

GOVERNMENTAL MANAGEMENT

The incorporating Act of 1932 passed by the Rhode Island State Legislature granted Fire District status to Bonnet Shores through a charter and by-laws. A Fire District is a quasi-governmental entity that has the legal authority to perform specified administrative and governmental functions independently of the Town in which it is located.

The defining purpose of a Fire District is to provide safety to its residents from fire and other hazards, manage its land and provide for recreation. However, the incorporating legislation also gave the Bonnet Shores Fire District the authority to raise money through a fire district tax for the following purposes: maintain streets and walkways, create fire, police and a life saving department, establish street lights, general improvement, upbuilding and beautification of district property, to purchase and/or lease land for recreation, including beach and boating facilities.

Bonnet Shores has indeed evolved beyond simple fire protection regulations and has adopted many ordinances and by-laws that further define the way in which self-government occurs.

This form of strong self-government functions through an elected governing Council which oversees the operation of the Fire District, and is also empowered to appoint com-

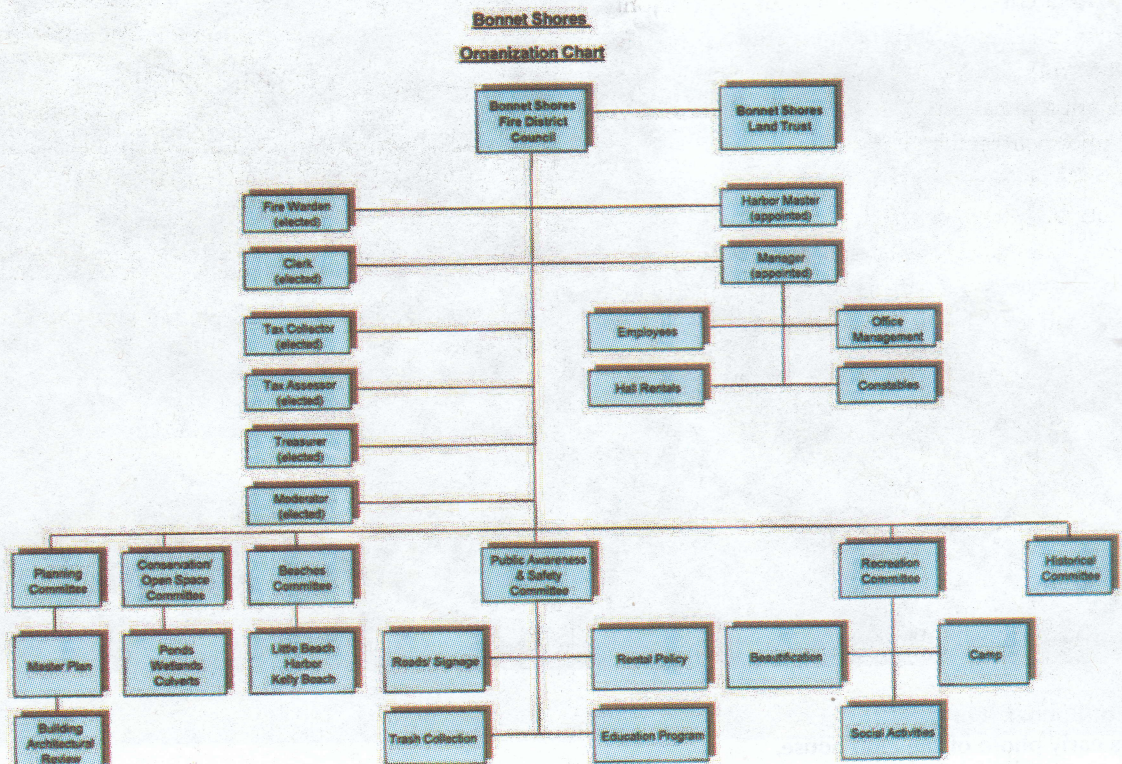
mittees with specific responsibilities. A Council person serves as a liaison on the six standing committees.

One of the most important functions of the Fire District Council is the power to tax, and to formulate and adopt an annual budget that provides for the maintenance of community facilities and services.

The power to tax was given to the Fire District in its original incorporating act. Currently the tax rate is set at a rate of one mil. The Council has the legal rate to tax to a rate of seven mil.

The Fire District Council conducts workshops to prepare the annual budget, which is then presented for public comment at two public hearings before it is finalized. The budget is then adopted by the Council and then presented to the community at the Fire District Annual Meeting. The budget includes operating and capital improvement budgets.

All roads within the Bonnet Shores community are owned by the Fire District. However, through agreement with the Town of Narragansett, all utilities and public assets are maintained by the Town. Potable water lines are owned and maintained by the United Water Company, and sewer lines are owned by the Town.



MAJOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS

FUTURE GROWTH AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER



Historic and traditional home styles reinforce the special character of Bonnet Shores.

There are approximately 850 homes today built on the approximately 400 plus acres that comprise Bonnet Shores.

