

Lot acquisition effort nets protection of 77 parcels in Shores

By Donna K. Drago

Town Administrator Bruce Keiser gave a presentation on progress the town has made on acquiring lots in the Jamestown Shores area since the town began a process to actively take over lots where taxes have not been paid.

At Monday's Town Council meeting, Keiser said that some of the lots have been acquired by donation, some by "outright acquisition," and some as a result of petitioning Newport County Superior Court.

Keiser said that 77 lots have been protected since the process started in the spring of last year. Those lots include 17 under the protection of the Conanicut Island Land Trust, he said. But the number does not include the 10 or 15 undeveloped parcels owned by the state, Keiser added. "That makes close to 100 lots," under protection in environmentally-sensitive areas, Keiser said.

A total of 94 lots are included in the town's acquisition process. The town has taken title to 49 of them and 10 are pending in Superior Court, Keiser said. This leaves 35 parcels yet to be pursued, Keiser said.

When lot owners fail to pay their property taxes the lots are entered into a tax sale. Town Solicitor Larry Parks said that if no one bids on the lots or there is no action, "the town takes over the tax title." But the real owner still has the right to redeem the property, Parks said, adding that right lasts "forever."

In order for the town to finalize the acquisition they must file a petition in Newport County Superior Court, Parks said, that asks the court to foreclose the rights of the owner to redeem the property.

Letters are sent to the property owners, "if we can find them," Parks said, and notices are run in the Jamestown Press for three consecutive weeks. After that, Parks explained, the town waits 20 days and then appears in court to ask the judge for a final decree. At that point the town takes title of the property, Parks said.

Keiser said the town has spent \$137,417 in legal fees to acquire the properties. But, he said, the effort has resulted in some property owners paying their back taxes to keep possession of their lots. A sum of \$115,807 has been collected. "This is substantial revenue as a result of this effort," Keiser said. He noted that the net cost for the effort is about \$22,000.

When asked by Councilman Bill Kelly where the money will come from, Keiser said it would be taken care of from the reserve fund.

Parking change at East Ferry

A public hearing was held July 28 on a change to the town's code of ordinances regarding parking at East Ferry Wharf.

The ordinance change limits parking to 15 minutes in the two spaces in the southwesterly corner of the square from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. where formerly the 15 minute ordinance ended at 6 p.m.

Only one person spoke on the matter at the hearing. Jill Anderson of West Reach Drive said that those two spaces, nearest Conanicut Avenue, are in the busiest spot and asked if it would be possible to move the 15 minute spots further down the row to avoid the constant backing up into traffic turning in from Conanicut Avenue.

Police Chief Thomas Tighe said "we haven't had a lot of accidents there," and said in order to change

the parking spaces, "We'd have to redo the entire ordinance."

The new parking ordinance passed 5 to 0.

Other business

In other business, the Town Council learned from Keiser that the Environmental Protection Agency has completed its review of the Sole Source Aquifer Petition, and has concluded that Jamestown qualifies for the designation. Keiser said that the petition still has to go through the Washington, D.C., headquarters for a final review.

Councilman Bob Sutton said about the designation "I continue to believe it's a mistake," that will create a district giving the federal government oversight. Sutton asked if the town could send a letter to the EPA noting that the town does not favor selection as a sole source aquifer district.

Councilman Kelly echoed Sutton's comments saying it is "a bad mistake," to allow a federal agency to have oversight in town.

The matter will be on the agenda at the Aug. 25 council meeting.

In other business, the Town Council:


- Accepted the resignation of Harbor Commissioner Terry Jones, who will leave the post to move to Massachusetts in September.

- Voted 5 to 0 to support a decision made by the Harbor Management Commission to deny a mooring to John Sahagian. Although there is room to accommodate Sahagian's request, the HMC denied the application because of ambiguous language in the Coastal Resource Management Council's ordinances about whether riparian moorings should be counted when adding non-riparian moorings in an area. The HMC felt that granting Sahagian's permit would trigger a CRMC violation that could affect some 100 moorings in similar situations. Council President Julio DiGiando said that the town should "put some pressure on CRMC" to get a ruling "so we can move forward."




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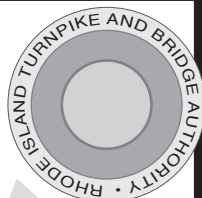
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