

114th ANNUAL MEETING  
WATCH HILL FIRE DISTRICT

July 11, 2015

9:30 A.M.

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by the Moderator, Charles S. Whitman III, at 9:30 a.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Robert Brockmann.

REPORT OF BOARD OF CANVASSERS

The Moderator called on Shelley S. Weier, Assessor of Taxes, to present the List of District Voters, as certified by the Board of Canvassers, to the Clerk.

She said:

As required by the District Charter, the Board of Canvassers, consisting of myself as Assessor of Taxes and Ann Brockmann, Collector of Taxes, met on the last Monday of June to prepare the list of voters for this meeting. We certify that the copy presented to the Clerk is a true copy of that list.

**QUORUM**

The Moderator called on the Clerk, who reported that there was a quorum (10 voters) present.

The Moderator declared the meeting in order. He called on the Clerk to read the Necrology.

Necrology – Clerk, George C. Moore, Jr.

Chaplin B. Barnes  
Mary S. G. Bisbee  
Jason E. Brown  
Joan B. Gray  
Morris Lloyd, Jr.  
John W. Mazzola  
Frank E. Rutan III  
John R. Whitman

The Moderator reminded those present of the qualification of voters (i.e., Watch Hill residents who are eligible to vote in a Westerly election and owners of property in Watch Hill – all individual owners, and one representative of any trust, corporation, partnership or other entity

owning property), and asked that those present who were not qualified voters refrain from participating.

#### Introduction of Guests – Moderator

The Moderator introduced the Police Chief, Town of Westerly, Edward St. Clair, who introduced his fellow officer, Lieutenant Stano Trombino. Mr. Whitman thanked the Chief for his work off season in having Watch Hill Road classified as a state no parking zone.

Chief St. Clair said he was working on further parking issues on Ridge Road. He noted that with the prevalence of GPS, visitors are finding new routes to the beach and creating new traffic issues. He also noted that communities are reluctant to have him post “beach closed”, but he will seek authority to post centrally located signs indicating that the parking lots are full.

Chief St. Clair explained that there is a parking waiver process for special events in residential areas, such as for parties, so it is possible that a group of cars parked in a tow zone or no parking area are there legitimately. However, he still urged local residents to call the police if they are concerned about vehicles parked in their neighborhood. He also stated that he was working with the new town solicitor to establish an expedited procedure to add streets to the no parking list due to safety issues. Asked if illegally parked cars would be towed, Chief St. Clair responded that the department would be reluctant to tow unless the car was blocking a driveway or a fire hydrant because of problems in where to take the car; towing would be an action of last resort. In answer to another question, Chief St. Clair advised that the fine for parking in a tow zone is \$75 and that the fine for overtime parking in the village is \$75 during the summer and \$15 during the off season. Collection rates for fines are very high.

Chief St. Clair advised that the police department is in the process of buying a new ATV and that the old one will be donated to the East Beach Association.

Chief St. Clair also reported that beginning next week, there will be some undercover policemen on East Beach to look for unruly behavior and alcohol use. He said his department had sent out undercover patrols last year but had done so later in the season so it had less effect. Hence, they are starting earlier this year and will be out at the end of the season as well.

A member of the audience mentioned that on the 4th of July, due to the congestion, there were many people walking on the streets after the fireworks display. Chief St. Clair said he was aware of this and had made a note to have an extra officer available next year to help alleviate this issue.

Finally, Chief St. Clair pointed out that Lieutenant Trombino was in charge of the day shift so if the Chief were not available, residents should call Lieutenant Trombino.

Mr. Whitman thanked Chief St. Clair and Lieutenant Trombino for coming.

### **Approval of Minutes:**

A motion to waive the reading of the minutes was made, seconded and approved. The Moderator then asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the last Annual Meeting on July 12, 2014 and those of the Reconvened Annual Meeting on August 24, 2013, both of which were previously circulated. The motion was made, seconded, and approved.

### **Report of the Treasurer – Robert C. Murray**

The Moderator called upon Mr. Murray to give his report. Mr. Murray referred those present to the Audit Report enclosed in the mailing and noted that the Fire District accountant, John Brough, was present in case anyone had any questions.

Mr. Murray said that as of 6/1/14, the Fire District had a cash balance of \$237,010.12. Receipts for the budget year ending 5/31/15 were \$1,067,588.56, 53% from taxes and 47% from rental income. Disbursements were \$1,055,966.14, leaving a cash balance of \$248,632.54, \$11,622 more than the prior year. Overall, for the 2014-2015 fiscal year, expenses were budgeted for \$1,032,644 versus an actual of \$1,014,260, about \$18,000 less than budgeted. However, Mr. Murray noted that some budget lines were overspent while others were underspent.

