

Ft. Wetherill

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"There are old ideas and there are new ideas," Keiser said. "The town council will need to set criteria for appropriate reuse," he said. The state Department of Environmental Management has told the town it is interested in expanding its facilities in a complex of three restored buildings that are adjacent to the old town barn at Fort Wetherill, the town administrator pointed out, and several local groups have made proposals in recent years for conversion of the old barn for various uses.

The DEM's Fish and Wildlife Division operates its Marine Fisheries Center and its 50-foot marine fisheries research vessel from the Fort Wetherill site for oceanographic projects, fish trawl surveys, stock assessments and fish conservation measures.

Keiser emphasized that the discussion about future uses involve the approximately 5,000 square foot building now used for highway purposes and a limited portion of the 3.6 acres of land that it shares with the DEM offices. "The discussion does not include any

changes to the boat basin and harbor there," Keiser said.

The site abuts the 58-acre Fort Wetherill State Park that vies for one of the most spectacular natural coastal settings and is recognized nationally as a significant scuba and skin diving area. It is listed as a major scenic and tourist attraction.

Proposals on record, in addition to the DEM goals, include ideas about a banquet hall by some individuals, about an arts center by the Conanicut Island Arts Association, and about expansion of the marina by the Fort Wetherill Boat Owners Association. "Not yet heard are talks about what municipal services might be there. They certainly should be recreation-leisure oriented, but they have not been discussed yet," Keiser said.

He said the decisions to be made all have significant cost factors to be determined. He summarized them as costs to renovate the old barn building and the town's ability and willingness to absorb the costs, as compared with revenue to be realized from a possible sale of the property to a third party, whether it be to the state or to some local party and the benefits to the community from such a decision.

Keiser reported that so far, the town's legal advisors have given opinions that the town charter is silent about the process for sale of municipal properties, suggesting that it would be a council decision, and not a voter action involved.

"The process for transfer of town property will have to be researched and confirmed, I would expect," he said.

The 2002 comprehensive plan provides that the island's features, such as Fort Wetherill, should be recognized for tourism with a focus on having a minimal impact on residents by developing management plans with special attention on provision of areas for commercial fishing boats.

2005 study

In 2005, the town ordered a study on reuse of the building for water-enhanced or water-dependent uses without being a high vehicular traffic generator, but, which affords the most residents the most use of the property.

At that time, it was noted that DEM uses a force-main sewer system in conjunction with a septic system, and there were questions about space for expansion of the septic system, and about limitations for connecting to the town

sewer system.

The old barn is surrounded by asphalt, and bordered on one side by a steep bank. Need to convert it to better fit its pristine shoreline setting was listed as a priority with whatever might be done with the building.

Another goal, self-sufficiency, was defined and examples were listed as a seasonal dinner hall, meeting space for municipal and organizational functions, artist studio and art center, and an event center for conferences and parties, including weddings. The study also resulted in a suggested reduction of 44 existing boat slips to create a community landing slip or touch-and-go for ferry or water taxi service.

The study noted that limited parking options would require alternate transportation; and shared used of the existing 36 DEM parking slots.

Response then to the study included approvals, as well as suggestions for more water-based uses, including a marine museum; and concerns about being in a flood plain.

Wetherill history

Fort Wetherill has served as a major defensive fort to protect Nar-

ragansett Bay. The first forts were built there during the Revolutionary War. They were not armed or garrisoned but the location became a popular picnic setting and artist's motif during the 1800s. Fort Wetherill itself was built at the turn of 1900 and was active for noncombatant service during both the First and Second World Wars. Although it was not tested in battle, it helped to establish security during the world's two greatest conflicts.

The eastern end of the Fort Wetherill site, at the cove, was used for buildings or sheds to store underwater cables that were strung across a narrow part of the East Passage to the Newport shore. The one-story building, now the town barn, was a submarine mine warehouse built in 1940.

