

# 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, November 15, 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, November 15, 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 Roger Rukowicz (President), David Colligan, Charles Epstein, Robert McIntyre, Donald Smith, John Sokolowski, Robert Donohue and Chip Darius attended. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Financial Manager Mike Lupkas, Fire Chief Jason Brade, Communications Manager Justin Lonergan, Fire Marshal Harold Holmes and Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri. Commissioner Mertie Terry was 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 Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.

The President called for a moment of silence for the 27-year-old New Haven firefighter that lost his life last week. He was hit by a car on Rte. 91. The funeral services were held today.

### **PRESENTATION OF PLAQUES TO FORMER COMMISSIONERS**

President Rukowicz presented a plaque to former Commissioner Jason Hinnars for his dedication and service to the Cromwell Fire District as a member of the Board of Commissioners serving as Secretary and Vice President. Mr. Hinnars thanked the Board for the plaque and the opportunity to serve with them. He enjoyed the time spent serving on the Board. He hopes the new Commissioners will continue the good work started by this Board.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments to report.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF  
OCTOBER 18, 2022

A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Sokolowski and unanimously approved to accept the Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of October 18, 2022, as submitted.

APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING MINUTES OF  
OCTOBER 27, 2022

A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Special Board of Commissioners' Meeting minutes of October 27, 2022, as submitted.

READING OF COMMUNICATIONS AND WRITTEN APPEALS TO THE BOARD

There were no communications or written appeals to report.

REPORTS OF THE STAFF

- A. Executive Director. The Executive Director's Report for October had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He discussed bullet item #1 on his report which addresses cyber security issues and maintaining a secure cyber environment in the District. This has become an ongoing issue. Mr. Neto is going to be utilizing \$5,252.20 of the training budget to be identified between the Water and Fire Divisions to engage the District in a program called "Know Before." It is an educational platform that is based on educating those that access the network. The biggest vulnerability is users posting information and opening attachments. This is an online program that he would like to make a job requirement and policy. Anyone in the District that accesses the District's network will be required to go through this training program. The District will do all the background work for registering for the training. It will be an online training program that is user friendly which will provide testing components during the program and is designed to be simple.

*A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to adopt this program to become a policy that every Commissioner, employee and volunteer will complete.*

- B. Financial Report. The Financial Report for October had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lupkas reported that regarding collection of taxes, the District is at 58% collected totaling \$2.7 million which includes the State's grant-in-aid. EMS receipts are a 27% year over year comparison. Last month the number was higher because October last year was a high month. All transfers between Water and the District have been done with the Administrative Account. It will become a standard monthly entry. The audit is still ongoing. All records were turned over to the auditors after last month's meeting. The auditors will be here the week following Thanksgiving.

Mr. Lupkas pointed out on Page 5 that a new report has been started. There has been some discussion about an Aging report for the water bills. It is similar to other reports where it shows 30, 60, 90 and 120 days past due. He pulled the report for the month's end for the last

five months. The report does not provide the same information that it will as it gets older. As it gets older there will be trends of collections going in each month. Mr. Lupkas would welcome any comments or feedback on how to improve the report or show things differently.

Mr. Neto explained the delinquent payment process for water billing, and Mr. Lupkas explained the accounting process for water billing. There was discussion about the West St. apron. Funds that were budgeted for that repair have been diminishing based on other priorities. Mr. Palmieri will be getting his crew to "hot patch" the spot until next year when more funding can be made available.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the Financial Report for October as presented.***

- C. Fire Department Chief. The Chief's Report for October had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. President Rukowicz complimented the Fire Department on a job well done regarding the structure fire on Wexford Lane. All the neighbors in the area were impressed by the Fire Department's response to the fire with mutual aid. Chief Brade had submitted his report and was available to answer any questions.

The Fire Department continues to be present at the football games. They also have been doing community service events, touch a truck events, Veteran's Day ceremony. Training has started up again. The live burn that was scheduled had to be canceled. It was a decision by the Chief and training staff due to high winds in the area. In the 2 weeks Chief Brade has been in charge there has been a car fire, a chimney fire and a structure fire. He wonders what will happen next week.

