

# Sen. Reed inquires about safety of highway barn site

By Dotti Farrington

The long-standing issue of building a new highway barn at the former town landfill reappeared Tuesday on the Town Council agenda after a lapse of public discussion for at least two months.

The issue appeared as a copy of an Aug. 1 letter from state Department of Environmental Management Director Michael Sullivan to U.S. Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island in response to Reed's letter of May 16. Sullivan detailed his reasons for not responding sooner to Reed. No one questioned or spoke about the reason for the Aug. 1 letter not being made public until Oct. 10.

Council president David Long and other council members hailed Sullivan's statements in his letter to Reed. Prominent in the letter was Sullivan's remark that the work to close the town's landfill, if done following DEM requirements, would improve ground-water quality. Some residents of the island's north end have voiced fears that the landfill itself represents a threat to ground water, and that building a highway barn on the site could increase the threat.

### Estimates overdue

Councilors and officials also did not comment on the town's engineering consultant, GZA GeoEnvironmental of Providence, being at least two months behind schedule in giving the council a report on estimated costs to close the landfill and build a public works garage there. GZA was asked in July about the costs to do the work in a way that would meet the DEM regulations intended to prevent the kinds of environmental problems that some Jamestowners fear. A tentative cost report for August was postponed to September, and no further public report has been made about its rescheduling yet.

The council in July called for estimates to show two accounts: the cost to close the landfill without the public works garage, and cost to build the barn at the former landfill site. The councilors were expecting the differences in the costs to be precise so town offi-

cial may know exactly what is involved.

Many islanders were predicting the costs for the barn at the landfill would be too high and another effort would have to be made to find a location for the barn.

Townspople approved \$75,000 to study the landfill as a barn site, and to design a barn if the study supported such a plan. Voters have not committed specifically to a barn at the landfill.

### Reed's letter

Reed's letter six months ago was prompted by a letter to him from Donna O'Neill, a leader of the North End Concerned Citizens, with her concerns about the way the landfill closure was planned and about the town's intent to build the highway barn there as part of the closure.

O'Neill was one of about 400 residents who wrote to Sullivan last winter about their concerns about the landfill. Sullivan responded to those letters July 7, when the DEM presented the town with its findings on what must be done at the former landfill.

### Sullivan's letter

Sullivan told Reed that he assigned a team of engineers, scientists, and hazardous waste experts to evaluate the Jamestown concerns. He said the findings were that some concerns were valid and DEM specified how the town must do the work to address those concerns. Sullivan said other concerns of residents were found to be erroneous or not pertinent in terms of applicable laws and scientific principles.

### Back up plan

The DEM director detailed for Reed work changes the state is requiring, as listed when his July report was made public. Sullivan said DEM does not have authority to order the town to create a plan to provide public water should the ground water become contaminated despite the DEM's required precautions. He advised the senator nonetheless that both DEM and the state Department of Health are prepared to help Jamestown devise a contingency plan if the

town chooses to make one.

Sullivan also referred to the state and federal "brownfield" programs to convert once-contaminated sites for new uses. Challenges to the safety of such site reuse have been made by some Jamestowners, as well as by people dealing with failed reuses in their communities, including in recent months involving schools and other projects in southern New England.

### Opposition point

Also at Tuesday's council meeting, Raymond Iannetta, a leader of the North End Concerned Citizens, told the councilors that they need to be aware of a clarification about a statement by Sullivan compared with NECC's position.

Sullivan referred to "numerous comments...that more stringent criteria should be applied" in Jamestown and how that would "create the impression that (the DEM) does not consider the human health of all communities to have equal value."

Iannetta said requests by himself and other residents for more stringent criteria were about standards in relationship to applying most recent regulations being followed elsewhere. He said it was not about getting special rules for Jamestown only. He said the DEM decided regulations from the mid-1980s should be applied to Jamestown, but he and others believe the more recent rules of

the 1990s should be followed.

### State findings

The DEM said in July that it approved the 50-percent-complete plans for the landfill closure, as to be updated to the DEM specifications; and the state said it had no authority over the plans for the garage there, as long as any construction there would meet several conditions related to ground water on the site.

The approvals with multiple conditions in 16 categories were specified in a five-page statement. The ruling was accompanied by a volume of several hundred pages recording letters for and against landfill activities by residents and the responses from the DEM to the letters. That volume is available in full at the town's Web page: www.jamestownri.net.

Town officials hailed the July report as thorough and helpful. They expressed concerns about the probable high costs for siting the garage at the landfill. They suggested the state documents seemed to diffuse all basis for critics' fears about environmental catastrophes.

Leaders of landfill critics, mainly NECC, did not accept all

aspects of the state's decisions and responses. They also suggested the state documents do not eliminate all points on which they would continue to oppose landfill activities.

The report suggested townspeople have no reason to fear for "plumes of pollution" or related disasters, but the state said many actions need to be taken to ensure there will be no pollution.

### Issue history

Town officials in 2004 proposed the garage be located at the landfill with the expectation that there would be little cost for site preparation. The town identified the need for a new town garage about 25 years ago, but townspeople have disagreed about where the garage should be located. Voters rejected a \$2.4 million garage at Taylor Point because of costs and location.

Some councilors said this summer the barn would have to be built elsewhere if the estimated cost for a barn at the landfill was similar (more than \$2 million). The landfill must be closed, regardless of the barn location, to state specifications, regardless of cost.

## Be an adoptive parent

The Department of Children, Youth and Families is hosting a Foster Care and Adoption Information Night on Wednesday, Oct. 25, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the DCYF Office at 650 Ten Rod Rd., North Kingstown.

DCYF staff and foster and adoptive parents will be available to explain the program and answer questions. The information night is open to anyone interested in looking into becoming a foster or adoptive parent for children in DCYF care. For additional information, call Robin Perez, DCYF Foster Parent Recruiter, at 528-3700 or the DCYF N. Kingstown Office at 294-5300.

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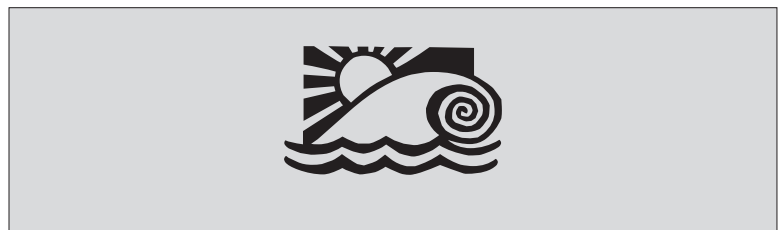
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