

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

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, October 7, 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, October 7, 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 Committee
Grant G. Simmons III, Chairman Park Commission
Penelope B. Kelly, Member at Large
Andrew Parsons, Member at Large

Voters present:

Joan Lemp
George C. Moore, Jr., Clerk
Robert Peacock
Richard H. Sayre, Finance Committee
Ann Stevenson, Park Commission

Also present were:

Chaplin B. Barnes
Judy Kelley, Office Manager
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 on August 26, 2011, which were previously circulated. The motion was seconded and approved.

Andrew Parsons suggested that the annual meeting minutes be posted on the website as a draft once they had been reviewed by the District Council rather than wait a full year until they are approved at the next annual meeting. The District Council supported this suggestion; the minutes of the July 9, 2011 annual meeting, marked draft, will be posted immediately.

Finance Committee – James T. Beale, Jr.

Mr. Beale reported that the Fire District had received a grant of \$8,100 from the Roberts Foundation to cover the cost of the purchase of a new ATV.

Mr. Beale went over a summary of the tax assessment history of the Fire District from the year 2000 to date. He noted that in 2000, the net taxable assessment value was \$303,000; in 2011 it was \$1,149,000,000, an increase of 379%. Over the same period, taxes collected increased from \$273,000 to \$442,000, a much more modest increase of 162%. In response to a question about whether the state limit on the percentage annual tax increase applies to Fire Districts, Mr. Whitman noted that it has not been an issue for Watch Hill given the small increases but that it is a real potential issue for other Fire Districts that have a smaller assessment value.

Mr. Beale reported that past due taxes for two properties were paid just in advance of a Westerly town tax sale. Taxes remain unpaid on four properties, one of which is significant.

Mr. Beale will distribute the Fire District financials through September 30th as soon as they are completed. They should reflect the recent tax receipts as well as lower salary expense due to the end of the season.

Report of the Treasurer – William White

Mr. White reported that everything is on track and due to tax receipts and lower expenses, there is ample money in the bank.

Report of the Park Commission – Grant G. Simmons III

Mr. Simmons reported that the application for repair of the sea wall is at CRMC. Usually it moves through their approval process within two weeks, but in this case it has been there for six weeks. He feels it is being held because of the various different parts of the application. One part of the application is to replenish the sand on the beach at the gate to Napatree. Another part of the application is a request to raise the level of the pavement in that area to reduce flooding. Mr. Simmons is hopeful for a positive response next week. The contractor, Field of Dreams, is still working at the lighthouse but is ready to move to the sea wall immediately after that. The estimated expense is \$60,000 to \$65,000.

Mr. Simmons reported that the real construction on Bay Street that will restrict access will not begin until about December 1. Work will begin in the north parking lot where they will put in galleys to store water as well as separate out material. The galleys will be quite heavy when full. The water then drains through an 18 inch pipe out through the sea wall. The area in question is currently covered by a concrete wall and sidewalk. The wall is in good shape but the sidewalk has dropped. The contractor for the Town of Westerly said he was concerned that the current design will put too much pressure on the sea wall and push it out. He suggested they reinforce the sea wall from the inside in the area by the galleys. The estimated cost is \$37,000 to reinforce about 60 feet of sea wall. The issue has been brought to the Fire District because the sea wall is on Fire District property. However, it is expected that it will be a town expense since it is protecting their galleys/infrastructure.

Mr. Simmons reported that the roof on the gazebo is being repaired with funds from the Improvement Society.

Mr. Whitman reported on the horse issue, which involved a horse and carriage being used for a wedding that left behind manure. Mr. Whitman spoke with the operator who was apparently unaware of the Westerly town ordinance requiring clean up and who has agreed to comply in the future. The horses used over Thanksgiving are paid for by the Fire District and thus aware of the ordinance. There was some questions whether there will even be a Thanksgiving event this year given the Bay Street construction. Mr. Whitman will check with Mrs. Carlson.

Fire Department – Robert Peacock for Jason Simmons

Mr. Peacock reported that the budgeted capital expenditures were under way. Two grants applied for to upgrade the alarm system were not received. There is one more grant application still being evaluated.

