

Minutes of the Meeting of
Quonochontaug Central Beach Fire District
Board of Governors
October 21, 2023
Charlestown Police Station
Meeting Room
4901 Old Post Rd, Charlestown, RI 02813

Members in attendance: Renee Cohen, Dede Consoli, Charlie Freedgood, Bob Frazier, Mike Lewers, Barry Okun, Ron Ruel, Fred Newton and Debbie Dupre

Members Absent: Mark Alperin

Also in attendance was a member of the public.

1. Call to Order/Moderator's Opening Remarks

Moderator, Charlie Freedgood

Charlie called the meeting to order at 9:00am. No opening remarks beyond a thank you for coming.

2. Approval of the Minutes.

Clerk, Debbie Dupre

There was one comment to the September 16, 2023 minutes from Dede that she would like the minutes to reflect that there is additional money available from the Merchandise Sales for community improvement projects and any community members interested should apply through the grants process. A **motion** was made to approve the draft minutes as amended. 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).

Next item discussed was the proposed 2024 calendar for BoG meetings. Following a brief discussion, there was a **motion** to approve the following dates: January 20, 9am; March 9, 9am; May 25, 9am; June 15, 8:15am; July 19, 8:15am; August 8, 8:15am; August 23, 8:15am; September 14, directly following the Annual Meeting; and October 18, 9am. 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). Meeting locations are to be determined.

3. Treasurer's Report

Mike Lewers, Treasurer

Mike reported that the tax collection for this season is 96% complete, with five properties outstanding. The current balance of the various accounts was reviewed including the line of credit, which has a current balance of zero. Accounts receivable will be at \$0 by next week. Both the cash position and the general financial position of the FD is good. Discussion arose around the Special Events monies, and in which account they are currently being held. Mike proposed contacting Kathy Alperin, Assistant Treasurer – Special Events/Merchandise Sales regarding how to hold these monies – balancing the ease of access to the funds with earning better rates. Mike also offered to talk to the bank about receiving better rates on the FD accounts more generally.

4. Moderator's Report:

Moderator, Charlie Freedgood

Charlie reported that a three-year maintenance permit for the district's three rights-of-way from Surfside to the beach was approved by CRMC on September 30, 2023 allowing the FD to clear the three beach access paths as appropriate.

Charlie reported that the construction contract in connection with the water system upgrade project with R.P. Iannuccillo & Sons has been revised and re-executed, with an effective date June 7, 2023 in order to correspond to the earlier form of the contract. All changes made are favorable to the FD and included the addition of a financing contingency provision among several others.

5. Committee Chairs' Report

Finance and Budget:

Barry Okun, Finance Chair

Barry took the group through the financials and reported that the actuals appear on target with the FD 2023 budget. The reserves look healthy and are generally aligned with cash but will not be fully reconciled until the tax collection is complete. Discussion arose around the new assessment from the Town of Charlestown and how the process works. Also discussed was the current method of taking inventory of the unsold merchandise following the close of the sales season.

Long-Range Planning

Renee Cohen, Chair

Renee reviewed the comprehensive Long Range Planning committee work done to date from the kickoff, community visioning and one-on-one interviews phases through to the establishment of five top priorities for the community. Renee led a discussion through each of the following priorities and how and by whom each might be addressed:

1. Water – Conduct assessment of water quality (including saltwater intrusion, PFAS and nitrates) and quantity to meet present and future needs (similar to the URISH report from 2000) and develop action plan to address the findings.
2. Quonnie Neck Cooperation - Enhance collaboration across Quonnie Neck organizations to create coordinated approach for beach erosion, water, dark skies and other environmental issues.
3. Water Distribution System – Create water infrastructure plan to maintain and upgrade the physical plant and distribution system, including building a financial reserve to cover expected costs.
4. Governance Structure and Paid Professional Support - Assess advantages and disadvantages of our current Fire District governance structure versus potential alternatives as well as the pros and cons of hiring professional support for the Fire District.
5. Multi-Prong Communication Plan – Create multi-pronged communication plan to better engage the community, communicate key information (including emergency information), welcome and integrate new residents, and better educate residents on how the Fire District operates.

