

BONNET SHORES FIRE DISTRICT

SPECIAL MEETING

Tuesday, July 1, 2025
6:30pm

Meeting Minutes - Approved

CALL TO ORDER

Leslie McKnight Called the meeting to order at 6:34pm. Council members in attendance were John Chereskin, Faith LaSalle, Leslie McKnight, Jane Duran and Tony Girardi.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / MOMENT OF SILENCE was observed

URGENT BUSINESS: There was no urgent business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: L. McKnight noted that there will be no zoom offered for this meeting due to a downed cable line at the community center. She also noted that due to the importance of the agenda topics, public comment would be first on the agenda.

Interim Clerk – The Clerk could not attend. Therefore J. Duran was appointed to take minutes. J. Chereskin made the motion, F. LaSalle seconded.

Agenda Topics

- I. **PUBLIC COMMENT** – The following Community Members provided comments:
 - **Carolyn DiLeo** indicated that while the Fiscal Responsibility By Laws being proposed have merit, she has concerns on who wrote them and whether or not they have been reviewed by an attorney. She questioned why the former By Laws Committee was not engaged. She also noted several inconsistencies with the final draft mentioning section 3, the grants section and the section that addresses leasing.
 - **Adrian Deberghes** supported C. DiLeo's remarks. He indicated that he had a lot of feedback, especially the leasing language and section 7. He offered to join any workshops to review his detailed feedback.
 - **Nancy Cordy** supported C. DiLeo and A. Deberghes remarks. She reviewed a history of the former By Laws Committee indicating it started in 2021 and was active until June 2023 and that the By Laws should have input by a committee before being submitted to the community for enactment.
 - **Anita Langer** indicated that she was on the By Laws Committee for many years and they were always open to the public. She indicated that the Charter has language on CAP Rate and that By Laws cannot conflict with the Charter so the Charter will also need to be updated. She also questioned if the proposed By Laws have been vetted with an attorney or Tax Accountant. In regards to the Annual Meeting, she noted that it has always been a meeting for the people of the Community and that we should have Old Business and New Business on the agenda but the last few years that has seemed to fall off the agenda. She expressed concerned that our Charter

indicates that all voting must be done by ballot and it is binding in the district. Therefore, we may not be able to conduct a non-binding vote.

- **Robert Patterson** indicated that while the By Law changes may be good, they are not ready to be put to a vote and they have not been properly vetted. All the by laws need a total re-write and the fiscal responsibility by laws are not the priority. He offered other priorities like eliminating the nominating committee. Regarding the proposed non-binding electorate scenario opinion poll annual agenda item, R. Patterson quoted Attorney Dickerson's response to Judge Taft Carter (*summary of response: that votes would likely be taken away if the parties pursued the case to litigation but could not speculate who the disenfranchised voters would be*). He expressed his opinion that to offer a non-binding opinion poll would muddy the water and suggested that the 2 Charter Committees sit down as a group.
- **Kristen Deberghes** indicated that although the proposed By Laws were drafted by someone with great experience, the process was unorthodox as it occurred outside of the By Laws Committee. Faith Lasalle interjected that the Leasing section is for Capital expenditures only – not to lease out any of BSFD assets. She also indicated that we should review the details of the scenarios with the annual meeting attendees as the concern is BSBC will promote a particular scenario and people will cast their vote without a proper understanding of the scenario.
- **Kevin O'Brien** suggested that we should have a workgroup collaboration and leverage available technological platforms to solicit input so that remote participants can contribute easily.
- **Paul Luba** indicated that it was he that wrote the draft of the by laws and it was discussed at several council meetings. He indicated that the leasing language is in the Capital Debt section but it can be clarified as it refers to leases related to taking on debt only.
- **Michelle Dunne** reviewed several voting/election recommendations including eliminating running from the floor and having interested candidates register 21 days before the election and then host a meeting where candidates can introduce themselves. The meeting should have a set time (ie 8:00am to 2:00pm). Proxy's should be completed ahead of time.
- **Janice McClanaghan** agreed with a lot of M. Dunne's recommendations including identifying candidates a head of time so that the names can appear on the ballot and mailed to everyone. A meet the candidates should be hosted. We should remove the "State of the District" item on the agenda and include that in the mailing. We need to reserve time for Proxy's to be notarized.

