

## **Mason's Island Fire District 2025 President's Report**

Dear Residents,

The Annual Meeting of the Mason's Island Fire District (MIFD) will be held on Saturday May 24, 2025 at 10:00AM at the Mason's Island Yacht Club. I hope you will be able to attend.

I am always impressed by the time, interest, and dedication of the MIFD Board. Even though they might not always agree on an issue, I feel that the Board members truly have the best interests of the community at heart. It is a pleasure serving with them. I thank them all for their service to the community.

The Board has been hard at work all year long on your behalf to find solutions to certain issues that have presented themselves. I have summarized the issues below that will be discussed at the annual meeting and any that require approval from the voters will be brought for a vote at that meeting.

### **Erosion Along Chippechaug Trail**

The erosion of the marsh that is north of the Allyn's Alley dock continues to pose a serious threat to Chippechaug Trail, which is the primary access route for the majority of residents within the Fire District.

The task force that was formed in 2020 originally focused on a "living shoreline" option. In early 2024, due to growing cost estimates and other permitting obstacles that were threatening to stop the living shoreline project in its tracks, the Board began to seek out alternative design options that would be easier to execute and reduce the overall cost to MIFD. An alternative design was proposed, a buried rock wall revetment, and this new concept was presented and discussed at MIFD meetings in the fall of 2024. An engineering firm, CLA, was engaged to come up with a preliminary design, estimates were received from a handful of contractors, and permits were granted by the Town of Stonington. Fortunately, the lowest construction bid by Machnik Construction was considerably lower than the budget amount pre-approved for the road protection project by the taxpayers at the 2024 annual meeting. With the funds and permits in place, the Board voted to hire

Machnik to install the rock wall revetment before the summer traffic and fall hurricane season were upon us. The project was completed during the first two weeks in April. The rock wall revetment will protect the road if the erosion eventually reaches the road buffer along the east side of the road. As the name implies, it is a buried rock wall, which means it will not be visible until the shoreline has eroded all the way up to the wall and exposes its eastern side; hopefully this will not occur until many years in the future.

Despite moving forward with the rock wall revetment in April, the living shoreline project remains a possibility, and the task force will continue to pursue this option. Why do both? The reason the Board moved forward this year with the buried rock wall revetment is that the location of its construction sits outside the coastal jurisdiction area and therefore did not need Army Corp and CT DEEP permitting. The Board became concerned that any further delays could complicate and add tremendous cost to this option because as the shoreline erodes, the coastal jurisdiction area moves with it, and eventually the road buffer where the wall has been installed would have been within the coastal jurisdiction area and required costly Army Corp and CT DEEP permitting, as is required when building within a coastal jurisdiction area. The disadvantage of the buried rock wall revetment is that it does nothing to arrest the erosion until it has hit the wall. On the other hand, the advantage of the living shoreline concept is that it is designed to slow down further erosion of the shoreline by reducing the wave action that is the cause of the erosion. Therefore, we have asked the task force to continue pursuing the living shoreline option. If we can get through permitting and are successful in obtaining construction grants to offset the higher cost of this option, we will likely come back to the taxpayers in 2026 or 2027 to see if there is support for approving any matching funds required to complete a living shoreline in that location. Stay tuned.

## **Changes to MIFD ByLaws and other MIFD Agreements and Ordinances**

1. **Modifying the Road and Recreational Facilities Maintenance Reimbursement Agreement.** The Boards of MIPOA and MIFD met numerous times throughout 2024 to prepare for the retirement of Rufus Allyn as the MIPOA Roads Manager effective on July 1, 2025. The *Road and Recreational Facilities Maintenance Reimbursement Agreement* signed in 2023 between MIPOA and MIFD called for the hiring of a General Contractor to carry out the responsibilities of the Roads Manager, and this role has been filled by Rufus

Allyn. The Agreement also called for the creation of a Facilities Committee with representatives from both MIPOA and MIFD. MIFD Board member Tom Giola and MIPOA Board member Bob Domurat fill those roles today. With Rufus' retirement, the role of General Contractor will be eliminated and all of the role's responsibilities will be transferred to the Facilities Committee. A motion will be made at the Annual Meeting to amend the Agreement to remove the General Contractor role and reassign its responsibilities to the Facilities Committee as follows: A motion to allow the MIFD Board, at its discretion, to amend the *Road and Recreational Facilities Maintenance Reimbursement Agreement* so that it would allow MIPOA to appoint the Facilities Committee to act in the capacity of the general contractor role that is required in the agreement, and to amend the protocol described in the Agreement as may be required when the Facilities Committee is acting in such role.

2. **Site Plan Approval.** In advance of Rufus' retirement, the Facilities Committee members Tom Giola and Bob Domurat have been shadowing Rufus for the past year and have identified an issue with how building site plans are approved. All construction projects within MIFD require site and building permits by the Town of Stonington. Because the Town does not own the roads or road drainage systems within MIFD, it came to our attention that they were not reviewing site plans for how changes to land parcels could negatively impact MIPOA roadways and stormwater drainage systems, a review they do perform when the impact is to a Town-owned road and stormwater drainage system. This has most acutely been experienced by a flooding issue on Money Point Road that has been exacerbated by home construction over the past 40 years. Storm water runoff from driveways in that section of the road is regularly overloading the street drainage system, and the most recent estimate was \$100,000 to upgrade the drainage system to handle the higher water load. If better site plan review had been done at the time of construction permitting of the homes in that area, it is likely that the homeowners would have been required to provide better on-property stormwater remediation, which could have avoided this looming cost to MIFD taxpayers. We would like to avoid a recurrence of this in the future. Tom and Bob have already worked with a few property owners that are in the process of building homes, and were able to come to agreement with the architects and builders who have redesigned their site plans to better absorb the

additional water runoff that comes with added impervious surfaces due to increased roof and paved areas. This reduces adverse impacts to MIPOA drainage systems, improves overall stormwater quality and helps with flood control and reduction.

