

Masons Island Fire District Meeting

March 18, 2025 – 5:30 PM

Masons Island Yacht Club

Minutes of Meeting

1. Call to Order President Scott Parry called the meeting to order at 5:33 pm. Board members Jeff Miceli (Vice President), Ricardo Kleinbaum (Clerk), Ethan Tower (Treasurer), Catherine Deichmann, Kristin Foster, Tom Giola, Fran Hoffman and Bill Taylor (Tax Collector) were present. Also attending were Louis Allyn (MICO Owner), Rufus Allyn (Roads Manager), Bob Domurat (MIPOA Roads Committee rep), and two students from Stonington High School (Jack and Aaron). Board member Audrey Brown was absent.

2. Agenda Additions/Deletions/Changes

a. New Business - Kristin Foster – Stonington Town hearing on Tuesday March 25 regarding causeway repairs.

b. Unfinished Business – Catherine Deichmann – Thursday Speakers’ Series schedule.

3. Approval of Previous Minutes A motion was made and seconded to approve the January 18, 2025 meeting minutes with the following addition to section 5 (a): *Jeff contacted Quiambaug Fire Chief by email to request a meeting to continue discussions on working together in the future.* The minutes were approved unanimously with the change above.

4. Treasurer’s Report - Ethan Tower Referring to his recent email with updated financials and the 2025/26 budget forecast, Ethan noted that current year budget figures are largely in line with projections.

a. Ethan described several new items impacting next year’s revenues and expenses:

i. Addition of a miscellaneous income line item to cover payments for Traffic Control and the four posters under the tick program from Mason Homestead Homeowners’ Association.

ii. Absence of roughly \$10K paid previously to the Mason’s Island Company (“MICO”) under a roads maintenance management contract, after other increases in the roads maintenance budget with an estimated net savings of \$4.6K.

iii. Unchanged Fire Dept mill rate, though fees will increase about \$7,000 as a result of an increase in the Grand List.

iv. Update from Connecticut Water Co to reflect the correct number of hydrants and water pipe footage.

v. Small expense increases for insurance, traffic & safety and accounting firm payments.

b. Ethan also reviewed the cost of four proposed capital improvement projects: rebuilding Hickory Ledge and Mallard Road (\$54.5K), repainting road lines (\$9K), replacing worn speed limit, warning and stop signs (\$2.4K), and an engineering study to look at the drainage onto Yacht Club Road (\$27K). These are included in the \$93K in the proposed budget for capital improvements. Separately, MICO offered to donate unused highway signs to the community.

c. Ethan anticipates the roads reserve will end next fiscal year with \$133K. Ethan added that the balance would be sufficient

to cover up to \$125K in matching funds for grants towards the Living Shoreline Protection Plan, depending on permit progress.

- d. A discussion then ensued on the use and level of the Roads Reserve. Bill noted that as a result of add-on projects over the past five years, the Roads Reserve has only increased by \$60K. He recommended that the Board set a fixed dollar reserve target that should not be diverted for ad hoc projects, particularly in view of inevitable District-wide road construction needs in the medium term. Scott concurred with Bill’s argument, while suggesting that expansion of the budget for a larger roads reserve should be considered once the large capital improvement projects are completed next year. Ethan noted that annual road maintenance costs projected at \$88K per year.
- e. Ethan stated that we might be able to drop the mill rate from 3.4 to 3.1 for 2026/2027. This should still allow for an \$80-\$90K surplus for the roads reserve going forward.

- f. Ethan made the following motion:

*Move to approve the 2025/2026 budget as presented by the Treasurer at the March monthly meeting in order to bring to the voters at the upcoming annual meeting.**

** For inclusion in the annual meeting motion to approve the Treasurer’s Report.*

The motion was seconded with a short discussion regarding the projects outlined above. The motion carried with eight Board members voting in favor and one Board member absent.

