

Commission looks for cumulative development strain in Jamestown Shores

By Michaela Kennedy

A proposed development plan asking for relief from wetlands setback requirements triggered a decision by the Jamestown Conservation Commission to make a site visit to the Jamestown Shores last week.

The property in question, at 15 Seaside Ave., is owned by John Hayes and located in a district known for impervious soil and high groundwater threats.

Commission Chairman Christopher Powell reminded the three other commissioners present that the visit was to look at the property and take notes only, since the walk was not an official meeting. Board members agreed to hold discussion comments for their regular meeting on May 20.

The four commissioners walked along and near Frigate Street, through a neighborhood block running from Bark Street to Seaside Avenue. They viewed wetlands south of Beacon Avenue, just northwest of the Hayes property.

Commissioner Kate Smith said that the application called for dimensional variances within 150 feet of wetlands.

The bottomless sand filter individual sewer disposal system is

planned to be constructed 67 feet from a freshwater wetland, and 109 feet from the coastal wetland, wrote Christopher Mason, environmental consultant, in a letter addressing questions of potential wetlands impact of the project.

As the group circled the site, they saw fill on various neighboring properties and questioned if fill would be needed for the project. They reviewed drainage data for the control plan from John Braga, engineer on the project. They also reviewed comments made about the plan by the town engineer.

In a memorandum to the planning office, Justin Jobin, environmental scientist for the island, reviewed the soil erosion and sediment control plan for the property with Town Engineer Michael Gray. They noted that open-ended piping in the plan might create direct water discharge to Seaside Drive during winter and spring high groundwater periods.

Jobin later said that the town has been working with the state Department of Environmental Management to improve communication and address cumulative effects of construction in sensitive areas. "We started using a GIS (geographic information system), linking information with DEM,"

Jobin explained. The town now links its septic system database with the state, he added.

Jobin also said that DEM recently unveiled new regulations that place greater restrictions on IDS approvals in areas that have experienced cumulative damage from groundwater. State representatives plan in the near future to offer a presentation to the Town Council regarding the changes.

"When reviewing applications, we're not designing systems, we're just reviewing them," Jobin emphasized. The town and the state have begun to look heavily at nitrogen concentrations, and the DEM automatically denies an application where the water table is 12 inches or higher. Since 2006, the state has denied four ISDS applications in the Shores area. "We need to be careful of the balance of protecting the people already living there and new construction."

As the commissioners returned to their cars, they saw fat, green, red-flecked sprouts of Japanese knotweed sprawling beside Seaside Drive, across from Head's Beach. Invasive species such as the knotweed are also serious problems and difficult to eradicate, the conservationists agreed.



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