

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

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, December 17, 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, December 17, 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
Grant G. Simmons III, Chairman Park Commission
Jason Simmons, Fire Chief

Voters Present:

John Felber
Joan Lemp
Cathy Moore
George C. Moore, Jr.
Joann Nicholas
George Nicholas
Robert Peacock
Linda Parrilla
Richard Sayre
Judith Smith
Shelley Weier
Stuart Weier

Also present were:

Chaplin B. Barnes
Officer Turano

By Phone:

Penelope Kelly, District Council Member at Large
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 October 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 in terms of income, there was about \$27,000 of property taxes left to collect but that the District was \$28,000 ahead of last year at this time. He also noted that the bathhouse income was \$8,000 over budget and the Merry-Go-Round receipts were \$4,000 over budget. It was asked if the latter was due to better weather or the new accounting. Mr. Grant Simmons said that June and July were virtually the same as last year so the gains came in August and September and that he could not say for certain what caused the increase. One additional payment of about \$25,000 is due from HOB. Expenses are on budget.

Mr. White stated that as of the end of November there was about \$465,000 in unrestricted cash and \$60,000 in restricted cash. About \$400,000 in budgeted expenses remain, so the District's cash position is fine.

Fire Department – Mr. Jason Simmons

Mr. Simmons reported that a new website is being developed which will be linked to the Fire District website. Target completion is February, 2011.

Contributions to the Community – Mr. Beale

Mr. Beale said that, working with Mr. Toolan, they were looking at the property tax contribution from the Watch Hill Fire District to the Town of Westerly. They were also quantifying the donations made to the Westerly Hospital, the YMCA and the Library. The goal is to make a statement for public relations on the monetary value of Watch Hill via tax payments and generosity.

Mr. Russell said that such a statement could have been useful in giving people a better perspective when there was negative publicity related to using part of a proposed Westerly bond issue for the utility pole project. He said the opposition was mainly from a small group.

Mr. Felber suggested that the numbers include the room and food tax revenue from the hotels and restaurants and also list the free events sponsored by the Ocean House and the Business Association.

Mr. Sayre suggested that the resulting numbers be shown as a percent of the total income for the town.

Possible Parking Meters on Bay Street – Mr. Grant Simmons

Mr. Simmons stated that the information being presented was primarily fact finding and that the Fire District did not have a position since Bay Street is a town road and hence this is a Westerly issue. However, he noted that parking has been a long time problem. The use of CSO's has had its pluses and minuses. One problem is being able to define a violation of the two hour parking limit. Use of meter kiosk parking would solve this issue. Such kiosks accept cash, credit and/or debit cards. The resulting slip is placed on the dash board, where it can be checked by the police or CSO's.

Mr. G. Simmons introduced Officer Turano. He said the Police Department reevaluates the parking issue each year to look for ways to improve it. They met with a kiosk vendor who suggested 11 kiosks; the police department felt 6 would be adequate. The kiosks would be on town property. There are 80 parking places on Bay Street and 15 on Larkin Road (the latter may or may not be included). The rates per hour would be set by the town, as would the parking time limit, currently 2 hours. There would still have to be CSO's to walk around to check the slips, so the enforcement would remain the same. They would also still chalk the tires to prevent someone from refilling the meter for a second two hour period. The capital investment to install the kiosks would be from \$70,000 to \$90,000. Officer Turano noted that over the past two years the town has collected about \$75,000 in fines, indicating the expense of the kiosks could be repaid in about two years.

Mr. Felber said that the Business Association had put together a committee representing a good cross section of businesses. The committee came up with a starting formula suggesting that the kiosk parking be in effect from June 15 to September 15, that the fee be \$5 per hour on weekends and \$4 per hour on weekdays, that the parking limit would be 3 hours and that there would be ½ hour of free parking.

Mr. Grant Simmons pointed out that there would still be some free parking in the Fire District lot.

Mr. Saunders asked where the committee was in the process. He felt it was basically not a good idea since a certain segment of the market would drop out once free parking was changed to paid parking. However, he also said that the starting point for the study should be the Business Association, which should take a true survey of how their members feel.

Mr. Nicholas, who is on the Business Association committee studying the meters, said one other part of the proposal was that kiosk parking rates be in effect from 10 am to 5 pm daily, allowing free parking early in the morning and later in the day. He also acknowledged that the plan had not been approved by the entire Business Association membership.

Mrs. Smith said she felt the three hour parking limit was too long; it gave people time to get to the beach. She felt a two hour limit would be better and also that the per hour rate was too high; it should be \$3 per hour.

Mr. George Moore said the Fire District should have a vote on the issue. Mr. Russell replied that he had heard from 39 residents, all of whom indicated that they were against going to metered parking. Mr. Russell also indicated that the Town Council would be heavily swayed by what the Watch Hill Fire District recommended and that they were waiting for the Fire District input.

Mrs. Lemp said she felt Watch Hill was a special place, which is why people come. She felt meters and the associated explanatory signs added more visual clutter to that already existing with flags and other signs.

