

**Bonnet Shores Fire District**  
**Annual Meeting/Election Process and Fiscal Responsibility Workshop**  
**DRAFT Meeting Minutes**  
**January 21, 2025 6:30pm**

**Council Attendees:** John Chereskin, Tony Girardi, Faith LaSalle, Leslie McKnight, Jane Duran, Melissa Jenkins, Kevin O'Brien.

Leslie McKnight called the meeting to order at 6:31pm

Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed especially for Terri Keagan

## **Annual Meeting/Election Process Minutes**

Leslie announced that the Annual Meeting/Election Workshop is a continuation of the same workshop held on November 19 2025. The team began with the Council Term item on the attached sheet. The following dialogue ensued for the ideas:

### **Council Member Terms**

- Jane Duran asked why there was not a 1 year cooling off period.
- Carolyn Dileo and Faith LaSalle indicated that the reason why there is no cooling off period because of the difficulty in enlisting candidates to run.
- Bill Delgizzo indicated that municipalities have term limits and that the chair should be a rotating position.
- Melissa Jenkins suggested that all of the changes being considered should be by laws.
- Carolyn DeLeo suggested that we should try a year off so that people can serve more than 2 terms in a lifetime.
- Jane Duran summarized that the former By Law Committee did a lot of work so summarized the direction for the work group which is: Term Limits, cooling off year and rotating Chair. Therefore, the recommendation is to stay with the former by Law Committees recommendation of two 3-year terms, then, 1 yr ineligibility, Chair maximum of 2 years.
- Council Vacancies – Carolyn DeLeo and Faith LaSalle had an exchange about what the previous by law committee recommended. The end result was to stay with that recommendation: Vacancy within 6 months of election-next highest vote getter (By-law committee) and Vacancy appointed by the council (Bylaw committee)

### **Other Elected Official Terms**

Leslie McKnight noted it was a public recommendation to extend the terms to 2 years. Carolyn DeLeo and Kevin O'Brien expressed support. After group discussion, vacancies would be appointed until the next election and then the person elected would begin his/her 2-year term. John Chereskin noted that if there is a vacancy that must be appointed, we run the risk of ramping up training and then at the next election the person is not elected into the role. It was acknowledged that risk is a condition we live with now.

### **Organizational Meeting**

- Carolyn DeLeo suggested 10 days post-election. Bob Patterson encouraged more flexible language like "as soon as practical after voting results are certified".

- A conversation focused on who would preside over the organizational meeting if there is no Chair. It was decided that we would follow what was done in 2025 – Clerk will preside and once chair is elected, the Chair will take over. If there is a leadership gap between the election and the organizational meeting, the new Council will meet as a whole.

### Annual Meeting

- Moving to electronic machines will expedite the Process.
- Carolyn DeLeo dais the election should preceded the annual meeting so at the annual meeting you install the new officials and celebrate.
- Kevin O'Brien cautioned that if you allow them to vote before the meeting that attendance would be low.
- Bob Patterson suggested that since there are no nominations from the floor, if people want to show up just to vote during the prescribed time (ex 2-hour window), that is their choice not to listen to the annual meeting. The Board of Elections will not say all day to help facilitate the electronic voting.
- Faith LaSalle indicated it is more than an election. It is a time to discuss matters.
- Melissa Jenkins suggested that maybe we think about more of a "trade show" format where we have tables of focus/topics (finance, treasurer, clerk, council etc.) where people can go to their area of interest. This would not require a by-law change.

### Council Member Absences

- Carolyn DeLeo indicated that there was abuse early-on so they wanted to ensure there was a commitment to the role. Executive Sessions and special meetings did not count because the scheduling of those is difficult. The Month Council Meeting schedule is a year in advance.
- Enforcement is difficult – Tony Girardi noted this in a board experience he had. Melissa Jenkins suggested that there are legal issues with unseating and elected official.
- Bob Patterson suggested a recall provision.
- Leslie McKnight suggested publishing the attendance record and community contributions. Carlyn DeLeo noted that this might be too subjective.
- Town of Narragansett has a recall provision. Group agreed to table this idea until more research is done with how the Town of Narragansett done.

### Clerk commentary

- Bob Patterson suggested that the 3 council members recuse themselves from voting on this if they are running again.
- Bob Patterson then discussed proxy voting and his intention as clerk by indicating the following: the Charter states voters shall vote in person with one exception for proxy voting if you were in common ownership of property. That's no longer the case with the addition of non-property owner residents now added to the electorate. These voters do not own property and therefore cannot have a proxy. This is unfair in his opinion. Bob went on to say that in a footnote in the charter, it states *the Rhode Island General Assembly added the requirement that the BSFD clerk must approve all proxy votes when it amended the BSFD Charter in 1985.*
- As the clerk, he is not comfortable giving special rights to landowners that he can't give to all voters. He does not see how we can change the rules on our own from what the charter says. However, from what the legislature approved, which said all votes must be in person. So, he is not going to accept the proxies without either 1) a court

order 2) a legal opinion from a lawyer that is not averse to him telling him why he has to allow some people to vote by proxy, and it's okay not to allow everyone to vote by proxy, he will take this opinion into serious consideration.

- Leslie noted if we don't follow the charter, we open ourselves up to litigation from both constituents: non-property owners who cannot use a proxy and property owners that are not allowed to use a proxy.

Leslie turned it over to Faith LaSalle to lead the fiscal responsibility workshop.