Public comment completed and Leslie asked if any Council members would like to respond to any items. Council responses:

- **Jane Duran** responded to the public comment regarding the non-binding referendum on voting scenarios. She explained that the General Assembly does not appear to have an appetite to change the voting electorate for all RI Fire Districts. Therefore, we are still in a position where we have to go to the General Assembly with a scenario that is supported by the majority of the people so that they will enable it to be presented to the community. Once enabled, all current state voters have to vote on it. The opinion poll will help us gauge the interest of the community and possibly influence a solution that will ultimately be approved.
- **Faith LaSalle** responded to the by laws public comment indicating that Paul Luba provided the first draft. She added that he is more than qualified and we are fortunate to have members of the community with his knowledge and experience in fiscal responsibility. She also indicated that these were not done in secret. They have been discussed in at least 5 Council Meetings in varying degrees of detail (J. Duran interjected the Council dates were 2/19/25, 3/8/25, 4/16/25,

5/21/25 and 6/18/25). She also indicated that the former by laws committee had not met since June 2023 and the current council was elected in Aug 2024. Therefore, the Committee has been dormant for over 15 months. She explained that she ran on a platform of fiscal responsibility and the corresponding by law changes were something that she had committed to accomplish. She also noted that the Council does not require a committee to propose by laws to be enacted by a vote at the annual meeting.

- **Tony Girardi** indicated that the proposed by laws should be vetted by outside council/accountants. He questioned the timing of why they need to be reviewed now. F. LaSalle responded saying that they need to be voted on by the community and therefore, would need to be presented at the annual meeting or a separate special community meeting. The later would be very costly. If we do not have them on the agenda this year, we will have to carry the risk of minimal fiscal controls for another year until the annual meeting in 2026.
- **Leslie McKnight** read from the Charter/By Laws which indicates the Council has the authority to draft the by laws to submit to the people for enactment/rejection.

II. FISCAL RESPONSIBLE BY LAW CHANGES: The agenda item read: *“Final review, discussion, consideration and vote of by law changes regarding fiscal responsibility amendments involving capital expenditures, emergency expenditures, debt approval by taxpayers, tax increase limitations and exemptions consistent with Narragansett”.*

F. LaSalle started to go through the by law changes and the council began to update them when R. Patterson interjected from the audience suggesting the Council discussion was an OMA violation because the wording on the agenda did not indicate we were making changes to the final draft. L. McKnight sighted this as an example of how the Council is paralyzed because we are continuously receiving OMA challenges. The intent of this agenda item was review, discuss and consider (make changes and vote on the final to be included in the Annual Meeting agenda). Rather than risk spending the community's money on responding to another OMA challenge, the council voted to table the discussion to a separate special meeting J. Duran made the motion, J. Chereskin seconded.

III. ANNUAL MEETING REVIEW, DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATION AND VOTE

- a. **Annual Meeting Agenda and Processes** – J. Duran reviewed the agenda items and updated them based on public comment and council discussions. The outcome is the attached updated annual meeting agenda including the contingent items. Motion to accept the revised agenda made by L. McKnight, F. LaSalle seconded.

b. Annual Meeting Process – Process improvement discussions were included throughout the agenda discussion and incorporated into the motion for the revised agenda. These include:

- Removal of “State of the District” agenda item. This will be replaced with a written summary to be mailed with the Annual Meeting packet.
- Removal of Nominations from the Floor and Candidate remarks. This will be replaced with:
 - A requirement for all candidates to register their interest in running for any of the elected positions (including Nominating Committee) by **July 14, 2025** so their name is printed on the ballot. Bios and qualifications to be included so that their information can distributed for the Meet & Greet (see below). A space for write-ins will remain available but there will not be an agenda item for write-in candidate remarks.
 - A Meet & Greet the candidates will be hosted the week of **July 21st** in the Community Center where candidates can address the community.
 - Candidates will also be allowed to solicit support for votes on election day following the board of elections distance guidelines at the polling place.
- It was noted that in order to reduce costs, the lists from the Tax collector have to be consolidated down to household level so that we can reduce the mailing costs. The consensus was that the Clerk is responsible to do this consolidation.
- A suggestion was made to include the following Reports in the Annual Meeting Packet:
 - Treasurer Report
 - Tax Collector Report

John Chereskin informed the Council that there was an error made by iGOV that caused the payments made by 18 properties not get recorded properly, resulting in these properties appearing on the Tax delinquency list thereby receiving a delinquent tax notice. John indicated that he will review and proactively communicate to those impacted.