Mr. Moore asked what started the investigation into meters. Mr. Felber replied that he had observed that 2 or 3 hour parking limits did not work to bring in people who were willing to spend money. He started to research options, checked some kiosk vendors and found that the Westerly police chief had looked into kiosk parking a year ago. Mr. Felber stated that his goal was to open a dialogue and suggest alternatives. He also stated that time is an issue if meters were to be in place for 2011. The only public hearing occurring in time is on January 3, 2011 and clearly, there will not be a consensus one way or the other by that date.

Mr. Beale noted that the current fine for violating the 2 hour limit is \$75. He suggested the town increase that to \$150 and see what effect that has.

After further discussion, the matter was tabled until there is more information available.

Mr. Whitman made a motion to table the approval the Fire District gave to the kiosk plan on October 22 until further information is available. The motion was seconded and passed.

Lattner Foundation Grant – Mr. Grant Simmons

Mr. Simmons reported that the Lattner Foundation was concerned about the safety issues at Ft. Mansfield and that the Fire District was having trouble getting funds to do something about it. They therefore issued a grant of \$50,000 that flows through the Watch Hill Conservancy for an engineering study of the structural integrity of the existing ceilings and the installation of some sort of safety railings. All previously discussed options will be considered.

Fort Road Sea Wall – Mr. Grant Simmons

Mr. Simmons reported that there was considerable erosion under Fort Road on the bay side just at the point of access to Napatree. There are a variety of suggestions as to how to fix it. Mr. Simmons is in the process of getting permits from CRMC.

Mr. Nicholas said that the existing sea wall has been a huge negative. It sends waves back out into the fleet and this wave action also discourages marine life. Going forward he suggested using something that does not reflect the waves back out.

Mr. Grant Simmons said he had discussed this issue with Docko but that the angle of repose needed to encourage marine life was so gradual that it would not work in high tides and was not practical.

Westerly Harbor Commission – Mr. Grant Simmons

Mr. Simmons said that there have been monthly meetings going to formalize regulations and that the work is 80% done. Once completed the resulting rules will have an impact on Watch Hill Harbor, so residents are encouraged to attend the meetings at the police station at 6 pm on the second Thursday of each month.

Utility Pole Project – Mr. Grant Simmons

Mr. Simmons reported that the last of 7 poles on Fort Road was taken down a week ago and the power reconnected. He praised the Larkin Square Condo group for their help.

Mr. Nicholas said one remaining pole is blocking access to his panel. Mr. Simmons will check on this with National Grid.

Mr. Barnes reported that the Conservancy is now working on the Bay Street piece of the project. \$1.1 million of privately raised funds has already been spent on planning and the construction of Phase 1, Fort Road.. Public money will be needed for the next phase, Bay Street and Larkin Road, and in the immediate future to put in the duct work when the town opens up Bay Street to fix the drainage and water line, which will be in fall 2011 or early 2012. Mr. Barnes reported that the Conservancy is working closely with the Town to coordinate the work and to get joint grants to defray the expense.

Website Update – Mr. Parsons

Mr. Parsons reported that the website went live in July and that there have been a reasonable number of hits. However, there have also been some hosting difficulties and calendar updates have not occurred in a timely manner. Having investigated alternatives, Mr. Parson is recommending the use of Mark Gordon of Three Bean Studios to manage the site. Mr. Gordon has over 200 clients including RISC, the Shelter Harbor Fire District, and the Weekapaug Foundation. His server is up over 99% of the time and his fees are modest. Mr. Parsons stated that Mr. Gordon had met with Judy Kelley, the office manager, and that she was comfortable with the proposed change, which will occur after New Year's.

New Sign Ordinance – Mr. Whitman

Mr. Whitman reported that the current ordinance restricts signs to 2 feet by 2 feet. The Lila Delman real estate signs were initially 6 feet by 6 feet. After Mr. Whitman complained to the zoning board, the Delman signs were reduced to 4 feet by 4 feet. Mr. Whitman reported that on January 10, 2011 there will be a hearing on a new zoning proposal to increase the allowable sign size to 6 feet by 6 feet. He finds it unbelievable that the Town Council would want to allow larger signs and he is planning to attend the meeting to speak against it.

Mr. Beale said that he had seen a real estate play book that indicated that an increasing percentage of real estate sales are due to internet advertising and a decreasing percentage due to signage. Mr. Weier agreed that this was the case.

Cathy Moore suggested that the initial position of the Fire District should be that no signs are allowed but if that is not possible, then the maximum size should remain 2 feet by 2 feet.

Mr. Weier pointed out that the use of signs is up to the property owner. Some insist on for sale signs.

Mr. Whitman said he had spoken with Mr. Hartford about going to no signs at all, but Mr. Hartford felt that might inhibit economic activity and therefore he would not endorse it.

Mr. Felber noted that the current ordinance has different standards for different areas so Watch Hill could ask for no signs at all in its area.

After discussion of the pros and cons, the District Council agreed that anyone attending the meeting should be there as an individual and not as a Fire District representative.

The meeting was adjourned to executive session at 5:35 pm.

The meeting returned to regular session at 5:45 pm and, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley
Office Manager