

Barn site on minds of conservationists

By Dotti Farrington

Conservation Commissioners revisited several town matters about environmental concerns at their Oct. 11 meeting. Those topics included the town barn site plans and the "visions" approach to revising town planning.

The conservationists revived work on the osprey observation platform at Great Creek, and updated themselves about the Eagle Scout Hull Cove Trail Project and the commission's trails guide distribution. They planned to assist Girl Scouts with dune restoration at Mackerel Cove.

They called for attention to wetland variances, praising a recent planning case for minimal development, but using it as an example for needed vigilance over all variance applications, and need for increasing attention to cumulative impacts of changes in wetlands and groundwater.

Commissioners also reported interest in following the RI Sea Grant symposium on "creating vibrant waterfronts" this weekend and on the stormwater management workshop of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission next Thursday at Middletown Town Hall.

Taylor Point

Commissioners authorized a statement about barn site concerns to be drafted by Chairman Christopher Powell, to focus on needs for oversight on drainage plans and on the need to assure that no endangered plants will be impacted by the site development. The letter is intended to "be more informational than anything," the conservationists noted, and will be addressed to the Town Council.

Commissioners said they still had concerns for the proposed barn site and noted that when another part of the Taylor Point property

was selected, two years ago, they rejected that location. Voters rejected that previous plan for various reasons, including costs and environmental considerations. The conservationists noted their concerns fall short of objection status now because the drainage options are different for the new location within Taylor Point and because of intent and commitment, as stated by Town Administrator Bruce Keiser, to pursue those options that have the least negative impacts.

The letter will include references to the violet wood sorrel, with an update about its status at the site and as a state endangered plant, to be obtained from the RI Natural Heritage and New England Plant Conservation Programs.

The town is looking to hire an engineering firm to prepare site plans, including drainage.

Keiser, in September, assured the commission that the town plans several esthetic considerations of special concern to the conservationists. He said the barn roof would be a green color, or possibly a plant roof if grants are available. He said the town will conduct a cost benefit study about type of shingles to be used on the barn. He also promised that the town would enforce strict policies about storage at the Taylor Point site.

Hull Cove Trail

Charles "Drew" Matley, 17, an Eagle Scout candidate in Jamestown's Troop One, outlined his proposal last month to improve the Hull Cove Access Path, a very wet area where wooden pallets are used haphazardly to enable walking through the area.

Commissioners made a number of recommendations, including his use of resources to provide a basis for building a multi-phased, permanent boardwalk.

Commission members envisioned work by succeeding groups of scouts to carry out the work that might be started by Matley. The scout was to refine his proposal for presentation to the Town Council in coming weeks.


Trails Guide

Commissioners ballyhooed their publication about the island's nine trails. The brochure will be sold for \$1 each at locations to be identified, with Town Hall expected to begin selling the guides this week.

The guide was funded through a RI Department of Environmental Management trails improvement program grant and is intended for wide distribution among environmentalists and hikers here and elsewhere.

Osprey viewing

Commissioners are working to obtain a permit to build an osprey viewing platform at the town water department property at Great Creek on North Main Road. They are to apply for the permit to the Coastal Resources Management Commission (CRMC) that some weeks ago approved site changes in conjunction with the water treatment plant improvements that have started.



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