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BONNET SHORES FIRE DISTRICT
RECONSTITUTED CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE
March 6, 2025, 10:00 a.m.

MEETING MINUTES

Call to Order: The Meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Faith LaSalle at 6:00 pm.

Announcements: There was no public comment at this meeting as the Committee has already taken public comment numerous times in previous meetings on this topic.

Approval of minutes from 3/1/24 meeting. Motion to approve made by Louise Healy and seconded by Jane Duran. Approved 4-0.

Bonnet Shores Beach Club Meeting Results: J. Duran made a presentation at the March 3rd Bonnet Shores Beach Club Board (BSBC) meeting. The BSBC feels they are the only group being asked to compromise. They accepted a seat on the charter committee in good faith to discuss the options but the plaintiffs did not accept a seat which they interpret at the plaintiffs being unwilling to compromise. The plaintiffs continually state there will be continued litigation with any solution that allows the BSBC to vote either in current state or one unit-one vote so the BSBC does not trust that any further compromise they make will be met with genuine acceptance and will result in another lawsuit. Therefore, they prefer to move into legally binding mediation or litigation if it is initiated. They also feel they continue to be the target of malicious statements, the fabrication and spreading of complete falsehoods, and harassment by a very small but very vocal group with the community. Therefore, they see no reason to compromise and will leave it in the hands of the attorney and the judge to decide. They are extremely grateful to the members of the community who have put so much effort into this process and appreciate that the majority of the Bonnet Shores Fire District are supportive of our longstanding partnership. Louise Healy took a poll of the audience and a majority want to stay the course.

Discussion and formulation of recommendations on the voting scenarios:

Scenario 1 – Current state. At the last meeting, the Committee's support for this option was: 1 support and 3 no support. F. LaSalle explained that in mediation, a new vote is often taken in light of new information and asked if any of the Committee members wanted to change their support in recommending this scenario. None of the Committee members changed their support so it remained 1 support and 3 no support.

Scenario 3 - Narragansett registered voters, resident and non-resident property owners and 1 person per unit from the BSBC. At the last meeting, the Committee's support for this option was 2 support and 2 no support. Michele Dunne presented a variation on this option that would weight the1 person per unit determined by the type of unit owned, thereby reducing the BSBC's voting power. A cabana would have 1 vote, a double bathhouse would get .5 vote, mini double bathhouse would get .25 vote, bathhouse would get .25 vote and each of the 6 live in units would each get one vote. (See complete presentation on BSFD website). F. LaSalle pointed out that we are a quasi-municipality and she knows of no fire district that has both elected seats and appointed seats on the council and no one has weighted voting. Legally, the General Assembly will say it is unfair to treat one class differently than another. When dealing with government, it is one person, one vote. L. Healy commented that if the BSBC was not going to support 1 person per unit they would surely not support a further reduction through a weighted approach.

J. Duran noted that she had been contemplating another scenario where voting eligibility would be based on beneficial ownership requiring at least 50% ownership in a BSFD property or a BSBC property. She had not worked out the math to see if it would benefit the majority of the people of Bonnet. F. LaSalle asked if any of the Committee members wanted to change their support in recommending this scenario. None of the Committee members changed their support so it remained 2 support and 2 no support.

Scenario 4c – Narragansett registered voters, resident and non-resident property owners, no eligibility to vote for BSBC and appoint BSBC a seat on the BSFD council. J. Duran noted that in presently, a seat on the council would represent 11% of the council but if the BSBC's tax contribution goes up (for example up to 18%), the seat on the council does not adjust.

Likewise, it does not adjust if the tax contribution goes down. Therefore, this option is not sustainable over time. F. LaSalle noted that giving an entire seat to the BSBC is generous because no other segment of the community has a permanent seat. It could be taking away a seat from permanent or seasonal resident because the beach club members have never run for the council. Our council is elected by the electorate and this would deviate from that model and become a guaranteed appointed seat. F. LaSalle asked if any of the Committee members wanted to change their support in recommending this scenario. None of the Committee members changed their support so it remained 1 support and 3 no support.

Scenario 5 - BSFD balanced voting proposal. This option creates a classification of voters from the BSBC and caps the actual BSBC votes to equal the amount of total tax revenue contributed by this class of voters, currently at 11%. There was no further discussion on this option. F. LaSalle asked if any of the Committee members wanted to change their support in recommending this scenario. None of the Committee members changed their support so it remained 1 support and 3 no support.

Reconstituted Charter Committee Report to BSFD Council – The Committee discussed that the following information would be included in the Committee report to the Council:

- How many times the Committee met
- The committee has not met its goal of having majority support on any of the proposals.
- A positive outcome was that we had constructive dialogue, participation from various segments of the community.
- Another positive outcome was that we gained data, we got some numbers, and further legal research and we have a better understanding of what makes up our community.

J. Duran questioned what are we expecting from the Council. Are we looking for further guidance, should I do more research on the 50% option given that we are running out of time to bring to the General Assembly. M. Dunne pointed out that the lawsuit says changes need to happen and we have not come to a consensus on that. L. Healey reviewed that if the BSBC could have some sort of commitment that if we acquiesced and went with one person per unit, that would be the end of this. However, the fact the plaintiffs did not participate, indicates to the BSBC that

it won't be the end of the litigation because they think it was a ploy because none of them would accept that seat. F. LaSalle pointed out that the BSBC is not doing the litigation. There has been a lot of litigation that should not have happened. The Board of Elections states that fire districts are not covered by the Board of Elections. There is a lot of litigation that went on and we paid for that should never have happened. The General Assembly and Sen. DiMario were very clear. She said work it out and come up with a resolution and she also said it would be a disservice to our community if she were to sponsor something that would fail in the General Assembly. In January 2025, some of the plaintiffs sent their own proposal to Sen. DiMario saying again that the beach club doesn't vote on whether their vote is going to be taken away after Judge Taft Carter said they do.

Next Steps: F. LaSalle concluded that we will write up this report and inform the BSFD council and just because we might miss the window to send this the General Assembly, we should continue to think through options and not give up. M. Dunne asked if given the new information from today, does it make sense to ask the plaintiffs one more time to accept their appointment to the Committee. The feeling was the plaintiff had many chances to contribute. M. Dunne asked that a request by the council be made one more time to the plaintiffs to see if they would like a seat at the table. F. LaSalle mentioned that at the recent meeting with Sen. DiMario, Faith told the plaintiffs at least 3 times that we were having a meeting on March 1st and there was a seat open for them and encouraged Bob Patterson to join the Committee. That invitation was extended to him as recently as Feb 18th. J. Duran noted that we need more work on monetizing the value of the in-kind services provided by the beach club. J. Duran thanked the Committee members for their contributions and thanked the public for all the civil discussion, cooperation and collaboration.

Motion to adjourn Motion make by M. Dunne, seconded by J. Duran. The meeting adjourned at 6:47pm.

Submitted,
/s/ Paulette Brousseau
Clerk, Reconstituted Charter Committee