

**BONNET SHORES FIRE DISTRICT
RECONSTITUTED CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE**

January 29, 2025 6:00 pm

MEETING MINUTES

Call to Order: Chair F. LaSalle called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm at the Bonnet Shores Fire District Community Center.

Announcements: The data analysis presented at the January 25, 2025, meeting has been updated to reflect that there are 1847 BSBC eligible voters rather than 2007 per Louise Healy, BSBC representative. This will be posted to the website along with the other 4 presentations.

Approval of Minutes: A motion to approve January 25, 2025, meeting minutes was made by Louise Healy and seconded by Jane Duran. Approved 4-0.

Review and discuss previous charter amendments recommended prior to 2025:

4.a NARRAGANSETT REGISTERED VOTERS AND 60 DAYS RESIDENCY IN A 12-MONTH PERIOD FOR SEASONAL OCCUPANCY. BC would have no vote. The proposal had a definition of residency that was not consistent with the language in the consent order, or the R.I. Constitution. No voting ties to property rights. The Council did not support it. This proposal was submitted to the General Assembly (GA) in January 2023 and was subject to hearings in May 2023. This proposal never made it out of committee. For further reference, see the House Committee Hearing on May 11, 2023, on the BSFD Website. (Jane provided instructions: Click here and scroll down to yellow button: [Bonnet Shores Fire District Community Website » Charter Commission Committee](#) starting at 1 hour 51 minutes). There was a second hearing in the Senate. This bill also died in committee.

F. LaSalle discussed the House Judiciary hearing and comments of legislators who were not receptive to this proposal because of the arbitrariness of the sixty-day time, and the elimination of the beach club and other seasonal property owners who are taxpayers and vote now. One comment was if the G.A. did nothing, wouldn't the existing voters under the charter plus the resident under the Consent Order be the franchise. The legislators' comments at the House Judiciary hearing suggested that people who pay taxes should have a voice and be able to vote. F. LaSalle commented that the District should not go to the General Assembly again with the same proposal that the Judiciary Committees already found was not palatable. F. LaSalle said that her impression after the hearings is that the General Assembly has no appetite for taking anyone's vote away.

4.b NARRAGANSETT REGISTERED VOTERS AND TAXPAYERS AND ONE PERSON/VOTE PER BSBC UNIT (SCENERIO 3)

This proposal keeps the current voting franchise, except for the BC where the Club's vote is reduced to one designated person per unit and permanent residents, those with a "residence and home" in the District, are added. It is simple and easily verifiable through the Town's Canvasser

list of registered voters and the Town's list of taxpayers on deeds and involves minimal expense to the community.

It was introduced to the former Charter Committee, but it did not move forward to the Council or General Assembly, as the Committee favored the first proposal, 60 days residency; though reference to it was made in public comments/submissions at hearings.

4.c NARRAGANSETT REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY (SCENERIO 2) This was submitted to Senator Alana DiMario by Carolyn DiLeo and Lloyd Albert in 2024. It appears from the public information on the General Assembly website, that it was introduced around May 28, 2024, and never came out of committee.

F. LaSalle pointed out the zoom hearing of the Charter Committee on July 31, 2023, on the District website, and encouraged people to watch it. Representative McEntee attended in person in an attempt to bring the community together. She said they had a staff of lawyers advising them at the General Assembly and the consensus was no one was disenfranchised by the Judge's rulings. There was no problem adding people, but you cannot take away someone's vote unless those who have a vote get to vote on it. Rep. McEntee said adding the permanent residents to the existing voters is something that could be done very quickly. She encouraged the community to reach a consensus before going back to the General Assembly.

Continuation and discussion of the identified scenarios:

5.a. Scenario 1: C. Current state: This includes Narragansett registered voters, taxpayers and beach club, as ruled by Judge Taft Carter on August 22, 2024, for the past election.

5.b. Scenario 2: BSFD Narragansett registered voters only. This eliminates 74% of the current voting population (seasonal homeowners and BC unit owners).

5.c. Scenario 3: BSFD Narragansett Registered Voters, BSFD resident (Narragansett voters in District) and nonresident residential property owners (taxpayers on deed) and one vote per unit for BC (taxpayers).

5.d. Scenario 4.a: BSFD Narragansett registered voters, BSFD resident and nonresident, residential property owners (taxpayers on deed) and no eligibility for Beach Club, but tax obligation still in effect.

5.e Scenario 4.b: BSFD Boundary proposal (presented by Kristen Deberghes on 1/24/25). Removal of Beach Club from BSFD boundaries and thereby relieving BC owners of their tax obligations as well as voting eligibility.

5f and 5g are now combined. Balanced voting and cap for Beach Club.

J. Duran – suggested to start having a discussion on narrowing down the options to present to the Council. She asked if anyone has questions about the current state option; no questions. She asked the same for Scenarios 2, 3, 4.a, 4.b; no questions.

K. O’Brien and M. Weber were asked at the last committee meeting (1/25/25) to determine how to operationalize and certify who can vote and how to address residents who do not own property in their weighted scenario.

