

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

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, April 27, 2012

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, April 27, 2012.

The following members were present:

Charles S. Whitman III, Moderator
John M. Regan 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:

Robert Peacock
Edwin L. Russell
Richard H. Sayre

Also present were:

Chaplin B. Barnes
Judy Kelley, Office Manager
Lyn Traver, Administrative Assistant

By phone: Penelope B. Kelly, Member at Large
Andrew Parsons, Member at Large
Henry Toolan, Finance Committee

Proper notice having been given and a quorum being present, the Moderator, Charles S. Whitman III, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the informational minutes of the District Council meeting of December 16, 2011, which were previously circulated. The motion was seconded and approved.

Finance Committee – James T. Beale, Jr.

Mr. Beale reported that out of a budget of \$445,000, \$413,000 of taxes had been collected as of the end of March. An additional \$16,000 was collected in April. He noted that about \$21,000 of taxes were past due, of which about \$6,000 was comprised of modest amounts from a variety of people. Of the remaining \$15,000 in past due taxes, \$10,680 was for the Holmgren property (2 years) and \$4,186 was owed by Lizanne Cunningham, who habitually pays late.

Relative to the Holmgren issue, Mr. Beale reported that the Fire District attorney, Mr. Knisley, has spoken with the Holmgren's attorney, Mr. Payne, who felt that a mortgagee has been paying the Town tax bill and might not be aware of the tax obligations to the Fire District. A formal letter was sent the Holmgren's on April 2, 2012 advising that if payment was not received by 5/31, appropriate legal proceedings would be

taken, most likely a tax lien. Mr. Whitman said he had spoken with attorney Matthew Thomsen, who advised that the Holmgrens could not voluntarily pay their back taxes as it would violate their bankruptcy proceeding. Mr. Whitman will coordinate with Mr. Knisley and Mr. Thomsen to proceed with a tax lien as soon as possible. It was noted that anyone owed money could instigate a tax sale but would also have to bear the associated costs. Since the Fire District cannot piggy back on a Westerly town tax sale, filing a tax lien is the next best thing.

Mr. Beale also noted that the fees for the consultant to the Future Projects Committee were currently being paid from the contingency account. However, if there are funds left in the legal budget at the end of the fiscal year, these consulting expenses will be moved to that line.

Report of the Treasurer – William White

Mr. White had little to add to Mr. Beale's report but did advise that the Fire District had received a check for \$107,961 from HOB Yacht, which is above the \$100,000 budgeted.

Report of the Park Commission – Grant G. Simmons III

Mr. Simmons reported that everything was in good shape for the start of the summer season. URI has begun the water quality testing, there are already birds nesting on Napatree, the Merry-Go-Round is getting spit polished and the horses are in fine condition.

Mr. Simmons thanked the Fire Department for rescuing the Park Commission's ATV when it broke down on Napatree.

Mr. Simmons advised that Bay Street has been paved and the contractor is working on the striping. There was a leak in the water main by the Yacht Club but that will be fixed by tomorrow. The sidewalks will be temporarily repaired for the summer, with final repair in the fall after all the work is complete. It is hoped that all of the sidewalks, not just those affected by the Bay Street work, will be repaved, not only because these unaffected sidewalks are in poor shape, but also so that all the sidewalks look the same. Doing so would require that an additional \$150,000 be found in the Town budget.

The north parking lot by Holdrege Garage will not be paved this year because the stone wall on the bay side is crumbling. Once the Fire District has had that wall repaired, the Town will pay to have the lot repaved. It was noted, however, that 100% of the Holdrege Garage parking lot will be available for use during the summer.

The south parking lot will be repaved and ready for use by Monday. The long speed bump has been removed and will not be put back unless deemed necessary for safety's sake.

Mr. Russell suggested that the Fire District put an ad in the Westerly Sun this spring when the first phase of the Bay Street work has been completed, letting everyone know that the business district is open and ready. Mr. Beale asked why the Watch Hill Business Association would not do this, or at least share the cost. Mr. Russell advised that the Business Association was in disarray. Mr. White said he thought doing something was a good idea but thought a news article would get more attention than an ad. It was then suggested that the best option might be a letter to the editor from Mr. Whitman thanking the Town for their cooperation and advising that everything was more or less back to normal in the village.

Mr. G. Simmons warned that now that parking was again available on Bay Street, staff from the Ocean House would take many of these spaces until the 2 hour parking limit goes into effect. This has been a

recurring problem during the shoulder months of May and September. It was suggested that the Fire District ask the Town to make the 2 hour parking limit year round.

Mr. Beale asked Mr. Simmons if he would be spending the \$10,000 in his budget for Merry-Go-Round horse repair; Mr. Simmons replied yes.

Fire Department – Jason Simmons

Mr. Simmons noted that two fire hydrants on Bay Street have been relocated and there is one new hydrant. He also said there are signs now as one comes into the village indicating that only Phase 1 of the project has been completed. Mr. Simmons is concerned that the temporary paving of the road will get chewed up as the season goes on.

Now that Bay Street is fully open for traffic, Mr. Simmons will begin the business inspections, which should be finished by 5/31/12.

Mr. Simmons noted that the Dunn's Corner Fire Department had asked Watch Hill to join with them in an application for a FEMA grant for a fire extinguisher simulator to be used for training. Watch Hill has agreed.

Mr. Peacock advised that there will be fire extinguisher training at the fire house on 5/17/12 from 6 to 7 pm. This is open to the public. Mr. G. Simmons asked if there could be a second training later in the season, perhaps in July. Mr. Peacock said that could be arranged.

