and Decision on Assigning the Fourth Open Seat in the October Election. President Rukowicz explained that because there were no candidates that came forward to fill the seat vacated by Commissioner Donohue, that Commission seat will be added to the election in October. There will be 3 Commission seats whose 3 year terms are expiring. There will be a fourth seat which will be former Commissioner Donohue's seat whose term will expire in October 2024. That vacant seat to fill will be a one year term. The voting will be so that the top 3 vote getters will get a seat for a three-year term. The fourth highest voter getter will get the seat vacated by former Commissioner Donohue filling that seat for one year until that term expires. There was some discussion about elections and getting the word out to recruit people to run for office.
- A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved for the upcoming Board election in October 2023, because there are 4 vacancies on the Board, when votes are counted that evening, the 3 top vote getters will get the 3-year terms and the fourth highest vote getter will get the 1-year term.*
- E. Discussion and Decision on the Cromwell Scout Lodge Exemption Request. This issue had been tabled from last month. Mr. Wygonowski was present and had submitted a letter explaining his position for the Boy Scouts on the water billing exemption request. Copies of his correspondence were distributed to the Commissioners for review. He had been asked at the last meeting what other things they are doing with other organizations to help them lower costs. They have worked out a cheaper rate with Eversource and are now using LED lighting in the building. It has reduced their electric bill considerably. They have worked with the Town. The Town has cleared trees on the Scout's behalf. They also had a company come out and clean their roof. He has also worked to reduce their insurance rates. They are also working with the Post Office to have mail delivered instead of using a post office box. They try to run as tight a ship as they can in terms of expenses. The concern among the Commissioners is if the Scout's request is granted, it will set a precedent. Commissioner Terry disagreed. She felt that each situation needs to be looked at separately.

Commissioner Terry made a motion to support the Boy Scouts by giving them an exemption for their water bill because the Board will be helping children in Town.

There was some discussion about establishing a special rate for non-profits. Special rates for non-profits has not been discussed by the Board. There will be a water rate study coming up, so it might be worth considering a special rate component in that study. Mr. Palmieri noted that the Water Department has just received all new equipment. They spent almost \$600 worth of reading equipment in the Scout's building. Since the District has made donations to the Children's Coalition, he suggested making a donation to the Scouts to cover their water bill. Commissioner Terry noted that the Cromwell Children's Coalition does not serve organizations. They help families through the school system but not organizations. It is in their Bylaws. Mr. Palmieri's intention was for the Fire District to donate to the Boy Scouts to cover their water bill for the year. Mr. Neto clarified that through a grant the Fire District may be able to subsidize the water.

Commissioner McIntyre also had the same concerns as some of the other Commissioners regarding setting a precedent. He would like to see a policy established first. He would support a policy that applies to all groups.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and approved 5 to 0 to table this issue until the next meeting. Commissioner Terry abstained.

- F. Discussion and Decision on Volunteer Association Activity Fund. Melissa Roming was present to discuss the history of the volunteer organization including their finances. She has been a volunteer in Cromwell for almost 23 years. When the Department started to do its change over to part-time paid, career and volunteer components, the volunteer component was not as solid as before and the Bylaws were suspended. Melissa was approached to create an organization to take care of the life membership, some of the social opportunities that they used to do for the public in town, some of the fund raising efforts such as the flower sale and some of the education they were doing in Town to find a way to keep the history of the organization as it was. But also to build something a little different that they could maybe get some real benefit for the Town's people as well as the Department members.

In considering what to do, they were given a committee, and they put that group together. They had a couple of workshops and then COVID hit. They were unable to have workshops or meetings. Melissa continued to do research. She decided to approach the committee with the thought and opportunity to create instead a not-for-profit with the intent to establish monies in Twn to donate to the Fire Department or provide public education such as additional training to help keep the town, community and children safe. There used to be in school programs that are now primarily kept up by the Fire Marshal's Office. The volunteer association has a lot of curriculum on programs that were developed.

They continued to have workshops and meetings. They created the Cromwell Fire Department Members' Association, and they incorporated it. The plan then was to move monies that were in the Activity Fund which was originally the Volunteers' Activity Fund. That money was made by things like pancake breakfasts and car washes, small donations, etc. The Trust Fund also still existed for the Department.

