

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

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, October 22, 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, October 22, 2010.

The following members were present:

Edwin L. Russell, Moderator
Charles S. Whitman III, Deputy Moderator
William H. White, Treasurer
James T. Beale, Jr., Chairman Finance Committee
Penelope B. Kelly, Member at Large
Jason Simmons, Fire Chief

Voters Present:

John Felber
Robert Peacock
Robert W. Richins

Also present were:

Chaplin B. Barnes
Richard Youngken

By Phone:

Andrew J. Parsons, District Council Member at Large

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

Mr. Russell asked for approval of the minutes of the August 22nd District Council meeting. A motion was made to approve the minutes as distributed. It was seconded and approved.

Financial Update – Mr. White and Mr. Beale

Mr. Beale reported that the Fire District remains in a very good cash position. He noted that during the period from the end of September to October 15 approximately \$114,152 of tax payments were received, with about the same amount still to come in.

Mr. Beale remarked that the Parks Commission has spent almost all of its Capital Improvement Budget on Fort Road repairs and was hopeful the work was near completion so they don't go over budget. On the operations side, the Park Commission is over budget for parking and maintenance personnel. Mr. Beale suggested that this might be due to invoices being charged to the wrong account. He will review with Mr. Jenssen and Mr. Simmons.

Mr. White noted that the Fire District has a good deal of cash on hand, currently a bit over \$400,000 of unrestricted funds.

Fire Department – Mr. Simmons

Mr. Simmons noted that several lines in the Fire Department's budget show no expense to date. In most cases those items are one time expenditures and these budget items will be fully spent. Mr. Simmons also reported that \$11,000 will be spent this fall from the Buildings and Grounds line to repair the roof and gutters over the meeting room. The gutters are totally rotted out and it is less expensive to replace than to repair.

Mr. Simmons presented a summary of the department's marine responses over the summer, a copy of which is attached and is a part of these minutes. There were 10 incidents with 19 victims. Mr. Simmons stated that he was very proud of the fire department's marine program, which is usually the first responder, and he thanked Mr. Peacock for his role in training the volunteers. One boat was damaged on a return from one of the calls but the repair was covered by insurance.

Mr. Russell asked Mr. Simmons if he was satisfied with his equipment. Mr. Simmons replied that the current vessels were adequate for most responses but that there is no fire boat. The department has fire fighting equipment but would have to bring a portable pump. Mr. Peacock pointed out that all the boats are summer boats. The department cannot handle a winter response. It was noted that by responding to any call, a certain degree of legal responsibility is assumed.

Mr. Russell suggested that the number of marine responses will only grow and that ultimately it may require capital expenditures to be better able to handle the needs. Mr. Beale suggested the Fire District get some positive publicity out of this public service that is provided to the whole boating community, not just Watch Hill.

Mr. Simmons reported that in June, 2007, the state fire marshal cited 22 deficiencies at the Holdredge Garage. After a hearing in March, 2010, it was ruled that effective October 1, 2010 the garage had to be emptied. Mr. Simmons has inspected the property and reported that as of October 19, the building was empty and he will so advise the fire marshal. Given that, if there is a fire now, it will be fought defensively as there is nothing inside worth saving. Mr. Simmons has met with the garage building committee and advised them that he will not authorize any permits for use in the summer 2011 (with the possible exception of bathrooms) unless the state fire marshal has signed off on completed building repairs. It is unlikely those repairs can be made in time.

Mr. Simmons thanked Mr. Peter Griffin for the new clocks for the meeting room.

Ocean View Highway – Mr. Youngken

Mr. Youngken reported that, at the Watch Hill Conservancy's request, he has been studying the safety concerns along Ocean View Highway from Shore Road to Ninigret and Watch Hill Roads. He has been looking at both pedestrian and bicycle use.

Mr. Youngken stated that there has been a lot of interest in creating a bikeway. Ocean View Highway has a 50 foot right of way of which 30 feet of width is paved surface. The national standard for a bike path is for two four foot lanes together on one side. Due to wetlands and steep slopes, it would be very difficult to create such a bike path along Ocean View Highway, so that option has been ruled out. The second idea was to create Class II bike lanes, which would be four feet of additional paved surface on each side. However, there is not room for that either. The third option is a Class III system, a shared roadway system, which is what they have on Shore Road now.

In terms of use, Mr. Youngken's studies (done in August for a 10 hour daily period) found that there were more pedestrians and bikers on weekends and fewer commercial vehicles. On a summer weekday, there were about 100 runners and joggers and about 210 bikers. On a weekend, there were 180 runners and joggers and 410 bikers. Car traffic stayed about the same both during the week and on weekends at about 2,000 vehicles per day. Mr. Youngken noted that bikers often came in groups riding abreast and that about half of the riders were teenagers or younger. He also noted that the Misquamicut Club was a major traffic generator.

