

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

January 18, 2025 9:00 a.m.
Organizational/kickoff meeting

MEETING MINUTES

Call to Order

Committee Chair Faith LaSalle called the meeting to order at 9:02 at the Bonnet Shore Fire District Community Center.

Welcome/Introductions:

F. LaSalle gave opening;; remarks. A new District Council is now in place with 5 out of 7 new members who are committed to resolving the voting issue and moving on to more productive projects for the community. It has been almost 5 years since the voting lawsuit was filed in March of 2020. The proposals from the former Charter Committee were not able to move through the General Assembly in 2023 and 2024. The 2023 proposal did not make it out of the Committee of the House or Senate. The 2024 proposal apparently did not get to committee. F. LaSalle explained how the General Assembly works: a piece of legislation like this is introduced by a legislator; referred to a committee for study; and that committee then allows it to go to the House or Senate for a vote by both. Against this backdrop the Council reconstituted the committee to reflect greater diversity in representation of the current BSFD Community. This committee is advisory only. It will present proposals to the Bonnet Shores Fire District Council who will then forward the selected proposal to the General Assembly for approval.

Committee member introductions: Faith LaSalle, 98 Col John Gardner Rd, is a full-time property owner who is not an owner at the beach club. Jane Duran, 15 Cross Rd, has lived in Bonnet since 1969 as a seasonal resident, as a college student, and is now a non- resident residential property owner and landlord. She is an owner at the beach club. Louise Healy was appointed to represent the beach club. She is not a resident of Bonnet Shores. Michelle Dunne's parents had owned a home at 17 Fairport Rd in Bonnet since 1981. Michelle has lived in Bonnet as a permanent resident for the past 10 years, and the property is in a trust.

Robert Patterson, 8 Parkman Rd, was appointed by the Council as the plaintiff's representative. He did not take a seat at the table. He was present at the beginning of the meeting as a member of the audience and allowed to make a statement at the time of introductions. He said he was not able to be on the committee. He commented that the consent order from Judge Taft Carter said the committee was to have a plaintiff representative. He mentioned he had other objections he did not disclose. He and his wife, Mary, are not available and he suggested that the five other plaintiffs be contacted to see if they will serve. He was asked by F. LaSalle if he would serve on this committee and by L. Healy if he would serve if the dates of the meeting were changed. R. Patterson responded he did not know, as it would depend on the time and circumstances. J. Duran invited him to sit down at the table as the plaintiff's representative and commented that the seat would remain open

for a plaintiff representative to participate. A discussion took place about Council efforts to appoint a plaintiff to the committee. R. Patterson left the meeting and did not participate on the committee.

Election of Vice Chair and Clerk: A motion was made by J. Duran to appoint Paulette Brousseau as the Clerk. L. Healy seconded the motion. Motion passed, 4-0. F. LaSalle made a motion to appoint Jane Duran as Vice Chair, seconded by L. Healy. Motion passed, 4-0.

J. Duran lead the discussion on objectives, ground rules, and potential scenarios.

Objectives: J. Duran identified the objectives as to consider the issues of dilution and defining the voting pool.

Ground Rules: J. Duran commented that the ground rules are keeping behavior in check, being respectful of others opinions, being open minded and listening to different options. L. Healy commented that we have to come up with a solution that will get through the General Assembly and that will then be passed by the entire community. M. Dunne was not sure how to address not having a plaintiff and asked if we could delay a week to find a plaintiff. She asked why are we going quickly. F. LaSalle explained that we are on a time table to meet the General Assembly's schedule for legislation; otherwise we will have an election with the voting pool as defined in the old charter plus residents.

J. Duran commented that the solution must be based on facts and data, not speculation. Consideration should be given to the impact on the community, both financially and on the quality of life. Compromise is considered as a means of resolution. Faith suggested committee members consider not posting on social media about committee's work as some do not have access to the sites.

Guiding Principles: J. Duran commented that recommendations must be supported by the majority, no vetoes, and must benefit the majority of the constituents. She understood that the consent order did not disenfranchise any voters, only added voters. She commented that the General Assembly would not support anything unlawful. She emphasized that the risks should be reviewed for probability and impact (financial and quality of life) using facts and data.

Scenarios:

J. Duran reviewed the 4 scenarios that are known so far and a short discussion ensued.

1. Current state: Registered Narragansett voters, all taxpayers, nonresidents and Bonnet Shores Beach Club unit owners. L. Duran commented Judge Taft Carter added voters but did not take any away.

2. Narragansett Registered Voters Only. This is what the old Charter Committee recommended and it was not voted on by General Assembly in 2024.

3. Registered Voters (residents), non-resident taxpayers with one person per unit at the beach club. This option was put to the old Charter Committee but they did not recommend this solution.

4. Registered voters (resident) and non-resident taxpayers with no beach club.

The Committee welcomes other proposals. J. Duran explained that she needs 72-hour notice of other proposals, with specifics, to place them on an agenda for an upcoming meeting. J. Duran commented that we need to do a deep dive using data at upcoming meetings.

Public Comment:

Tony Lupino, permanent resident, non-BC owner, commented on the amenities available to beach club owners and offered by the District, and discussed his thoughts on quasi-municipalities, and the empty seat for the plaintiff representative, suggesting a temporary appointment.

Michelle Caraccia asked about the prior proposal (2023) that allowed snowbird residents in Bonnet for 60 days, to vote, and clarification that students voters are only those students who are registered voters with Narragansett.

Susan Resnick, a permanent resident, non-BC owner, inquired about the number of human voters in the District, and expressed concern over the BC having all voters, but for harmony in the community, could support a proposal of one voter for each beach club unit.

Kevin O'Brien, non-BC owner, offered to fill the fifth chair. He has a proposal that he will be presenting in the future and sees the importance of fact-based info and the benefits, as a social hub, the beach club affords to the community.

Leslie McKnight explained that a lot of thought process went into the reconstituting of the Charter Committee. Its origins began over the summer, before the election, when those running were considering the failure with proposals in the General Assembly and what could be done. The approach to reconstituting the committee has been handled in fair and open-minded way., and not orchestrated. The guidelines, objectives and ground rules discussed today are the best practices for building consensus which have been discussed at Council meetings. She asked the community to be open minded, allow for changing hearts and minds, and give the process a chance.

Carol O'Donnell indicated that the Council move forward with the reconstituting the Charter Committee with legal oversight; a seat remains open for the plaintiff under the consent order to fill one seat; and it's is legally in place. She expressed her concerns over the bullying tactics occurring, and are not what this Committee or Council is about. She commented on the quasi-municipal nature of the District and the agreement with the beach club which allows use of 250 feet of BC beach and cleaning of the estuary. She indicated that on the state level, new committee appointments are made often, as she has served on state boards and now others serve on them.

Nancy Cordy addressed the matter of the reconstituted committee and her interpretation of the 14th Amendment and voting. She commented how much the loss of tax revenue from the beach club would cost each piece of property, on an average, and asked Committee members to familiarize themselves with the Charter and legal documents from lawsuits.

Anita Langer discussed the formation of the new committee and the issue of resignations on the prior committee. In her opinion the old committee is still in effect. She referenced reviewing the work done during the prior committee.

Next meeting. Wednesday, January 22, 2025 at 6 pm at Community Center.

Motion to Adjourn made by F. LaSalle. Seconded by J. Duran. Meeting adjourned at 11:31 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Paulette Brousseau
Reconstituted Charter Committee Clerk