

# EPA makes case for aquifer designation to islanders

By Nick Pereira

Three dozen islanders and three Environmental Protection Agency employees gathered at the Jamestown Library to participate in a discussion about Jamestown being declared a sole source aquifer on Wednesday, Feb. 13.

The night began with a presentation by Doug Heath, a member of the EPA, about what a sole source aquifer is. A sole source aquifer is a location where at least 50 percent of the drinking water comes from a single source. In addition, if that sole source should be contaminated

it must be physically, legally, and economically unfeasible to replace that water from another source, Heath said.

According to Heath, Jamestown meets these criteria. The entire island north of Route 138 is dependant upon well water. Newport, North Kingstown, and United Water in South Kingstown have responded to inquires that they would not be able to supply Jamestown's water needs except on a short-term basis. Also, the cost of installing the equipment to supply the North End with town water is prohibitive,

Heath added.

If Jamestown does become a sole source aquifer then the EPA would only become involved if a large, federally-funded, partially or otherwise, project is undertaken anywhere on the island. These types of projects can involve major highway construction and airports. Heath added the major direct benefits to Jamestown would be educational. Karen McGuire, also of the EPA, added that the designation is not a way for the EPA to usurp local control. Also, the EPA has no additional penalties or guidelines

it enforces on sole source aquifers, she said.

In Jamestown's surrounding area Block Island, two Rhode Island rivers, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, and all of Cape Cod have been designated sole source aquifers. None have reported any negative results, McGuire said.

Later in the meeting Town Council member William Kelly pointed out that he "could not think of a municipality that doesn't fit this designation under some set of circumstances."

Heath agreed saying "much of New England could be designated as a sole source aquifer."

After the presentation, the meeting was opened to the floor so people could make comments or ask questions

North end resident Sav Rebecchi said he was "very supportive for its educational value."

Ellen Windsor, a member of the North End Concerned Citizens group, which brought the petition for the designation, added that it would be "up to us to make sole source aquifer powerful to the community and to tourists."

Councilwoman Barbara Szepatowski said, "I feel very positive about this."

Not all present agreed that the SSA designation was a good idea.

Carol Trocki said, "we can do all those things with or without the sole source aquifer. We don't need the designation."

Councilman Kelly pushed the EPA representatives and they admitted that having a sole source aquifer would not place Jamestown in line for special grants or preferential treatment in any way. The only change would be that the EPA would get involved if federal funds were used in a major construction project such as an airport or highway on the island.

If Jamestown goes ahead with the petition it will be handed over to the EPA regional director to review. The director would decide whether to grant sole source aquifer status. No petition which has reached that phase has ever been turned down. The whole process "would take weeks not months," said Heath.

At times, the meeting became heated. In the end, all seemed to agree that the meeting was a success, if only to educate people.

At the end of the meeting, Ernie Panciera presented a letter from the state's Department of Environmental Management urging support for the sole source aquifer.

Councilman Michael White summed up the night when he said "one thing we are not is ignorant of our water situation."

The EPA's website has more information on the SSA. Questions or comments on the matter can be sent to mcquire.karen@epa.gov until March 13. Council President Julio DiGiando asked that anyone who sends something to the EPA also send a copy to the council.

# Wind energy consultants submit proposals

By Michaela Kennedy

Interviews with bidders for a wind power feasibility study are scheduled for next week, the Jamestown Wind Energy Committee announced at its Feb. 12 meeting. Financing and further stages of the project were also discussed.

Town Planner Lisa Bryer sent out 20 requests for bids and received six proposals from consulting companies that specialize in the sustainable energy industry. Most applicants offered a two-phase approach to the study, Bryer said. She expressed satisfaction with a multi-stepped approach, in consideration of funding for the project. "The study must be broken up into phases," Bryer said.

Criteria for selection of a consultant will be based on a comparison of details offered in the proposals. "I will take notes on each one, and then create a matrix," Bryer said.

In the request for proposals, the committee asked for a consulting partner who could provide the professional studies required to plan a wind power generator for the town. The study is expected to include evaluations of sites, financial modeling, environmental requirements, legal requirements, and other necessary elements that the volunteer committee cannot supply on its own.

In a discussion about funding, committee members mentioned renewable energy programs at the state level. Wind committee chairman Don Wineberg said he would work on the first part of the renewable energy fund grant application for funding of the study.

Committee members agreed to ask the state's Office of Energy for \$35,000, to augment the town's commitment of up to \$25,000.

Committee member Clayton Carlisle read aloud a letter from Lily Wright, a student at the Jamestown Schools. The letter included a petition voicing support of windmills on the island, with four pages of signatures from students and

staff in the district. The committee penned a response to Wright's letter, and decided to include it in the grant application as evidence of support for the island's sustainable energy plan.

Committee member Abigail Anthony suggested talking to the University of Rhode Island Partnership for Energy, which does outreach programs. The grant-driven partnership plans to involve students, faculty and existing resources at URI and link them with consumers and energy industries outside the school. "They have a bunch of undergraduates who need to do projects," Anthony said.

The committee also discussed legislation avenues that could protect the market for wind power. Wineberg brought up feed-in tariffs, "national mandates that would require National Grid to pay at least a minimum price."

Questions arose regarding the price at which a premium should be set, and the politics involved in passing bills for the tariffs. A feed-in law would require electricity utility companies to buy renewable energy at above-market rates.

"There's quite a bit of interest in supporting the concepts that we have been bantering about. I think we can be optimistic about it," Wineberg commented. "If you push the premium high enough, you can actually have the town making money." He noted that FITs were different from net metering, which "lets you apply what you generate to bring your bill down to zero."

Feed-in tariffs place a legal obligation on utilities to purchase electricity from renewable energy installations. The tariff rate would ensure profitable operation of the installation.



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