

Minutes of the Meeting of
Quonochontaug Central Beach Fire District
Board of Governors
August 8, 2024
Charlestown Police Department
Meeting Room
4901 Old Post Rd, Charlestown, RI 02813

Members in attendance: Mark Alperin, Renee Cohen, Bob Frazier, Charlie Freedgood, Fred Newton, Barry Okun and Debbie Dupre

Members Absent: Mike Lewers, Dede Consoli and Ron Ruel

Also in attendance were Kathy Alperin, Diane McEnroe as well as a member of the public.

1. Call to Order/Moderator's Opening Remarks: **Moderator, Charlie Freedgood**

Charlie called the meeting to order at 8:16am and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Approval of the Minutes: **Clerk, Debbie Dupre**

There were no edits or comments to the July 19, 2024 draft minutes. A **motion** was made to approve the draft minutes as written. The **motion** was **seconded and passed** with all in attendance voting in favor (the Moderator, who under the District's By-Laws only votes in the case of a tie).

Debbie reminded all chairs and managers to get their annual meeting reports to her by August 12, 2024 for inclusion in the annual meeting packet, which must be distributed to the community prior to the Annual Meeting in accordance with the bylaws. Charlie added that in years past each chair and manager read their report to the community and then answered questions. Recently the process was changed to referencing the reports generally and opening the floor for any questions. Discussion ensued on how the reports should be handled this year. Barry suggested that a materiality standard to decide which reports should be read in the meeting. Debbie added that during the next two meetings, the BoG will be asked to vote on issues to be presented at the Annual Meeting for a vote by the community.

Next item discussed was the timeline for receiving proxies for voting at the Annual Meeting. Following a brief discussion, a **motion** was made to allow the clerk to receive proxies up to 7:00 am on September 14, 2024, the day of the Annual Meeting by mail, email, or physical delivery. The **motion** was **seconded and passed** with all in attendance voting in favor (the Moderator, who under the District's By-Laws only votes in the case of a tie).

3. Moderator's Report: **Moderator, Charlie Freedgood**

Charlie stated that he did not have anything to report other than to focus on preparation for this year's annual meeting. He raised the likely increase in cost of the water upgrade project resulting from the rebidding of the construction contract and reminded the group that the community has approved up to \$1.6M for the upgrade project. If the updated contract price exceeds that, the community will need to approve the increase at the annual meeting. He reported that the contractor has not yet provided the updated number, and an estimated amount may need to be presented to the community. Discussion ensued and the group agreed to table the decision until the Finance and Budget and Public Works reported.

4. Treasurer's Report: **Barry Okun for the Treasurer**

Barry deferred the Treasurer's Report to the Finance and Budget portion of the meeting.

5. Committee Chairs' Reports:

Charlie suggested we move to Long-Range Planning to allow our guest speaker to report next.

Long-Range Planning: **Renee Cohen, Chair**

Renee discussed the status of the draft Comprehensive Long-Range Plan. She reported work continues on three of the five priorities - Quonnie Neck Cooperation, Governance and Water Quantity projects – and that the Water Quantity project team plans to provide an interim report at the October meeting.

Then Renee welcomed Diane McEnroe, who presented the interim findings of the Governance project team, tasked with evaluating our current fire district governance structure against alternative structures such as an HOA (homeowners' association) and making recommendations about the best structure going forward given the volunteer nature of the community.

Diane outlined the fire district structure generally as well as QCBFD specifically. Under Rhode Island law a Fire District is considered a non-profit quasi-municipality that may offer an array of infrastructure and services (in QCBFD namely, fire protection, water, garbage collection, roads, right-of-ways, beach and dunes oversight and water access through the marina) and pays for these through its right to tax. In evaluating the structure, the following considerations are being weighed: state legislature action is required to make changes; the district must comply with some government regulations like the Open Meetings Act and Access to Public Records Act; limited means of enforcement of fire district rules and regulations; power to tax (attractive to lenders); volunteer exhaustion; structure is under scrutiny by press and rights organizations such as the ACLU; and if changed structure might need to privatize community-owned property.

Diane also outlined the HOA (homeowners association) structure and relevant considerations, such as non-profit status keyed into a specific mandate (leaving homeowner to arrange individually for services outside the remit of the mandate), lower level of administrative requirements (OMA does not apply) though meetings with recorded minutes is required; provided services paid through dues; no taxing authority; volunteer burden is lighter; and structure currently attracts less scrutiny from press and rights organizations.

