

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, October 17, 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, October 17, 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), Donald Smith, Robert McIntyre, Mertie Terry, Donald Goranson and Steve Wygonowski attended. Also attending was Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Communication Center Manager Justin Lonergan and Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri. Finance Manager Mike Lupkas dialed into the meeting. Commissioners Chip Darius, 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. The President took time to welcome the two new Commissioners to the Board, Steve Wygonowski and Donald Goranson. He encouraged them to feel free to ask if there is anything they need.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Wygonowski, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Agenda as submitted with the following corrections: under the first Public Comment, the Presentation by President Rukowicz will not take place. That item was deleted. Also under New Business there will be an Item E. Discussion Regarding a New Ambulance by Chief Brade, and Item F. New Phone System Update by Justin Lonergan.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
SEPTEMBER 19, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of September 19, 2023, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of September 18, 2023, as submitted. Commissioner Terry abstained.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF
OCTOBER 12, 2023

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of October 12, 2023, as submitted.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS AND WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

The first communication was from Commissioner Darius. The Darius family thanked all involved for their support in the recent passing of life member Frank Darius. Mr. Neto read the full communication which was signed by Nancy Darius. The communication is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

There was also a thank you card read for the donation in the memory of Frank Darius from Spirit Animal Sanctuary, Inc. That communication is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

There was a communication from St. Peter's Episcopal Church which was a thank you for the \$50 donation in the memory of Frank Darius. The communication is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

Lastly there was a communication from James Rude, 25 Highridge Rd., Cromwell. The Executive Director read the comments regarding the Executive Director position, Bylaw revisions and the 22/23 Audit. They are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's Report for September had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Neto wanted to highlight a couple of items. One was an update on the PFAS testing and information. Mr. Neto has been working with Mr. Palmieri and Environmental Partners gathering data. He explained the process used in gathering data. They will be meeting with the Department of Public Health and Environmental Partners to share the information they have received. They will then develop a plan moving forward. All the numbers came in way below the anticipated EPA standards of 4 parts per trillion. No action needs to be taken because the numbers are very low. The District plans on staying on top of this situation. Mr.

Palmieri pointed out that nothing is regulated yet, but will be in the future. At that point testing will be on a regular basis. Mr. Neto discussed public awareness of these issues.

Regarding other parts of the Executive Director's report, Commissioner Wygonowski asked about the tax funds owed the District by the Town. The Town still needs to reconcile their year end. The District will not be able to receive their funds until the Town has reconciled. The District did receive \$1 million after speaking with the Town Manager and Town Finance Director approximately 5 to 6 weeks ago. Another increment is expected soon.

Commissioner Goranson had questions about the hearing with FOI. Mr. Neto explained briefly what had transpired with those complaints. Neither investigations were used for disciplinary actions. The individuals resigned or retired. There were personnel issues in both cases. There is a news organization requesting copies of the reports in both cases. However, both Chief Brade and Executive Director Neto felt that the cases should not be made public because the individuals are no longer associated with the District. They felt it was in their best interest to protect the individuals' privacy.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Executive Director's Report for September as submitted.

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for September had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lupkas had zoomed in the meeting. He highlighted a few items in his report. He mentioned the \$1 million received by the Town which was just discussed in the Executive Director's report. He also noted the District received a State grant-in-aid of \$160,000. That was not included in this budget as a budgeted item because they were not aware of it. Mr. Lupkas researched it and discovered it does belong to the District, and the District will be receiving the same amount next year. The EMS calls for the month were 182. Receipts are 95% of last year's receipts on the EMS calls. Regarding Water, water produced year to date is about 60 million gallons less than last year. There has been a big change in weather between this year and last year. Regarding collections over \$1,000, three accounts were paid off. They are at 78% of the 120 day collection cycle. Regarding the STIFF account, the deposits there have been challenges getting access to the account and getting funds transferred over. They put a little over \$2 million in that account. Regarding the audit, the auditors have all the paperwork they need for 99% of the accounts. The money coming in from the Town will help those reconciliations.

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

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for September had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Chief Brade congratulated the new Commissioners being elected to the Board, and Commissioner Smith for becoming the new Vice President. The Chief highlighted some of their activities. They were at the Farmer's Market, they helped the high school soccer team out with a car wash, did a 911 tribute, they are involved with the home football games. They are out in the community. This month is Fire Prevention month. The Fire Department events will be highlighted in next month's report.

