

# Shoreby Hill historic district returns to Town Council

By Tyler Will

The Town Council on Monday heard from islanders who say a zoning ordinance to establish a historic district is needed to protect the lower Shoreby Hill subdivision.

The Jamestown Planning Commission recently recommended that the Town Council make Shoreby Hill a historic district. Residents on both sides of the zoning issue agree that the neighborhood is changing, but disagree on how to best preserve Shoreby Hill.

Jamestown resident Betty Hubbard presented a slideshow that outlined the need for a historic district. Homes in the area date back to 1898, she said. Houses in the neighborhood share characteristics such as window shape, roof style, building symmetry and evenly-spaced front porch columns, among other attributes.

Approximately 50 people were on hand for the presentation.

A 2008 survey of homeowners showed strong support for the creation of a historic zoning district, Hubbard said. Eighty-five percent of the residents responded to the survey, and 74 percent of the respondents indicated they supported creating a historic district, Hubbard said.

"We feel that the significance of Shoreby Hill is not so much in the individual buildings, but rather in the grouping of houses of similar materials, scale and the period of details of the colonial revival,"

said James Buttrick, a former president of the upper Shoreby Hill homeowners' association.

Benefits of a historic district include tax incentives, neighborhood character preservation and a halt to the "McMansions" that are beginning to creep onto Jamestown, he said.

Buttrick added that homeowners in a historic district can receive a 20 percent tax deduction – up to \$2,000 a year – for repairs done on a house.

Four houses were demolished last year – two of which were historic. Hubbard said preservation is needed to protect the remaining homes.

"After much discussion...we have determined that really the best tool to accomplish protection of the town's character would be a historic district," Hubbard said.

Council President Julio DiGiando asked Town Solicitor Peter Ruggiero to explain how the town would create an ordinance.

Ruggiero said the Planning Commission would need to draft the ordinance and hold a public hearing.

Ruggiero said the process could take two to three months. The Town Council would then consider the ordinance and hold another public hearing, he added.

Councilman Robert Sutton questioned the need for a historic district and said residents should be patient with the legislative process. He wants to be sure that cre-

ating a historic zoning district is the best way to preserve the area, he said.

"If we have serious misgivings about a historic district, it seems you would have to deal with those before you start an ordinance process," he said.

Council members agreed to send the proposal back to the Planning Commission to draft an ordinance.

Councilwoman Barbara Szepatowski said everyone's opinion on the proposed historic district should be heard. While there is strong support for a historic district, opponents are also quite vocal, she said.

"I do not have a problem taking it forward, but I really think there has to be more consensus," she said. "I think a public hearing really is the best way."

Councilman Bill Kelly said he has great sympathy for people who want to preserve houses, but a public hearing is the best way to entertain community concerns. "It is an opportunity for more people to express an opinion," he said. "I think it is an opportunity for people to speak their peace."

Councilman Michael White said he wants the ordinances to be reasonable.

"The question [for me] is not really whether Shoreby Hill will be designated a historic district or not, the question is whether somebody will have to apply to paint the trim around their front door," White said.

The town should be open to other methods of preservation, according to Councilman Robert Sutton, who advocated educational programs for historic homeowners and voluntary compliance with historic character.

"We need to be very sure at the outset that this is, in fact, the best way to do it," he said. Sutton asked if there were any voluntary historic districts in the state.

Hubbard said that of the 15 historic districts in Rhode Island, none

were voluntary, and that other voluntary districts across the country have proved to be ineffective.

DiGiando said he favors going forward with the process because it best suits the town.

"I personally do not feel we are rushing on this because this is a complicated thing," he said.

Shoreby Hill resident Andrew Ross said the process is concerning because there are other ways of dealing with excessive real estate development than mandated zoning.

"I think there should be a certain standard that exists for all of us, not some of us," he said, adding that more research needs to be conducted. Restrictions should apply to all of Jamestown, he said,

and local homeowners' associations can enforce restrictions.

Alexandra de Koranyi, another Shoreby Hill resident, said she lives next to a "McMansion" and labeled it "inappropriate."

A historic district in Shoreby Hill could be extended to other parts of the island, she said. "I think the whole of Jamestown would be enhanced if we had a historic district," she added.

After the meeting, Town Clerk Arlene Petit said the issue will now return to the Planning Commission, which will be responsible for writing the proposed ordinance.

"There are a lot of steps left," she said.

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According to the Harbor Commission office, the procedure for permitting has not changed. Boat owners must submit a mooring inspection report every three years with the mooring permit renewal application before a mooring permit will be issued.

Also, the deadline for applications is May 15, but boat owners have a 30-day grace period to turn in applications before a fine is charged.

For complete information on permits and procedures, visit [www.jamestownri.net](http://www.jamestownri.net) and click on the Harbor Department link. The full Harbor Ordinance is available online.

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Obstructed vision at many intersections in Jamestown make full stops absolutely necessary. Rolling quickly up to and through the stop line, without coming to a full stop, may earn you a traffic court summons. At a minimum, it is discourteous to other drivers.

Driving while distracted (reading, eating, drinking, texting, talking on phone, etc.) creates a large problem for the driver, and for everyone else who shares the road with him/her.

Think defensively: on crowded roads, the safe driver must assume that he/she will encounter others not driving safely, and proceed cautiously. Keep to the right to allow others to pass whenever possible.

Do not drive while impaired or tired.

Think of a fresh uncooked egg tossed from the window of a speeding vehicle: in a collision, that's the head of a motorcyclist without a helmet.

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