

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

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, August 17, 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, August 17, 2012.

The following members were present:

Charles S. Whitman III, Moderator
William H. White, Treasurer
Grant G. Simmons III, Chairman Park Commission
Jason Simmons, Fire Chief
Andrew Parsons, Member at Large

Voters present:

Deborah Lamm, Park Commission
Joan Lemp
Robert Peacock

Also present were:

Chaplin B. Barnes
Lyn Traver, Administrative Assistant

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 minutes of the District Council meeting of June 15, 2012, which were previously circulated. The motion was seconded and approved.

Finance Committee – William White for James T. Beale, Jr.

Mr. White said that there was very little to report. He felt that the balance sheet was in good shape as of the end of July. There will be significant expenditures in August, however, with the tax receipts arriving in September, the Fire District will remain solvent. He stated that rent bills went out early to the three big rental properties and that those receipts came in July. On the expense side, disbursements are running a little bit below last year.

Mr. Simmons remarked that the Park Commission didn't have any large expenditures other than normal cash flow.

Report of the Park Commission – Grant G. Simmons III

Mr. Whitman commented on the flash flooding that took place outside of Layng Martine's property. Mr. Whitman had received pictures of the flooded area and Mr. Martine sent copies to the town asking if this was part of their flood control program. Mr. Whitman further stated that flooding took place in Misquamicut at the same time which was the result of a pump failing to turn on. Mr. Simmons stated that

Watch Hill does not have a pump. The flooding was a result of water flowing off of the Holdredge Garage parking lot. Mr. Simmons explained that when the water flows off of the street, the water then goes into catch basins and then into a series of galleys, and finally runs into the bay. But in the case of a substantially high tide, the galleys are filled so there is no place for the water to run. Holdredge Parking lot has one catch basin and that water flows into an 8 inch pipe which then goes into a baffle system so that water won't be allowed back in. But if the tide is high enough, the water can't drain at a fast enough rate. He further stated that there was little that the Town of Westerly or Watch Hill could do to correct the problem short of raising the entire level of the parking lot, which CRMC would not permit. Mr. Simmons felt that the problem was not rain related but rather due to high tides. Mr. Parsons commented that the tides are getting higher and higher with climate change and that CRMC will eventually have to do something. Mr. Simmons reported that CRMC's attitude is that flooding is a natural event and one can't play with Mother Nature. CRMC would have to be petitioned in a political way in order to change. Mr. Barnes commented that in some cases CRMC has caved in, as in the case of Matunuck's seawall.

Mr. Whitman asked if the fire trucks could make it through this kind of flooding. Chief Simmons answered that the trucks could make it through such conditions but that it is not good for the trucks. Mr. Peacock added that truck 103 doesn't have undercoating, but trucks 102 and 104 have sealed battery compartments.

Mr. Whitman referenced meetings that he has had with some of the other fire districts regarding the proposed sewer project in Misquamicut. There is concern that if the flood plain can not be managed successfully, how do you prevent the sewers from backing up.

It was stated that a proposal to extend the sewers to Misquamicut was voted down three times and therefore the description has been changed from a "tax" to a "fee" for sewer services, which will be securitized into a bond, a portion to be paid by the public. Mr. Simmons asked if the sewage plant, located by Riverbend Cemetery, is already operating at capacity. Mr. Barnes said that the answers vary and after he attended a comprehensive planning meeting, the original belief was that there was very limited extra capacity but the committee feels the capacity is now greater than originally thought. Mr. Whitman said there is a big push by business owners in Misquamicut to do the project, and they have the political power to accomplish it.

Mr. Whitman felt that people in Watch Hill are not necessarily in favor of the project going forward for fear of it happening here and turning the village into a "Miami Beach". Mr. White commented that the circumstances are different in Watch Hill. He pointed out that in Misquamicut there are cesspools and septic tanks draining into a salt pond and also the housing is more congested than it is in Watch Hill. Mr. White felt that the sewer project in Misquamicut is a positive step in correcting their sewage problems.

Mr. Simmons felt that there are steps that could be taken to prevent a sewer system from coming into Watch Hill. Having been successful through the Conservancy to change the height ordinance, he felt that not too much more could be built on Bay Street. Mr. Whitman added that variances are granted all the time for political and other reasons and that there isn't historic zoning to prevent such a project. Mr. Parsons mentioned that he felt that the Riverbend area was a very vulnerable site for a sewage plant since it is in a flood zone.

Mr. Simmons reported that the HOB Yacht parking lot is currently being populated by the CSOs. Mr. White commented that the CSOs had been given permission to park at the Lighthouse at one time. The HOB Yacht lease generates a good deal of money and having the CSOs infringing on the parking lot is a problem. Mr. Whitman agreed to speak to the Westerly Police Captain to instruct the CSOs to park in the Lighthouse Parking Lot.

