

# Town Council reflects on 2008 and sets goals for 2009

By Sam Bari

As 2008 draws to a close, the Jamestown Town Council and Town Administrator Bruce Keiser reflected on the accomplishments of 2008 and gave their separate and collective thoughts on the challenges facing the town in 2009.

All agreed that the council, elected in 2007, inherited the unfinished projects initiated by the previous council, which were many. The significant accomplishment initiated by this council was the approval of additional state and local funds to complete the purchase of the Dutra and Neale farms when the Conanicut Island Land Trust backed out of the deal.

Additionally, the 2007 council shepherded many projects to and near completion. Some had been in the works for nearly a decade. Among them were the opening of the Teen Center, approval of the police station renovation and expansion project, construction of the highway barn, approval of the final design plan for the closure of the landfill, and the completed rehabilitation of the wastewater treatment facility.

The most significant challenge facing the town according to the Town Council and town administrator is the budget. Keiser said that the recession and the State fiscal crisis will have significant impact on the development of the 2009-2010 town budget.

The town is facing major cuts in state aid as well as declining revenue from economically sensitive non-property tax sources such as real estate transfer taxes, building permits, and investment income. "We need to examine our spending priorities closely to maintain services without shifting new burdens on to property taxpayers," Keiser said.

Councilmen William Kelly and

Michael White cited the school budget as a formidable challenge. "With state funding cuts, we have to come to terms with why the enrollment keeps declining while the expenses keep escalating," Kelly said.

"Finding ways to sustain the level of education we have provided in the past is not going to be easy," White said.

The town and school budget issues are not the only fiscal challenges. Making sure funds are available for planned project completions are also concerns. If everything goes as planned, 2009 will be a year of major accomplishments.

Councilman Robert Sutton said, "During the upcoming year, the Town Council, town commissions and our professional staff should concentrate on creating a more sustainable community lifestyle. We have established goals underway that provide town opportunities for tremendous sustainability successes, in spite of the economic climate."

The Town Council and the town administrator have a busy schedule planned for projects that will be initiated, and/or completed in 2009.

- The new \$4 million water plant will be brought on line in the spring.

- In December the council approved entering into a purchase agreement with the Jamestown Arts Center to transform the Old Town Offices at 44 Southwest Ave. into a visual and performing arts center. Negotiations will be completed in January to enable the JAC to commence a fund-raising campaign.

- The council will hold a public work session on Jan. 12 to discuss options for re-use of the old highway barn at Fort Wetherill.

- The Fort Getty Master Plan Committee will meet with the council on Jan. 22 to discuss proposed

improvements.

- The police station expansion and renovation bid will be awarded in March with completion scheduled for summer.

- The Rhode Island Department of Transportation has informed the town that the \$1.2 million Downtown Improvement Project funded with a federal grant is slated for construction in 2009.

- The state has mandated that cities and towns increase recycling rates by 2.5 percent per year, with a goal of reaching 35 percent by 2012. To meet this target the town will examine a pay-as-you-throw program both at the transfer station and curbside.

- The town plans to work closely with the state Department of Environmental Management and The Department of Health to refine septic system, drinking water, and storm water regulations to prevent adverse development impacts on existing properties.

- The improvement projects for the docks at East Ferry are either to be completed this winter, or started this spring. The new touch and go dock should be in place for the upcoming boating season.

Town Council President Julio DiGiando said, "With the exception of the final touches to the water distribution system, and perhaps repairs to the golf course building and the library roof, the last few town councils have done what is needed to make significant improvements to town facilities. With the help of President Obama, we may be able to have everything bright, shiny, and new."

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