5. Committee Reports

a. Fire & Safety Committee – Jeff Miceli

- i. Jeff reported that he is still awaiting a reply from the Quiambaug Fire Chief as described in the February 2025 monthly meeting minutes. Ethan suggested Jeff also contact Jack Garbarino,
- ii. Jeff presented an update on the Emergency Planning initiative which was mapped out for volunteer leaders at a February 26 meeting. Next steps include holding a meeting on May 14 at the Stonington Emergency Operations Center, conducting table top drills, and identifying a cost efficient method of sourcing radios. Ethan noted \$1,200 can be made available in the miscellaneous budget for equipment procurement.

b. Tick Committee – Fran Hoffman, Dave Ludwig (absent)

- i. Fran reported that Seascope has been sent a new contract consolidating chemical-based and organic tick treatment services with the first of three treatments anticipated in early April. Scott asked if a specific date for the first treatment could be communicated to the Board.

c. Shoreline Protection Committee

i. Update on Sloped Rock Design – Tom Giola

1. Tom reported receiving approval last month from the Stonington Planning & Zoning Commission (“P&Z”) for the 130 foot covered

stone revetement as described in the January and February MIFD meeting minutes.

2. Tom detailed the five contractor bids for the project with a recommendation to select Machnik Bros, Inc., at a projected cost of \$119.4K. The figure covers all project elements including an estimated contingency for the extraction of difficult to foresee rocks underground, the cost of sourcing water for bordering vegetation, and yet to be determined legal costs payable to MICO, according to Tom.
3. Tom noted that work can begin in early April subject to completion of the following:
 - a. Construction stake out of the new revetement including stakeout of the property line between Mason’s Island Company and MIPOA;
 - b. Engineer review and approval of submittals (contractor documentation and product suitability);
 - c. Post project submission of ‘as built’ drawings required for the Town of Stonington;
 - d. Firming up of contingency costs;
 - e. Posting an estimated \$7K erosion and sedimentation bond with Town of Stonington (not included in the project cost above, as the funds are refundable one year after completion.)
4. Tom noted that work can be completed within 30 days. A discussion followed on the need to notify residents ahead of the project.

5. Scott then introduced the following motion:

Move to approve hiring of Machnik Brothers, Inc. to build a 130 foot long buried stone revetement to protect a portion of the east side of Chippechaug Trail at an approximate project expense of \$119,000, with overall costs not to exceed \$195,000 as previously approved by taxpayers at the 2024/25 annual meeting. The agreement is contingent on final approval from the Mason's Island Property Owners' Association and completion of a written agreement with Mason's Island Company for land access and indemnification of legal fees.*

** including costs already reimbursed*

6. The motion was seconded by Kristin Foster followed by a discussion regarding vendor selection, payment terms, and legal constraints. The motion carried with eight Board members voting in favor and one Board member absent.

ii. Update on Living Shoreline Plan – Kristin Foster

1. Kristin provided an update on the permitting process related to the streamlined (rock sills-only) project, as described in previous monthly meeting minutes.
2. Kristin then referred to written materials circulated before the meeting that included an Interim status report on the Living Shoreline Project that needs to be submitted by March 30, 2025 under the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant. Kristin's report describes a

- 15% increase in project construction costs. The higher cost is related partly to pollution protection insurance, according to Kristin.
3. Kristin also reported that GZA responded to a request for comments on the relevance of rock sills settling observed at the Old Saybrook Project, and noted the following:
 - a. No current elevation survey was done;
 - b. Visual observations alone cannot be used to determine if settling has occurred;
 - c. Sill designs in the Mason’s Island project include measures to prevent settling.
 4. Kristin advised that she has been exchanging consultation draft permits with the engineers, and anticipates document submission to the eight regulatory agencies in March. Responses from DEEP and Army Corps of Engineers replies are anticipated between October 2025 and January 2026, while the Town of Stonington is expected to reply by early fall.
 5. Kristin added that assuming all the permits are received by January, the work of dropping rocks in the water could begin in early 2026. The project remains dependent on grant offerings with the best prospect being the Long Island Sound Futures Fund which would require a 25% match on a grant, according to Kristin.
 6. Catherine asked if there is an agreement with MICO for use of their land. Kristin replied that she expects an agreement would be forthcoming along with a commitment to pay \$5K to MICO once all regulatory approvals,

final construction plans, and third party funding are in place.

