

# **BONNET SHORES FIRE DISTRICT**

September 17, 2025

7:00 pm

## **Meeting Minutes**

### Call to Order

Council Chair Leslie McKnight called the meeting to order at 7:03pm. Council members present were: John Chereskin, Jane Duran, Tony Girardi, Faith LaSalle, Leslie McKnight and Kevin O'Brien. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence observed.

### Administrative

Due to the absence of Clerk Robert Patterson, upon a motion made by Faith LaSalle, and seconded by Jane Duran, Faith LaSalle was unanimously appointed Acting Clerk for the meeting

### Approval of Minutes

The Council then took up consideration of approval of the draft minutes of the August 18, 2025 Organizational and Monthly Council meetings, and the public portion of the September 8, 2025 Executive Session Council meeting, copies of all of which had been distributed to all Council members prior to the meeting. Upon a motion made by Jane Duran, seconded by Tony Girardi, the minutes of the Organizational meeting were approved as drafted. Next, the Council considered the draft minutes of the August 18, 2025 Council Monthly meeting. Faith LaSalle stated:

“Yes, I have changes. Page 4, D, Working Groups.

It says Faith LaSalle reviewed her engagement with the Fire District

Legal Counsel when requested by the Council Chief (Chair).

I would... if... if I was requested by Carol O'Donnel to become involved, I did.

And the next one would be...

And reminded those present that she is a lawyer. This should be ...

The point was, I reminded people ... I noted that I was a lawyer, and because of that, we could... I could hopefully help resolve some legal issues before we had to pay the district attorney legal fees to address simple issues. That was the point of the comment.

And thirdly, on that same paragraph, 1,2...

1,2,3,4 lines up.

Faith LaSalle opposed that as beyond the role of the clerk

As defined. I opposed that because the role of the clerk as defined in Article 3, Section 4 of the Bonnet Shores Fire District By Laws.”

Upon a motion made by Jane Duran, seconded by John Chereskin, those minutes were approved as amended. Lastly, upon a motion made by Jane Duran, seconded by Kevin O’Brien, the draft minutes of the Executive Session Council meeting were approved as drafted (Tony Girardi abstaining).

### Urgent Business

None.

### Public Comment

- **Anita Langer** commented that per the Charter and By Laws, a voter registration list is to be posted and available at all Council meetings, yet such is not occurring. She opined that inclusion of 84 votes for “Status Quo” in the Opinion Poll conducted at the Annual Meeting was improper and skewed the results. Lastly, she said that limiting proxy voting at Annual Meetings only to property owners unfairly discriminates against non-property owners.
- **Michelle Dunne** asked the Council to consider supporting a “Never Dunne 5-K” event to be held next year. Her comments were for informational purposes only and no action was requested. L. McKnight suggested that consideration of the proposal be added to the agenda for a future meeting.

### Committee and Team Reports

- 1. Treasurer Update:** Laurie McCarthy reported that the Fire District is in good financial shape, with \$546,000 in combined savings, checking, and CD accounts. All required regulatory reports have been filed, and the seasonal employees have completed their employment. The payroll audit is underway. J. Duran asked about the tax revenues as reported on the financial reports previously supplied to the Council. Mrs. McCarthy recommended that the Council appoint a Council lead for the Rhode Island Interlocal Trust and also take up consideration and approval of the Employee Handbook. J. Duran said that both would be added to the agendas for future meetings.
- 2. Tax Collector:** Helen Patience reported that \$455,878 in tax revenues have been received. There are 33 tax bills for which she lacks good mailing addresses. She will be going to Town Hall in an effort to obtain those addresses. Notices of the October 9, 2025 Tax Sale have been duly posted. In response to a question from L. McKnight, Mrs. Patience said that the most current list of taxpayer addresses maintained by the Town is not available on-line, which is why she needs to visit Town Hall in person. J. Chereskin noted that per the advice of the Fire District's lawyer, a list of the properties up for tax sale has been posted on the bulletin board at the Community Center, and will be updated as needed.
- 3. Land Trust:** Joan Fandetti reported that at its meeting on September 9, 2025, the Land Trust rejected a request for establishment of a community garden, and cited the reasons why. The protocols for memorial benches have been finalized and are awaiting Council approval. She said the Land Trust was considering selling a new version of T shirts. She addressed concerns about the proposed Masse automobile dealership and said the Land Trust would be preparing a letter regarding the matter, and asked for Council and community support.
- 4. Manager and Harbor Update:** Mark Gillooly asked the Council if there were any questions regarding the report he had previously delivered and which was distributed prior to the meeting. T. Girardi asked about the status of the new seawall being installed.