Ms. Roming had meetings with the Executive Director to take over some of the fiscal management. They met with Citizen's Bank. They also had to pay some of the fees with the Secretary of State's office. The only money that came out of the Activity Fund from the balance left from the volunteer system, was to fund getting the not-for-profit off the ground. She submitted her first recorded report to the Secretary of State's office a few weeks ago. They have been established for approximately one year. Currently there are three members

of the organization. They began with five. They had a meeting back in April to recruit people. There were some interested folks. They have already signed off on policies regarding conduct.

They need to move the monies from the activity fund at this point. They are still establishing themselves and this is a part of that process. The Executive Director discussed the three volunteers' dedication to this organization. They are doing everything right in terms of rules and regulations for a volunteer organization. He supports any action they are recommending.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and approved 5 to 0 to transfer the current balance in full from the Citizen's Bank Account named the Cromwell Fire Department Activity Fund to the control of the Cromwell Fire Department Member's Association, and to close the Cromwell Fire Department Activity Fund account. Commissioner McIntyre abstained.

President Rukowicz thanked Melissa Roming, Commissioner McIntyre and Stephanie Webber for all their hard work and dedication to this organization. Ms. Roming shared her thoughts on the future of the organization.

- G. 2023/2024 Non-Union Employees' Raises. The non-union employees were identified as the Water Department, the District office staff, Russ Johnson and Chris Logan. This is an annual agenda item to determine the appropriate cost of living increase for non-union staff. Union staff have this item negotiated in their contract discussions. It has been referred to as a COLA or an annual increase. The maximum percentage increase was agreed at 3½% for budget purposes. Last year the employees were given a 2½% COLA.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to authorize a 3½% cost of living increase to all Cromwell Fire District non-union employees effective July 1, 2023.

- H. Discussion and Possible Decision on Deputy Fire Marshal and Fire Inspector Salary Increases. It was explained that Colin Whalen is the current part-time Deputy Fire Marshal and Brian Mello is the current part-time Fire Inspector. The Executive Director explained that the Board promoted Mr. Whalen to Deputy Fire Marshal approximately one year ago without any salary increase. Money has been set aside in this year's budget to provide the necessary salary increases for both positions. Mr. Neto proposed a 10% increase in Mr. Whalen's salary with a \$2.50 hourly increase, and \$1.00 an hour increase for the Fire Inspector. Considering the marketplace, and salaries for these positions, these individuals are still paid less than current market value.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to increase the Deputy Fire Marshal's hourly rate from \$25.00 an hour to \$27.50 per hour, and the Fire Inspector from \$25.00 an hour to \$26.00 an hour. As non-union employees, these individuals will also receive a 3½% COLA, effective July 1, 2023.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to award the Deputy Fire Marshal a recognition bonus of \$1,000 to recognize Mr. Whalen's dedication and job performance in his duties as Deputy Fire Marshal for the Cromwell Fire District.

- I. Decision and Approval of Solar Panel Tax Appeal Cases Including A Resolution. A memorandum from Attorney Kevin Deneen explaining the Solar Panel Tax Appeal Cases was distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The major point being paying back taxpayers that were incorrectly billed for solar. The District's share of that cost will be \$6,941.21. That was the amount decided on through the lawsuit.

A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the resolution to accept the settlement in the solar panel tax appeal case against the Town of Cromwell and the Cromwell Fire District at an amount of \$6,941.21.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Frank Magnotta, addressed the Board. He is a consulting civil engineer representing a property owner, Andre Bordinaro who owns a parcel of land on North Rd., just over the line in Rocky Hill. He is approaching the Commission for a water main extension. Originally it was for service to his property with a hydrant for fire protection. The requirements for a water main extension would not work because of the cost and requirements of the Commission. A proposal has been sent to Mr. Palmieri through emails. The issue driving this request is the Rocky Hill Fire Marshal. They have an ordinance which states no new house can be built that is no more than 500 ft. from a hydrant. The closest hydrant now is more than 500 ft away.

The Executive Director explained the background of this issue. The other property owner on that street has come before the Board in the past. It was recommended to accept the document Mr. Magnotta presented to the Board for consideration and advisement. Mr. Neto will work with the Water Department Manager to get this item on next month's agenda. The issues to be discussed are who owns the fire hydrant and who is responsible for maintaining it. It was agreed to have the Commission review the document Mr. Magnotta distributed. This issue will be placed on next month's Board meeting agenda.

Mr. Wygonowski from the Boy scouts suggested the Board consider forming a Capital Planning Committee to review assets over the long term.

EXECUTIVE SESSION


There were no items to discuss under Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:55 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary


Charles R. Epstein, Secretary