

Dunn's Corners Fire District

1 Langworthy Rd
Westerly, RI 02891

Minutes Operating Committee Meeting April 14, 2015

The Dunn's Corners Fire District Operating Committee (OC) convened on Tuesday, April 14, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. at Station #1.

Attendees were comprised of the OC members Moderator Matt Thomsen, Jon Schreier, Ken Martin, Chief Mike Frink and Treasurer Bob Delaney. Committee member Tom Algiere was excused. A quorum was present.

Actions of the OC (all votes unanimous unless otherwise noted):

Agenda Items:

Pledge of Allegiance - The meeting started at 6:00 PM with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Grange Building Temporary Closing – Chief Frink on March 23, 2015 had to close the Grange building due to a water leak issue in an under ground pipe. To resolve the matter of the immediate water leak issue the water that feeds the building had to be shut off which in effect deactivated sprinkler system making the building unusable for public activities.

The meeting was the first of several to debate the short and long term future status and viability of the facility.

Moderator Thomsen turned the floor over to the Chief to discuss what the situation currently is and provide his thoughts as to the potential future status of the facility.

The Chief stated that because the sprinkler system needed to be shut down that the build was closed for public safety reasons.

He then went on to explain that over the past 3 years alone the District has spent \$58,345 to address fire code issues and upgrade the septic service. During that period the District has only taken in \$10,264 in usage fees equating to an annual deficit to the district of almost \$5,000 per year. He went on to state to keep the facility running over the long term it would require the removal of the kitchen because is exiting fire extinguishing system is unusable; the windows need to be replaced, the chimney needs work, and the entrances and egresses need to be redone.

The Chief informed the attendees that the District was in the business of providing fire protection services and not in the business of maintaining and operating a meeting hall.

Committee member Delaney inquired if the Chief had found any formal agreements requiring the District to maintain the Grange Building for public use. The Chief stated that he did not locate any in his review of the District's records.

Committee member Delaney discussed with the attendees that in addition to the hard dollar costs that maintaining the Grange has required a considerable amount of volunteer hours from the Department's members and it is getting more difficult to get volunteers in general let alone for non-fire protection related projects.

The President of the Charlestown Town Council Tom Gentz spoke on behalf of repairing and reopening the Grange stating its historic value as well as it being one of the few public meeting places available within the town. He went on to read a resolution (attached) from the Charlestown Town Counsel requesting that the District work with concerned local volunteers to find a solution to keeping the Grange open to the public.

Dick Sarter of Wells Lane Charlestown asked to speak and reiterated the Charlestown Town Council's sentiments. He went on to commend the DCFD for the service provided; stated that volunteer fire departments have in rural communities historically have made their facilities available to community groups; voiced concern about the building being used for fire training then demolition; spoke of the loss to the community; and hoped that the building would be reopened for public use. Mr. Sarter then suggested possible funding mechanism for the maintenance and upkeep of the building such as, foundations, subscriptions, USDA loans, and grants. He proposed the possibility of organizing a volunteer effort to rehab the facility.

Additionally, he discussed the development of a short-term plan to get the facility reopened quickly and a long-term plan for the rehabilitation and ongoing maintenance of the building.

A representative of the Quonnie Historical Society respectfully requested that a dialog be maintained with the Operating Committee with the goal of reaching a solution to keeping the facility open.

Artie Gantz of East Beach Rd Charlestown was recognized and suggested that the District raise the rents to an appropriate level to help with costs; look into foundations and grants such as the Champlin Foundation; forming a subcommittee to manage the facility either directly or working with another nonprofit organization,

Ed Schilke of Fern Dr Westerly was recognized and spoke as a former member of the Operating Committee's successor; he went on to discuss the history of the District and the Grange and how he was pleased that they both were able to work together and obtain the land for Station 2 and that DCFD was a good fit to take over the Grange Building. Mr. Schilke went on to state that he believed that part of the agreement of the transaction was that the District make the Grange building available for meeting and community events. He also stated he would hate to see the money already spent on the building be thrown away and suggested a committee be formed to run and manage the facility and take that burden off of the Department.

Ray Jacobsen of West Beach Rd stated that in regards to the Grange building there may be a disconnect between the District and the community and that we should work together to look for an opportunity to develop a win-win situation for both constituencies.

Eden Casteel of West Beach Rd director of the annual children's musical production held at the Grange was thankful to the district for making the facility available for the event.

Cassandra Crandall of Klondike Rd informed the audience that she was a former grange member and reviewed the history of the donated land; and that the sale of the additional land and Grange building was contingent on keeping the building open.

Kathy Stedman of Klondike Rd a former Grange member discussed how grants should be available and would volunteer in efforts to rehabilitate and maintain the facility. She also stated that former Dunn's corners fire Department member Tom Dinwoodie was a signer on the sale agreement of the Grange and may have information as to documentation and the intent of the agreement.

Ron Meneo of East Beach Rd discussed forming a committee to work on a long term solution to keeping the facility open which would include the potential of the sale of the building to another non-profit who would manage and maintain the facility.

William Myer of Neptune Ave questioned if there were any restrictions on what the District could do with the building and/ or how it can be used. (Research required to answer questions)

Eileen Harrington of Fifth Ave discussed the possibility of forming a nonprofit "Friends of the Grange and Quonnie" to obtain grants, fund raise for and manage the Grange facility.

There was a question from the audience in regards to will insurance cover the expense of repairing the water pipe. The Chief responded that it will need to be dug up to determine.

