



TOWN OF NARRAGANSETT

Town Hall 25 Fifth Avenue Narragansett, RI 02882-0777
Tel. (401) 789-1044 TDD (401) 782-0610 Fax (401) 783-9637

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

INFORMATION ON THE BONNET SHORES FIRE DISTRICT

The Bonnet Shores Fire District was established by a special act of the Rhode Island Legislature in 1932 to provide for public services in two adjacent platted areas surrounding Wesquage Pond, including the peninsula known as "The Bonnet" on the east of the pond and the east facing slope of Boston Neck to the west of the pond. The District is represented as Plats N-R and N-S on the Narragansett Tax Assessor's Plats.

At the center of the District is Wesquage Pond, a fresh and/or slightly brackish water body of 85 acres. The pond is divided into two segments by Bonnet Point Road. The larger segment of 65 acres drains to the ocean via a narrow unstabilized breachway or channel that is subject to the dynamics of sand transport on Bonnet Shores Beach. The smaller pond of 20 acres lies at the foot of the slope of Boston Neck and is connected to the main pond by two sets of culverts. There is little regular tidal exchange between Wesquage Pond and Narragansett Bay, as the elevation of the pond is often above sea level, and the channel from the ocean is shoal.

Wesquage Pond is an scenic resource for the surrounding areas, and is also an important nesting and wintering area for migrating waterfowl. Most of the land under the pond surface is owned by the Rhode Island Audubon Society as a preserve. More information on Wesquage Pond is available at the Audubon Society. A limited of fishing is enjoyed by local residents.

BONNET SHORES AND THE WESQUAGE POND WATERSHED LAND USE AND POPULATION

The Bonnet Shores District comprises 405 acres in total. It is predominately residential with neighborhoods defined by relatively small (5-10,000 square foot) lots laid out in a general grid pattern. The road system includes approximately 14.5 miles of paved surface.

Of the 1934 lots of record in the district, 1052 are occupied by single family residences capable of year-round occupancy. In addition, there are 143 dwellings listed as seasonal, 8 commercial properties, 1 industrial, 588 vacant undeveloped lots, 173 of which have severe constraints for development, and 142 lots held as open space by conservation organization.

POPULATION

There are no exact figures of the population of the District since its limits do not coincide with US census enumeration districts. Also, there is a strong seasonal effect as summer vacationers still represent a significant influx of population during summer months. Based on 1990 Census average occupancy throughout the town, the Bonnet Shores Fire District is estimated to have a year round population of 2,735. During peak summer periods this number may increase to 3,500 or more.

ZONING

The Narragansett Zoning Ordinance divides the Fire District into six districts, including 3 residential districts, (R-80, R-20 and R-10), 2 commercial districts B-B and B-C, and a Public Use Zone. The relative percentages and physical distribution are shown in the accompanying zoning map. The predominant zone, both on an area, and residential density is R-10, the town's densest residential zone. R-20 Zoning includes the South half of the Bonnet, where servers are not available. The principal commercial district is Waterfront Commercial (BC) occupying the greater part of Bonnet Shores Beach. Based on present Zoning requirements accounting for or substandard lots of record, it is estimated that 415 new dwellings may be able to be constructed.

ISSUES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The Wesquage Watershed is a relatively small geographic area (720 acres) of which over one half is within the Bonnet Shores Fires District. The glacial till soils underlain by shallow bedrock create high runoff volumes and saturated soils during the wet season. Two important effects of this local geology and soils are (1) high potential for pollutants to reach the stream and flow into Wesquage Pond, and (2) potential for flooding of low lying areas in the watershed, particularly the pond shores and Bonnet point Road.

Protection of Water Quality and habitat are critical issues for this small, shallow and poorly flushed embayment. In particular, suburban runoff supplies, bacteria nutrients, and petroleum, pesticides and herbicides to the stream and ultimately into the pond. Once in the pond these pollutants can disturb the natural ecological balances, increase productivity of algae, and reduce habitat for aquatic life.

Conservation efforts should concentrate on acquiring open space property to enhance filtration of pollution and uptake of nutrients before they feed into the stream. Major parts of the middle and upper parts of the stream are now protected. Conservation interests should focus on the 100 or so lots located close to Wesquage Pond located in the wetland and high water table area.

While protecting the water quality this acquisition effort could also serve to increase the time it takes for drainage to reach the pond, and thus reduce flooding. More careful management of the outlet to enhance drainage and promote tidal flow could likely greatly improve the potential for anadromous (buckeye) runs, and the wildlife that they support.