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Thursday, August 10, 2006

Public forums allow for dialog between council and citizens

By Dotti Farrington

The public and town officials, particularly Town Council and School Committee members, can have discussions during open public forums, despite a series of disputes to the contrary during the past 18 months, according to State Attorney General Patrick Lynch.

Last week, Lynch told hundreds of public officials and others that new legislation now allows his office to clear up the issues and allow all public officials to comment on topics raised by citizens at open public forums. The new rules are spelled out in the recently published fifth edition of his office's Guide to Open

Government in Rhode Island.

The advisories of his office to other towns, and especially directly to Jamestown, led many citizens and officials to grumble about the law as they tried to heed what they thought was the existing law. One or more people at last week's hearing came away with the impression that Town Councilors here and officials elsewhere were acting illegally by not responding to citizens' comments and questions.

The open forum rules last year led to an apparent lessening of public comment at council meetings in Jamestown during the past year. Lynch unveiled his new

guide and interpretations of new and existing laws at the eighth annual Open Government Summit on Aug. 4.

The controversy and earlier rulings grew out of the attorney general's staff advisory in March, 2005, about the need for school committees to follow stricter rules about public notice for any discussions. Evolution of that advisory spread to interpretations that all public bodies were restricted, and that individual officials, or less than a quorum of a body could not respond to citizens at open forums.

See "Public forum" on page 12

Superintendent of schools appointed, began job Monday

By Donna K. Drago

During an Aug. 3 meeting that lasted less than 15 minutes, the School Committee made appointments to the administrative and special education staff.

Held in the stifling heat of the Lawn Avenue library, no one complained when School Committee Chairwoman Cathy Kaiser adjourned the meeting not long after it was convened.

About 10 people showed up to greet the newly appointed Superintendent Dr. Robert Power, the replacement for Kathy Sipala, who left the Jamestown district on July 28 to take over the helm at the Narragansett School Department.

Sipala was at the meeting to introduce the new school chief to the community.

Sipala described Power as being "dedicated to education," and noted that she had worked closely with him when she was a principal in Newport for seven years.

"He believes in kids," Sipala said, adding, "It makes me feel so good about this transfer" of positions.

Power retired from Newport in 2005 and will work part-time in the Jamestown district. According to state pension board rules, Power will be able to work a maximum of 90 8-hour days and be paid \$500 per day with no benefits, for a total of \$45,000 per year.

This is less than half of what the town paid the most recent superintendent.

Power was the assistant superintendent in Newport from 2001

to 2005 and served as the acting superintendent from May to July 2005, when he retired.

Prior to being an administrator, Power was the director of special education in Newport, Bristol, and Narragansett, beginning his special education teaching career in 1974.

Power addressed the three members of the School Committee present at the meeting. Julia Held and William "Bucky" Brennan were absent.

In researching everything he could about the Jamestown schools, Power said he concluded

See "Introduction" on page 12



In with the new

Kathy Sipala, outgoing superintendent, congratulates Dr. Robert Power on his new appointment as head of island schools.

Holiday deadlines at the Press

The Press office will be closed on Monday, Aug. 14 for Victory Day. Deadlines for the Aug. 17 issue:

Display Advertising:
5 p.m. Friday, Aug. 11

Classified Advertising:
Noon on Wednesday, Aug. 16

News items:
2 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 16



Side by side:

A new water tower is being erected next to the existing one on Howland Avenue

Photo by Vic Richardson

Water tower on time and on budget

By Sam Bari

Public Works Director Steve Goslee was all smiles when asked about the progress of the new town water tower now under construction on Howland Avenue. "They'll be finished by the middle of October if all goes as planned at the pace they're keeping now," Goslee said.

"They" is the Fischer Tank Company of Chester, Pennsylvania, the company contracted by the town to build the structure. The project broke ground on April 3 of this year.

"They're working on welding ring number four of the 12 rings that are needed," Goslee continued. "Then the roof goes on after that. The crew of seven men includes six welders and a crane operator. They work 40 hours a week, weather permitting," he added.

The steel comes to the site pre-primed. All they have to do is weld it in place. After installing the tank, they will paint it under encapsulation. The tower will be the same size as the existing tower and the tank will also hold the same volume of water. It will

also be painted the same color as the existing tank, blue illusion, Goslee said.

"We're on budget and on schedule, and that makes everybody happy," Goslee said.

The site of the new tower is beside the existing tower on Howland Avenue.

The Fisher Tank Company was the lowest of three bidders and came in at \$1,169,220 for the project. They are building the tank as part of a 2004 bond issue of \$6.2 million for several projects to upgrade the municipal water system. The town also has a \$500,000 federal grant that will be applied toward the tower work.

Fisher Tank has been constructing above ground tanks for approximately 58 years. The Jamestown contract is one of about 100 that the company currently has in various stages of completion.

The existing water tower holds a million gallons and provides less than 400,000 gallons of stored water for emergencies, especially fire protection, accord-

See "Water tower" on page 12