

# Island Opinion

## • EDITORIAL •

### Choosing the next Town Council chief

The island election is over. A new Town Council has been voted into office. All that's left is to swear in the new council members and get down to the business at hand.

The first agenda item for a new Town Council is to select a president. It has been a long-time Jamestown tradition that the council presidency goes to the highest vote-getter of the majority party. It is a simple solution to the leadership question and it follows our basic tenets of democracy — let the people rule.

This tradition could be equated to another one that is dear to the hearts of islanders — the Financial Town Meeting. The FTM is an anachronism, a historic hold-over from our colonial roots. We cannot really justify the FTM as a necessary component of good government. We keep the FTM because our Yankee heritage will not allow us to abolish the annual community meeting where all can attend and speak their minds. Tradition can be good thing.

Given those guidelines, one would assume that Bob Sutton would be a shoo-in for council president. There is no compelling reason for him not to be so anointed. Sutton received more votes than anyone else and ran on the Democrat ticket, which won four of the five council seats.

But there seems to be dissension among the ranks over who should lead the next council.

All this hoopla is silly, divisive and counter-productive. Sutton should be council president because he was the top vote-getter. That should be the end of the discussion. However, for argument sake let's review a few additional reasons why he ought to be named the chief when the new council convenes:

- Sutton has loads of local municipal management experience. He was Jamestown's first town administrator and served 17 years in that post. He knows Jamestown and understands the problems our community faces.

- Sutton has probably attended more Town Council meetings in those 17 years as town administrator than all of the other newly-elected council members combined. What better experience for an individual to chair the council meetings for the next two years?

- Sutton has great contacts up north in Providence and knows how state government functions because he has worked on the inside. Sutton spent 15 years as a division head at the state Department of Environmental Management. That ability to cut through the bureaucracy would be a tremendous asset to Jamestown's next council president.

- Sutton has attended numerous city and town council meetings in other communities throughout the state due to his former position with the DEM. He has seen first-hand what works and what doesn't work at those meetings. He might have some new ideas about how we can improve things here.

- Sutton has a great down-to-earth, roll up your sleeves, let's get it done, aw-shucks, common-sense leadership style.

- Sutton has the time — because he is retired — to keep an eye on the town operations on a day-to-day basis. He can work closely with our town administrator and staff to make sure that we are getting the most out of our property tax dollars.

This is not to say that the four other islanders elected to the Town Council would not make good presidents. Each individual would probably do an outstanding job if given the opportunity.

Only one person can chair a meeting. This is where island tradition should rule.

— Jeff McDonough



### Stick with council president tradition

As you are aware, I was the highest vote getter in the Town Council election and I thank the townspeople for their support of my candidacy.

Over the years, the highest vote getter of the winning party in council elections typically has been asked to be the council president. I believe there was one year that Tot Wright was the highest vote getter and indicated he did not wish to be council president and so it was voted to another councilperson. Although none of the elected council people have formally asked if I was interested, for the record, I am interested in being the next president of the Jamestown

## • LETTERS •

Town Council. There is apparently a recount of the ballots this Thursday and if at the end of that recount I am no longer the highest vote getter than I am obviously not interested in pursuing the position of president. Also, you should know that if I had not been the highest vote getter I would have made no attempt to be the president and I would have supported the highest vote getter.

There is a valid principle for my position and there is a valuable precedent for selecting the highest vote getter to serve as council president. Quite simply, it takes the negotiation for the position out of the decision-

making process and because the president holds that position as a result of winning the highest number of public votes, he/she is most inclined to represent the public interest in the subsequent public business that comes before the council. The individual can reflect and represent the public interest and not be influenced by favors/obligations that he/she might have incurred as part of a negotiation with others in order to become president.

If the council abandons this precedent they open up future council presidencies to all manner of negotiation by any combination of three elected council people and the public interest is even

further eroded.

I realize that my articulating this principle and precedent seems terribly self-serving, but I believe I have a responsibility to the public and to those who voted for me to actively pursue the position of Jamestown Town Council President.

**Robert W. Sutton**  
Jamestown Town Council-elect

### Scouts do good deeds for the poor

The St. Vincent de Paul Society of St. Mark Church would like to express a sincere thank you to the Boy Scouts for donating the canned goods collected in their recent food drive for the needy.

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## This week in Island history

Compiled by Sue Maden  
Week of November 15

The news of 10 and 15 years ago is from the Jamestown Press. The news of 100 years ago came from the collection of the Newport Historical Society.

### 100 years ago

**From the Newport Daily News, November 15, 1907**

Men are at work setting out trees, under the direction of the Improvement Society, on both sides of Narragansett avenue, from the foot of Greene lane east.

**From the Newport Daily News, November 17, 1907**

The work of re-shingling the east roof of St. Matthew's Church will be completed today.

**From the Newport Daily News, November 18, 1907**

A juvenile football team from Newport, styling themselves the Atlantics, came to the island Saturday to play the team of the local grammar school, and were defeated by a score of 20 to 0. The local players were slightly heavier and also played a better game.

### 75 years ago

**From the Newport Daily News, November 14, 1932**

The annual meeting of the Directors' Board of the Philomenian Library Association was held Saturday evening. ... Each member present was asked to present a list of books they would like to have purchased this year.

**From the Newport Daily News, November 15, 1932**

The State Board of Public Roads has placed guide posts along Narragansett avenue, from East to the West Ferry, stating that "George Washington traveled along

this highway." The posts have a figure representing Washington on horseback.

### 50 years ago

**From the Newport Daily News, November 12, 1957**

Gov. Dennis J. Roberts has renewed his backing of the proposed Jamestown oil refinery while announcing the state will engage an expert to protect against possible water and air pollution.

**From the Newport Daily News, November 15, 1957**

A misunderstanding as to the amount actually available in the \$6,000 allocation of funds for the Recreation Board was cleared up by the Jamestown Town Council last night. The Council agreed that the full appropriation of \$6,000 be used for the program and the difference in question, \$2,480, be placed on the deficit budget for the next financial meeting.

The resolution (at the Jamestown Town Council meeting) pointed out that "the investment by each bank (Industrial National Bank and the Rhode Island Trust Co.) of \$1,000,000 is a very substantial and real contribution toward improving industry in Rhode Island by creating job opportunities for people and improving the standard of living of our citizens."

A proposal to acquire government-owned Dutch Island for a private home and for cattle raising was before the Jamestown Town Council last night. As a result, the town's attorney was instructed to take whatever action possible to return the island once owned by the town to the town tax rolls.

**From the Newport Daily News, November 16, 1957**

The Jamestown Bridge Commission reduced bridge indebtedness by \$105,000 last year, bringing it down to \$691,000. ... The Rhode Island Development Council ... requested 3,500 copies of the fishing map of Jamestown for distribution at travel shows.

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## Write to us

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