

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

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, August 20, 2010

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 20, 2010.

The following members were present:

Edwin L. Russell, Moderator
Charles S. Whitman III, Deputy Moderator
Grant G. Simmons III, Chairman, Park Commission
William H. White, Treasurer
Penelope B. Kelly, Member at Large
Andrew Parsons, Member at Large
Scott Harold, Fire Chief

Voters Present:

Joan Lemp
Walter Lentz
Linda Parrilla
Keith Parrilla
Robert Peacock
John M. Regan III
Jason Simmons
Henry Toolan

Also present were:

Wendy F. Brown

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

Financial Update – Mr. White

Mr. White reported that the Fire District remains in a very good cash position. At the end of July there was about \$90,000 in unrestricted cash but then a lease payment was received from the Misquamicut Club as was the first payment from HOB Yachts. That brought in about \$140,000 so there is a little over \$200,000 in unrestricted cash, with tax payments due to come in during the next few weeks. There are no surprises in terms of the expense budget.

Real Estate Signs – Mr. Russell

Mr. Russell stated that for many years there was an unwritten agreement among realtors that there would be no real estate signs in Watch Hill and that policy was consistent with a policy for no signs for builders, contractors, etc. This worked well until the Lila Delman office opened and they started putting up signs. Mr. Russell said he asked them to remove the signs and they declined. Mr. Russell then sent a letter to all their clients and asked them to ask the Delman

Agency to remove the signs. Some signs were removed and some were not. Mr. Russell then went to the Westerly Zoning office and found that the ordinance limits signs to 2 feet by 2 feet. The zoning enforcement agent identified and removed some oversized signs. However, since that ordinance is under review, the Delman Agency representative was reluctant to remove all signs and took the matter to Steven Hartford. Mr. Russell doesn't think this is an escalating issue but has asked Mr. Thomsen to speak with Mr. Hartford. The matter will be pursued. Ironically, all the Caprio campaign signs are larger than allowed by the ordinance.

Mr. Harold asked if the Fire District would protest the Delman real estate signs if they were reduced to the proper size. Mr. Russell replied that they would have to be allowed if they complied with the size ordinance but that he hoped they would defer to the unwritten no sign rule. Mr. Harold then asked if the Fire District might not be proactive, as they do in some other communities, and provide an acceptable, standard type sign that would be used by everyone. Mr. Russell said that could be tried but worried about the great variety of signs currently around town, including the amount of information included.

Mr. Simmons suggested a product made out of _____ that comes in sheets and could be cut into signs that have a scallop design, not just square, and perhaps these could be used by agents. Asked if they would be given away, Mrs. Kelly suggested that not be the case.

Mrs. Brown, the local Prudential Real Estate agent, said that it was not necessary to be given a sign for free. She then went on to state that as soon as the town starts imposing fines on non-conforming signs, they would have to do it throughout Westerly, and the majority of signs are non-conforming. She said that if the Fire District were to come up with an acceptable solution, the local agents would work to comply with it. Over 50% of the buyers who purchased in 2009 credited signs as the reason they bought that house. Therefore, to not have a sign is hurtful to the real estate agent. Mrs. Brown said the local agents do not want to be at odds with the Fire District. If the Fire District can come up with a recommendation on size, format, etc., it would be a start toward the solution. Mr. Russell thanked Mrs. Brown for her input and said the Fire District would work on a prototype.

Mr. Whitman noted that not only is there a size limit but only one sign is allowed per property. Mrs. Brown said that the size limit has not been enforced but having more than one sign on a property has been enforced. No signs can be put up without the property owner's permission.

Mr. Whitman asked about the agreement not to have signs that worked until this year. Mrs. Brown replied that judging by the Delman agency's success, the signs work. She was last year's top agent. So the problem is that having signs is successful.

Mr. Parrilla stated that he is on the town committee reviewing the sign ordinance and that once the ordinance has been revised, it will be enforced. They are working on size, etc. The process is that the committee makes a recommendation, there is a public hearing and then it is brought to the Town Council.

Mr. Whitman stated that if the Fire District were to create a template sign, that is giving in and there will be signs everywhere. He feels the Fire District should try to get the Delman Agency to back off rather than concede.

Mr. Harold suggested that reacting to the enforcement or lack thereof of the sign ordinance may focus a lot of attention on Watch Hill and may lead to other problems. Consider the non-conformance of the 4th of July bike parade sign and the fire safety night sign.

Mr. Harold suggested that the new ordinance may allow larger signs than the current one does since so many real estate signs are non-conforming and the agents may cite the cost to replace those signs.

Mr. Russell polled those present on how to proceed with the sign issue. The majority felt that the Fire District should wait to see how the town revises the ordinance. Mr. Russell summarized that the Fire District will pursue enforcement of the ordinance as it stands and then wait for the revised ordinance. Once that has been reviewed, the Fire District will revisit the issue and the idea of a template sign.