Mr. Peacock noted that there are still some problems with the fire horn, primarily due to old wiring. Until the problem is resolved, they may try to put the horn on a timer so that it is shut off at night. There are two main reasons for keeping the horn. One is that there is only one phone line to dispatch so if that is out, the backup link to call the firemen is the horn. The second is that the firemen can respond before they hear from dispatch as the horn blows a few minutes before the dispatch call comes through. This can be a critical time advantage. While the wiring is very old, to switch to a radio system would cost about \$220,000.

Mr. Simmons asked what had happened relative to the docking of the ambulance boat. Mr. Peacock said that the suggested time trials for the various alternatives never took place and that Mr. Jason Simmons should be contacted for any further information.

ATV Complaint – Mr. Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman noted that he had received a complaint from a shop owner on Bay Street that an ATV had gone speeding past. She was unable to give a specific date for this occurrence. When contacted, Mr. Jason Simmons said the ATV had not been out on any calls recently. Mr. Peacock reported that the ATV had been out fourteen days before as part of a beach clean up and that he was driving it. He noted that it can't go that fast in general and due to rusting, it is not safe to go very fast. He also said he generally slows down as he passes that shop as he checks out the fire department boats harbored across the way in the harbor. Mr. Whitman will contact the shop owner to show concern but also to emphasize that the Fire District personnel are well trained in correct operation of the ATV and that the one she saw may not even have been the Fire District's.

Mr. Whitman said he had received a call from a person in the Town of Westerly department of transportation noting that there were no signs on some private roads in Watch Hill, specifically Kidds Way and Aloha, and that this was of concern if there were a 911 call. The caller suggested that the Town of Westerly does not put signs on private roads. After discussion it was decided that Mr. Whitman will call back noting that there are town signs on other private roads, that there

are currently road names on white posts for those two roads, and that the Fire District has no objection to the Town putting up other signs if they feel it is necessary.

Future Projects Committee – Mr. John M. Regan III

The long range planning committee is comprised of John Regan (chairman), Andrew Parsons and Richard Sayre.

Mr. Regan explained that the purpose of this committee was to do some long range planning to anticipate large expense items, such as Fire Department equipment and Park Commission issues such as the sea wall, as well as to look at possible changes in revenue flow. The committee has laid out a rigorous process to gather information from the Fire Department, the Park Commission and residents. They may also gather information from other fire districts as well as look at regulation trends that might affect expenses. The end result is an assessment of cash flow that can allow for a build up of some sort of fund to smooth over the expense peaks.

The committee would like to hire someone to gather this information, put it together and then create various scenarios and the resulting implications and financial options. This will be a time consuming process and while not urgent, it is important to the future planning efforts of the Fire District. The committee has unanimously recommended a budget of \$25,000 for the project which would likely be completed during Fiscal Year 2012-2013.

Mr. Sayre said that Harvard is now requiring their students to work on projects as part of their graduation requirements and that these same students also need summer jobs. This might be a less expensive way to get the necessary help. Mr. Beale pointed out that there is not money in the budget right now. There is a \$25,000 contingency fund for capital needs. He suggested that the hiring be postponed until next June when it can be incorporated in the 2012-2013 budget. He also suggested that there may be some state records that already have some of this data. Mr. Barnes suggested that the committee look at Vision 2012, which may have some useful information.

Mr. Regan made a motion to spend up to \$10,000 from the Contingency fund in the 2011-2012 Fiscal Year to fund expenses associated with this work and any further needs will be reviewed in the 2012-2013 budget process. The motion was seconded and passed.

Harbor Commission Legal Fees – Mr. Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman said the Fire District had spent just over \$36,000 on legal help from two law firms and that this expense had been prorated back to the Conservancy and the Yacht Club. The Yacht Club had agreed to pay a share but thought they were only paying for the fees of the outside counsel, not our Fire District counsel. Consequently, they paid only \$8,200, about \$7,000 short. The Conservancy paid the full amount allocated to them. Most of these expenses fall into last year's budget while the reimbursement is in this year's budget. There will be further discussion with the Yacht Club over the \$7,000 in light of the fact that the Fire District counsel may have been attending meetings in Mr. Prentiss' stead.

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Mr. Whitman said there will be meetings with Mr. Simmons to explore how to limit future legal expense without jeopardizing the Fire District position. Mr. Simmons said he thought that the Harbor Commission meeting, scheduled for next week, will be the last that will require legal representation. It will involve independent scientific testimony that should hopefully support measures suggested by the Fire District and Conservancy.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley
Office Manager