

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

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, August 26, 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, August 26, 2011.

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  
Jason Simmons, Fire Chief  
Penelope B. Kelly, Member at Large  
Andrew Parsons, Member at Large

Voters present:

Joan Lemp  
Robert Peacock  
Richard H. Sayre, Finance Committee

Also present were:

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

By Phone:

Grant G. Simmons III

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 on June 17, 2011, which were previously circulated. The motion was seconded and approved.

Report of the Park Commission – Grant G. Simmons III

Mr. Simmons reported on measures being taken due to the impending hurricane. The horses are being removed from the Merry-Go-Round and all boats have been taken off the HOB pier except for one. Mr. Simmons will handle that tomorrow. On Saturday, Mr. Pappadia will be at the gate

to Napatree and will ask any visitors to sign in and sign out, essentially absolving the Fire District of responsibility for their welfare. It was noted that the Town of Westerly has closed all the beaches.

Finance Committee – James T. Beale, Jr.

Mr. Beale reported that the Fire District cash balance as of August 24, 2011 was \$311,324.82. This balance was mostly due to rental income received at the end of July as follows: Misquamicut Club, \$109,208; Watch Hill Yacht Club Cabanas, \$104,775; Watch Hill Yacht Club Parking Lot, \$31,703. These flows were at or slightly above budget. In addition, tax payments are beginning to come in. Two months into the fiscal year, all expenses are on budget except for legal expenses. That budget is already half spent.

Mr. Whitman noted that a significant part of these legal expenses was related to the Harbor Management Commission activity and will be reimbursed to some degree by the Watch Hill Yacht Club and the Watch Hill Conservancy. He said that about \$36,000 has been spent on this since last year. The lawyers are currently working on a fair division of this expense between the three entities. Mr. Whitman said once the division has been determined, bills will be sent out, hopefully next week, and that the final total charge to the Fire District will be about \$20,000 for this fiscal year.

In response to a question as to why lawyers were involved, Mr. Chaplin Barnes replied that their input was critical in influencing how the control of the harbors is set up in the final Harbor Management plan. Essentially, the goal is to protect the existing mooring patterns and to protect certain areas around Napatree.

Mr. Beale said he was concerned about spending legal funds on a project that may be never ending as he feels the Harbor Commission group is not a cohesive, effective committee.

Mrs. Penny Kelly said she felt the project would come to an end because the CRMC would run out of patience. However, Mr. Barnes pointed out that CRMC's role was unclear.

Mr. Whitman assured the group that he would not allow the Fire District to be blindsided by unending legal bills.

Mr. Beale asked Mr. Grant Simmons about the status of the electrical bill at the cabanas. Mr. Simmons said he had not yet met with Mrs. Lentz but that he would suggest that the Park Commission pay the Cabana group a set amount once a year for their share of this expense.

Mr. Beale discussed tax bills outstanding, some from as far back as 2008 and 2009. It was noted that one of these properties is under foreclosure and another has just been put on the market. Mr. Beale said if the town was to have a tax sale, the Fire District could piggy back on it, but there are no tax sales on the calendar as of now. If the Fire District were to pursue the taxes themselves through legal measures, the expense might exceed the value of the taxes. The Fire District must act within three years or it loses its right to collect. After further discussion, it was decided that

Ms. Brockmann will continue to pursue payment through letters, etc., particularly to two parties who made partial payment and that Mr. Beale will speak with town authorities on the possibility of a tax sale.

Fire Department – Jason Simmons

Mr. Simmons began with an update on the hurricane. An evacuation has been ordered by the Town Manger and is to begin at 6 pm tonight and go for 24 hours to 6 pm Saturday. As of 8 am Saturday morning police will be blocking off roads to areas south of Route 1A. They have a system in place to check people in and out even if they do not have their red hurricane pass. After 6 pm Saturday, no one will be allowed into these areas even if they have a hurricane pass. Access back in will be determined by safety issues, but probably won't be until Tuesday morning. A Code Red message will be set to those registered with the Police Department. The Westerly Senior Center is the official shelter and will be open by 3 pm and possibly earlier. Beaches are closed as of 6 pm Friday night. Mr. Simmons stressed that the firehouse is a command center, not a shelter.