Park Concerts – Mrs. Brown

Mrs. Brown reported that they had a wonderful summer and a wonderful response. They had from 250 to 400 people per concert and did have one rain night. Mr. Russell asked if the stores were benefitting at all. Mrs. Brown said some were and some weren't. They put some coupons in the program and as a result St. Clairs got a good deal of traffic. They tried to build on this through the season to give people the idea of coming early to shop or have dinner and as the season went along, this was starting to work.

Mr. Simmons said from the Park Commission perspective it has all gone smoothly, no trash or parking problems. Positioning the performers closer to the Gazebo has been better for sound and the patrons.

Merry-Go-Round – Mr. Simmons

Mr. Simmons said he had had a meeting with the ladies of the Improvement Society to discuss the maintenance of the horses. Some of their members have grave concerns about the operation, which Mr. Simmons addressed. He reported that they were using a computerized ticket system this summer which gives a much more accurate tally of usage. When this was compared with last years results it was almost identical, which indicates past records have been quite accurate. Some of the ladies also had concerns with signage. They will come to the site, look at the current signs and hopefully come up with suggestions which will then be taken to the Randalls.

Mr. Simmons noted that the Fire District has committed to carving one new horse this year and that is in progress. The Improvement Society is taking on the responsibility for the annual maintenance which is the hair, saddles, painting touch up, etc. The motor mounting needs to be sand blasted which will be done after the season. Otherwise, all is fine.

Mr. Simmons was asked if he had met with Mr. Berkeley yet. Mr. Simmons said no but he will do so.

Mr. Simmons also said that members of the Improvement Society would meet with the young people who run the operation to explain the significance of the horses. Mr. Simmons wants to speak with Gary to discuss the use of a material that could be cut in the shape of a saddle and placed on the horse when a child comes in with a wet bathing suit.

Mrs. Lemp, who was at the meeting with the Improvement Society, stated that she will supply the District Council with minutes from that meeting so everyone understands their respective responsibilities.

Watch Hill Parking Lot – Mr. Simmons

Mr. Russell asked Mr. Simmons to talk about enforcement of the rules for the lot. Mr. Simmons stated that there are a few people who are habitual abusers of the stickers. They arrive before the parking lot crew starts work. Mr. Simmons has gone to speak with them and asked them to move their cars and some have complied, such as the people from Bruna's table. But there are still cars that stay for extended periods of time. In these cases the parking sticker numbers are traced to the property owner. They will get a letter from Mr. Simmons and will be told that if those using the stickers do not adhere to the rules, the stickers will not be sent next year. This is about all the Fire District can do. Mr. Simmons would advise against trying to involve the police. In fact there are only about 5 regular offenders and he is working with them.

Mrs. Kelly asked if the abusers were shoppers or beach goers. Mr. Simmons said they were primarily shoppers, in contrast to a few years ago when they were primarily bathers.

Mr. Russell summarized that the biggest problem is enforcement, - that there is not much the Fire District can do. However, he also pointed out that it is really only a handful of people who are not in compliance.

Harbor Commission and Moorings – Mr. Simmons

Mr. Russell stated that Westerly is in the throws of redoing its Harbor Commission report and part of that was a review with regard to moorings. Mr. Simmons explained that there is the Watch Hill Harbor and then outside of it there is a break water and then the kitchen, a part of little Narragansett Bay. In the kitchen the Yacht Club has 5 moorings that date back to the 1970's. They are trying to get those mooring sites certified by CRMC. There are now 4 new rogue moorings that have appeared. Two are owned by one gentleman; ownership of the other two is unknown. The Police Chief has sent a registered letter to the known owner asking him to not use the moorings. Mr. Simmons is trying to have those two moorings removed as opposed to just unused. If the Police Chief does not feel he has the authority to ask them to remove the moorings, Mr. Simmons will go to CRMC.

Mr. Russell advised that the Fire District is concerned about mooring creep; if these are allowed to stay it will get worse. Mr. Russell stated his understanding that the moorings in that area should be under Fire District control since the Fire District owns most of Napatree Point. Mr. Simmons said that was correct and also, the area has been designated as an open anchorage. Also there is an estuary plan from CRMC that says there cannot be any moorings in the area with the exception of the 5 allotted to the Yacht Club.

Mr. Parsons asked about moorings in Foster Cove. Mr. Simmons said there was one gentlemen in there for a while but he has gone.

Mr. Russell stated that the Harbor Commission has a hard job here because they cannot satisfy everyone and it is a hot topic. Ultimately the report will be circulated for comment and then go to the Town Council. This is just one of several areas of controversy.