K. O’Brien and M. Weber gave additional information on the combined proposals. The following is a summary of the slide presentation.

Two constituency groups – BSFD residents and BSBC unit owners. BSBC Unit Owners group includes all BSBC owners. K. O’Brien’s perspective is that dilution occurs regardless of whether you have another affiliation with the BSFD. That we cannot just look at the BSBC “only” group because residents/taxpayers that own a unit contribute to the dilution. In this model, the percentage of votes for the BSBC would be set each year and capped at the amount of taxes they contribute to BSFD.

The BSFD Resident constituency group vote percentage is the remainder. Group includes:
Residential property owners, trusts and LLCs with one vote per person registered in town of Narragansett and/or named on the deed and live in a BSFD residential zoned property.
Corporations and non-residential trusts and LLC and addresses – one vote per address.
Renters – one person registered in town of Narragansett and living in a BSFD residential zoned property.

People affiliated with both constituencies would be assigned to one of the above groups. Option to have voter choose but must adhere to “one body/one vote”.

After the presentation, J. Duran thanked K. O’Brien and M. Weber for all their hard work.

Mark Michaelson – Food for thought. If you give a cabana owner one vote, a mini double bathhouse owner 1/3, and a bathhouse owner ¼ of a vote, you basically accomplish the same thing in an easier way to address the dilution issue.

Carolyn DiLeo – commented that we are a quasi-municipality, government body and in her opinion, the voting practices must follow the constitutions, and voting should be based on residency only. C. Dileo suggested adding a Council seat so there are 8 seats instead of 7, one seat would be a Beach Club appointment, no voting for the BC and one seat will be assigned to the BC. She said the former Committee struggled with this and were worried about sending something unconstitutional.

M. Michaelson commented that he suggested adding an 8th seat to the Council in November 2023 and it was rejected.

L. Healey commented that though the Beach Club would get a seat on the Council, the proposal would disenfranchise all BC voters.

Kristen Deberghes – talked about identifying the buckets of voters – residents, property owners, Narragansett voters who don't own property, and fire district non-resident owners.

F. LaSalle wrapped up this discussion by saying we have to present a recommendation that is palatable to the General Assembly. They do not appear to want to disenfranchise BC.

J. Duran led the discussion on narrowing down the options. She noted that there are now 951 registered voters in Narragansett who are in the District, adding 461 new voters to the franchise with the court order. So about 50% of new voters have been added to homeowners who permanently reside in Bonnet but already voted because they owned property.

The Committee eliminated the following: 1) Proposal 5c, Boundary Redrawing, because it involved more than just the voting issue and redrawing boundary lines of the district; 2) Proposal 4a, the 60 Day seasonal residents, because it has already gone to the General Assembly to both the House and Senate for two hearings and died in both Judiciary Committees; 3) Proposal 4c, Narragansett only registered voters in the District because it disenfranchised about 74% of the current voters; and 4.) Proposal 5b was eliminated because it includes Narragansett voters only and eliminates property owners and taxpayers.

Proposals remaining: Current state (5.a), one person/one unit; (4.b, 5.c), everyone, but Beach club, still pay taxes (5.d), the weighted voting proposal, (K. O'Brien and M. Weber combined); (5.f and 5.g); and new proposal of adding BC Council seat and eliminating all voters from the BC (C. DiLeo/M. Michaelson) (5.h).

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Louise Healey corrected a statement made by someone during public comment at the January 25th meeting. The beach raking is not aligned to the sewer agreement. The sewer agreement is in perpetuity. However, the beach raking agreement ends in June 2026. During public comment, Tony Lupino implied that the beach raking was part of the sewer agreement and it is not.

Nancy Riccitelli – She is a property owner and beach club owner. She is in favor of the solution that gives the beach club 12% proportional vote. She does not like 1 vote per unit.

Kristen Deberghes – She feels the 1 vote per unit will be a tough sell. She wants to prevent another lawsuit and put her proposal together to try to prevent another lawsuit.

Jane Duran – reminded everybody we are trying to work collaboratively, and we need to respect those who think 1 vote per unit is a good idea. When she was out campaigning, many people said just give one vote per unit to eliminate the problem of many people on the deed.

Faith LaSalle – commented that she has no interest in the beach club. At the first new council meeting, Janice McClanaghan stood up and asked if we could consider one person/vote per unit. At the second meeting, Neil Coleman asked us if we would reconsider one person/vote per unit.

They have both been leaders in the community and she said she is trying to listen to members of the community.

Louise Healey – commented that the one person/vote per unit, that would be only for people who have no home in Bonnet.

M. Michaelson thanked this group for being professional, participatory, being a working group and being so productive. Regarding the one person/vote per unit, he noted that he did an analysis in 22 and if you deduct the duplicate votes it comes to 24% which addresses dilution, and it is the same info that Jane has come up with in her analysis.

F. LaSalle called for a motion to adjourn. L. Healey made a motion to adjourn, seconded by M. Dunne. Meeting adjourned at 8:44 pm.

Submitted,

Paulette Brousseau
Clerk, Reconstituted Charter Committee