**5. Social Team:** No report

**6. New and On-Going Business**

**A. Appointment of a Treasurer**

L. McKnight reported that ten persons had received at least one vote at the Annual Meeting for the position as Treasurer; however, all declined to serve. Accordingly, pursuant to Article IV of the District's By-laws, the Council is required to appoint a new Treasurer. Neal Prescott had indicated an interest in serving in that position. Upon a motion made by F. LaSalle, and seconded by J. Duran, it was moved that Mr. Prescott be appointed Treasurer. Mr. Prescott then addressed the meeting and gave a brief summary of his background and reasons for wanting to serve, at the conclusion of which the Council voted unanimously to appoint Neal Prescott as Treasurer until the next Annual or Special Meeting.

**B. Community Bulletin Boards**

Upon a motion made by J. Chereskin, seconded by J. Duran, the Council voted unanimously to proceed with the improvement/repairing of the four community bulletin boards, the cost of which is \$2400. M. Gillooly asked about handling of temporary signage as the work progressed.

**C. Kelly Beach Boardwalk**

L. McKnight discussed the status of consideration of improvement options at Kelly Beach, including possibly adding a ramp. J. Chereskin offered his thoughts about possible improvements. M. Gillooly said it was very difficult to maintain any such structure and suggested a seasonal alternative. J. Duran said the next step should be to contact CRMC and begin consideration of options. Whereupon a motion made by J. Duran, seconded by T. Girardi, the Council voted unanimously to evaluate improvement options for the Kelly Beach boardwalk step, including investigating CRMC/DEM applications required and obtaining bids to build. J. Duran will take the lead on follow-up

with CRMC and DEM; thereafter M. Gillooly will follow up. T. Girardi addressed the importance of ADA compliance. In response, L. McKnight suggested that the previously approved motion be amended to include consultation with District Counsel regarding ADA compliance. Upon a motion made by J. Duran, seconded by T. Girardi, the previously approved motion was unanimously amended as stated above.

#### **D. Lessons Learned – 2025 Election; Data Analysis**

Next, L. McKnight asked that J. McClanaghan address the Council regarding lessons learned from the 2025 election and for J. Duran to present her analysis of election data. K. O'Brien objected to proceeding with the discussion in its entirety, as he felt he had not been afforded sufficient time to review J. Duran's analysis and that he disagreed with various aspects of it. He commented that the analysis had already been disseminated to the community and labelled as "Fast Facts". He moved that the discussion be tabled and rescheduled to include a working group discussion of the election data. J. Chereskin seconded the motion. Whereupon a discussion was held among the Council, including whether to proceed with Janice McClanaghan's comments. The Council then voted three in favor of tabling the entire discussion, two expressed a desire to limit discussion to the presentation from J. McClanaghan, and one voted to proceed with the entire discussion as set forth in the agenda. Accordingly, the motion to table was approved. Following that vote, T. Girardi moved that the Council proceed with hearing only from J. McClanaghan, with no statistical presentation. L. McKnight seconded that motion. K. O'Brien asked that the analysis previously distributed to the community be withdrawn. L. McKnight said it had been distributed and cannot be taken back. In response, Mr. O'Brien said that he would add an agenda item to the October meeting to conduct a workshop addressing the voting data and analysis. Whereupon a vote was held on the pending motion. Five Council members voted in favor of the motion; K. O'Brien abstained.

Following approval of the motion, Janice McClanaghan addressed the meeting. She thanked the volunteers who assisted with the election. She

recommended that in the future the requirement of placing ads in the Providence Journal be changed given its high cost. She said the mailing of the election newsletter was much improved, thanks to assistance from Jane Duran. The newsletter itself included a lot of information which allowed for shortening the meeting. She discussed several improvements that had been made to improve the efficiency of the registration process, and discussed steps taken to protect the authenticity of the ballots cast. She said that she had ordered printing of 500 ballots, which proved sufficient. She praised the efforts to improve the nomination process, allowing all who wished to run for office to do so, which helped reduce the impact of running from the floor and allowed their names to appear on the printed ballot. She talked about the significant challenges associated with write-in votes, including tallying the votes and the need to contact those who received votes, sometimes without their prior knowledge, to determine whether they would agree to serve in various offices. She praised the effectiveness of the pre-election candidate forum, which helped speed the process. She recommended the elimination of the Nominating Committee, which she likened to a popularity contest, and supported efforts to vote electronically. Lastly, she reviewed and defended the process for counting votes, as well as the recount process. She suggested possibly adding more tax assessors to help with the registration process. At the conclusion of her presentation, J. Chereskin summarized her recommendations. F. LaSalle referenced the Charter section that required the availability of the voter registration list. A discussion was had regarding how best to make the list publicly available. In response to a question, Janice discussed how she handled those whose names did not appear on the registration list. Janice also recommended that the proxy voting process be reviewed and reconsidered. From the audience, Tony Lupino recommended the use of electronic voting machines, which may be available from local governments, and that ballots with write-in votes be counted separately by hand.

