



From the Town Administrator

By Bruce Keiser

In last week's column I focused on the location of the proposed highway barn at upper Taylor Point. Recognizing that voters will be making a judgment on the appropriateness of this potential site based in part on the scenic impacts on Taylor Point and its environs, graphic illustrations have been prepared to depict the barn situated 35-foot north of the Newport Bridge and set back 50-feet from Freebody Drive behind the wastewater treatment plant. The renderings were produced from digital photographs taken from the bridge and from vantage points within the wastewater treatment plant complex. To provide a realistic view of the visual impact of the 23-foot high x 60-foot wide x 200-foot long garage structure, the images are based on actual elevations and dimensions of the barn drawn to scale and set within the proposed building site.

Photographs were also taken from the Taylor Point parking lot and East Shore Road to demonstrate visibility of the barn from off-site locations. These images show that both the height and the density of existing vegetation substantially screen the garage and parking area from public view.

Public Safety

Police Chief Thomas Tighe, who also serves as the town's emergency management director, and Fred Pease, deputy director, have advised me that the Taylor Point location is preferable to the landfill area on the north end. They reason that a central location for the highway garage facility will promote better coordination of DPW personnel and equipment with public safety agencies in responding to major storm events. The operational benefit of co-locating each of the town divisions with a critical role in disaster response is also supported by the RI Emergency Management Agency.

Any predictions of the actual conditions that emergency responders will confront following a major natural disaster are often of limited value. However, it is clear that a significant storm has the potential to completely block passage on roads lined by mature trees and power lines. Under this scenario, there is great concern that lack of immediate access to and from a highway garage on the north end would unacceptably hinder storm operations. Although the island is only nine-miles long, a centrally located facil-



View from the bridge

Top, Burgin's rendering of the view of the barn from the east-bound lanes of the Newport Pell Bridge. Above, the barn footprint is overlaid on an aerial photo of the proposed site.

ity will provide strategic advantage allowing rapid response of essential equipment that may be required to meet critical needs. In addition, because the barn will house two fully-equipped mechanic bays for vehicle maintenance and repair, convenient and ready access to these facilities is vitally important under a storm emergency.

Efficiency

I have read the prior study performed by Gannett-Fleming that analyzed travel distances and time from the north end and from Taylor Point. Conclusions were drawn that the Taylor Point site is more cost-effective operationally with lower fuel costs and maintenance due to mileage differences. I am not convinced that this study or any other claims about which site is more efficient based on travel time to job sites have either: a) controlled for all variables; or b) will stand the test of time given the life span of the barn at one location or the other. Based on the current geographic distribution of population on the island and potential for future build-out, the variations in travel times to and from Taylor Point versus the north end are difficult to accurately measure and are of marginal difference.

There is also a stated concern that the Taylor Point location will result in a "split" site resulting in inefficiencies because materials will have to be retrieved from the storage area at the north end landfill (lot 48). This site is currently used to store drainage pipe, asphalt, gravel,

and stone, and serves as a temporary, short-term dumping site for street sweepings and other debris that is later transported to the landfill in Johnston.

The operating plan for a barn at upper Taylor Point includes storage bins for day-to-day use to meet the highway division's need for asphalt, stone, and gravel. The location of the bins will be subject to the site plan review process performed by the Planning Commission.

Project Costs

The Aug. 28 referendum presents a \$1.5 million highway barn bond proposal at upper Taylor Point. This sum represents the entire amount that taxpayers will be asked to appropriate for both purchase of the bridge authority property for \$97,500 and the construction of the barn. As previously reported, approval of this site will also permit the town to accept an offer to sell Lot 47 to an abutting property owner for \$150,000 which could be allocated to defraying the highway garage costs. (The conditions of the sale require that Lot 47 remain as an unbuildable lot).

What does \$1.5 million mean to taxpayers? Passage of the highway garage bond referendum will require annual debt service payments amounting to an average of \$115,000 over a 20-year term, adding 5-cents to the tax rate. Tax payments by the owner of the median assessed house (\$476,415) would average \$25.10 dollars per year.

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