

# Town Council and School Committee hold joint retreat

By Sam Bari

The School Committee welcomed the Town Council at its annual retreat held Aug. 14 at the Senior Center. The groups held informal discussions on how they can work together to accomplish common goals. Town Administrator Bruce Keiser and School Superintendent Marcia Lukon also attended.

The School Committee introduced a range of topics that needed addressing. In the informal setting, the groups discussed ways to make the budget process easier and more efficient.

Together, they identified business operations, technology and consolidating the purchase of utilities as areas that might provide opportunities for collaboration and cost reduction. They discussed the possibility of hiring a consultant to review school and town departments to identify strategies for savings and increased efficiency, which was a suggestion made by Councilman Bill Kelly.

School panel Chairwoman Cathy Kaiser initiated a discussion on health insurance options. Town Administrator Keiser reported that the self-insured West Bay Collaborative program constitutes too great a risk for a small community and that Jamestown's claims history may preclude participation in the East Bay Collaborative Government Health Group of Rhode Island. Both the council and school committee agreed to closely follow legislative proposals for a statewide health insurance contract for municipal and school employees.

School Committee Vice Chairwoman Julie Kallfelz suggested that the budget fell into two categories, the fiscal side and the philosophical approach to the budget. The discussion resulted in the two groups agreeing to meet in October to discuss pre-budget concerns and address broader, philosophical questions about school management, direction and vision.

Councilwoman Barbara Szepatowski suggested that council members submit questions to the school panel in advance to give members an opportunity to prepare comprehensive answers, thereby making the process more efficient. The groups agreed that the questions would be submitted by Oct. 1 to facilitate the discussions at the joint meeting.

The October meeting will allow the school committee to report updated enrollment numbers and share with the council factors and assumptions that contribute to budget decisions. The two groups will meet again in February, following the school administration's January budget presentation to the School Committee. The school will submit its budget to the town administrator by March 1. The joint council/school committee annual budget workshops will continue to be held in March and April.

Cathy Kaiser said that her com-

mittee will include council members in the regular e-mail of the SCAN (School Committee Action Notes) to keep the council up-to-date on school discussions, decisions and developments.

Councilman Robert Sutton commented on the meeting saying, "Meetings like this are always good. Questions are often answered before they are asked. The atmosphere is more relaxed and discussions are more informative and less confrontational."

Sutton said that he still has a few questions, but the first meeting was not the time to ask. "It was important for us to establish a format, meeting schedule, and agree on the timetable for different subjects to be discussed," Sutton said.

Councilman Kelly agreed saying, "A lot was to be gleaned from both sides. The input from Bruce Keiser and Superintendent Lukon provided a real insight into areas of

research that had been explored and the outcomes. Things that we were not aware of were brought to the forefront," Kelly said.

Chairwoman Kaiser said that she was very pleased with the meeting. "It went exactly as I had hoped," Kaiser said. "We established dialogue. We heard input from both sides, and we began thinking as one instead of in opposition. I think everybody realizes that we're on the same team with the same concerns and that we share common goals and interests."

**NOTICE**  
Recently someone took two ratty old green resin chairs from a bus stop in the Jamestown Shores. The folks who use the chairs need to sit in them while waiting for the bus and would appreciate having them returned.

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Perhaps tests of the physical ability to drive, and knowledge of the rules of the road should be periodically required, every ten years or so, rather than just when the operator's license is first issued.

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Of course, one shudders to think of the DMV having more authority.

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The presentation given by Geologist Robert M. Thorson last week at the annual meeting of the Jamestown Historical Society was a *tour de force*, and definitely deserves a follow-up.

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The proposed revisions to the zoning ordinance, now under review by the Jamestown Planning Commission, contain substantial changes from the current rules. Given the central importance of the zoning ordinance to the Town's future, this process of evaluation deserves the close attention of all citizens.

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