Mr. Murray called upon the Clerk to propose the following resolution:

### **RESOLUTION VALIDATING OVER-EXPENDITURES OF APPROPRIATIONS AND TRANSFERRING UNEXPENDED BALANCES**

RESOLVED:

That all over-expended appropriations as of May 31, 2015, aggregating \$114,873.72 for the fiscal year ending May 31, 2015 before application of unexpended appropriations for said fiscal year, as reported by the District Treasurer and as noted under Statement of Appropriations, Cash Disbursements, Reimbursements, and Encumbrances, be and the same are hereby validated to the same extent as if the District Treasurer had been fully authorized to make such expenditures, and all unexpended balances of appropriations as of May 31, 2015, as reported by the District Treasurer and as noted in said Statement of Appropriations, Cash Disbursements, Reimbursements, and Encumbrances, be and the same are hereby applied against said over-expended appropriations.

The motion was seconded and approved.

### **Report of the Tax Assessor – Shelley S. Weier**

Grand List of District properties is \$1,158,435,460 as of December 31, 2014. After the deduction of Westerly and Watch Hill exemptions of \$15,009,710, the assessed value of taxable property is \$1,143,425,750. This reflects an increase since last year of \$9,091,532 in assessed value.

**Report of the Tax Collector – Ann L. Brockmann**

Taxes received	
2014	\$560,546.87
Prior Years	\$7,520.33
Unpaid Taxes (Total)	\$11,949.36 on 8 properties

Comparison Unpaid in Prior Years

2013	\$12,849.45
2012	\$3,641.09

**Report of Fire Department – Chief Robert Peacock**

A copy of the Fire Department Annual Report is attached and a part of these minutes.

Chief Peacock reported that there had been 114 calls in the past year, down 30% from the previous year. He noted that 50% of the calls come during the first shift, 70% come Monday to Friday, when most of the volunteers are at work, and that 50% occur during the summer season. He noted that mutual aid with the other fire departments is working well, with the sharing of resources and equipment.

Chief Peacock advised that the fire department had been in need of a new pumper, which would have cost \$450,000, but that the District was able to purchase a used pumper from the Bradford Fire District at a total cost of \$90,000, including refurbishment. This used vehicle should last another 10 years.

Chief Peacock reported that there was also a need for a new boat to aid in water emergencies, noting that one of the existing vessels was donated by Mr. Royce. Mr. Whitman suggested that if anyone had a boat that they wished to donate for a tax deduction, they should speak with Chief Peacock.

Chief Peacock thanked Mr. Griffin for his donation of the Dodge Charger, which is parked in various places within the Fire District and which has been very useful in reducing speeding.

Chief Peacock advised that there would be a push coming from the Town of Westerly to ensure that all street numbers are visible from the street and urged residents to check their homes to be certain they are in compliance.

Finally, Chief Peacock thanked the District Council, the Board of Engineers, his officers and all the volunteers for their support and efforts throughout the year.

**Report of the Park Commission – Chairman, Grant G. Simmons III**

Mr. Simmons reported that all the leases are up to date, that the Marry-Go-Round is in good shape and that the new Larkin parking lot is generating revenue. He noted that he had had a study done of the sea wall, which has about 10 years of life left but that certain areas may need attention sooner. Repair of the sea wall and addressing issues related to Ft. Mansfield are part of the Long Term Study and will be addressed in that context.

A member of the audience stated that he was pleased to see work being done on the bathhouses, as these are a face of Watch Hill. Mr. Simmons said this would be a continuing renovation process, with a little bit being done each year.

Finally, Mr. Simmons stated that he is working on the installation of back flow preventers to reduce flooding in the village area.

### **Report of the Finance Committee – Chairman, Paul Verbinnen**

Mr. Verbinnen started with some key points related to the 2014-2015 budget year. He reported that the Fire District had ended the year with a surplus even with the purchase of a new fire truck and the repayment of a \$42,000 loan to the Misquamicut Club for expenses related to the swap for the Larkin parking lot, which generated \$37,000 more in revenue than budgeted. He also noted that the mill rate for Watch Hill is the lowest of any fire district in Rhode Island, primarily because of the District's rental properties, and it is therefore critical to maintain these properties so this revenue stream will continue. He further noted that donations and support from the other Watch Hill non-profits help to keep the mill rate low.