## **Fiscal Responsibility Workshop Minutes**

- Faith LaSalle gave a brief history on the previous work that was done on this topic as well as it being a primary platform for her during her election campaign. She showed a slide from Neal Prescott breaking out how the district expenses are allocated. community members. She reviewed that RI state Law has a Tax Levy of 4%. She then reviewed the 1932 BSFD Charter language which has a max on 7 mills.
- Faith then showed a slide of the current assessed value of the BSFD property which has doubled over the last 10 years and currently sits at \$1.137B. She then talked through a comparison of the current mill rate vs the maximum mill rate in the Charter. She cited several examples such as a property assessed at \$1.6M, the current tax is \$759 BSFD tax which would be \$11,329 which is higher than the Town of Narragansett tax.
- She noted that the mechanism for implementing a tax rate cap would be a by-law change. The question is what cap would we suggest as a cap rate. It is important to implement this because right now the community does not have the opportunity to vote on the budget.
- John Cheresking noted that a 4% increase is not enough in a small budget which is why last year he suggested 10% is more realistic considering our budget. He also suggested that the mill rate is backed into by the budget and he would expect the community would be outraged at a huge increase in the budget.
- Neal also suggested that 10% may seem like a lot but dollar-wise it is not. He agrees with the cap but it should be higher.
- Kevin O'Brien questioned how did this priority rise to the top of the priorities which has impact on the strategic plan.
- Paul Luba questioned the fear on the cap. He suggested a rogue council could take out debt etc. and the next generation would suffer as a result. John Chereskin questioned what Paul's opinion would be on a cap rate – Paul thought 6 or 7%. Kevin O'Brien suggested that this should be set in context of community priorities.
- Leslie noted that we needed to move onto the council meeting but there will be a continuation of this topic in a future workshop.
- Tony Giradi made the motion to adjourn the workshop portion of the meeting John Chereskin seconded the motion. Council unanimously approved.

The Monthly Council Meeting immediately followed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jane Duran

**Attachment – Results of 1/21/26 Annual Meeting/Election Process Workshop:**

**BSFD Annual Meeting/Voting Process Modernization Workshop | November & December 2025**

**Inventory of previously suggested improvements**

Last updated - 1/21/2026

<b>Existing Process</b>	<b>Suggested Change</b> (Source of suggestion)   Recommendation from the Public or former By-Law Committee	<b>Community Feedback</b>	<b>Charter Change Required?</b>	<b>Bylaw Change Required?</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Nominating Committee</b>	Candidates submit letter of interest 30 days prior to election (Public)	Yes	No	No	
	Meet and Greet with perspective candidates including zoom (Public)	Yes	No	No	
	Eliminate nominations from the floor (Public)	Yes	No	No	
	Election Meeting Committee-work with clerk and district manager to schedule meeting (Bylaw committee)	Role of NC to receive letter of interest and facilitate meet & greet			Article II, S2
<b>Tax Assessors (3)</b>	Additional Tax Assessors (Public)	Not needed - use volunteers		Article III, S6	Tax Assessor needs to be paired with volunteer
<b>Proxy Voting</b>	Expand to include sealed mail in/drop off ballots to be opened on the day of election/arrival prior to election (Bylaw committee)		Yes, S2	Article I, S5	Must vote in person
	Eliminate proxy voting (Public)		Yes, S2	Article I, S5	
	Process for authenticating ballots/duplicates/notarizations (Public)		No	No	
<b>Write-in Candidates</b>	Require additional information for write-in candidates (Public)	No	No	No	
	Eliminate write in's (Public)	No	No	No	
<b>Paper Ballots</b>	Electronic Ballots/Voting Machines (Public)	Yes, voting machines	No	No	
	Paper Ballots for write-ins only (Public)	Yes	No	No	
<b>Voter Registration List/Notice of Election</b>	Discrepancies with Town of Narragansett List (Public)	Pre-registration	Yes, S2	Article I, S6	Tax Collector prepares list
	One Notice per household/electronic, paper, website, posted (Public and Bylaw committee)	Yes	No	Article I, S3a	Requires first class mail - 9 days prior
	Publication Notice in local paper (Public and Bylaw committee)	Yes	Yes, S3	Article I, S3	Requires PROJ0 and local
<b>Council Member -Term</b>	Council Member Term Limits two-3 year terms then 1 yr ineligibility, Chair maximum of 2 years (Bylaw committee)	Yes	No	No	
	Vacancy within 6 months of election-next highest vote getter (By-law committee)	Yes	No	Article IV, S1	Filled by council

	Vacancy appointed by the council (Bylaw committee)	Yes	No	Article IV, S1	Filled by council
<b>Other elected Officials - Term</b>	Extend to two year term (Public).	Yes - see comments for vacancy	No	No	Vacancies will be appointed until the next election. Winning candidate then begins the 2-year term from that point.
<b>Organizational Meeting</b>	Held immediately following annual meeting (Bylaw committee)	Yes - see comments	No	Article II, S4	As soon as practical after voting results are certified. The Clerk will preside and once chair is elected, the
<b>Annual Meeting</b>	In person-present for entire meeting (Public)	Yes	Yes, S2	Article I, S4	In person or by proxy
	No voting until end of annual meeting (Public)	No	No	Article I, S4	In person or by proxy
	Allow continuous voting throughout the day (Public)	Yes - See comments	No	Article I, S4	<b>Time:</b> ince there are no nominations from the floor, if people want to show up just to vote during the prescribed time (ex 2-hour window), and their choice is not to listen to the annual meeting. The Board of Elections will not say all day to help facilitate the electronic voting. <b>Format:</b> Tink about more of a "trade show" format where we have tables of focus/topics (finance, treasurer, clerk, council etc.) where people can go to their area of interest. This would not require a by-law change
<b>Council Member Absences</b> (6 Meetings in a 12 month period - <i>meeting types not specified</i> )	Reduce to 4 absences total or 2 consecutive absences (Bylaw committee)	Table - see comments	No	Article III, S10	Table this until more research can be done on how the Town of Narragansett operationalizes their recall position.