Renee reported that the next step would be to form a task force for each of these priorities, to be chaired by a member of the LRP committee and include other QCB community members and, when appropriate, experts and/or others from outside the community. Charlie emphasized that we need to examine the process involved in the formation of each task force as well as ensure that the mandate of each group remains Central Beach focused. Renee welcomed suggestions on who might be in a good position to serve on each priority task force with the intention of setting up each task force in the near term and asking each to pull together a project plan. The composition of each priority task force (and their project plan if ready) will be brought to the BoG for their review and comment at the next meeting. Charlie requested that each task force bring their findings and recommendations to the BoG for comment before any information is disseminated to the wider community. The BoG thanked Renee and the LRP committee for all their hard work.

Public Works:

Bob Frazier, Chair

Bob reported that the Certificate of Approval from the RI Department of Health (“RIDOH”) remains outstanding. Once the approval is in hand, the building permit from the Town of Charlestown will be pulled, the negotiation of the loan documents with the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank (“RIIB”) can begin and ultimately the Order to Proceed can be issued to the contractor. Bob mentioned that he is considering commencing the building permit process while waiting for the RIDOH approval to allow for any possible requirements from the Town of Charlestown to modify the construction plans. Bob led a discussion on how the approval process and the timing would work under the RIIB loan from invoice to payment. Charlie raised the potential impact of the RIDOH approval and resulting delay in commencing the construction on the June 1, 2024 construction contract completion date, the 2023 and 2024 FD budgets as well as the significant increase in interest rates ultimately payable under the proposed RIIB financing.

Bob then updated the BoG on the wetlands restoration project. The marking of the perimeter of the wetlands buffer zone has been completed by the engineer. The request for proposals for the remediation work is ready to go out for public bids. The scope of work will include both the earthworks (the depth of the excavation required remains unknown until the fill removal begins) and the purchase and planting of the items on the planting list. He hopes to have a bid accepted, a contract executed, and work begun before the ground freezes.

Following a discussion on how to keep the remediation project moving before the BoG meets again, a **motion** was made to approve all expenditures associated with the restoration of the wetlands at the well site, not to exceed \$70,000 in total

and, all in accordance with the wetlands remediation plan approved by CRMC. 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).

Managers Reports

The Police Liaison & Manager of Beach Gate Monitors:

Ron Ruel

Ron updated the BoG on the hiring process for the 2024 beach gate monitors, reporting that the same process used in 2023 will be employed. For rehires, the process will be streamlined to an age certification only without requiring completion of a new W4 form. An online workshop will be held for onboarding the 2024 beach gate monitoring crew.

Ron reported that there continue to be questions about the new RI law covering golf carts. RI has not yet published how to register golf carts as will be required by the new law but will keep the community updated as the information is available. He intends to send an eblast on the topic to include a copy of the law in early 2024 and again as the summer season and the July 1, 2024 effective date of the law approaches. Mike asked how the community will enforce the new law and Ron pointed out that it will be up to local/state law enforcement.

Ron raised the issue of whether district property could be made available for private use. The question stems from a request to use the beach parking for an off-season private event. Ron noted that there is no district policy providing for such use. Discussion followed around insurance/liability issues, conflicting use questions, process, and compensation. Charlie proposed that the question be tabled for now and revisited to give the BoG time to do some research and reflection before taking action.

Beach and Dunes:

Debbie Dupre/Caroline Gilpin

Debbie read the following into the record at the request of Caroline Gilpin:

The boardwalk was removed for winter storage ahead of the last storm and will be reinstalled in the spring of 2024. Rescue equipment and the boardwalk brooms have also been stored for the winter. Sandbags will be installed at the ocean end of the boardwalk path after Thanksgiving to prevent sand from flowing into the parking lot during winter storms.

Adjournment

A **motion** was made to adjourn at approximately 11:17am. 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