Regarding training, they finished some operations with Middletown and South Fire District. There was joint river training and marine operations. They continue with EMT recertifications. There was some extrication training. Live burn training will be starting this month. There will also be live fire training which is mandated by OSHA. Middlesex County Fire I School class will be held at Coles Rd. There are three new volunteers. They received a woman from New York. They are in the process of transferring her credentials.

The Chief reported they were just under 300 calls this month. The Department has been very busy. This week was particularly rough. There was a 4 car crash on Rte. 9. There was another crash on the other side of the highway. They called Rocky Hill for assistance. There was also a fatality in front of Lowe's on Rte. 372. There was another crash last night on Rte. 91 involving rolled over cars. There is also an Engine out of service for repair.

The Chief discussed the reinstating of the Highway Cost Recovery Program. The State used to reimburse fire departments for taking calls on State property such as the state highways. The Chief had Assistant Chief Driscoll look into the program and has registered Cromwell for participation in the program. It is a volunteer-based program. Volunteers must be on scene at calls in order for Cromwell to be eligible to participate. Last month was the first month that Cromwell was able to put in a submission. They applied for approximately \$2,500 of reimbursement for the last 3 weeks. They anticipate that to grow. It will be a new revenue stream for the Fire Department.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Chief's Report for September as submitted.

1. Fire Marshal's Office. The Fire Marshal was not present at the meeting. His report had been submitted. Chief Brade noted the issue Mr. Holmes is working on currently is the former Red Lion. There was a meeting in Town this evening to determine tax abatements. The District's position is to demolish the facility before winter sets in. There have been issues with homeless people moving in there in the winter. Texas Roadhouse is under construction in the Shop Rite Plaza. Auto Zone is moving into the old Friendly's building. The Chief has been working with the Fire Marshal on a Middle School project. They have also met with the staff from the Landon on some issues there. They are in the process of hiring two part-time Fire Inspectors.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Marshal's Report for September as discussed.

- D. Water Operations. Mr. Palmieri welcomed the new Commissioners, and he looks forward to working with them. A lot of his report was discussed under the Executive Director's Report and Fire Marshal's report. He wanted to discuss the West St., side street project. Water main installations should be completed by tomorrow. Water services will be hooked up next week after all testing is completed. The weather has held up the project. Donna in the Water Department has collected over \$700,000 since she was hired in 2021. She does a great job collecting delinquent accounts. Mr. Neto explained the collection process.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Goranson and unanimously approved to accept the Water Operations Report for September as submitted.

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center Report had been distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lonergan

congratulated the new Commissioners and the Officers for their appointments. He reported it has been a busy month. They have also worked on some major fatal calls and fire calls. He has been helping the Chief in-taking some of the volunteers that are coming on board. Also processing new Commissioners and part-time staff. He has worked with Mr. Alvarado on relicensing for some of the Microsoft accounts. He posted for two part-time dispatchers. They are replacements for people that left their positions. He will be interviewing 7 people for the two positions. This will help reduce the overtime they had recently trying to keep shifts staffed. The camera systems are on hold a little bit because he has multiple projects, and is trying to focus on one at a time. He worked with the alarm system vendor to replace some aging smoke heads and systems with codes.

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

REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations Committee. A meeting was held on October 5, 2023. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The Recording Secretary noted the misspelling of Commissioner Wygonowski's last name. A correction will be made to those minutes. The meeting was held to realign committee assignments after the election. This action is temporary because there are proposals to the Bylaws changing the committee structures on a more permanent basis. The proposals need to come before a Town vote for approval. The Town vote has not been scheduled yet. Currently the Bylaw changes are being reviewed by the District's attorneys.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the minutes of the District Operations Committee meeting on October 5, 2023, as submitted.