Mr. J. Simmons reported that Mr. Philip Koretski had recently addressed the Board of Engineers about establishing a scholarship fund to benefit younger volunteers. It was suggested that this be more of a work/study type of arrangement. Mr. Koretski volunteered to spearhead the initial fundraising effort. Mr. Beale suggested the Fire Department seek the advice of counsel as the selection criteria can become a very sticky issue. Mr. Peacock wondered if the Fire Department could use some of the Fire District's budgeted legal funds to secure this advice. Mr. Whitman said yes.

Mr. Simmons advised that, after speaking with the Westerly Police Chief, it was decided that the Fire District will issue hurricane passes again this year. While not absolutely necessary, they do significantly expedite the reentry process.

Mr. Simmons advised that the Maintenance and Operations budget, currently over budget by \$4,500 will be overspent by \$7,000 by year end. In order to come in overall within budget, the Fire Department will not spend \$3,000 for radios and the \$3,000 that had been budgeted for new doors. Mr. Simmons has submitted the draft 2012-2013 budget to the Finance Committee. It requests an increase of \$11,500 for operations; capital funding is level.

Future Projects Committee – John M. Regan III

Mr. Regan reported that a consultant has been hired, - Al Daniels. He has been paid a \$5,000 retainer. He was in Watch Hill last week for introductory meetings, to firm up the major steps of the study and to go over the process in general. Mr. Daniels met with Mr. Russell, Mr. G. Simmons, Mr. White, the fire chiefs and then with the committee, consisting of Mr. Parsons, Mr. Sayre and Mr. Regan. Mr. Daniels was provided with some historical information (the last 5 years) from the office. He needs to gather some history from the Fire Department and get some input from Mr. G. Simmons on future projects/expenses. Mr. Daniels will also be looking at comparative data from other fire departments/districts. It is expected

that Mr. Daniels will have further interviews with District personnel as well as the general public. They project will stay within the \$25,000 budgeted.

Mr. Beale said he would need a budget for 2013. It should be equal to the balance of the \$25,000 not paid in this fiscal year.

Road Safety – Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman reported that he has been talking with the Westerly police department and Town Manager Steven Hartford about road safety. The official accident report from the Flynn death has not been released to the Sun yet but effectively, there will be no criminal charges. The committee headed by Cathy Moore is eager to put up signs but is awaiting the results of the Department of Transportation study. It is likely that “Welcome to Watch Hill” signs will be approved but questionable if the speed limit will be reduced from Avondale Road on.

Mr. Whitman brought up the issue of increased police patrols, noting changing the speed limit is ineffective if it is not enforced. He reported that the police budget for next year asks for an additional police position. If it is passed, that might mean more patrols for Watch Hill.

Mr. Whitman advised that there is a proposed new ordinance that would replace current signs with LED signs. It has currently been sent back to committee for review.

Mr. G. Simmons said there are two flashing speed signs in Watch Hill, one of which is by the Watch Hill Garage. He feels they have been effective. These signs will be moved to their summer positions soon and Mr. Simmons will try to get two more for Ocean View Highway. He will also get more share the road signs and the news ones will be reflective (the current ones are not).

Memorandum of Understanding WHFD/WHC – Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman noted that there is no formal agreement between the Fire District and the Conservancy relative to working together on Napatree. The Conservancy has prepared and its board has approved a memorandum of understanding. A motion was made for the Fire District to sign this memorandum. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

CRMC Water Category – Richard H. Sayre

Mr. Sayre said that several landowners are pushing to have the water from the Yacht Club Cabana area, past the lighthouse and to East Beach reclassified as Type 2 water; it is currently type 1. Type 1 water is conservation water; type 2 water includes recreational activities and hence, mooring areas. Mr. Sayre pointed out that if the reclassification were to be approved, there could be public moorings in the area and therefore, public access to those moorings. Mr. Sayre said this was not just a neighborhood issue but a Fire District issue, and pointed out that all the waters from Point Judith to Napatree are Type 1 waters.

Mr. Sayre noted that the Town Council cannot approve the reclassification, - it can only endorse the change. Approval to change the classification would have to come from CRMC. However, he also noted that CRMC would not approve the reclassification if the Town objected, so a positive resolution from the Town would be an important first step.

Mr. Sayre said he had spoken with Mr. Royce and Mr. Berkley and that it appears they want the reclassification so that they can get approval to put in docks. Mr. Royce has agreed to have a workshop with the landowners affected to discuss the possible impact.

Mr. G. Simmons noted that the Harbor Commission has been looking for a location for a mooring field. If this resolution were to pass, this might be the site for such a field. The related access might be through the lighthouse property or via the bathhouses.

Mr. Russell noted that the Harbor Commission report was very close to being finalized. All the issues raised by Watch Hill and Weekapaug have been resolved. If this resolution were to pass, it might cause the report to be reopened, which could jeopardize some of these compromises.

Mr. Whitman said he will ask Mr. Royce to stop work on the resolution until the Harbor Commission report has been finalized.

Other Business

Mr. Russell said he had been approached by Mr. Jack Carson, a member of the school board, asking if the new superintendant of schools could come to speak to the Watch Hill community.

Mr. Barnes noted that the Westerly Ambulance Corps would also like the opportunity to be heard. Mr. Whitman said he would take both suggestions under advisement but noted that having them speak at the annual meeting was unlikely as the meeting is already quite long.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley
Office Manager