There was a question as to whether or not a waiver could be granted to allow for spring and summer use while a long-term solution is found. The Chief stated that it would be a matter for the State Fire Marshall.

John Rooney of Neptune Ave asked when is the pipe going to be repaired. The response from the Committee was unknown.

John Schreir of the Operating Committee stated that he personally would like to see the building remain open and thanked Debra MacManus for all of her volunteer efforts as Grange Manager.

The Moderator informed the attendees that the matter will be continued at the Committee's May 12th meeting. Additionally, he passed around a sign up sheet for a separate meeting to form a volunteer committee to develop a strategy for the Grange building.

Contracting Districts – Tom Lloyd Moderator and John Bruno Vice Moderator of the Shelter Harbor Fire District (SHFD) stated that they had attended the meeting to say hello and thank the

District for the good relationship it has maintained with SHFD. They also discussed beginning the process of implanting long-term contract negotiations and asked the District to provide a proposal for their review. The Committee stated it would have a proposal prepared.

Previous meeting minutes – *A motion was made seconded and so voted to approve the March 10, 2015 Operating Committee meeting minutes.*

Next OC Meeting – The next OC meeting will take place at Station #1 on Tuesday, May 12, 2015 at 6:00 p.m.

Financial Statements – There was a question regarding the sale of Engine 2 and how it was accounted for on the balance sheet (answer to be provided at the May meeting). There was additional discussion on bringing in an accounting firm with governmental accounting experience as part of next year’s budget to help the bookkeeper transition the District’s books over to a true modified accrual municipal accounting system.

A motion was made seconded and so voted to accept the financial statements through February 2015.

Treasurer’s Report - The Treasurer reported that the tax sale was proceeding on schedule for April 22, 2015. He informed the Committee that with the additional proceeds from the tax sale and an acceptable amount of cash on hand that District was in position to pay the voter approved \$55,000 in additional principal payments on the Station 2 loan.

A motion was made, seconded and so voted to authorize the Treasurer to make an additional \$55,000 principal payment on the Station 2 loan.

The Treasurer commended the Chief for the deal he reached on the sale of the retired Engine 2 and requested information as to how the proceeds may be used.

Additionally, he repeated his request that funds be budgeted for a comprehensive facility review be completed next year to develop a long term strategy for the maintenance and upkeep of the District’s facilities.

Chief’s Report – The Chief reported on the following;

The Chief met with the Municipal Finance department on March 13, 2015 to discuss changes to bill S0701 to “Levy and Assessment of Local Taxes” specifically time requirements, reporting requirements and who report them. The biggest item is not having to report the District’s information to the town council as currently stated and to report just to the State. If the council wants to review the report it can obtain it through the State’s website. Additionally, the legislature is looking into having fire districts that fall into Tier II report semi-annual instead of quarterly. The Chief believes the District will fall under tier II and will check into the matter. The legislation allows the District ten days after the first tax bill goes out to send in the certified rate instead of 30 days prior to the district annual meeting; Gives the District 45 days to submit

its annual budget instead of 30; and changes the current process of requiring the District have legal counsel report the reasoning of having a deficit to allowing the Committee to report directly on the matter.

The Chief did not hear from the Charlestown town Counsel in regards to the possible sale of the wetlands as open space.

The Chief testified opposing House Bills H5343, 5344 & 5345 at hearing for at the State house on March 11, 2015 with regard to the following:

- H5343 – 4% tax cap of budget and 5% cap one max debt.
- H5344 – 2% of district taxpayers at annual meeting to make quorum
- H5345 – Posting of meeting minutes schedule change

As stated last month the District sold Engine 2 for \$195,000.00 after \$11,581.94 in expenses to bring the truck up to specifications, the District received net proceeds of \$183,418.94.

The Chief informed the Committee that in next year's budget, Accident & Sickness insurance is going up 43% (9,986.00 to \$14,287.00) due to no increase in premiums over the last six years and the addition of fulltime firefighter.

The Chief spoke with Randall Realtors who are willing to pave between the lots for mutual access through both properties. The Chief suggested a "speed bump" style so people will not speed through the area.

The Chief Had all facilities inspected by the State Fire Marshal. The report will be in soon. Major findings:

- Second means of egress from second floor and CO detection at Station 1
- Emergency lights at Station 2
- Ansel system needs to be inspected or removal of all cooking equipment and Ansel system, and the repair of the sprinkler system at the Grange.

The Department responded to 51 Calls in March

- 23 Medicals – 7 had no response
- 28 Fire

The Fire Marshalls Conducted 11 inspections & Plan reviews

- 2 Plan reviews
- 8 Residential
- 1 Commercial

Annual Meeting Election Process – The District Moderator in preparation for the Annual Meeting and to provide information to the Nominating inquired whether or not the incumbents M. Thomsen and K. Martin were going to run for reelection. Both stated they would.

Bradford Industrial Park (BIP) – The Moderator updated the Committee on the of legal proceedings to remove DCFD as the primary call department for BIP and informed the committee that attorney John Payne who after some research and review did not feel he would be right counsel to represent the District in this matter. The Moderator contacted attorney Patrick McKinney of McKinney and Associates of Wakefield who is willing to represent the District.

A motion was made seconded and so voted to retain Patrick McKinney, Esquire of McKinney & Associates to represent the District to obtain a binding ruling not to be the primary call department from the Westerly Dispatch for BIP and pay an initial retainer of \$5,000.00 for such services.

A motion was made, seconded and so voted to adjourn the meeting and go into executive session.

Meeting adjourned at 8:25.

Steve White District Clerk