d. Traffic Control Committee – Catherine Deichmann

- i. Catherine reported that the 2025 decal application is on the website. She also confirmed receipt of the Ace Security contract (slightly above \$40K for 2025 and 2026) with guard duty beginning on May 2.
- ii. A short discussion ensued on the replacement of the gate house speed bump which was removed several weeks ago due to damage.
- iii. Scott mentioned that the Stonington Food Waste Curbside Collection Pilot Program (“green bag”) is expected to be suspended in the coming weeks as it has not proven to be economically feasible for the Town.

e. Facilities Committee – Tom Giola

- i. Referring to the slide presentation circulated before the meeting, Tom reviewed tree and vegetation maintenance issues, drainage maintenance, upcoming paved road projects, driveway permit applications, and repairs of road surfaces. Scheduling of work on several items remains dependent on final budget approval at the upcoming annual meeting.
- ii. Tom reported that six trees should be monitored as potential hazards, including the tree in the center of East Forest Road. He also noted that two arborists have recommended its removal, and that Eversource Energy has offered to remove it at no cost. A

discussion then ensued on whether removal of the East Forest tree is indicated in the near future. Rufus stressed that since he believes the tree poses a hazard and he has received complaints, it should be taken down. Rufus added however that if the Stonington Tree Warden inspects the tree and attests to its safety in writing, he is willing to reconsider his position. Scott stated he would contact the Town Tree Warden to confirm her view on the condition of the “landmark” tree, and, if it is deemed safe, have her provide the Board with a written statement.

- iii. Tom also reviewed the status of 2024 Committee initiatives as described in the February 2025 meeting minutes. He stressed the time sensitivity of making changes to the 2021 MIFD ordinance covering driveway and road excavation of MIFD-managed roads, specifically to enable work on the “right of ways” in the District. According to Tom, there is a need to align construction/repair design practices with current standards set by the Town of Stonington and State of Connecticut Department of Transportation. Scott agreed to address the proposed bylaw changes at the next monthly meeting.

f. Nominating Committee – Catherine Deichmann, Ethan Tower (absent)

- i. Catherine reported that the Committee (Catherine, Ethan, Gail Lane, Tommy Thomason, Gay Reichart), has identified two Board nominees to replace Audrey Brown and Fran Hoffman in 2025/26: Kevin Riley has been nominated to serve as Vice President. Nancy Ross has been nominated to serve as Assistant Treasurer, working alongside Ethan. Both candidates

will be presented for election at the May annual meeting.

6. Unfinished Business – Spring Speakers’ Series – C. Deichman

- a. Catherine confirmed that the Yacht Club is reserved every Thursday in April at 6 PM for guest speakers as reported in last month’s minutes. Meeting topics and dates will be posted on the guardhouse and announced as ‘special meetings’, according to Catherine.

7. New Business – Kristin Foster

- a. Kristin reported that funding is no longer available for a dedicated study of the causeway’s safety and viability. However, a public hearing is scheduled on Tuesday March 25, 2025 as part of its 2025/2026 Budget and Bonding update, according to Kristin. The Town has proposed issuing a \$15.5 mn infrastructure bond which would begin to cover causeway work, according to Kristin. She encouraged sending letters of support for causeway work to the Town.
- b. Kristin urged Board members and MIFD taxpayers to attend the meeting, and cited the inability of Mason Island residents to go to work and school during past flooding events. Ethan noted the poor condition of the bridge to the causeway and recurrent flooding to the approaches to the causeway.

c. Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 15, 2025 at 5:30PM

8. Adjourn

Catherine made a motion to adjourn the meeting. It was seconded.
The meeting adjourned at 7:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ricardo J. Kleinbaum – Clerk, Masons Island Fire District

DRAFT