Mr. Verbinnen stated that the 2015-2016 budget is up \$70,000 over the previous budget year and up \$88,000 from the previous year's actual expenditures. The bulk of the increase is in general expense, due to increased costs for insurance, bathhouse repairs and the District Council's recommendation that \$85,000 be set aside in the contingency fund. Mr. Verbinnen stated that revenue was budgeted equal to expenditures so the Finance Committee was presenting a balanced budget. The budget includes a \$0.015 increase in the mill rate to \$0.515 per thousand, a 3% increase. So, Mr. Verbinnen questioned, with a small surplus from the past year, why was the committee proposing a mill rate increase? He again noted that the Fire District needed to prepare for the eventual purchase of a new fire truck and a new boat, further repair of the bathhouses and repair of the sea wall. In addition he noted that while FEMA had reimbursed the Fire District for most of the expenses associated with Superstorm Sandy, there was no assurance this would be the case in a future weather event; thus, the storm reserve needed to be replenished.

Finally, Mr. Verbinnen thanked Chief Peacock, Mr. Simmons, and Mr. Murray for managing the budgets this past year. Key initiatives going forward will be a focus on costs, revenue producing properties and more clearly separating the Fire District's responsibilities and associated costs in the stewardship of Napatree Point. Mr. Verbinnen noted that the Fire District's commitment to activities on Napatree was being reduced by \$10,000 and that the District was working with the Conservancy to better apportion oversight, responsibilities and accountability for activities on

Napatree. Mr. Verbinnen expects that the reimbursement accounting that flows through the Fire District accounts will be eliminated this year, reducing the Fire District's exposure.

In closing, Mr. Verbinnen stated that he and his committee members, Jeff McGill and Judy O'Connell, believe that the proposed budget is reasonable.

Mr. Whitman asked the Clerk to read the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the report of the Finance Committee be accepted and filed and the Appropriations for the fiscal year 2015-2016 be and the same are hereby approved.

The motion was seconded and approved. The Budget is approved.

### **TAX RESOLUTION**

Mr. Whitman called on the Clerk.

RESOLVED:

That the electors of the Watch Hill Fire District, hereby order the assessment and collection of a tax on the ratable property of said District in a sum not less than \$580,000 nor more than \$610,000. The Assessor of Taxes shall assess and apportion said tax on the inhabitants and ratable property of said District as of the 31<sup>st</sup> day of December, 2014 at 12:00 noon, according to law, and shall certify and deliver the same to the Collector of Taxes on or before the first day of August, 2015. The Collector of Taxes shall proceed to collect said tax; said tax to be due and payable on or before the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September 2015, and all taxes remaining unpaid on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September 2015 shall carry interest until collected, a penalty at the rate of 12% per annum upon such unpaid taxes. To the extent that assessments as of the 31<sup>st</sup> day of December 2014 may be modified by the Assessor of Taxes, the Treasurer and the Collector of Taxes shall make adjustments as appropriate.

The motion was seconded and approved.

### **TAX ANTICIPATION NOTES**

Mr. Whitman called on the Clerk.

RESOLVED:

That the District Treasurer be, and hereby is, authorized and empowered during the current fiscal year of the District, commencing June 1, 2015 and ending May 31, 2016, to borrow such sum or sums of money as shall be necessary for the payment of the current liabilities and expenses of the District, but not to exceed in the whole the sum of \$100,000.00, and to issue negotiable promissory note or notes of the District therefor, which shall be made payable not later than one

(1) year from the respective date or dates thereof. Negotiable notes issued pursuant to the authority hereof shall be signed by the District Treasurer and countersigned by the District Clerk, and such counter signatures shall be conclusive evidence to all holders of such note or notes of the approval and consent of the District and the District Officers to the loan or loans evidenced thereby. The District Treasurer is hereby authorized and empowered to renew any of said notes from time to time, but any such renewal note shall be due not later than one (1) year after the date of the original note so renewed.

The motion was seconded and approved.

**RESOLUTION RE: EMERGENCY NEEDS**

Mr. Whitman called on the Clerk.

RESOLVED:

That the Treasurer is authorized to expend sums not to exceed \$30,000.00 in the aggregate, to meet the contingent and emergency needs of the Fire District and to carry out the duties and obligations of the officers and committees in accordance with the provisions of the charter.

The motion was seconded and approved.

