

Budget

Continued from page 1

levels and \$17.1 million would be cut from Rhode Island's three public universities. Currently Rhode Island schools are improving. Scores for proficiency in English and math are up three and one percent respectively from last year. Educators have expressed fears that this plan may cause a double-digit percent increase for the cost of tuition at the public universities. Also, with inflation and other cost increases, a freeze on funding for education has been called a de facto cut for schools.

Most pressing for local communities is a proposed cut of \$12.5 million to the towns and cities for

non-education related expenses. These cuts would begin, if the General Assembly passes them, with a mid-year revision of the budget for the remainder of this fiscal year. The towns and cities would stand to lose the same amount in the next fiscal year, which begins on July 1, according to the budget summary.

Jamestown would have \$31,000 cut from state aid in both cases. As such, Jamestown would account for .002 percent of the \$12.5 million cut. It is hoped that by the time the cuts for the next fiscal year begin, local communities will have enough time to prepare for the loss in revenue, the summary stated.

On the surface, \$31,000 may not seem like a large amount,

however, Rep. Bruce Long, who represents Jamestown and Middletown, noted that he has witnessed the Town Council debate items for as little as \$500. Rep. Long said he opposes the cut to Jamestown for the remainder of this year because he feels that the town manages itself efficiently and he does not feel that Jamestown, nor Middletown, should be punished for working well.

As for the next fiscal year, Long feels that the towns and cities of Rhode Island will need to accept that the state is facing hard times, he said.

Senator Teresa Paiva-Weed, who represents Jamestown and Newport, said she is against the cuts to the towns and cities. Although the state is facing hard

times, she believes by cutting funding to the different communities the state is bucking some of the responsibility for the state debt onto the local communities. This sentiment has been echoed by several key members of the General Assembly.

Several fire sale ideas for selling off state assets have been floated, including selling the Dunkin' Donuts and Convention Centers. Perhaps most pressing for Jamestown was the notion of selling the Newport Bridge to the private sector. All of these ideas never gained traction and have been strongly opposed.

Senator Paiva-Weed acknowledges that the plan is an "extraordinarily difficult budget" that needs to be debated. Long

expressed that everyone needs to tighten their belt in the coming years. To that end, the Republican caucus voted to pay for part of its health care costs and is urging Democrats to do the same, Long said.

Both Long and Paiva-Weed stressed how important it is for the entire General Assembly to work together to solve the problems facing this state. Although the state's financial situation may be bleak, this may be a chance for compromise on many issues.

Regardless of the politics and the numbers, the Rhode Island budget is in trouble and Jamestown will most likely feel a



Aquifer

Continued from page 1

falling in the New England region. There are three in Rhode Island, including the Pawcatuck River, the Hunt-Annaquatucket-Petaquamscutt in North Kingstown, and Block Island.

"The public hearing is one of the key steps in the process," said Doug Heath, a hydrogeologist with the EPA. "This happens after we deem the petition is complete enough to satisfy all of the requirements for an area to qualify as a Sole Source Aquifer. It allows us to give information and receive written and oral comments about the process and the designation."

The hearing will include a brief presentation, a description of the petition and remarks by key personnel at the state level, followed by a public question and answer session.

Heath said that the EPA will take written comments for two weeks after the hearing, and it will respond to the written comments in writing.

"The most important thing about the hearing is for residents to get answers for their concerns," Heath said.

One local concern that has

already been raised is if the designation is really necessary, considering that the SSA designation could impact future projects in Jamestown.

"If an area is designated as an SSA, the EPA gets involved in any projects that receive federal funding or grants," Heath said.

Over 90 percent of the projects the EPA has participated in as a result of the area being an SSA have been airport expansions and federal highways where storm water runoff or spillage have been concerns, Heath said. The other 10 percent have mainly involved large-scale wastewater treatment facilities like those from nursing homes and hospitals.

Those statistics are exactly what Town Administrator Bruce Keiser says show that the designation is not required on the island.

"The EPA gets involved, for good reason, in these large federally-funded projects that we are not likely to have here in Jamestown.

We have one federal highway, and we don't plan on building another. Most of the land on the island is either protected or developed, so there isn't even enough land for a project of that scale to be even possible here. We are not being threatened by projects that might harm the water supply," Keiser said. "On the other hand, we are planning an affordable housing development and we do not want federal interests to slow down or add additional costs to the project when we are already very good stewards of our water supply."

Heath said that the EPA does have an understanding with other federal agencies that they will alert the EPA to projects that involve an SSA, but that does not automatically mean that they will get involved.

"A typical question of concern is that there will be federal intrusion at the local decision-making level and the answer is absolutely not," Heath said.

Still, Jamestown Conservation Chairman Chris Powell said Jamestown has a model program for the island's water protection and he does not see the need for additional oversight.

"The idea of protecting water is always a good idea, but we are doing a great job now and it is necessary to look at the benefits and the downsides to a program like this," Powell said.

Winsor said that although the program may not have tangible benefits to the island, the educational benefits are worth it.

"We are a summer community and people come here from other places where water use may not be an issue. This is our way of letting them know that when they are here, they need to do things differently," Winsor said.

The next step in the process following next week's hearing is for Heath and Karen McGuire, the EPA's assistant branch chief of drinking water, to put together a package for EPA Regional Administrator Robert Varney.

"This will include the petition, and all of the correspondence about the matter, for his consideration. Once he signs off on the package, the designation is published in the federal register," Heath said.

According to Heath, Varney has the sole authority on whether to issue the designation for Conanicut Island.

"Jamestown has led in a lot of ways when it comes to water, and I think this is one more way we can," Winsor said.

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