

Minutes of the Meeting of
Quonochontaug Central Beach Fire District
Board of Governors
March 9, 2024
Quonochontaug Grange
Lower-Level Meeting Room
5662 Post Rd, Charlestown, RI 02813

Members in attendance: Renee Cohen, Dede Consoli, Bob Frazier, Charlie Freedgood, Barry Okun, and Debbie Dupre

Members Absent: Mark Alperin, Mike Lewers, Fred Newton, Ron Ruel

Also in attendance were members of the public.

1. Call to Order/Moderator's Opening Remarks

Moderator, Charlie Freedgood

Charlie called the meeting to order at 9:01am and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Approval of the Minutes.

Clerk, Debbie Dupre

No edits or comments were made to the January 20, 2023 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 led a discussion overviewing the currently proposed RI Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) legislation and the Charlestown ADU zoning ordinances and how these might affect QCBFD.

3. Treasurer's Report

Barry Okun for the Treasurer

Barry reported that the 2023 RI annual report has been filed. Currently, QCBFD classification as a Tier III fire district allows for self-reporting. The classification is based on certain criteria (current expenditures and outstanding loan amounts). Barry indicated that QCBFD may reach the threshold of a Tier II fire district in 2024 and be held to more stringent reporting standards including hiring an independent RI CPA firm to perform Agreed-Upon Procedures. Barry agreed to contact the appropriate person within the RI Auditor General division to clarify the criteria.

Barry stated that the current cash balances are sufficient to cover the budgeted and other expected expenses but given that tax collection does not happen until September, we may need to tap the existing line of credit with Washington Trust later in the year. Barry asked that the authorization to draw on the line of credit be addressed at the May 25, 2024 BoG meeting.

4. Moderator's Report:

Moderator, Charlie Freedgood

Charlie returned to whether QCBFD might want to name a possible representative to serve on the Charlestown 250th Committee, which was established to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States by honoring the history of Charlestown. Although the anniversary will not occur until 2026, the Charlestown committee has already met prompting the discussion. Charlie plans to send an email to the community asking whether anyone is interested in participating. Discussion arose around whether this should be an effort taken up across the neck and include East Beach.

Next Charlie raised the issue of beach erosion and its impact on QCB, in particular the potential influence on freshwater wetlands and water resources with the possibility of establishing a working group to think through these issues and possible strategies for the District. Discussion arose around the preferred expertise required to lead such a group and that careful consideration be given in formulating the remainder of the working group.

A **motion** was made to approve the establishment of a working group to analyze issues related to and possible available mitigation strategies to address beach erosion and saltwater inundation particularly into Fresh Pond and the QCBFD water system. The **motion** was **seconded and passed** with all in attendance voting in favor (other than the Moderator, who under the District's By-Laws only votes in the case of a tie.)

Charlie reminded the BoG members to provide Amy Murphy with any information that they wanted to be included in the Spring Packet by April 1, 2024.

Charlie informed the BoG that he received notice on March 8, 2024 from US Senator Whitehouse's office that the grant application for the water upgrade project had been approved for \$1 million and the federal agency responsible for the grant will reach out to the District with more detail. A discussion arose around what this approval might mean for QCBFD and how to access the funds as efficiently as possible. Barry raised the point that there may be some restrictions in tapping multiple sources of federal funds, and that our potential loan from the RIIB utilizes federal funds. Charlie indicated that more information around the process, phasing, timing and allocation of the funding will be forthcoming and suggested that the topic be raised at the May BoG meeting. He also asked for assistance as the process moves forward and suggested that Barry in his role as Finance Chair and Debbie as Clerk support the effort, to which they agreed.

5. Committee Chairs' Report

Long-Range Planning

Renee Cohen, Chair

Renee reported the teams responsible for four of the five initiatives are continuing to move forward and that she would have more comprehensive updates for each at the May BoG meeting including a game plan for each for the work to be accomplished over the summer season. Renee indicated that a leader for the Integrated Communication Plan initiative had not yet been secured but she is working toward identifying someone by the next BoG meeting. Renee also reported that she hoped to have the team leads attend various BoG meetings over the summer to update the group on their progress.