L. McKnight recommended that the various suggestions for improvements for voting be the subject for discussion at a future Council meeting.

## **E. APRA Procedures**

Next, L. McKnight directed the Council's attention to draft APRA procedures that had been distributed prior to the meeting. F. LaSalle moved that the policy be approved, which was seconded by J. Duran. A discussion ensued during which F. LaSalle recommended that the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph be deleted. L. McKnight confirmed that the draft procedures are simply for informational purposes only. At the conclusion of the discussion the Council voted 5-0 (F. LaSalle was not present) to approve the draft proposal as amended.

## **F. Protocols for Dealing with the District Counsel**

J. Chereskin began this discussion by noting that in the past communications with the Fire District's attorney were limited to between the Council Chair and the attorney. As a result, the other members of the Council were often left in the dark as to what was occurring, as became evident during a recent issue when council members felt blindsided by what had been discussed. He proposed that a point person from the Council be appointed to serve as the contact with the attorney, but that thereafter the point person share with entire Council the relevant information. K. O'Brien said that the District's Counsel represents the entire Council and thus all the Council members should be aware in advance of what actions the attorney proposed be taken. There was unanimous agreement among all the Council members on this topic, and it was agreed that the new procedures would be followed going forward. Leslie as Chair will be the contact person and communicate with the Council.

## **G. Strategic Planning Workgroup**

K. O'Brien addressed his proposed approach for the newly formed Strategic Planning Working Group, for which he will serve as Chair. He referred to documents setting forth his proposed approach, which were distributed prior to the meeting. He said that he intended to host public work group sessions to solicit community input in order to determine the strategic plan's goals and priorities, and he set forth a timeline for executing on the proposals. He said that he engaged in a "listening tour" with 68 people and presented a

word chart summarizing the items of most concern. T. Girardi commended Mr. O'Brien and requested that the proposed community forums provide for participation by Zoom. The Council members agreed with that recommendation. Whereupon a motion made by J. Duran, seconded by T. Girardi, the Council unanimously approved the process for the Strategic Planning Workshop as outlined by Mr. O'Brien.

#### **H. Audio/Visual Capabilities**

Mr. O'Brien discussed the importance of investing in improving the Fire District's audio/visual capabilities and equipment. J. Chereskin suggested that Mr. O'Brien research the matter and come back with specific recommendations in that regard. T. Girardi noted that the Town of Narragansett was in the process of upgrading its AV equipment and might be a source of useful information. M. Gillooly also recommended that Mr. O'Brien seek the input of David Kaufman, who is knowledgeable about these matters.

#### **I. Beaches/Public Safety Workgroup**

This item was tabled.

#### **J. Paul Masse Dealership Workgroup**

J. Duran suggested that the Council form a work group to gather community concerns, raise questions, and present to the Council recommendations/findings to present to the Town of Narragansett regarding the proposed Paul Masse Automobile dealership on Route 1A. J. Duran moved that a work group be formed as proposed; T. Girardi seconded the motion, which thereafter was unanimously approved by the Council.

### **7. Acting Clerk – Executive Session**

L. McKnight moved that J. Duran be appointed Acting Clerk for the Council Executive Session that was to follow immediately hereafter. K. O'Brien seconded the motion, which was then unanimously approved.

### **8. Executive Session**



At 8:54 pm, the Council voted unanimously to move into Executive Session.

#### **9. Return to Open Session**

Following the Executive Session, the Council reconvened in Open Session. J. Duran reported that the minutes of the September 8, 2025 Executive Session, as amended, had been approved 5-0 (T. Girardi abstaining).

#### **10. Adjourn**

There being no further business, and upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

/s/

Robert E. Patterson, Clerk