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Island zoning rules need an overhaul

By Michaela Kennedy

“Your zoning ordinance is not a strong enough document to protect what you want to protect,” says planning consultant and architect Donald Powers. His observation of Jamestown planning practices was one of many offered at the recreation center on Monday night.

The Oct. 15 community planning meeting provided a chance for residents to hear feedback generated from the Jamestown Vision Charrette so far. The community planning project has already brought forth new insights for the town.

The coalition of experts, hired by the town to recommend design guidelines for development, shot holes in the town’s zoning policies. “A conventional zoning ordinance reflects a time when there

was more consensus of what development should be like,” Powers noted.

Traditional ideas of zoning from a century ago did not anticipate the automobile, according to Powers. As development grew to accommodate drivers, land use became the focus of zoning laws, creating ordinances too blunt to respond well in a complex ecosystem. “We want to shepherd new development with consideration for preservation,” Powers added.

Consultant and long-time summer resident Sandy Sorlien stepped in to explain a new planning code, SmartCode™, being implemented in many areas of the country and offering a response to sprawl development. She noted

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Low water

Autumn foliage at North Pond on Wednesday provides a colorful background to the reservoir’s low water level. Town officials say a three-month supply of water remains if no significant rain is received. Emergency plans include a temporary flexible pipeline that could be used to transport water purchased from North Kingstown.

Photo by Jeff McDonough

Council considers restructuring the town’s water rates

By Tom Shevlin

In an effort to get a better handle on the island’s water use, Town Councilors on Monday discussed the possibility of restructuring the town’s water and sewer rates in order to take advantage of recent improvements to the town’s water infrastructure.

Sitting as the Water and Sewer Commission for the last time before next month’s elections, coun-

cilors discussed several courses of action with Department of Public Works Director Steve Goslee including restructuring rates to reflect Jamestown’s successful conservation efforts.

Broadly defining the commission’s concerns, Council Vice President Julio DiGiando said that he felt it was important to determine who the island’s thirstiest consumers were. “We need to find

out who the big users are and how many there are,” DiGiando said.

Town Administrator Bruce Keiser agreed and recommended a “comprehensive retooling” of the island’s rate structure.

The move by councilors to re-examine the town’s rate structure comes less than two months after adopting a two-part rate increase in order to bridge gaps left in the water and sewer budget due in part

to decreased water usage and consequent revenue.

Specifically citing increased debt service payments for the town’s recent water and sewer upgrades and declining water revenue due to a successful conservation program, councilors took the step in August to raise rates by 15-percent for the minimum charge and 23-percent for excess water use.

The rate increase, which appeared on ratepayers’ Oct. 1 bill, was the second in three years, and follows a trend of decreasing per-person water use on the island. According to Goslee, the average Jamestown resident uses 37 gallons of water per day compared with 70 gallons of water per day for the average Rhode Islander.

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Architects unveil school neighborhood pathways design

By Michaela Kennedy

The Jamestown Schools and surrounding neighborhood are flagged for a facelift, or so the area residents hope. Consultants offered a plan for transportation route improvements in the district at a presentation in the new town hall on Oct. 10.

Landscape architects Arek Galle and Randall Collins of Gates, Leighton and Associates, present-

ed renderings of the neighborhood upgrade, and talked about design objectives. Aims included improving access and safety to the school campus, maximizing efficiency of athletic fields, and improving car and bus traffic. Enhancement recommendations extended from Narragansett Avenue, south of the school property, as far as Arnold Avenue to the north.

Part of the consultants’ job is to

look at traffic problems and erosion problems, and create a system that would address those issues, Galle noted. The consultants agreed that the area in general needs more structure, but also agreed not to propose changes in the bus loading area. “The bus drop off seems to work well. The speed issue is something we need to pay more attention to,” Galle said.

The consultants looked at how

students get to the neighborhood, and how sidewalks functioned with pedestrians and vehicles. After witnessing student traffic flow, the team recommended upgrades to sidewalks, additional crosswalks, and installations of handicapped access areas. “A lot of kids utilize Watson Avenue. Both sides could use sidewalks,” Collins suggested. A new sidewalk on the north side of Arnold Avenue was

also suggested.

A question arose from the audience about installing speed bumps in the area. Collins noted that some communities do not like speed bumps because of the maintenance issues, such as plowing and drainage concerns. Nevertheless, the experts said that speeders needed to be addressed, and that other options beyond speed bumps could

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Harvest season delights

Participants in Monday night’s pumpkin cooking workshop were given sugar pumpkins to take home so they could try out some of the new recipes they learned.

Photo by Vic Richardson