Public Works:

Bob Frazier, Chair

Bob reported that the RI Department of Health ("RIDOH") had sent a notice requesting a public comment process be undertaken in connection with the proposed chlorination aspect of the water upgrade project before the Certificate of Approval could be issued. Bob Ferrari of NWSI has been in contact with the RIDOH on the District's behalf explaining why this process is unnecessary and RIDOH said they would reach a final decision about whether to require the hearing process on Monday, March 11, 2024. A discussion arose around the risks to the project resulting from the extended delay, namely that the contractor R.P. Iannuccillo & Sons Construction Co could walk away or significantly increase their contract price. In the interim, it was observed that the delay has also postponed the related interest and operating expenses of an upgraded system.

Bob reported there was no new information on the wetlands restoration project. There remain a few plants to be installed due to overly saturated conditions. Our environmental engineer is coordinating with CRMC to get their sign-off and upon receipt, QCBFD will seek to have the levied fine reconsidered by CRMC.

Bob raised the issue of vegetation at the pump house and other locations within the District. He is specifically concerned about a tree near the water tank and believes it should be removed in coordination with Community Property. Charlie asked whether the tree sits within the wetlands or other areas within the purview of CRMC. Bob agreed to confirm with Ed Avizinis, our environmental consultant, whether regulatory consent was required before any action to remove the tree is taken. More generally, he also identified the vegetation obstructing visibility at the corner of Neptune Avenue and Central Street as another area that needs attention.

Bob updated the BoG on the implementation of the District rules approved last year concerning encroachment onto District roads and rights-of-way. Charlie reminded everyone that the right-of-way extends roughly 10 feet on either side of each road. Bob indicated that the rules on encroachment are being applied to new work, but Charlie questioned how the District should consider enforcing those rules in connection with existing infringements? Discussion arose around how to enforce the rules, with particular focus on determining what type of violation might be worth the District taking action. Separately, but related, mention was made to the drive-through conducted by Dunn's Corners Fire Department two years ago, noting that identifying particular areas of concern from a health and safety perspective might be useful. The BoG agreed to take up the issue again at the May meeting.

Finance and Budget:

Barry Okun, Chair

Barry reported that given the status of the water upgrade project and the recent approval of our Federal grant application, any further action in connection with the financing of the project is on holding pending approvals and additional information.

Managers Reports

Merchandise Sales:**Dede Consoli**

Dede reported on the status of the planning and purchasing for the 2024 Merchandise Sales and announced the first sale will be in the last week of June.

Beach and Dunes:**Charlie Freedgood for the Manager**

Charlie read an update from Carrie Gilpin on the proposed repair by Carl Larlham of the snow fencing damaged in the recent winter storms.

A **motion** was made to approve the proposal from Carl Larlham Landscapers to repair the snow fencing along QCB in an amount up to \$7600, and if necessary, move the required funds from the Contingency Reserve account into the Beach and Dunes Reserve account. 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).

A discussion arose around funding part of the repair through the Special Events community grant program. To fund the entire project would require a second bid (necessary under the grant program for projects in excess of \$5,000) and Carrie decided to forego that process in the interest of coordinating our repair with East Beach which will be done at the same time by the same contractor. Instead, Dede proposed the grant application be made for a portion of the repair costs, suggesting that SE would cover \$2,600 with the balance of \$5,000 paid from reserves. In connection with the project, Charlie indicated that an application to CRMC for the snow fence repair is required and an approval by the BoG for that application will be placed on the May agenda.

Ellen Frost updated the BoG on the work of the Quonochontaug Conservation Collaborative (QCC) and their upcoming events for 2024. She thanked the BoG for their support and specifically thanked the Special Events grant program for providing events funding. Ellen also asked whether QCBFD would sponsor two events at the Grange. Discussion arose around the nature of the events and any liability arising out of sponsorship. Ellen asked that approval by the BoG to sponsor the two events be taken up at the next meeting.

Adjournment

A **motion** was made to adjourn at approximately 10:51am. 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