

Conservation Commission considers restoration project at Round Marsh

By Michaela Kennedy

The Conservation Commission discussed a possible wetlands mitigation plan for Round Marsh at its regular meeting on Nov. 14. A feasibility study would initiate the project.

Conservation Commissioner Carol Trocki said the idea resulted from a conversation with the state Coastal Resources Management Council and the town about water treatment.

The advancement of phragmites, an invasive species of reed, into the marshland indicates an infiltration of fresh water, freshwater runoff, or salt water is not flowing freely into the site, according to Trocki. "Salt marsh is very predictable," she said, adding that problems arise when a marsh moves beyond a certain elevation.

The commission reviewed a map of the area, which raised concerns for clearing a culvert beneath Route 138. "The first step would be to get funding for an engineering design to clear out the pipe," Conservation Commission Chairman Christopher Powell said, adding that he could find some of the original engineering plans from when the tollbooths were built.

Round Marsh includes Marsh Meadows and all of the marshlands at the Great Creek. The culvert under discussion runs from the marsh to Potter Cove. If the pipe was open and free flowing, it would bring salt water into the marsh on the incoming tide.

"If clearing of the pipe is not possible, we can address the fresh water runoff on the Round Marsh side," Trocki noted.

The commission considered various avenues for funding a feasibility study of the project. Trocki said that federal funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program might be possible. Both programs are offered through the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Powell suggested applying to the Habitat Restoration Fund, a trust fund that was created from oil-spill-settlement money.

In old business, Powell noted that he spoke before the Town Council at last week's meeting regarding the land clearing violations by PBH Realty, part of the Procaccianti Group in Cranston. He said the council was "100 percent supportive of and agreed to send a letter supporting the conservation's position" concerning the disregard of a protected area within 200 feet of a coastal feature. Powell added that a CRMC spokesman said this was "one of the most significant individual violations ever seen by CRMC."

In his Harbor Management Commission report, Conservation Commission Liaison Tom Johnson said a presentation had been made on a mooring alternative to chains that does not scour the bottom and tear up eelgrass. He noted that the harbor commission would have to approve use of the new system.

"It's basically a big rubber band," Powell said about the mooring-anchor connection, adding that it would be a good move for the underwater environment. Powell also said the blocks currently used "are big obstacles for eelgrass."

In a discussion of the Hull Cove Right-of-way project, Powell said the wetland maps of the area were finished, and the harbor commission has committed \$5,000 toward the project.

Concerning the long-anticipated Conanicut Island Trails Guide, the commission moved to send the document to press after final review. The board expects 3,000 copies to be printed.

In new business, the Conservation commission reviewed a request from a development plan applicant in the Jamestown Shores asking for a variance near a wetlands area. The applicant seeks relief of 20 feet from the ordinance requirement of a 150-foot setback from wetlands.

The commission agreed to question whether the site on the design was the best place for the septic system, because "it appears the system could be rotated so the proposed system would become the alternative."

In a reference to farm, forest, and open space tax relief, Powell suggested it would be a good time to pursue an information campaign on tax relief that is available for those who may qualify for an alternative to selling their land.



Tennis tourney benefits family

Members of the Ladies Doubles Clinic held a Halloween costume tennis tournament in October. Proceeds were used to buy items for a Thanksgiving basket to be given to a family. Despite the cat-like moves of Keliagh Sabourin and Maureen McGuirl, winners were Carrie Melucci and Furhana DiBaise who played costumed as RI Interstate 95. Photo by Kathy Brownell.

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