

*Watch Hill Fire District
Watch Hill, R. I. 02891*

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, February 18, 2011

4:00 p.m.

Fire Station

222 Watch Hill Road

Watch Hill, RI

A meeting of the District Council of the Watch Hill Fire District was held at the Watch Hill Fire Station at 4:00 p.m. Friday, February 18, 2011.

The following members were present:

Edwin L. Russell, Moderator
Charles S. Whitman III, Deputy Moderator
William H. White, Treasurer
James T. Beale, Jr., Chairman Finance Committee
Grant G. Simmons III, Chairman Park Commission
Jason Simmons, Fire Chief

Voters Present:

Ann Brockmann
Peter B. Griffin
Walter Lentz
Robert Peacock
John M. Regan III
Henry Toolan

Also present:

Chaplin B. Barnes

By Phone:

Penelope Kelly, District Council Member at Large
Andrew J. Parsons, District Council Member at Large

A quorum being present, the Moderator, Edwin L. Russell, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Mr. Russell asked for approval of the minutes of the December 17, 2010 District Council meeting. A motion was made to approve the minutes as distributed. It was seconded and approved.

Financial Update – Mr. White and Mr. Beale

On the income side, Mr. Beale reported that outstanding property taxes as of January 31, 2011 equaled \$24,776. He noted that since then about \$8,700 in payments has been made, leaving a balance as of February 13th of about \$16,000. An additional payment of \$25,000 is due from HOB Yacht this month, which would bring their total payments to the full amount budgeted. On the expense side, legal fees are well under budget. Moderator expenses are over budget but that may be due to misapplication. Mr. Beale will check with Mr. Jenssen.

Mr. Beale noted that of the \$25,000 reserve, \$7,500 has been spent for the new position of training officer. Mr. Simmons may have more unexpected Park Commission expenses that will have to come from these funds as well. Mr. Simmons noted that for the first time, the Park Commission kept their personnel employed through September, so the payroll was higher than budgeted.

Mr. White reported that last year the Fire District was audited for its workers compensation insurance. The result was a change in classification of some employees, resulting in an increase in the insurance premium from \$2,800 to \$5,300. Subsequently, the insurer, Harleysville, sent the Fire District a cancellation notice effective March, 2011. Beacon Mutual will assume the coverage as of March at a lower premium of \$3,000.

Mr. White was asked if there was any right of appeal on the reclassification/increased cost; he replied no.

Mr. White noted that about a year ago the Fire District stopped paying into the unemployment insurance fund. Then this summer a parking lot attendant filed for unemployment at the end of the season. Mr. Jenssen provided information that indicated the employee in question had not worked enough hours to be covered. Going forward, as long as an employee earns less than \$2,960 per quarter, there is no unemployment liability.

Mr. White reported that the Fire District had received \$20,000 from the Roberts Foundation for programs on Napatree.

Fire Department – Mr. Jason Simmons

Mr. Jason Simmons reported that a committee was formed within the Fire Department to review the existing by-laws. They brought proposed changes to the last monthly meeting and these should be approved at the March meeting. The changes are mostly administrative. The last time the by-laws were updated was in 2001.

Mr. Jason Simmons then read a proposal to relocate the Westerly Ambulance Corps boat from Avondale to Watch Hill Harbor. (A copy of that proposal is attached and a part of these minutes.) Mr. Simmons explained that according to protocol, two boats must always respond to a call. The Fire District has a Boston Whaler, which can get close to shore but is somewhat slow and a larger jet boat, which is faster. The Westerly Ambulance boat is designed for the open ocean. Having all three available enables the Fire District to respond to any kind of emergency. In the case of a fire, a portable pump needs to be available. The Westerly Ambulance boat has a flat platform that can support such a pump.

Mr. Grant Simmons acknowledged that it would be great to have the capability to respond to any emergency but noted that the docks are run as an important revenue stream and that right now all the slips are full. He did note that one dock is paid for for the season but only used for one month. Normally that dock is rented again. If the Fire District were to give that space to the

Westerly Ambulance Corps boat, they would lose that revenue, so there would be a cost associated with having the Ambulance Corps boat moved to Watch Hill Harbor.

Mr. Russell asked if the Fire District should even consider the proposal. Mr. Jason Simmons responded that, as Fire Chief, he felt such a move would greatly maximize the Fire District's potential service to the community. Mr. Russell asked Mr. Grant Simmons, Mr. Beale, Mr. Jason Simmons and the commander of the Westerly Ambulance Corps to work together to explore options and to report back at the next District Council meeting.

