

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

DISTRICT COUNCIL INFORMATIONAL MEETING

Friday, December 16, 2011

4:00 p.m.

Fire Station

222 Watch Hill Road

Watch Hill, RI

An informational meeting of the District Council of the Watch Hill Fire District was held at the Watch Hill Fire Station and by phone at 4:00 p.m. Friday, December 16, 2011.

The following members were present:

William H. White, Treasurer

James T. Beale, Jr., Chairman Finance Committee

Jason Simmons, Fire Chief

The following members participated by phone:

Charles S. Whitman III, Moderator

Grant G. Simmons III, Chairman Park Commission

Penelope B. Kelly, Member at Large

Andrew Parsons, Member at Large

Voters present:

Robert Peacock

Also present were:

Judy Kelley, Office Manager

Lyn Traver, Administrative Assistant

As a quorum was not present, all discussion was for information only and no action was taken.

Finance Committee – James T. Beale, Jr.

Mr. Beale reported that as of November 28, 2011, 391 tax bills had been paid; 38 remain unpaid with some of them repeat offenders. As a result, tax revenue is \$44,000 below budget and \$12,000 less than last year at this time. Mr. Whitman will check with Mr. Thomsen on the cost of filing a lien on the most serious offender.

Report of the Treasurer – William White

Mr. White reported that given the existing revenue to date and the anticipated revenue, the Fire District would end the year over budget with \$856,000 versus the budgeted \$854,000. If the entire expense budget is spent, that would total \$896,000, leaving a deficit of \$40,000 versus the \$67,000 originally anticipated, so the Fire District is doing at least as well as planned. (This assumes the \$25,000 Contingency/Capital Reserves is not spent.) Mr. White estimated that cash on hand at year end would equal \$100,000.

Report of the Park Commission – Grant G. Simmons III

Mr. Simmons thanked Mr. White for his help in coordinating the work done on the sea wall by Field of Dreams. The sea wall repair is finished and Mr. Simmons thinks it is better than he had anticipated and should stand up for the next 10 years. The project came in just under budget at \$57,000.

Mr. Simmons reported that the Bay Street project is proceeding on time and that it is a very clean and orderly excavation project. There have been problems for a few merchants, but that is really an issue of communication between the Town of Westerly and the merchants. Gabriels was most impacted as, while an access lane was left open, it was not clearly marked and hard to see. Down town parking by the Ocean House staff has resulted in their use of most available parking spaces. Mr. White noted that Bay Street had been virtually free of construction until December 1, 2011.

Fire Department – Jason Simmons

Mr. Simmons asked Mr. Peacock to discuss the group purchase of electricity as offered from a vendor through the Town of Westerly per a contract they had negotiated. Mr. Peacock explained that the Fire District would have to sign a three year contract at a set price. The rate only affects the supply cost, not the delivery cost. For the Fire Department, electricity runs about \$255 per month of which \$131 is the supply portion. Changing to the group purchase might save \$220 per year. However, it is a gamble. If the rate goes up, more is saved. If the rate goes down, there is actually a loss. Mr. Parsons pointed out that there is little variability in electric rates and perhaps the group contract would not be worth it. Mr. Jason Simmons thanked Mr. Peacock for his research into the pros and cons of the group contract.

Relative to the Bay Street construction, Mr. Simmons reported that there were some access concerns but that he had spoken with the manager on site and communication has improved. The Fire Department will be looking into alternate routes when roads are blocked. In reviewing the placement of the fire hydrants on Bay Street, which are supposed to be 500 feet apart, Mr. Simmons concluded that one should be moved and one should be added. He is working with Cherenzia on the best locations. It appears that the best place for the new hydrant would be in front of the Watch Hill Inn. Mr. Simmons has communicated this to Mr. Catalano. It is anticipated that the new hydrant will not result in the loss of a parking space. The moving of one hydrant and the addition of the new hydrant will come at no cost to the Fire District. It will be paid for by the Town as part of the Bay Street project.

Mr. Simmons reported that a Rhode Island bill is pending that would extend to volunteer departments strict fire code standards currently applied only to paid fire departments. If passed it would require a plan for compliance by 1/1/2013 and full compliance by 1/1/2015. Right now the Watch Hill Fire Department is about 90% compliant but to achieve the remaining 10% would be very expensive. Various volunteer fire departments have written letters against the passage of the new bill. It is apparently a union backed measure.

Mr. Simmons reported that several large budget items for the Fire Department normally paid in December were expended in November instead. Also, he reported that the Fire Department has

purchased a new ATV. The old one was 7 years old (a donation from US. Tobacco) and was starting to cost too much in maintenance. The new one cost a net of \$10,000 (after trade in) and should last longer than the previous ATV as there is now inside storage. Overall, the Fire Department will still be within budget.

Future Projects Committee – Andrew Parsons

Mr. Parsons said no progress had been made since the last report. They are waiting for a response from the Harvard Business School on possible candidates for the information gathering position. Mr. White asked if any other local schools had been approached. Mr. Parson replied, not to his knowledge.

Road Safety – Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman noted that he had sent a letter to Senator Algieri to have him ask the state Department of Transportation (“DOT”) to do a study of Watch Hill Road to determine the best way to improve safety, and that Senator Algieri had written such a request letter to the DOT. He also reported that a committee of concerned citizens has been formed and that they met on December 10, 2011. Mr. Richard Youngken was present to give insights based on his research for improvements along Ocean View Highway. Cathy Moore, the head of the Improvement Society, is coordinating the suggestions for change. Minutes from that meeting are being prepared and will be circulated to the District Council.

Mr. Grant Simmons said Police Chief St. Clair has given permission to use more speed monitoring signs and that the Fire District will buy one more sign. This will cost about \$4,500 and will come from the Park Commission budget. For the next fiscal year, two additional signs are projected.

It was suggested that pedestrian safety be addressed in the letter that goes out in the spring, suggesting the wearing of reflective clothing. While a long term solution might be a sidewalk all the way along Watch Hill Road, that would be very expensive and (using eminent domain) not very feasible in the short term. It was agreed that lowering the speed limit and enforcing it was a quick and inexpensive fix, but would require consent from DOT.

Harbor Management Legal Bills – Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman noted that the Fire District has received reimbursement for the first set of legal invoices and that he will go to the Watch Hill Yacht Club to negotiate regarding the next set of invoices. Asked about the status of the Harbor Commission, Mr. Grant Simmons said they were in the process of writing up their report for the state.

Mr. Whitman advised that the next meeting will be Friday, January 20, 2012, either as a formal meeting if a quorum is present and there are matters to decide, or as an informational meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley

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Office Manager