Mr. Simmons said that he is waiting to get an estimate on a sheet piling bulkhead for the north parking lot. Mr. Simmons said that he would use \$15,000 of the \$30,000 he has in his budget to take down one-third of the changing room cabanas, which is part of the 3-year maintenance assent from CRMC. Mr. Simmons explained that there is an individual who does the whole project, including acquiring permitting.

Lastly, Mr. Simmons commented that the plantings by the Gazebo and the north parking lot look poorly due to overgrown weeds. The plan is to wait until fall to eradicate the weeds by pulling out the entire root system.

Fire Department – Jason Simmons

Chief Simmons reported that there were an increased number and variety of calls at this time of year. Both the boats and the ATV were called out of the district the last three weekends. The ATV had been used for missing people at Burlingame, Charlestown and Bradford. Chief Simmons remarked that a small group of highly dedicated individuals continue to participate and respond to the calls.

Chief Simmons spoke to a problem of finding houses due to a lack of markings. He and Mr. Whitman had a brief meeting to draft a letter that will be signed jointly and mailed to the district residents. The town will also be copied on this letter. The letter will address the problem of hidden or missing numbers on homes, sometimes due to overgrown shrubbery. In other cases, houses are set back off of the road and the number is on the house and cannot be seen from the street. Mr. Parsons asked Chief Simmons if he had access to the photographs of the homes so that they can be identified if a number is obscured or hidden. Both Mr. Peacock and Chief Simmons felt the photo system helped to identify houses for them. Mr. Parsons pointed out that it was a Westerly System that provided these photographs. Mr. Peacock pointed out that the photographs were aerial photos not the CAD photos turned in for alarm systems.

Fire Prevention night took place on August 1st. The antique fire apparatus was on display. There were between 300 and 400 visitors. Chief Simmons reported that the FEMA grant process had begun again. Chief Simmons has applied for two grants since the last meeting, one in the Fire Equipment category and the other in the Staffing and Education category. Chief Simmons said that the number of grants decreases each year, but that the demand increases.

Chief Simmons thanked Mr. Bob Peacock for his services while he was away on his honeymoon. Mr. Scott Harold was also away. Chief Simmons referred to an incident where the fire horn went off multiple times last week due to a compressor issue that had to be fixed. The Harbor House has an automatic system that goes to the fire house before dispatch and the horn allowed the response time to be 45 seconds. He noted that there was significant pushback from the Fire District about the horn but that it continues to be a viable, responsible and cost effective method that works well.

Future Projects Committee

Due to a tragedy in Mr. Regan's family, there was not a report from the Future Projects Committee. Mr. Whitman stated that the report will come out sometime in the future. Mr. Simmons asked if there would be another opportunity to sit with Mr. Daniels to discuss further issues. Mr. Whitman said that Mr. Daniels is there to receive information but that the recommendations will come from the committee not Mr. Daniels. Recommendations will go to the District Council to help plan the budget process for the next five years.

The question of tax exemption for both the Fire District and the Fire Department was raised and discussed, but was left to be handled by the accountants as there were conflicting opinions.

New Business – Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman mentioned that Chief St. Clair has two police cruisers that are not currently on the road. The Fire District has been offered the use of these two vehicles to park on the road which results in reduced traffic speeds. It is not clear how the vehicles could be moved to Watch Hill, and then returned to the Westerly Police Station at the end of the summer.

Mr. Whitman followed up by saying that the speed limits have been enforced and some local residents have been ticketed. He further stated that Senator Dennis Algieri wrote a letter to RIDOT, on behalf of the Watch Hill Fire District, asking for speed limits to be lowered in response to the accident report of last fall. Mr. Whitman felt that a reduction in speed limits might be beneficial, but more importantly, the speed limits should be one constant speed along Watch Hill Road and into the Village. Mr. Whitman continues to be concerned for the many bicyclists and pedestrians on the roads in Watch Hill.

Mr. Simmons mentioned that he felt that there is an increase in bicycle activity. Mrs. Joan Lemp commented that bicyclists travel in large packs and ride two and three abreast and that it is particularly dangerous for them on one way streets like Niantic Road. Mrs. Lemp was also concerned about the road markings before bicycling events and that the markings are not easily removed. Mr. Simmons suggested that the only way to remove the markings is possibly with a power washer which is the responsibility of the Town of Westerly. Mr. Simmons also mentioned that the heart walk would be coming soon to Watch Hill and will have a non-staked tent by the gazebo.

Mr. Whitman told the group that a list of proposed meeting dates would be emailed to them. These dates would serve as a guideline but that meetings would not take place every month. Mr. Parsons asked for a month's notice if a meeting were to be canceled.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lyn Traver
Administrative Assistant