Currently the MIFD requirements for builders only address excavation of a MIPOA road and changes to a driveway apron that attaches to the road and does not explicitly give MIFD or MIPOA site plan oversight to prevent stormwater drainage issues. We would like to amend the existing ordinance language to make site plan review more inclusive to the already required MIFD / MIPOA permit process as follows: A motion will be made to allow the Board to amend the existing *Ordinance re Permits to Work or Excavate In or Under MIFD-managed Roads* to: i) keep the program current with other governmental agencies and regulations, ii) allow for a more thorough review process to mitigate potential impacts to MIPOA property, roads and drainage systems, and iii) limit MIFD liability.

We have met with the Town Planner and he has agreed to work with our Facilities Committee in the site plan review, approval and permitting process. This will hopefully prevent another road drainage issue that we will all have to pay for.

**3. Changes to the MIFD Tick Program.** At the April MIFD Board Meeting, a MIFD resident provided the Board with notice that they plan on making a motion at the annual meeting to remove yard spraying as part of the MIFD Tick Program. They provided evidence as to why they believe this is an appropriate course of action. The Board discussed the pros and cons of the yard spraying but could not come to a consensus so it was decided to allow the motion to proceed at the annual meeting and let the voters decide. If the Motion passes, property owners will have the option of treating their yards for ticks, but it will be at their expense and require their arrangement with a licensed vendor. The other parts of the tick program will continue to be contracted and paid for by MIFD, inclusive of a deer treatment protocol such as a 4-poster system.

Alternatively, should that Motion fail, it came to our attention in 2024 that the wording of the motion to bring the tick program into the MIFD budget precluded treatment of undeveloped parcels of land. Despite these property

owners being required to fund the “tick tax”, MIFD could not treat their properties even if they requested treatment. So a motion will be made to allow treatment of undeveloped parcels should the owner request treatment.

**4. Public Meeting Notices in a Local Newspaper.** On October 1, 2024, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a law that allows municipalities to publish public notices on the internet Web site and no longer requires posting in a local newspaper. Because the MIFD By-Laws prescribe which public notices we must provide, it came to our attention that our By-Laws may be out of synch with State Statutes that apply to Fire Districts. We would like to amend the MIFD By-Laws in a way that will keep the By-Laws in synch with State Statute by simply stating that MIFD will comply with applicable State Statutes on providing advance notice for public meetings instead of prescribing what we must do, which may, or may not, be in synch with the latest law. It has not been determined if the revised State Statute applies to Fire Districts, but if it does, this would allow us to save the MIFD taxpayers approximately \$150 for each posting in the Day. A motion will be made to amend Section 14 of the MIFD By-Laws to that affect.

### **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)**

Masons Island Fire District, as a public entity, is subject to the Freedom of Information Act. The Act requires us to provide information that we retain to those that request it. While there are a few carve outs on certain information that may be kept confidential such as salary information and health information, most information that MIFD maintains in paper and online storage facilities, including paper documents, meeting minutes, emails, submitted forms, etc must be retained and shared upon request. This includes information you may provide to us in applications and survey responses and includes window decal request forms and tick selection forms. Please assume that if you send in a form or an email to MIFD or to one of its Board members on a topic under consideration by the Board, it is public information and may be shared with the public upon request.

### **Emergency Preparedness Plan**

Lastly I would like to express my personal thanks to the team of individuals who worked hard to develop the emergency preparedness plan that Jeff Micelli will go over in his Fire & Safety Committee report and the residents who have taken on specific roles in the

event the plan needs to be set in motion. This is exactly the type of community-minded program that makes the Masons Island community a unique place, with neighbours looking out for neighbours.

### **Roads Reserve and Roads Maintenance**

It is good governance to grow our reserves to address future expected expenses and, when funds are used from the Reserves, it is expected that the Board will look to replenish the reserves in future budgets. At the same time, we recognize that adding funds to reserves creates a tax burden on current taxpayers. So the Board needs to weigh those future needs versus the current tax burden when allocating current taxes towards future needs.

To ensure we are not over-taxing to fund our Roads Reserve, the Facilities Committee each year assesses all of our roads to create an inventory of their condition and uses this information to update the future Roads Plan for when they will likely need to be replaced and to forecast the future costs and fund the Roads Reserve appropriately. Thankfully, due to the recent repaving of most of our roads, the roads are generally in good shape. Based on the most recent roads assessment, in the fall of 2025 we plan to repave Hickory Ledge and Mallard Road.

### **Mil Rate for FY26**

To fund the MIFD budget for FY26, the MIFD Board recommends that the mil rate for FY26 remain at 3.4. This mil rate will allow us to fund our financial obligations for FY26 and replenish the Roads Reserve after using a portion of the Reserve to pay for the rock wall revetment project, as well as fund the next phase of the Living Shoreline project, and aforementioned facilities expenses that will occur in FY26. The Treasurer's report provides more details about the FY26 budget that will be proposed at this year's annual meeting including further details on the 3.4 mil rate for FY26.

Sincerely,

William Scott Parry, MIFD President