IV. **ADJOURNMENT** – Meeting was adjourned: T. Girardi motioned, F. LaSalle seconded.

**BONNET SHORES FIRE DISTRICT
ANNUAL MEETING
August 2, 2025**

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| Date: | Saturday, August 2, 2025 |
| Place: | Bonnet Shores Fire District Community Center |
| Time: | REGISTRATION 8:00am-10:00am ANNUAL MEETING 10:00am – 1:00pm |
| Zoom: | Zoom will not be offered. |
| Designated area for recording/ photography | To preserve order and decorum, and to avoid interfering with the ability of spectators to see and hear, any members of the public video recording or photographing the meeting should do so from the designated area. |

**BSFD ANNUAL MEETING
Draft Agenda
August 2, 2025**

- 1. CALL TO ORDER:** District Moderator to call the meeting to order
 - a. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
 - b. REFLECTION ON DECEASED MEMEBERS OF THE BSFD COMMUNITY**
- 2. PROPER NOTICE AND QUORUM ATTESTATION** – Clerk to attest to proper notice and quorum required for the annual meeting to proceed.
- 3. RATIFICATION OF 2024 ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES** – Motion, Discussion, Vote
- 4. OLD BUSINESS**
- 5. NEW BUSINESS**
- 6. REPORT OF THE TAX COLLECTOR** - Presented by District Tax Collector
- 7. REPORT OF THE TREASURER** - Presented by District Treasurer
- 8. VOTE TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING 2025-2026 BUDGET ITEMS PURSUENT TO THE BSFD BY LAWS:**
 - a. BSFD Land Trust Allocation (\$1,500)
 - b. Rates of Compensation for the following elected officials:
 - i. Tax Collector (\$6,000)
 - ii. Clerk (\$6,000)
 - iii. Treasurer (\$6,000)
- 9. REPORT OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE:** Nominations for the following offices:
 - a. Council Candidates *(2 Needed)*
 - b. Land Trust Candidates *(1 Needed)*

- c. Other Candidates for BSFD Offices (Moderator *(1 Needed)*, Tax Collector *(1 Needed)*, Treasurer *(1 Needed)*, Clerk *(1 Needed)*, Fire Warden *(1 Needed)*, and Tax Assessors *(3 Needed)*).
10. **REVIEW OF FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY BY LAW CHANGES ITEM ON BALLOT – **CONTINGENCY:****
This agenda item is contingent based upon the outcome of a special meeting. Explanation of the ballot item that would implement fiscally responsible by law changes involving capital expenditures, emergency expenditures, debt approval by taxpayers, tax increase limitations and exemptions consistent with Narragansett.
11. **REVIEW OF NON-BINDING REFERENDUM ITEM ON BALLOT (OPINION POLL)**
CONTINGENCY: This agenda item is contingent based upon the outcome of consulting with BSFD Counsel to confirm a non-binding opinion poll can be included on the annual agenda. Explanation of the non-binding referendum on the ballot. Its purpose is to gauge the level of community support for potential electorate structures. The referendum will propose electorate scenarios below and voters will select one and only one to register their opinion. Failure to select only one will result in the opinion not being counted. The options include:
 - a. **Current State of the Electorate:** BSFD Narragansett registered voters, BSFD deeded residential property and landowners, and deeded BSBC owners.
 - b. **Proposed Electorate #1:** BSFD Narragansett registered voters, BSFD deeded residential property and landowners, and one deeded designated BSBC owner per unit.
 - c. **Proposed Electorate #2:** BSFD Narragansett registered voters only
12. **VOTE BY BALLOT**
13. **ADJOURNMENT**

Attachments for Annual Meeting Agenda:

- 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes
- Reports: Treasurer and Tax Collector Reports
- Final By Law Changes **(Contingent)**