- B. Executive Committee. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations. A meeting was scheduled for October 11, 2023, and was canceled. The next meeting is Monday, November 13, 2023, at 5:30 PM.
- D. Volunteer Pension. There was no meeting.
- E. Personnel. A meeting was scheduled for October 10, 2023, and was canceled. The next meeting is Tuesday, November 14, 2023, at 5:30 PM.
- F. Water Operations. There was no meeting. The next meeting is Wednesday, November 1, 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. There was no meeting. The next meeting is Friday, December 1, 2023, at 10 AM.
2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. A meeting was scheduled for October 5, 2023, but was canceled. The next meeting is scheduled for January 2024.
3. Bylaws Committee. This committee was disbanded.
4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. This committee was disbanded.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners' Comments. There were no Commissioners' comments to report.
- B. Budgetary Adjustments, Water Enterprise Fund and General Fund. There were a couple of adjustments to report. Worksheets had been previously distributed for review. Mr. Lupkas explained the adjustments to the Water Enterprise Fund and General Fund. He noted there are no issues with anything being over budget. All accounts are within their appropriation. Copies of the worksheets are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. The worksheets listed accounts where money was either taken out of or transferred into in order to provide some balance from accounts that did not use all of their appropriation to accounts that may have needed some additional funds to balance out an overage in their appropriations. It was noted that this is all part of the auditing process as well. The auditors need this process to complete their work.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to authorize the transfer of funds totaling \$68,814 in the Water Enterprise Fund as follows: \$7,814 from (Acc't 05-90-904-5438) Maintenance of Services and \$61,000 from (Acc't 05-90-907-5320) Professional Fees to Payroll (Acc't 05-90-901-5105) \$22,501 and Power (Acc't 05-90-902-5620) \$29,668.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to authorize the transfer of funds totaling \$42,649 in the General Fund as follows: \$20,000 from (Acc't 01-10-104-5105) Administrative Payroll and \$22,649 from (Acc't 01-10-104-5320) Professional Fees to Operating Expenses (Acc't 01-10-101-5805) \$475, Payroll Computer Ops. (Acc't 01-10-103-5105) \$1,355, Payroll Dispatch (Acc't 01-12-122-5105) \$23,219, Utilities Court St. (Acc't 01-14-140-5621) \$16,287 and Debt Service Interest (Acc't 01-26-260-5910) \$1,313.

- C. Approval of Contracts/Contractors. This was referred to the next item on the agenda.
- D. Discuss/Choose a Vendor for Roof Replacement at the Coles Road Firehouse. President Rukowicz noted that two bids were received. One was from Turner & Sons that did the roof at the West St. firehouse. That bid was \$72,700. The other bid was from DiGiorgi. The amount was \$96,062. The copies of the bids are attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District office. The difference between the two being \$23,362. Last year's budget has \$80,000 earmarked for this item. Any additional problems the contractor runs into is not included in the bids, but the District has set aside extra funds in case something should come up. This would only apply to the lower bid. The District looked for 3 bids but did not

receive them. The District was completely satisfied with the work Turner & sons did at the West Street firehouse.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Terry and unanimously approved to have Turner & Sons to the roof at the Coles Road firehouse at a price of \$72,700.

- E. Discussion Regarding a New Ambulance – Chief Brade. Chief Brade discussed the need for a new ambulance to replace one of the 3 that the Department currently has. This recommendation to replace the ambulance is coming from the District's mechanic, Chris Logan. The ambulance to be replaced is a 2010 with 184,000 miles on it. The Chief is intending to get a conversation started regarding replacement. There is currently \$350,000 in an apparatus replacement fund. The ambulance that was purchased last year was approximately \$250,000 - \$275,000 with additional equipment added. Currently pricing for the same thing is closer to \$350,000. There is a price increase coming again in January. He distributed copies of a comparable spec to the one purchased last year to give an idea of pricing and what is needed. The wait time once an ambulance is ordered is now 1½ to 2 yrs. out. The Chief is looking for permission from the Commission to start looking for a new ambulance to purchase. The Chief also explained that although a van style ambulance is cheaper, it is not suitable for Cromwell because they carry fire equipment on their ambulances, and staff are cross-trained to respond to fire and EMS calls. There was a lengthy discussion about the options available.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to table this issue and authorize the Fire Chief to get three bids for an ambulance replacement based on previous specs used for the last ambulance to be decided upon at the next Board meeting or sooner.

- F. New Phone System Update – Justin Lonergan. Mr. Lonergan explained that the new phone system has already been approved and funded. There have been cost increases and shipping delays over the last year or so in this process as well. The project originally was being handled by Angel Alvarado who became part-time. By the time Mr. Lonergan took over, there had been some changes in pricing in terms of cost increases. The cost has gone up, and they were warned by the vendor of the cost increases. There were also additional costs because of offices that moved over the last year or so and other changes that were done in house. He distributed copies of a quote that includes adding additional phones to the project as well as an "expressway core." He explained the quote. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He discussed having the funding for the additional work. He explained that there are funds that need to be transferred in order to afford this change order. The increase or price of the additional work is \$8,809.70.

A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to authorize \$8,809.70 be allocated from a previous unspent capital item to finish the Phone System update by the Communication Manager.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments to report.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

There were no Executive Session items.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 PM.

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary

Roger Rukowicz, Acting Secretary