The Chief was requested to speak about the structure fire at Wexford Lane. He reported that the crew did very well. He spoke about the operations at the fire. Staff was there within 5 minutes. The fire was off of Field Rd. The terrain on the front lawn was dry and very pitched. The Ladder was backed up as far as they could go without the bumper hitting the driveway. The ladder was approximately 5 feet short of the roof line. They were only able to use the ladder for lighting, not water.

There was a delay in getting to the fire hydrant because it was covered with leaves. They were able to find the hydrant by the identifying flag that was attached to it that is usually used for hydrants in snow piles. The call had a good response with call backs from the part-time and career, volunteers and mutual aid.

As Co-Chair of the Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee, Commissioner Epstein suggested to his Co-Chair, Commissioner Darius, to organize a public awareness campaign on not piling leaves or snow near the fire hydrants. Commissioner Darius commented that there have been some issues with the Cromwell Chronicle because they have a new editor. Commissioner Darius will work on getting the message out on social media.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner McIntyre and unanimously approved to accept the Chief's Report for October as submitted.***

1. Fire Marshal's Office. The FMO report for October had been previously submitted and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. He was available to answer any questions. Fire Marshal Holmes spoke about the specifics of the

fire on Wexford Lane. Photos had been taken by the neighbor prior to the Fire Department reaching the scene. Another neighbor that works for Channel 3 had a drone up over the fire.

The house was owned by Bob Fuller. Mr. Fuller's girlfriend went to start up the gas grill to make dinner. The grill ignition button was not working properly. The person closed the lid on the grill and went into the house to find a match. When she came out, opened the lid and lit the match, it created a fireball. The leaves underneath the grill caught fire because the wind picked up and spread the fireball. Those leaves dropped below the deck and spread the fire to the leaves under the deck which caused the deck to catch fire. There was a delay in calling 911 by the residents. The house was built in 1986 and had cedar shingles that were very dry causing the fire to travel. It entered the soffits and traveled to the attic. The windows were not damaged. There was a lot of heat trapped in the attic.

Mr. Holmes noted that Fire Inspector Colin Whalen was there. He is still available to the District on nights and weekends. There was no flame damage inside the home except for part of one chair and an ottoman. The rest of the home was smoke and heat damage. The Fire Marshal commented that a great job was done by all. The Red Cross was called out to work with the family. The insurance company is working to find temporary housing for the owner.

Commissioner Sokolowski asked if the Marshal's Office was looking for Inspectors. Mr. Holmes reported they are going to start looking again after the first of the year. There are some individuals in the industry that are retiring. Mr. Holmes will be trying to recruit some of those individuals that already have the experience.

Salary is a key factor in trying to recruit. They had a couple of applicants with no experience. Colin Whalen will be coming back two or three days a week. The New Haven Fire Marshal's office is short-staffed. Mr. Whalen is one of two firefighters in New Haven that has their Fire Marshal certification. New Haven is replacing people in the office. They will be taking the next class in February.

Commissioner Sokolowski also asked about the Lord Cromwell. Mr. Holmes reported that the project did get approved. They will be doing disruptive testing on the parking garage. This will determine if it can withstand a 74-ton truck. That should take place late winter, early spring. There will be a Town meeting regarding tax abatement next month. After that happens the plans will start for the testing.

Mr. Holmes just signed a C.O. for the Burlington Store. They will have a soft opening on Thursday, Nov. 17. The Grand Opening will be Friday, Nov. 18. There are plans coming in for Simonize Car Wax. They are building a 70,000 sq. ft. manufacturing facility at the end of Commerce Dr.

***A motion was made by Commissioner McIntyre, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Marshal's Report for October as submitted.***

- D. Water Operations. The Operations Report for October 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. The President complimented Mr. Palmieri and his

crew for handling the water main break at the middle school which happened a couple of weeks ago. Mr. Palmieri received the call at 12:30 AM. Repairs were made and the water was turned back on around 7:00 AM. However, school had already been canceled. The Superintendent was very pleased with the work the Water Department did. The Water Department had the Burlington store offset the water main around the loading dock that was installed for Burlington. That was completed last night. Mr. Palmieri reported that his office staff are in training today and tomorrow for Munis training. Munis is the Water Departments's billing and accounting system.