Other governance structures such as Planned Unit Development, town or condominium were mentioned but not considered in detail. Mark raised the issue of hiring professional services to cover certain functions or roles currently provided by community volunteers. The Governance team is still collecting information on using professional services in addition to bookkeeping and will update the group later.

The group thanked Diane and her team members for their hard work.

Finance and Budget:

Barry Okun, Chair

Barry reported that the Finance and Budget Committee "Agreed Upon Procedure" meeting reviewing 2023 tax collection took place, and the procedures accepted. The 2024 tax bills are scheduled to go out on time.

Next Barry led a discussion on the Finance and Budget Committee's proposed 2025 budget. He noted the allocation for garbage collection of \$68k was based on single weekly collection and the budget included an allocation of \$120k for estimated debt service to RIIB for the water upgrade project. He added that the projected tax collections for 2025 would be approximately \$543k to cover the budgeted expenses.

The group then revisited the discussion around the increased cost associated with the water upgrade project and a suitable estimated overage amount to present to the community (above the approved \$1.6m). Charlie proposed an increase of \$400k for a total of \$2m. A BoG vote to approve the amount will be placed on the late August agenda.

After answering questions about appropriate levels of reserves and clearer communication around what community taxes cover each year, Barry made a **motion** to approve the 2025 budget as proposed by the Finance and Budget Committee, using the draft assumptions with a minor adjustment to cash, for presentation to the community for approval at the 2024 Annual Meeting. The **motion** was **seconded and passed** with all in attendance voting in favor (the Moderator, who under the District's By-Laws only votes in the case of a tie).

Public Works:

Bob Frazier, Chair

Bob reported he is continuing to press the contractor for updated cost numbers for the water upgrade project. A question was raised around patching certain areas on the district's roads and repairing the fragmenting road edges (particularly on Surfside and Kenyon Avenues). Bob is pricing the patch work and reviewing the cause of the edge disintegration.

Community Property:

Mark reviewed the bid from CWPM, LLC for garbage and recycling collection services. Discussion arose around whether a second pickup is necessary during July and August especially given the larger can size and wear and tear of a second pick up on community roads. Mark clarified that if we decide on a single weekly collection in year 1, a second pickup could be added in years 2 and 3. A **motion** was made to accept CWPM's bid for garbage and recycling collection services from September 1, 2024 through August 31, 2027 with a single weekly collection and enter into a contract with CWPM, LLC on those terms to be executed on behalf of the district by the Moderator or his designee. The **motion** was **seconded and passed** with all in attendance voting in favor (the Moderator, who under the District's By-Laws only votes in the case of a tie).

Mark next reviewed ongoing maintenance projects. He reported that he met with Carrie to discuss a chemical-free approach to controlling vegetation on community property, requiring manually removing certain invasive species such as knock weed. He reported that Carrie and he met with Kaitlin Sowinski of PS Yardwork, LLC – a full-service, insured, certified plant manager with private clients within the district and provides services for the Weekapaug Conservation Foundation - on August 7th to get a bid for weekly chemical-free maintenance of certain community property areas (parking lot, playground, tennis court garden, and merchandise sales areas) as well as the dunes (Band D area). PS Yardwork have agreed to provide a detailed proposal within a week for BoG review at the August meeting.

6. Managers Reports:

Merchandise Sales:

Kathy Alperin for Dede Consoli

Kathy reported that the POD located at the shed has been removed. Kathy thanked Public Works for trimming the vegetation to facilitate the removal.

Kathy announced the kick-off of the 2024 Special Events Merchandise Sales Grant program, which offers proceeds from merchandise sales to fund community projects. Interested community members should apply by completing the grant form by 9am August 26th. The ad hoc grant task force will review the proposals on August 27th and present the selected projects to the BoG for approval at the September meeting. The grant forms are available from Dede. Charlie requested that the grant form also be distributed to the community via the district eblast.

Beach and Dunes:

Debbie Dupre for Carrie Gilpin

Debbie reported that the beach and dune safe swimming lecture was well attended and received positive feedback. Lifeguards Joe and Grace Morganthaler did a terrific job.

Beach and Dunes is continuing their work of chemical-free vegetation maintenance, particularly in connection with the overgrown bittersweet in the dune area as allowed under an existing CRMC permit. There are a few dedicated weeding volunteers, who assist but additional help is needed.

7. Adjournment:

A **motion** was made to adjourn at approximately 10:11am. The **motion** was **seconded and passed** with all members of the Board of Governors in attendance voting in favor (other than the Moderator, who under the District's By-Laws only votes in the case of a tie).

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Dupré, Clerk
Quonochontaug Central Beach Fire District