Mr. Simmons said he had been in touch with officials at the Ocean House. They are asking their incoming guests not to come and are asking those currently there to stay.

It was noted that the Ambulance Corps has determined that if the winds reach a sustained speed of 39 miles per hour, they will not respond to calls. Similarly, Mr. Simmons said the weather may become so severe that the Fire Department cannot respond to calls. He also noted that the Fire Department's boats have been removed from the water.

Mr. Simmons reported that he has had comments from various people about hearing the fire siren so frequently. He noted a dramatic increase in the number of calls since the annual meeting and that they covered a large range of conditions.

Mr. Simmons also said that the FEMA grant process, which is very competitive, has begun. The Fire Department has received two grants in the past and will be applying again this year.

Mr. Simmons reported that, through the efforts of one of the volunteers, the department has received a 750 pound piece of steel from the World Trade Center. It will be part of a memorial for 9/11.

Mr. Simmons said that the Fire Department had difficulty responding to an emergency on Everett Avenue due to 6 wooden pots along the street. Mrs. Joan Lemp explained that after traffic issues on the road that were discussed with Chief Mello, it was suggested that these pots be put out and the town actually helped in their placement. Mrs. Lemp and Mr. Jason Simmons will work on a solution acceptable to both parties.

Other Business – Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman read the following proposed resolution for Edwin Russell:

**Testimonial to Ed Russell  
Moderator  
Watch Hill Fire District**

*July 8, 2006 to July 9, 2011*

**Ed Russell has served the residents of the Watch Hill Fire District with dedication, commitment and true concern for the well being of the continued special character of Watch Hill.**

**During his term of office, the fire district purchased a new ladder fire truck and added a fourth bay to the firehouse to house it.**

**An extended long term lease with the Watch Hill Yacht Club was negotiated enabling the owners to rebuild much more attractive cabanas.**

**Moderator Russell strengthened the relationship between the fire district and The Watch Hill Business Association.**

**A new website was launched for both the fire district and the fire department. This has improved the level of communication and information available to residents and visitors alike.**

**The Watch Hill Fire District Council and all the residents of Watch Hill extend their heartfelt thank you to Ed Russell.**

The District Council supported the resolution and agreed to have it printed on nice paper and framed for presentation to Mr. Russell.

Mr. Whitman said he wanted to prioritize future projects. He said that Mr. Regan had agreed to head up a small committee. Mr. Regan has suggested that they hire an intern to interview the various Fire District committee heads to determine their needs in the next five to ten years, the approximate expense and hence the effect on Fire District taxes. They will also look at revenue and how that might change. Mr. Regan noted that this project is important but not urgent. It will allow the Fire District to plan ahead and to smooth out costs. Mr. Regan said he felt the project would take six months and should be finished in time for next year's budget process. He would bring a project plan to the District Council for approval before any work began.

It was noted that there is not any money in the budget for this project. Mr. Reagan said he felt it would cost a maximum of \$10,000, the amount varying depending on how much work the committee does versus the intern. Mr. Beale suggested that Mr. Bill Horne might be interested in taking on this work. Mr. Regan will speak with Mr. Horne.

Mr. White reported that the CRMC application for the sea wall repair has been filed and it is in active status. A similar CRMC application for the sea wall at the Lighthouse has been approved and work is to begin in September.

Mr. Whitman asked that District Council members mark the suggested 2011-2012 meeting dates, previously sent by email and attached to these minutes, on their calendars. If there is no need for the meeting, it will be cancelled but at least the time is set aside. The next meeting will be September 16 at 4:00 pm. The meeting dates will be posted on the Fire District website.

Who has authority to approve what bills was discussed. It was decided to keep things as they are for now.

Mr. Whitman said he felt people wanted smaller, more user friendly parking stickers that were less permanent. He also suggested a committee of two to three people to determine which meritorious cases deserved parking stickers in the future.

The meeting was adjourned to executive session at 5:45 p.m.

The District Council returned to regular session at 5:50 p.m. and, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley  
Office Manager