

Group seeks to stop bridge fishing pier project

By Dotti Farrington

Despite being threatened with lawsuits by opponents to a new fishing pier adjacent to Plum Point in the Saunterstown section of North Kingstown, state officials have not backed down from continuing with plans for the pier.

The opponents are organized as the North Kingstown Coastal Preservation Association (NKCPA) with retirees Anthony DeLuca and Donald Kern and lawyer Robert Craven identified as leaders and spokesmen. Their primary attack is on the structural soundness and safety of any structure near the new (1992) Jamestown-Verrazzano Bridge. It links mainland Rhode Island at North Kingstown with the island of Jamestown and connects with Aquidneck Island communities via the Claiborne Pell-Newport Bridge.

NKCPA leaders are working to make their issue a matter of statewide concern. They said all Rhode Islanders would be impacted if the Jamestown Bridge were disabled.

They have appealed for support from state and municipal elected and appointed officials. The Jamestown Town Council took no action Oct. 9 on their request. The North Kingstown Town Council agreed with them in August and adopted a resolution. It calls for the state to dismantle all efforts for

a Plum Point fishing pier because of other more pressing state needs, neighborhood concerns, traffic issues and possibilities of weather hazards.

NKCPA predicted the old bridge as a pier, or a newly-constructed pier at Plum Point would be slammed by severe hurricane conditions into the Jamestown Bridge and cripple the state's transportation system and economic security.

State engineers said any new structure would be designed to be safe. "The design process will ensure that the proposed pier is structurally capable of withstanding severe storms," a DEM spokesman said.

Opponents cited Hurricane Katrina damage as an example of poor coastal outcomes in bad weather. They predicted any near-by pier would be a "battering-ram-hazard ... should hurricane winds and surge destroy the wooden fishing-pier-park, slamming it against the bridge, only 150 feet away, with potentially devastating, catastrophic consequences for all of Rhode Island."

The association is focusing on the original plan to rebuild part of the old bridge for the pier. Most of the old bridge was demolished in 2006 but a North Kingstown section was retained for the pier under

a 1987 law.

State Department of Transportation (DOT) engineers more than a year ago said the remaining bridge sections are not structurally safe for any use. Funds have been earmarked to remove those sections and to build a new structure for the pier.

NKCPA said using the old structure is not safe and building a new one is not legal. They said the state law that provided for renovations has not been rescinded and has not been replaced with a law for any new pier. They said they would oppose any new law because even a new pier would not be safe.

The state Department of Environmental Management (DEM) called the opponents' recent efforts "a red herring," in reference to its diversionary approach to basic "not in my backyard" attitudes of some neighbors about the pier. Neighbors are resisting fishing facilities because of bad experiences with fishers illegally using the old bridge since it closed in 1992. The fishers were cited for inconsiderateness through improper disposal of fish and human wastes, trespassing on private properties and other nuisance behaviors.

Pier priorities

Early this year, DEM reported its goal, set by DEM Director Michael Sullivan, of "one pier a year, ten piers in ten years," to build or improve ten fishing piers along Narragansett Bay, with work begun on five, including at Plum

Point. Sullivan this week oversaw a celebration to mark progress at Van Zandt public fishing pier in Newport. DEM said Van Zandt is a 1929 historic wooden structure that has survived numerous hurricanes and is used for passive activities such as reading, painting and bay viewing, and active recreation such as swimming and fishing.

Other piers in some stage of development or improvement are: the US Navy's Midway Pier at Burma Road in Middletown, Prudence Island T Wharf and the former Stone Bridge Pier in Portsmouth.

DEM said Plum Point and Portsmouth piers are being done with federal funds in tandem with DOT; and the others as part of the parks and recreation authority of DEM. Former US Senator Lincoln Chaffee arranged a few years ago for \$8 million added to \$15.5 million in federal funds and \$4 million in state money to ensure enough money for the complete Jamestown bridge removal and for pier plans.

A committee of state and North Kingstown officials is conducting the Plum Point design for a fishing pier state park. The committee goal is to have a design for public hearing within a year, then construction over two years once a design is adopted.

Opposition

In continuing efforts to terminate plans for a new pier at Plum Point, NKCPA is trying to draw statewide attention to its dire warnings. "We will continue to seek

all administrative, executive, and legislative redress, in the hopes of successfully convincing (all) officials that challenging Mother Nature has never proven to be wise," the organization leaders declared.

Kern, a retired marine and submarine engineer, said he began to alert RIDOT engineers in 2003 about concerns. Most recently, he warned that "building a fishing pier in the location of the old bridge's trestle section would reintroduce the risk of serious damage to the new bridge as the result of the fishing pier being driven into the new bridge by hurricane surge."

Kern and his colleagues said they were dissatisfied with DOT's response of referring them to the state Transportation Advisory Committee to discuss possible changes in plans, but they did testify at a recent committee hearing about their worries. They also said that fishing lines could endanger bridge traffic by striking vehicles on the bridge, and that traffic flow and parking provisions for the pier will not be safe or adequate.

If its arguments are not heeded, the association said, it will challenge the 1987 law through whatever legal options may be available. NKCPA said money for the pier would be better spent on other infrastructure needs in the state.

Candidates

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He believes the town should vote for him because, "I am a strong voice for the working people and families. I am a single father of three and I understand the needs of the community," DeAngelis said.

His idea of good government is based on fair, non-partisan communication that represents the needs of all the people, not special interests or special interest groups.

DeAngelis has two years of elective general business courses at the Community College of Rhode Island and Bryant University. His government experience was serving as director of operations and public building superintendent, as well as acting highway superintendent in Cranston.

"My children are my inspiration for running for office," DeAngelis said. "I want to provide a long-term, decent place for my children to live. Their roots are here. I don't want them dug up."

He has never run for office.

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