**RATIFICATION AND APPROVAL OF ACTS OF COUNCIL, OFFICERS, FINANCE COMMITTEE AND PARK COMMISSION**

Mr. Whitman called on Audrey Moore.

RESOLVED:

That each and all of the resolutions, acts and proceedings of the District Council (as shown by its records in the Minute Book of the District Council) and of its Officers, Finance Committee, and Park Commission in carrying out and promoting the purposes, objects, and interests of the Watch Hill Fire District, during the fiscal year ending May 31, 2015, be and the same are approved, ratified and hereby made the acts and deeds of the Watch Hill Fire District.

The motion was seconded and approved.

**AUTHORIZATION OF MODERATOR TO APPEAR AT HEARINGS**

Mr. Whitman called on the Clerk.

RESOLVED:

That the Moderator, or such other person or persons as the District Council or the Moderator shall designate, be and hereby are fully authorized and empowered to enter objections or legal actions on behalf of the Watch Hill Fire District in reference to any zoning matters, liquor licenses, legislative matters, or any other subject affecting the properties at Watch Hill.

The motion was seconded and approved.

**RESOLUTION RE: ASSISTANT TO THE TREASURER**

Mr. Whitman called on the Clerk.

RESOLVED:

That William D. Horne is appointed and employed as Assistant to the Treasurer for the year 2015 - 2016 and said Assistant is empowered to execute checks and make withdrawals from funds of the District in the same manner as the District Treasurer, subject to limitations requiring dual signatures and that the Assistant to the Treasurer shall be bonded in the same manner and amount as the District Treasurer.

The motion was seconded and approved.

**RESOLUTION APPOINTING AUDITOR**

Mr. Whitman called on the Clerk.

RESOLVED:

That DiSanto, Priest & Co. be appointed Auditor of the District for the year 2015 – 2016.

The motion was seconded and approved.

**REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE**  
**ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Mr. Whitman called on Jane O’Connell.

Mrs. O’Connell noted that the slate that was included in the mailing indicated an open position and that the revised slate in front of the voters today was complete. She then thanked her committee for their help: Joan Beth Brown, Whitney George, Deborah Lamm, and Roberta Allardyce.

The Nominating Committee, in accordance with the prior vote at the Annual Meeting of July 12, 2014, moves the election of the following slate of Officers:

Moderator

Charles S. Whitman III, 1 Yr.

Deputy Moderator	John M. Regan III, 1 Yr.
Treasurer	Robert C. Murray, 1 Yr.
District Council, Members at Large	Andrew J. Parsons, 1 Yr.
	William J. Miller, Jr., 1 Yr.
Clerk	George C. Moore, Jr., 1 Yr.
Collector of Taxes	Ann L. Brockmann, 1 Yr.
Assessor of Taxes	Shelley S. Weier, 1 Yr.
Finance Committee	Paul Verbinnen, 3 Yrs.
Park Commission	Grant G. Simmons III, 3 Yrs.
	Elizabeth Bean, 3 Yrs.
	Dabney Pierce, 2 Yrs.
	Jeanne Blasberg, 1 Yr.
Fire Chief	Robert Peacock, 1 Yr.
First Assistant Chief	Scott Harold, 1 Yr.
Second Assistant Chief	Jason Simmons, 1 Yr.
Fire Department Members-at-Large	Andrew G. Barber, 1 Yr.
	John M. Regan III, 1 Yr.

Mr. Whitman asked if there were any nominations from the floor. There being none, Mr. Whitman asked for a second to the motion to approve the slate as presented. It was seconded and the motion was approved.

**APPOINTMENT OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Mr. Whitman called on the Clerk.

RESOLVED:

That Jane B. O’Connell be appointed Chairman of the Nominating Committee, 2015- 2016 and that the Chairman be empowered to appoint at least two additional members to serve thereon and that the Nominating Committee deliver to the District Clerk, at least three weeks before the next annual meeting, its proposed slate of officers. The Clerk shall give notice of the proposed slate in the call of the annual meeting.

The motion was seconded and approved.

**Other Business**

Mr. Whitman thanked Ann Stevenson for her two years of service on the District Council.

Lisa McGill complimented Mr. Robert Henderson for his 20 years of service to the Fire District. She stated that one could see him daily picking up trash in the village and on the beaches and encouraged anyone who did see him to thank him.

There being no further business, upon a motion made and duly seconded it was

RESOLVED:

That the meeting be RECESSED to the call of the Moderator.

The motion was approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith H. Kelley  
Office Manager