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Town to feel pinch of reduced state aid

By Adrienne Downing

State budget decisions have had a trickle-down effect on local cities and towns and Jamestown is no exception.

Jamestown will receive \$130,000 less this year in general state aid, the result of a state legislature reduction in revenue sharing from income and sales taxes to cities and towns.

Several years ago, the state committed to provide cities and towns with a percentage of state sales and income taxes to ease the burden on local taxpayers. The state's goal was to reach 3.5 percent in revenue sharing.

"The state never even came close to reaching that goal and now they are eliminating the program altogether to shave \$55 million from state spending," Town Administrator Bruce Keiser said.

To replace the state funds in the town budget would require adding six cents to the tax rate, Keiser said, which equates to \$28 for the average tax payer.

Keiser said \$80,000 of the \$130,000 had already been appropriated in the budget.

Each fiscal year, the town adds \$150,000 to the fund balance. "The fund balance is basically a savings account for the town that creditors use to determine bond ratings," Keiser said.

The loss of the state funds will make it more difficult for the town to add money to the fund balance this year, Keiser said.

The fund balance stands at \$2.95 million, or 14.5 percent of the operating budget. "Creditors like to see that at 15 percent, so we are very close," Keiser said.

The town was at 18 percent, or \$3.85 million, before drawing \$900,000 from the fund balance to give Jamestown taxpayers a zero percent tax increase this year.

"We had to make adjustments this year to deal with the economy and changes at the state level," Keiser said. "We are fortunate that we have a reserve that we could use without jeopardizing our standing and to help us keep taxes low."

Keiser said town officials felt that using the reserve, which exceeded the standard that credit agencies set, to pay off debt was in the best interest of the town and taxpayers. "Think of it like paying off your mortgage. We were able to reduce our annual debt service

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Rise, stretch and shine

Kim Chandler of Innerlight Yoga leads an early morning yoga class at Beavertail last Thursday morning. The class is offered through the Jamestown Recreation Department.

Photo by Daniel Forster

Teacher contracts, recycling efforts dominate Town Council concerns

By Erin Tiernan

Teacher contracts are due for renewal next year, and negotiations will soon begin between the teacher's union and the school committee. The Town Council voted Monday to oppose legislation passed by the R.I. Senate, and pending House approval, that could undermine attempts to settle new contracts with teachers.

School Committee Chairwoman Kathy Kaiser said the bill

eliminates the union's incentives to negotiate with management because, if passed, it would allow current contracts to remain intact in the event of a bargaining impasse between the parties.

According to Town Administrator Bruce Keiser, "The economic climate that we are currently in has changed the dynamic between management and unions," he said. "In a different economy this legislation would

be more beneficial to management."

However, due to these difficult economic times, teachers will have to make concessions as they negotiate new contracts, according to Keiser.

Many teachers will not be given raises, and will face higher co-pays and limited health benefits because communities are struggling financially. According to Keiser, there is no way com-

munities can move forward with current teacher contracts without going "belly-up."

School Committee Chairwoman Kaiser said many communities have already reached agreements, but since the legislation would favor union goals, "there will be more bargaining impasses if this bill goes through," she said.

See "Council" on page 10



Ready for occupancy

Town Engineer Mike Gray and Highway Superintendent Kevin Deacon say construction of the new highway garage is complete and the building is ready for business. Town workers began moving in this week. See more pictures on page 6. See the blog Island Time at www.JamestownPress.com for details on the new structure.

Photo by Jeff McDonough

Few oppose toll hikes for Pell Bridge

By Eileen M. Daly

The proposed Newport Pell Bridge toll hikes met with minimal opposition Tuesday evening at a public hearing at Town Hall held by the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (RITBA).

The proposed toll increases, as presented by RITBA officials, include a hike from \$2 to \$4 per crossing for cash tolls, an increase from \$1.75 to \$4 per crossing for out-of-state EZPass holders and an increase from \$1 to \$2 per axle for commercial vehicles. RITBA officials emphasized that Rhode Island EZPass users and commuter EZPass users' tolls will remain the same at 83 cents and 91 cents, respectively – for now.

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