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

- E. Communication Center Report. The Communication Center report had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. Mr. Lonergan did not have many changes from last month. They continue to push forward on a couple of projects they are working on. Three weeks ago a very productive meeting was held with the State, the Executive Director, Chief Brade and Mr. Lonergan. Mr. Lonergan had reached out last week for a status report from the State. He has not heard back, but the meeting was very productive. The State is in the process of working on Cromwell's licensing request. He was available to answer any questions. Commissioner Darius asked about putting some of the statistical information in his report in the form of charts or graphs or something with pictures. Mr. Lonergan discussed some other ways to produce his report.

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

#### REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- A. District Operations. There was no meeting.
- B. Executive. There was no meeting.
- C. Fire Operations. A meeting was held October 17, 2022. Minutes had been previously distributed and reviewed. A copy is attached to the minutes on file in the Fire District Office. This was the first meeting that Commissioner McIntyre ran as the new Chairman of the Committee. He explained to the Committee members how he would like to run the meetings going forward. The report was self-explanatory.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Sokolowski, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of October 17, 2022, as submitted.***

1. Communications Committee. Commissioner Colligan reported that the District is at a stand still with the State of CT with licensing. There is no report.
2. Apparatus Committee. Commissioner Colligan reported that a decision needs to be made regarding the inspection. They were not able to schedule a committee meeting on this. Chief Brade reported that the rescue/pumper is coming along. They are looking at the total completion being done by the first week of December in Wisconsin. After the last apparatus was completed, the Commissioners really did not want to do the videos and

pictures again, but rather send someone out to Wisconsin to do the final inspection. This is an option that was not budgeted for when the apparatus was purchased. Fiscally it would be easier to do the picture presentation, and that is the plan unless the Commissioners would like to do otherwise. A lot of the equipment is already here. If the Commissioners decide they would like to do the inspection in person, the Fire Department needs to know ASAP in order to make the travel arrangements. They will have the opportunity for a final inspection in Rocky Hill once the apparatus arrives. That will be mid to the end of December.

Because of the time crunch, the Executive Director checked with the Chief and the President, and in lieu of a decision by the Board, it was decided to go with the same process as the previous apparatus because there are no dollars for travel.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Sokolowski, seconded by Commissioner Darius and unanimously approved to have the virtual or remote inspection of the rescue/pumper done in lieu of traveling to Wisconsin. Once the apparatus arrives in Rocky Hill, anything sited in the inspection can be corrected here.***

Commissioner Darius asked for some clarity on whether or not to put the big number on the front of the apparatus. Chief Brade wanted to ask the crews what their opinion was before giving Commissioner Darius an answer. Commissioner Darius was asking because it is not consistent across the fleet. It is something that has been done once the piece is received in house. It has been done in the past by the mechanic.

Chief Brade noted that they are expected to receive the new ambulance in March. He is also looking into a stretcher. As far as the Chief knows, the new ambulance was not quoted with a powerload or a stretcher. Commissioner Darius questioned how the ambulances are numbered. Mr. Lonergan tried to explain how the ambulances are assigned.

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

- D. Pension. Commissioner Colligan reported there needs to be a meeting to discuss Roger Ambler's pension situation. They have done their research and gathered the information they need. The meeting will be able to determine what Mr. Ambler will be entitled to after gathering all the facts.
- E. Personnel. There were two Special Personnel Committee meetings on Oct. 18, 2022, and Oct. 27, 2022. The regular Personnel Committee meeting was held on Nov. 8, 2022. 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 Sokolowski and unanimously approved to accept the Special Personnel Committee meeting minutes of October 18, 2022, as submitted.***

***A motion was made by Commissioner Sokolowski, seconded by Commissioner Smith and approved 6 to 0 to accept the Special Personnel Committee meeting minutes of October 27, 2022. Commissioners Colligan and Darius abstained.***

*A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Smith and approved 7 to 0 to accept the Personnel Committee meeting minutes of Nov. 8, 2022, as submitted. Commissioner Colligan abstained.*

- F. Water Operations. There was no meeting. The quarterly Nov. 2, 2022, meeting had been canceled.

#### BOARD APPOINTMENTS

There were no appointments to report.

#### CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

- A. Report of the Town Council Liaison. There was no report. The Executive Director will follow up on future meetings and whether or not there will be a liaison. However, he did mention that the Town would also like representation at their Council meetings. Mr. Neto will send an email out in the morning.
- B. Reports of the Special Committees
1. Public Safety Tower Committee. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, Dec. 2, 2022.
  2. Health & Safety/Building Committee. There was no meeting. There are no more meetings scheduled for the rest of this year.
  3. Bylaws Committee. There have been no meetings.
  4. Public Relations/Community Outreach Committee. Commissioner Darius reported that for the past two months they have submitted a full set of articles and photos to the Cromwell Chronicle with promises that that they would be published, and they got nothing published. He has had some intimate discussions with the vendor about it who explained it as “growing pains” in their new position. Unfortunately there has been very little coverage of the District. The Warning Notice about the Commission election did not make it into the Chronicle, but it was published in the Rare Reminder. There was an outstanding article in the Middletown Press that did not come from the Committee about the new Fire Chief.

The article in the Middletown Press went to the National/International Association of Fire Chiefs’ Dispatch. The article discussed the Chief’s platform to be truthful and transparent.

#### NEW BUSINESS

- A. Commissioners’ Comments. Commissioner Colligan apologized for being unable to attend a few meetings due to some family issues. He was also not able to make the structure fire the other night, but was able to listen to it. He thought that the Fire Department did an outstanding job, and no one got hurt. The President reminded everyone that the swearing in of the Fire Chief will take place this Saturday, Nov. 19, at the Coles Road firehouse.
- 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 Vote on MOA with Local 4662 Re: Additional Duties for 2 Lieutenants. A draft copy of the MOA was distributed to all the Commissioners in attendance for review. Mr. Neto gave a brief overview. There will be two Lieutenants that will be assisting with Assistant Chief duties during the interim until a decision is made about Assistant Chiefs. The Chief added that this opportunity was offered to 4 Lieutenants, and two Lieutenants will be participating. The President sat in on the Personnel Committee meetings where these things were discussed. He is in full support of this MOA. Mr. Neto added that the agreement will be in affect for up to 120 days, until March 14, 2023. If the process is not working, the MOU can be stopped. Every 45 days the process will be evaluated to see what is working and what is not.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Colligan, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the MOA with Local 4662 Re: Additional Duties for 2 Lieutenants.***

- E. Discussion and Approval of 2023 Holiday Schedule. Right now the District and the Town have the same amount of paid holidays. The Town has added another holiday to their holiday schedule which is Juneteenth. The question to the Board is whether or not they would want to add another paid holiday to their schedule making their total paid holidays thirteen. \$5,439 is the incremental expense to add one more paid holiday to the District's paid holiday list. The Executive Director noted that the Town has 13 paid holidays, whereas the District only has 12. They do not have the same amount as the District as stated earlier.

The Town has 4 holidays that are called moveable or floating. It is up to the Town Manager how those days are used. The Town decided to substitute the Lincoln's birthday holiday for Juneteenth.

If the District decides to add Juneteenth as a holiday, they would be adding a 13<sup>th</sup> holiday to their paid holiday list. A possible option to switch for the District might be the Friday after Thanksgiving which is currently a paid holiday along with Thanksgiving. If the District would like to remain at 12 holidays, they can swap the Friday after Thanksgiving for Juneteenth.

Juneteenth is a Federal holiday that was passed to commemorate the effective end of slavery in the United States. Commissioner McIntyre had no objection to the holiday, but thought that a swap should be done rather than incur additional expenses for payroll. Commissioner Sokolowski suggested reaching out to the local unions to see if this will impact their collective bargaining agreements. This would be considered a change in working conditions.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Darius, seconded by Commissioner Smith and unanimously approved to table consideration of this item until December's Commissioners' meeting, pending the outcome of the West Street roof referendum and also pending follow up with the firefighters' union.***

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Firefighter Lt. Bill McKnight thanked the Chief, the Executive Director and the Board for approving and trusting himself and Lt. Hallden with the new duties they are about to begin. He assured the group there will be no issues. He noted that if anyone had any questions of them, to reach out to them. Regarding the West St. roof, he asked about insurance coverage to file a claim

for some of the repair work. The District is not able to do that because the contractor for the West St. roof installed the roof incorrectly. That is why the Insurance company will not honor a claim.

Fire Marshal Holmes asked people to stop by the office to see the new plaque that was hung right outside the Fire Marshal's Office. The plaque indicates that the FMO has been renamed in honor of Todd Gagnon.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

There were no items for Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

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

ATTEST:

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Secretary

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Charles R. Epstein, Secretary