Mr. Youngken pointed out on a map grassy areas along the road that were compromised by shrubs or wooden guard rails. The easiest safety improvement that could be made would be to clear these areas by moving the guard rails and cutting back the shrubs to the edge of the right of way.

Mr. Russell noted that there is an old path on the left side of the highway (going East) and wondered why that couldn't be repaired and used. Mr. Youngken replied that Ocean View Highway is a town road so the Fire District could go to the town and ask them to fix up that area.

It was agreed that widening the paved area of the road might well encourage people to go faster. It was suggested that "Share the Road" signs be put up.

Mr. Youngken stated that the Watch Hill Conservancy has directed him to create a larger map showing areas of concern that could be fixed. Mr. Barnes suggested that the Fire District might consider asking the town to let the Fire District update the paths and trim the hedges so that the residents of Watch Hill have some aesthetic control.

Mr. Beale stated that the biggest threat to safety was speed. This has been acknowledged by Chief Mello, who has been responsive.

Westerly Bond Issue – Mr. Barnes

Mr. Barnes reported that the town has put a \$6.5 million bond issue on the ballot for November 2, 2010. The bond proposal includes something for just about everyone in town. One piece involves road issues along Canal and Bay Streets and includes partnering with other groups to simultaneously bury utility lines. A Westerly Sun editorial questioned the use of public funds for a Watch Hill utility project. In a letter to the editor, the Town Manager defended such a use of

funds. However, he noted that the bond was structured with flexibility and it would be up to the Town Council to decide which projects would actually go forward. A variety of very negative letters and blogs resulted with reference to giving any funds to the Watch Hill project.

Mr. Russell stated that he would like to go on the offensive with a letter to the editor. Mr. Barnes said he thought at this point it would be better to just be quiet. Mr. Felber agreed, stating that all the town councilors were speaking in favor of the bond and that he personally was talking about the Watch Hill piece as a safety issue rather than a cosmetic fix. He noted that after any period of time with a prevailing northwest wind followed by fog, one can watch electricity arc along the wires on Bay Street that have been exposed to the salt.

New Parking Proposal – Mr. Felber

Mr. Felber stated that two hour parking limits on Bay Street were a failure, the change to three hour parking limits was a failure and the return to two hour limits more strictly enforced was also a failure, generating positive income from fines but negative feelings.

Mr. Felber suggested using kiosk meters which cover 9 to 11 spaces each and where visitors pay by the hour. This type of meter was originally researched by Chief Mello, who shared his information with Mr. Felber. The kiosk meter is solar powered, unobtrusive and one can pay with a credit card. The meters would only be on Bay Street, not on Larkin Road. If the meters were programmed at \$3 per hour, they would have paid for themselves by the end of the first year. However, at \$3 per hour, there might be a conflict with the rates charged by the parking lots. Mr. Felber suggested that charging \$4 per hour would encourage those wishing to stay longer than two hours to go to a lot. Mr. Felber said he thought the immediate impact of the meters would be to weed out the worst habitual offenders.

It was pointed out that the meters would need to be removable, which they are, so they wouldn't be destroyed by plows in the winter. It was also noted that a town ordinance will determine the actual programming of the meters. However, Mr. Felber was certain they would not allow for unlimited hours and might only be set for one hour at a time.

The proposal to install these meters has been approved by the Town Manager, the Chief of Police and the Watch Hill Business Association. If the Fire District Council approves, the proposal would then go to the Town Parking Commission and then to the Town Council.

Mr. Russell made a motion to support Mr. Felber and this parking initiative. He also requested that the Fire District Council be allowed to participate in the creation of the actual ordinance controlling the programming of the meters. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Website – Mr. Parsons

Mr. Parsons reported that through September 24 (12 weeks since the site went live) the website has averaged 6.7 unique visitors per day. The highest rate was 13.0 per day for the week ending July 30; the lowest was 3.4 per day for the week ending September 24.

Mr. White reported that the website is moving up the list on Google.

It was suggested that the website address be added to the Fire District letterhead.

General Discussion

Mr. Russell reported that there was a suggestion that there be a three to five mile "Turkey Trot Run" on Thanksgiving or the day afterward. The District Council suggested that the event be on the Friday after Thanksgiving. Mr. Russell also noted that he has pledged Fire District underwriting for the horse drawn carriages in the village on that same Friday.

Mr. Russell also reported that the Ocean House is trying to bring in more people off season and over the holidays. They would like to use the Watch Hill Chapel for some musical events and will pay to blow in hot air for heat.

At 5:15 pm the meeting was adjourned to Executive Session during which the following motions were made and passed:

A motion was made to elect Scott Harold as the First Assistant Fire Chief. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

A motion was made to create the position of Training Officer with an annual stipend of \$10,000 per year. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

A motion was made to create a new fire department website using funds in the current budget. It was seconded and passed unanimously.

The District Council returned to regular session at 6:00 p.m. and, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley
Office Manager