

# Commission opposes proposed wetlands plans

By Sam Bari

The Conservation Commission discussed at length the proposed wetlands project surrounding the new water treatment plant on North Main Road at its June 10 meeting.

The commissioners did not agree with the plans for a variety of reasons. They agreed content of the osprey observation platform would further disturb natural wetlands. Chairman Chris Powell said that he saw no reason why the platform could not be constructed in the location originally proposed by the Conservation Commission in an area where the wetlands will be mitigated.

The commission opposed the location of the trailhead and parking area for the same reasons. Commissioner Pat Driscoll questioned the requirements of the fence around the water treatment facility. "Why can't they just lock the buildings if they are afraid someone will break in?" he asked.

According to Town Building Officer Fred Brown, the federal government is mandating more stringent security measures around all public utility facilities as part of the effort to improve national security. Fenced in water treatment facilities is just one of the mandated precautions.

Powell pointed out several discrepancies in the site map that he said, "had to be made clear before the commission could make any recommendations." Powell said he would draft a new letter to the Town Council addressing the com-

mission's concerns and questions. "Even if the map is corrected, I have problems with the plan either way," Powell said.

In old business, the commissioners further discussed the increase in the number of docks at the north end of the island. The discussion was continued from the previous regular meeting of the commission.

Commissioner Jennifer Talancy, who researched the issue, said that only eight docks existed between the Newport Pell Bridge and the north end of Conanicut Island in 1988. She said the number increased to 34 docks by 2003, and further increased to 43 docks by 2006.

"Some of the docks are as long as 200-feet," Talancy said. "It's not only dangerous, but I think any dock could be seen as an extension of private property onto public waters." She said that every dock is basically making private use of public property.

Powell agreed, and said that the main concern was a safety issue. "If a hurricane hit, and one of those docks were swept away, it could take all the other docks and any attached vessels along with it," he said.

The zoning officer supported Powell's analogy. "All of those docks built so close together creates a dangerous situation," Brown said. "However, the regulations covering dock construction falls under the CRMC (Coastal Resources Management Council). All coastal regulations fell under

their jurisdiction sometime in the mid-90s," Brown added. "We used to be able to regulate the erection of docks, but not any more."

A rule was in place that said property owners should share dock space, Brown explained, but added that it was never enforced.

Powell agreed, and said that little could be done when the town has no jurisdiction.

Brown said he wasn't sure how many properties without docks remained, but added that every coastal property had the potential of having a dock built if the owner chose to do so.

In new business, the commissioners agreed to recommend to the Town Council that the \$50,000 of available grant money for the Conanicut Island Greenway project be used to build the section of sidewalk from the osprey observation platform to Weeden Lane first.

In an unrelated matter, town councilman William Kelly asked Powell if the Conservation Commission could arrange sending a permit application to CRMC to build a boardwalk at the Hull Cove right of way. Kelly said that he had a group of volunteers who would build the boardwalk if the CC would apply for the permits. The project would require 472-feet of boardwalk. Commissioner Patrick Driscoll agreed to submit the necessary applications required to initiate the project.

The commission briefly discussed the progress of the proposed animal shelter with Town Coun-

cil liaison Barbara Szeptowski. She reported that her proposal was presented at the last Town Council meeting. However, "The councilors would not give me an answer when I asked if they would consider using the old water treatment plant as a shelter," she said. Commissioner Kathy Roheim said

that she felt the town needed more information from surrounding municipalities.

Chairman Powell announced that two osprey chicks were observed at Fox Hill Farm, and two more were seen at the nest on North Main Road.

## LNG

Continued from page 1

Fall River.

The proposal would still allow LNG tankers to enter Narragansett Bay and pass between Jamestown and Aquidneck Island on the way to Mount Hope Bay where the tankers would connect to the water facility to unload their cargo.

The Coast Guard did not offer a favorable ruling because of safety, security and navigational reasons. The new proposal does not change any of those issues, Representative Bruce Long (R-Jamestown, Middletown) said. "These tankers are floating time bombs. They create serious hazards and life threatening situations, particularly when the tankers pass between Jamestown and Newport. This is the most narrow point between land masses. A security zone will be necessary during movement, even when the tankers are empty. Traffic on our bridges will halt during passage underneath them. We will suffer great disruption in our economy, environment, and our recreation activities on the bay," he

said.

The scoping meetings are the first step to an amendment to the Weaver's Cove application. FERC representatives will take testimony and questions from scientists, state organizations, the attorney general's office and individuals who have an interest in the case.

The meetings will determine the issues to be included in the Environmental Impact Statement, which is required under the National Environmental Protection Act. Then, FERC will use the EIS to determine whether or not to authorize the project. The Coast Guard will then assess safety, security, and navigational requirements to determine whether to issue a letter of recommendation.

The meetings are scheduled for Tuesday, June 24 at Mount Hope High School in Bristol and on June 25 at Venus DeMilo Restaurant in Swansea, Mass. Both meetings have 7 p.m. start times. Written comments must be submitted by July 7.

For more information, visit <http://elibrary.ferc.gov/idmws/common/opennat>.



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