Early in 1946, Fort Wetherill was deactivated. The fort was transferred from the Defense Department to the General Services Administration in 1960. In 1972, most of the land was transferred from the federal government to the State of Rhode Island as part of a federal program turning surplus property over to recreational use. In 1974, the town acquired ownership of the 3.6 acre basin area from the federal government.

Boat

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unusual or hazardous in the marina. We have no evidence of an inordinate amount of electricity in the water," Gregory said.

He went on to say that they wanted to test the water at absolute high tide at the dock where the boat is kept so conditions at all water levels will have been considered. Gregory also said, "The manufacturer's claims about electricity in the water have not proven to be correct. To date, our tests have revealed no reason for us to think otherwise. Now we're going

to focus on the boat itself."

Gregory said they were going to closely examine the areas where the paint peeled off. He said they would test the galvanizing, the bottom paint, and the adhesive used to attach the gunnels to the hull. He said the corrosion is substantial and that the materials used by the manufacturer should be considered as a possible source of the problem.

Several town officials questioned the findings of Ribcraft because no other boats in the area suffered damages, the fire department boat, Marine I, being one of them.

The 21-foot, 3-inch long by 8-

feet, 6-inch beamed harbor-master's patrol boat was made by Ribcraft at a cost of \$97,920, "and was purchased to serve our needs for a long time," according to Mike de Angeli, chairman of the Harbor Management Commission. Professor Gregory said that next week's testing would be more conclusive.

Prior to Gregory's observations, Ribcraft sent marine surveyor Joe Lombardi to Jamestown to take readings and test the water around where the boat was docked at East Ferry. Lombardi reported that electric current readings "went off the meter."

When Matt Provenzano, director of operations at Ribcraft, was asked about the testing, he said that Lombardi performed multiple tests in the water where the boat was docked and at the time of

the testing, the level of electrical current in the water was so strong that it was a safety hazard. He said that Lombardi used a multi-meter, which tests for both alternating and direct current, but he wasn't clear about the type of current that tested so high.

Provenzano explained that the harbor needed to be analyzed in order to find the source of the problem because the damage to the boat was so severe. "The boat is two months old and shouldn't have sustained that much damage in its lifetime," he said. He said that damage to the boat was certainly a concern, "but the biggest issue should be a safety issue. The area where it is docked is dangerous and unsafe," he said.

Dancers to perform at meetinghouse

Island Moving Co. continues the celebration of its 25th anniversary season as Newport's resident dance company with a work in progress showing of Newport Stories, a new interdisciplinary collaboration with composer Christopher Eastburn, writer John Pantalone and the Boston area Family Folk Chorale.

The excerpt will be performed in a program including works from the IMC repertoire at the Great Friends Meeting House in Newport, Saturday, Sept. 22, at 4 and 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Sept. 23, at 2 and 5:30 p.m. Tickets are \$23, which includes a \$3 restoration surcharge for the maintenance and renovation of the Meeting House by the Newport Historical Society.

Tickets for Newport Stories are available through the Island Moving Co. at 847-4470, at www.arttixri.com and at the door. The Great Friends Meeting House is located at the corner of Marlborough and Farewell Streets in Newport.



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Narragansett, 1183 Boston Neck Rd. (Rt. 1A)	WESTERN OR COCONUT SHRIMP \$12.99/lb.
Warrick 2848 Narragansett 2420	ROCH'S OWN ARTISAN BREAD OF THE WEEK
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2007 Franny Reardon - Jimmy Doorley Memorial Golf Tournament

Saturday, September 29, 2007
Jamestown Country Club • Sign-in at 7:30 a.m.

9 Hole Scramble Format
8 a.m. Shotgun Start

Limited to 72 Golfers (18 Foursomes)
Sign-up Deadline: September 15, 2007
\$200 per foursome (\$50 per person) includes:
Golf, Cart, Prizes and Steak Fry

Steak Fry ONLY - \$25 per person
Arrive around 11 a.m.

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