East Beach Garbage – Mr. Simmons

Mr. Simmons stated that the East Beach Association has been trying a new policy on East Beach to get visitors to carry out their own garbage by not providing garbage cans on the beach. As far as Mr. Simmons knows, it is working. However, the garbage being taken off the beach ends up in the garbage cans on Bay Street, which get overfilled. Mr. Simmons has suggested that the East Beach Association put in garbage bins with lids at the top of the right of ways on Larkin and Bluff. Then the Fire District garbage collector would come and empty the bins. This would relieve some of the overflow on Bay Street. Mr. Markham will take that suggestion to the East Beach Association board of directors in September. The East Beach Association would also need a contract with Mr. Piccolo to pick up from those bins.

It was also suggested that bins be put at Everett and possibly Niantic. It was felt there may not be a need for further bins at Niantic as there are two there already and people don't walk from there downtown.

Mr. Russell stated that this raises the issue of whether there should be garbage cans back down on the beach as there were before. The East Beach Association will have to assess if they want to continue this trial and bear the associated added costs.

Mr. White, who walks the beach daily, noted that the beaches are much cleaner then they have been in past years and feels this new policy is working. Mrs. Kelly also feels the new policy is an improvement.

Mr. White noted that he had had a call from Mr. Markham asking if trash was building up at he end of the wall. Mr. White told him that it was not. Mr. Markham also asked about Fire District beach security telling visitors that they are not allowed on the beach after dark. Mr. Simmons will try to determine which of the Fire District employees may be doing this.

Mr. Parilla asked about police and CSO's ticketing the scooters of some of the residents of Watch Hill. If one had a license plate, you were ticketed. If there was no license plate, they were not stopped. Mr. Russell said he had spoken with the police about the matter.

3 Way Stop Sign and Walk Ways - Mr. Russell/Mr. Simmons

In September the effect of the 3 way stop sign will be reviewed. Mrs. Kelly stated that she feels the sign has been very beneficial. Traffic has slowed down, one feels safer. There are still some people who don't stop. Mr. Whitman noted that most people stop but then look at each other because they don't realize it is a 3 way stop and don't know whose turn it is to go; it doesn't say three way stop.

Mr. Russell reported that Mr. Simmons was to move cross walk signs around to where they were most appropriate. One has been stolen. He has not bolted one onto Westerly Road as he understands the road is about to be repaved. The two most important places for the signs are at the top of Larkin and Bluff. Mr. Simmons stated that people do not pay attention. There has been a request that when we go forward with the Utility Project, that the cross walks be slightly raised when the road is repaved as they are in Westerly.

Mr. Toolan noted that the turn coming out of Everett is very difficult due to traffic. Mr. Simmons would like to put another sign there as well but there is some resistance to the sign from the residents.

Mrs. Lemp has noted that part of the problem is the hedge on the Reynolds' property. She and some of the other neighbors will speak with the Reynolds when they return to town, in hopes that they will trim or remove the hedge.

Mr. Simmons noted another hedge problem on Avondale Road, which is in Westerly.

Mr. Parilla said it was very difficult to get around the pedestrian crossing sign by the Merry-Go-Round. Mr. Simmons replied that this sign is under the jurisdiction of the Westerly police. There are 5 of those signs on Bay Street and they are not to be moved. Perhaps the problem could be alleviated by removing one or more parking spaces.

Mr. Parilla also noted that the 3 way stop is a good thing but also a possible problem since one comes upon it after a sharp curve and then has to stop suddenly. Mrs. Kelly said this would be less of a problem if the speed limit were reduced to 20 miles per hour much earlier on Watch Hill Road. Mr. Simmons said that when he meets with the Town officials to review the signs, he will ask that the sign be moved up so it can be seen earlier. Mrs. Lemp asked that the overall sense of the residents be considered when moving/placing these signs.

General Discussion

Mr. Russell ask Mr. Parsons for updates on the website. Mr. Parsons said it was operational. He has not had any reports on the number of hits yet. That will come at the end of the month.

Mr. Parilla said he had attended the DEM meeting last night on pollution in the Pawcatuck River. Tests were done from the Stillman Avenue bridge all the way to Sandy Point. The river is polluted in the Westerly area due to broken sewer lines, which have now been repaired. The biggest polluted area is in Avondale. Swans have affected that area as well as perhaps the numerous boatyards, even though they are supposed to use pump out boats.

Mr. Simmons noted that his water quality tests have been very steady.

Mr. Russell advised that last Sunday, upon recommendation of the nominating committee, the District Council approved the new fire chief. The next step is for the Fire Department to come forth with the next three officers.

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The meeting was adjourned to Executive Session at 5:19 p.m.

The District Council returned to regular session at 5:36 pm and, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley
Office Manager