Mr. Jason Simmons said he had had an initial meeting with the Dunns' Corner and Misquamicut Fire Departments to consider operational cooperation. Further meetings will take place.

Mr. Jason Simmons said the Fire Department had obtained three computerized dispatch systems. Two will go on the trucks and one will remain at the firehouse. These computers provide real time information on hydrants, fire alarm systems within buildings and much more helpful information when on the scene of a fire.

Mr. Jason Simmons reported that the Holdredge Garage has received a variance for this season only to run their parking lot and open the bathrooms as required. In response to a question, Mr. Jason Simmons stated that, by ordinance, port-o-potties could not be used instead of opening the bathrooms. No merchants will be allowed to operate out of the building.

Mr. Russell noted that the Holdredge group was looking at various options for the building and once they have chosen one, they have to go to the Providence Fire Department for approval.

Mr. Russell reported that Mr. Jason Simmons, Mr. Peacock and Mr. Harold have been working on fire department recruitment issues. Mr. Jason Simmons said not only was it hard to get new volunteers but retention was just as difficult an issue. He noted that the job is very different now, requiring more certifications. Also, he noted that volunteers join the department to fight fires and there are not many in Watch Hill. Finally, Mr. Jason Simmons said the problems facing the department are not unique to Watch Hill.

Mr. Jason Simmons said the fire department had been paying insurance on the old ladder truck after it had been donated so the department will be getting a reimbursement of about \$2,000.

Finally, Mr. Jason Simmons said the fire department had obtained an actual artifact from the World Trade Center and in honor of the tenth anniversary of 9/11, they will be building some sort of memorial.

Fort Road and the Sea Wall – Mr. Grant Simmons

Mr. Grant Simmons stated that he had looked at various options to repair the large open voids that are currently under the road. The most attractive solution would be cut granite blocks, but this would cost about \$1,000 per running foot and with 250 feet involved, the total cost would approach \$400,000. Cherenzia gave an estimate of \$250,000 for a repair with poured concrete.

East Coast proposed a repair using precast blocks for a cost of \$65,000. Mr. Grant Simmons suggested that he continue to explore the various options, checking on all the fine print so he can get a clearer sense of the actual cost. A CRMC application has been completed but not submitted.

Mr. Beale asked if the work could wait until after June 1, so it falls in the next budget year. Mr. Grant Simmons replied that East Coast might be willing to do the work first and wait until after June 1 for payment.

Mr. White said that the Fire District could find a way to fund the project but the District Council can not authorize the expenditure; it has to be voted on at an annual meeting, either in July or earlier if the annual meeting is reconvened.

Ft. Mansfield – Mr. Grant Simmons

Mr. Grant Simmons reported that the Lattner Foundation had given the Conservancy \$50,000 for use by the Park Commission to explore the options for securing the fort. Mr. Simmons is proposing to install a railing system on the top deck to prevent visitors from falling off. He has obtained three estimates. The most economical is a 5x5 wooden post in a steel base with three strands of wire. This would go around the perimeter and would cost about \$10,000. Similar railings around the second deck would cost \$8,000. It would cost about \$5,000 for related work. Mr. Simmons will present this proposal to the Lattner Foundation. Ultimately, it is hoped to refurbish the site and provide information on slant boards. In response to a question, Mr. Simmons said that material for the project would be brought out to the site by ATV and hence the work needs to be completed before the piping plovers arrive.

Larkin Road – Mr. Russell

Mr. Russell reported that the Westerly Town Council had approved an adjustment to parking rules on Larkin Road. Now a town beach sticker is also acceptable as a parking sticker for Larkin Road. However, if a resident does not want a beach sticker, they can still get just the free Larkin Road sticker. Watch Hill residents are eligible for either of these stickers.

Website – Mr. Parsons

Mr. Parsons reported that at the December meeting he had advised that the website was going to be moved to Three Bean Studios. The changeover was more complex than anticipated and has resulted in the need to totally reconstruct the website, which is being done at no cost to the Fire District. The new site will be up by March 7, 2011

Watch Hill's Financial Impact on the Town of Westerly – Mr. Henry Toolan

Mr. Toolan reported on the data he had collected and those present discussed the findings and decided to continue the research.

General Discussion

Mr. Whitman reported that he went to the Westerly Town meeting at which the sign ordinance was discussed. He brought a sample of a two foot sign and a six foot sign. Despite his arguments

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in favor of the smaller sign, the Town Council passed the ordinance allowing the larger signs. He noted that Lila Delman has already enlarged their signs. It is hoped that the other realtors in Watch Hill will continue to voluntarily avoid the use of any signs.

There being no further business, upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley
Office Manager