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JAC receives unanimous Zoning Board approval

By Tyler Will

The Jamestown Zoning Board of Review on Tuesday unanimously approved a variance and special-use permit for the property on Valley Street, the proposed site of the new Jamestown Arts Center.

The JAC, a recently-formed town organization that aims to improve the community through art education, has faced little opposition from Jamestown residents, and from the town boards and commissions it has appeared before in recent months.

The variance and permit were two of the last legal hurdles the organization had to clear before moving forward with an aggressive fundraising campaign.

JAC President Kate Petrie said the arts center will be a central location to unite the Conanicut Island Arts Association, the Piano Guild, the Jamestown Community Chorus and other artistic groups in town. Approximately 250 people in Jamestown identify themselves as artists, according to Petrie.

"Everyone is born an artist, the trick is to stay one," Petrie said in a speech at the zoning meeting.

The special-use permit will allow the group to convert what is currently a boat repair and painting facility into a recreational facility and school. The variance will allow the side yard to be used as a parking lot, which normally is not permitted. Sign approval also came with the unani-

mous vote.

JAC attorney Peter Brockmann said the plans do not call for any alteration to the footprint of the building, except for two canopies. No additional height will be needed, he said.

The current structure also violates a town-mandated 50-foot setback. Brockmann said the property is 100 by 100 feet, and it would be impossible to satisfy that ordinance on all sides.

"This is a hardship that we cannot get around without destroying part of the structure," Brockmann said.

The only significant issue the zoning board raised regarding the center was that of parking.

The Planning Commission a few weeks ago urged JAC board members to conduct a parking survey, which the group did. The survey found that even at peak hours of the day — even when school is in session — few cars travel on Valley Street.

The town required JAC to find eight off-site parking spaces. Board member Abigail Campbell-King said the center will have up to 30 spots, even without shared parking with the library.

When asked about bakery parking interfering with the library and the likely future location of the JAC, Campbell-King said it did not appear that such interference would become an issue. She conducted a parking survey on two different days, she said.

Zoning panel members ex-

pressed more concern regarding Campbell-King's report that she saw cars travel between 40 and 50 miles per hour than it did about the parking issue itself.

"I do not see what the big deal is [with parking], other than that you need our permission," said zoning board member Richard Boren.

Petrie said the library board of trustees has yet to meet to approve shared parking with the JAC, and that Jamestown Philomenian Library Director Judy Bell has said she will support shared parking with the center. The schedules of events and classes were designed with peak library hours in mind, Petrie said, adding that big attractions, like art gallery openings, will be scheduled on nights when the library is closed.

Members of the JAC board also expect that many people may park at the library and use the JAC — or vice versa — because of its central location, and that many residents will walk or use a bicycle to get to the center.

Brockmann said there are also some environmental concerns at the Valley Street property, mainly a neighboring lead paint fence. There was some concern that paint chips from the fence, which has been removed, had contaminated the soil over the years. JAC had an environmental survey conducted by a Pawtucket firm, and tests showed that the soil is harmless, and no chemicals were

See "Zoning" on page 11

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