Land use maps of the Town of Narragansett show approximately 420 undeveloped legal lots of record within the Fire District. Of these, 120 are located in wetland areas, and others are located in sensitive areas where it may be very difficult to obtain development permits. The majority of the severely constrained lots are adjacent to properties owned by the Audubon Society and Bonnet Shores Land Trust. In all, approximately 200-250 lots can be considered "buildable" under current laws and regulations.

The recent rate of growth within Bonnet Shores over the past two decades has been sustained at approximately twenty (20) houses per year. At the current rate of growth, Bonnet Shore will be completely built out within 10-20

years. By 2015, there could be over 1,000 houses in a community whose 1928 Master Plan anticipated fewer than 500.

How can Bonnet Shore maintain the community character, deemed so important by residents, in the face of so much new construction? This potential growth is the greatest threat to the existing character of the community.

In addition to new construction, another threat is the growing trend of "tear-downs". This involves purchasing an existing house, tearing it down, and building a much larger structure on the site, one that often overshadows the smaller neighboring homes.

In order for Bonnet Shores to maintain its valuable character, it must be proactive in preserving its natural resources, open spaces and architectural scale.



New buildings can reinforce the charm and character of the community.

FUTURE GROWTH AND WASTEWATER TREATMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Beyond the changes to community character that new development brings, there are significant environmental and infrastructure implications. If all of the "buildable" lots in Bonnet Shores are filled with new homes, the population increase will have a severe impact on the community's natural resources. New buildings will generate increased sewage that will need to be dealt with through new infrastructure, a major investment for the community.

Seventy percent of Bonnet Shores is served by sewer lines that deliver wastewater to a treatment facility. Narragansett's Department of Community Development and Planning is currently drafting a septic management plan for Bonnet Shores. Sewer extensions at the Point and beach areas are scheduled, but are not a town priority because of their cost. The area south of the Community Building and Bonnet Shores Road is predominantly wetlands and, therefore, is under consideration for sewer expansion. To address wastewater treatment, the community can consider:

Expansion of the sewage lines:

If the sewer system is extended to the beach and lower Point cliff area where prime real estate is located, density can be expected to rise.

Tearing down older, smaller houses to make way for larger ones with more bedrooms may begin once sewers are installed. This increased density will further strain community resources.

No new sewage lines:

Building permits will not be granted without approvals from State, and/or Federal, agencies.

If no new sewage infrastructure is created, new development could have a severe impact on water quality in the pond and beach areas.

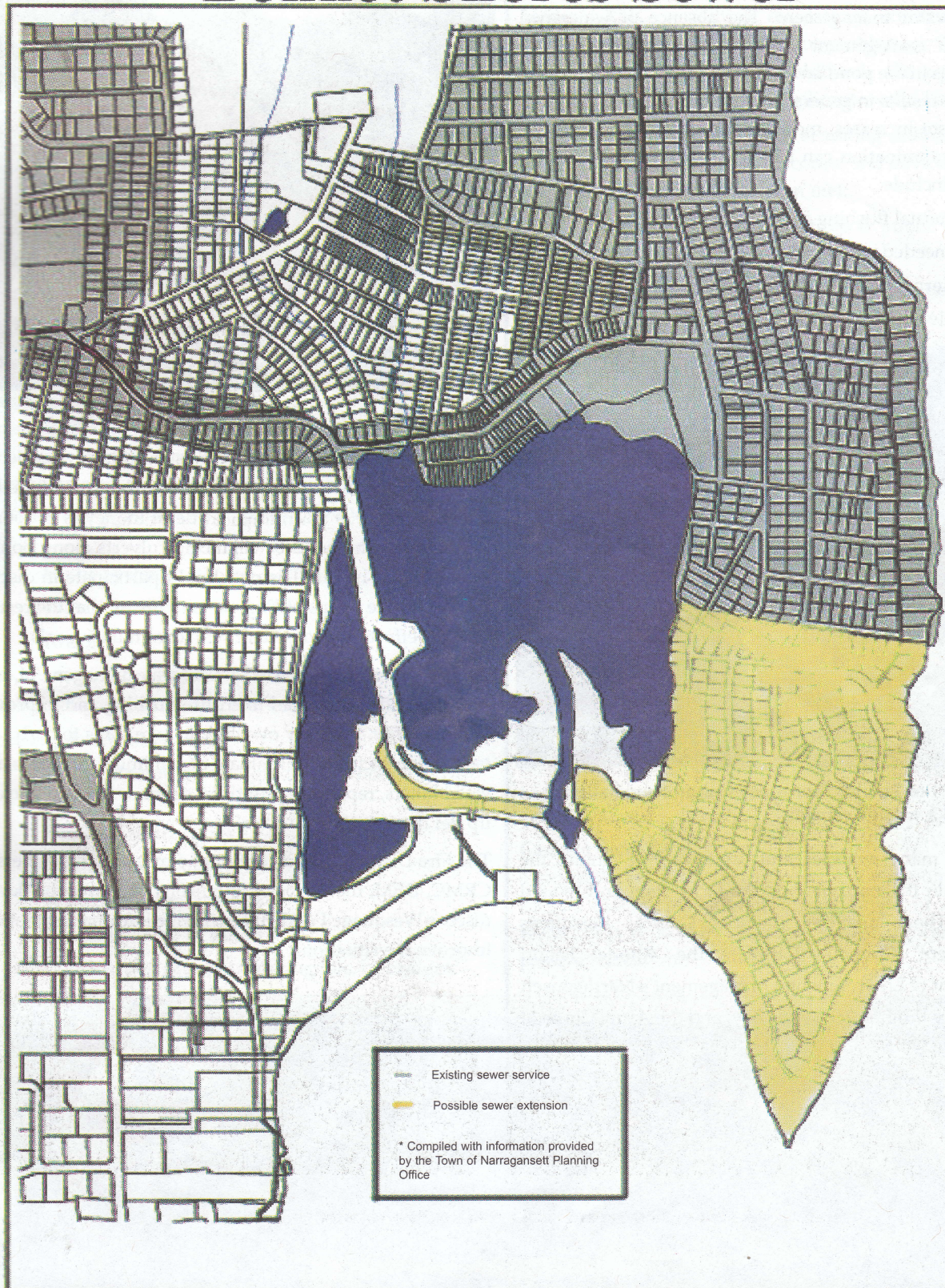
While sewage line expansion may be unlikely, new technologies may evolve that will accommodate residential

development without impact to water quality. Because of this, sewage limitations will not be an effective retardant to growth for an indefinite period.



New construction controls help retain community character and limit teardowns.

Bonnet Shores Sewer



WESQUAGE POND

Primary concerns for Wesquage Pond are run-off and lack of storm-water management. The absence of watershed and runoff management translates into higher seasonal water levels in the pond and the water table in surrounding areas. This results in general water quality degradation. As development increases, more run-off, flooding, and water quality contamination can be expected to occur. Current problems include:

- ▶ external flushing in the form of tidal water inflow is needed,
- ▶ internal flushing is needed because of undersized culverts.



At the heart of Bonnet Shores, Wesquage Pond has been designated a wildlife refuge.

There are many agencies and organizations having the pond within their purview on the local, state and federal levels. These agencies include: Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, Save the Bay, and the Army Corps of Engineers.



The pond provides open space and water views.

The Army Corps of Engineers is currently completing reconnaissance mapping of the pond to determine if federal involvement is warranted. Federal money is proposed for restoring the pond by replacing culverts along Bonnet Point Road. The Fire District should participate in discussions with the Corps of Engineers to insure that the results of these efforts are consistent with community goals.

The community has started breachway management, and that should be continued to ensure flushing and improved water quality. Property owners can take steps to curb contamination including: eliminate or minimize fertilizers and weed killers, replace or pump out septic systems, and clean up pet droppings.

The Fire District should continue to meet with members of CRMC, DEM, the Corps of Engineers, and Save the Bay to discuss Wesquage Pond and exchange information that can improve the situation.

BEACHES and WATERFRONT ACCESS

Bonnet Shores Beach Club:

Initially, the Bonnet Shore Beach Club was privately owned. Later, it was sold as condominium units so that there are many individual owners. This change in ownership significantly changes the way in which decisions are made about the future of the Beach Club property.

Indeed, there is confusion as to the extent of the expansion possible at the Bonnet Shores Beach Club. The Club has a DEM permit to build an additional 139 new units. Permission to build these units was granted during the initial expansion and the Beach Club still retains its right to build.

However, in order to expand, the Club must face a number of significant regulatory hurdles. Any site and construction plans must be submitted to the Town for approval, and the Club must rectify any outstanding violations before a building permit can be issued. In addition, the Rhode Island Coastal Resource Management Council requires permits for:

- ▶ Septic Systems
- ▶ Water Quality
- ▶ Runoff

Also, many uses are highly regulated because of the Beach Club's location in relation to coastal waters and wetlands.

These regulated uses include:

- ▶ Filling, Removing, and grading of shoreline features
- ▶ Residential structures
- ▶ Commercial or industrial structures
- ▶ Sewage disposal systems
- ▶ Point discharge of runoff
- ▶ Construction of roads, parking lots, or bridges.

Under CRMC permitting regulations, construction of a public recreational facility may be problematic in wetlands areas, as such facilities are prohibited. On a moderately developed barrier beach the applicant would have to:

- ▶ demonstrate that all local zoning ordinances, building codes, state safety codes, and environmental requirements have been met;
- ▶ demonstrate that connections to public water and sewer will be provided;
- ▶ demonstrate that adequate transportation and utility services are available to support proposed operations and related activities;
- ▶ describe the need for the alteration;
- ▶ describe the impact of alterations on coastal and wetland waters;
- ▶ describe the impact of erosion on water circulation, flushing and sedimentation; and
- ▶ demonstrate that there will be no significant deterioration of water quality.

Kelly Beach and Little Beach:

While the Beach Club property is privately owned, Kelly Beach and Little Beach are two smaller beaches in the Bonnet Shore community that are public open space and provide important access to the shoreline for many residents. Both are important as recreational beaches and as access points to the shoreline.

Camden Road Pier:

This small pier is another important access point for community members who want a public right of way to the water. This is used by residents for fishing, canoing, and passive recreation.

