

Planning Commission discusses update of town zoning ordinance

By Tyler Will

The Jamestown Planning Commission last week discussed updating the responsibilities of the town's Technical Review Committee.

The discussion was the only item on the Aug. 5 meeting agenda, and no members of the public attended the meeting.

By the end of the nearly two-hour discussion, the consensus on the commission was to keep the TRC's responsibilities what they are, with few adjustments.

"Do we really have so much work that the Planning Commission should not be making these decisions?" Commissioner Nancy Bennett said, adding that the commission should simplify its own decision-making processes rather than hand duties down to another committee. "Is not that

sort of what we are supposed to be doing, is streamlining our process so we do not hang people up while we worry about the color of their wall paper?" she said.

Vice Chair Gary Girard said the commission could revise the ordinance again in the future.

"This is not carved in stone... we can always change it," he said.

The idea of giving more responsibilities to the TRC was an attempt to pare down the commission's load by allowing "uncontroversial" applications that satisfied all ordinances to appear solely before the TRC.

"I think there are certain things that do not need to come before the planning commission," Town Planner Lisa Bryer said.

Commissioner Richard Ventrone agreed, saying that if an

application meets all town rules, there is no reason for the planning commission to see it. Commissioner Barry Holland added that sending a cooperative application before the commission would be "pointless."

"You could not deny it anyways, because...there would be no grounds to deny it," Holland said.

A "checklist" of requirements that an application must meet would streamline the process for the planning commission, some said, but Duncan Pendlebury, appointed to the commission when former Commissioner Alexandra Nichols resigned, said that a checklist could make it more difficult for the town to deny an application.

"You cannot ask them to make a change if we have no basis for them to make a change," Pendlebury said.

A system in which only con-

troversial or uncooperative applications go before the planning commission might also give residents the idea that they can make changes when they may not be allowed to, he said.

The commission also recommended that a planning commission member serve on the TRC on a rotating basis for administrative purposes. Bennett asked whether the rotating commissioner should serve on a time basis, or for a certain number of projects. Girard said that a project quantity basis would be better because some months are busy, while others are idle.

Bennett was concerned that extending the power of the TRC would increase town bureaucracy.

Ventrone agreed, asking if the town needs "another layer."

Holland said the TRC is a permanent committee whose members have experience and

can handle the responsibilities well. He said the commission discusses parts of an application that have little relevance to town regulations.

Bryer said her experience with technical review committees is that they are efficient, but she also said amendments can be made, if the planning commission later decides to give the TRC more responsibilities.

Other proposed changes to the zoning ordinance will assess loopholes. Under current town regulations, two structures adjoined by a breezeway can be classified as one structure. The commission will look to modify the language of the ordinance so that an accessory structure must have a common roof and wall. The commission also plans to restrict external night lighting to prevent outdoor lighting from offending neighbors.



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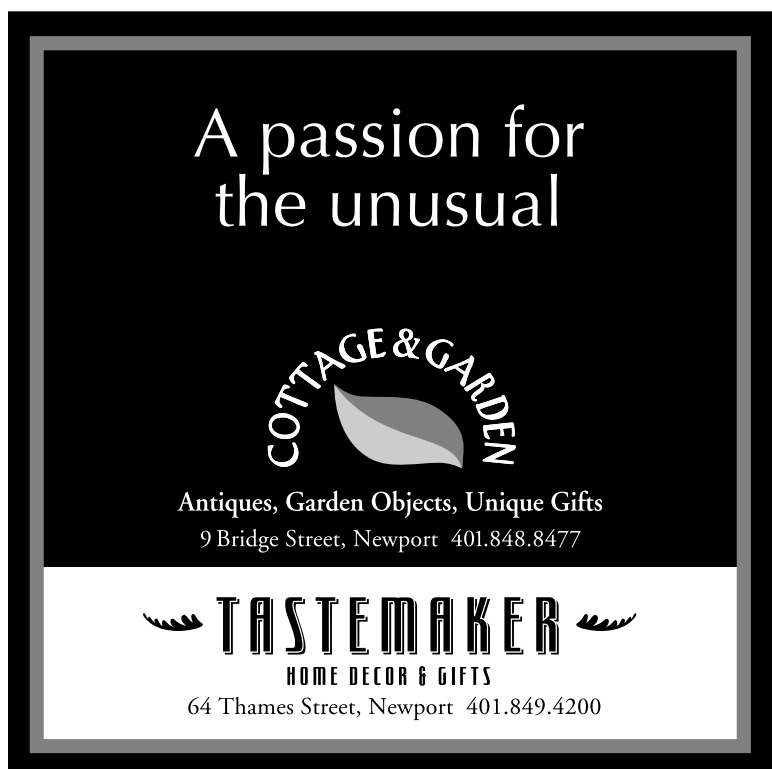
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Letters

Continued from page 6

election is only a few days away. At the Town Council's last meeting on Aug. 4, there was a significant signal that most of the council will be retiring.

Their vote to start the legal meter running, and spend town resources to draft a historical district ordinance, bore no consideration for the taxpayers. This legislative trip will consume hundreds of hours of the time of the Planning Commission, town staff, and the council itself. It will take three months and at least two public hearings.

Is this what Jamestown taxpayers want?

The potential result of this effort is more regulations, another commission, more town employees, more legal expense, higher taxes and loss of freedom.

Is this what Jamestown taxpayers want?

The targets of the historic district effort are the owners of 40 houses in Shoreby Hill, who are far from certain they want more rules, regulation, expense and limits to their liberty.

Let us try to be compassionate and understand how our hard-working council came to its conclusion. Often, government takes a series of small innocuous steps,

each one not worthy of serious discussion. However, the momentum created by these actions sometimes suggests a consensus (which turns out to be fictional). When the council agreed on July 6 to seek \$18,350 of taxpayer money to study the 40 houses in Shoreby Hill, it seemed innocent, since this was not Jamestown tax money, but "other taxpayer money." Now, with that study in process, the council's logical action was to continue the steamroller.

If this big brother effort succeeds, what neighborhoods are next - Green Lane, Dumplings, West Ferry or even Clarke Street, Mr. President?

**Nicholas Schaus
Jamestown**

Where did all the silence go?

First, let me thank the great men and women who volunteer at the fire department. Not only do they save lives, but by being a volunteer organization, they help all of us in keeping our taxes down.

Living across the street, I witness their dedication to education and training on Thursday evenings and that's all wonderful.

The only that isn't wonderful to me (and to many) is the volume of the horn. Sometimes, I see people grab their ears with the noon and

six o'clock blast if walking nearby. The multiple blasts at all hours of the day and night actually make the photos on my walls move, dogs bark and babies cry.

I know there has been debate over the horn for years before I moved here. Some love the tradition of it, some say it's strictly function. In either case, my concern stems from the level of the sound.

Before the horn went on sabbatical (under repair), the silence was wonderful. Still, I saw fire trucks leaving in a timely manner and fully manned. In a day and age of cell phones and pagers, why do we need the horn as often? OK, keep the tradition with a shorter, softer blast at noon, but drop the rest.

I bought a sound level meter from Radio Shack and I've been keeping a log on the level of sound. I've also begun some research on levels that cause hearing loss. Once I have completed my findings, I hope to submit them to the town for consideration. I'd hate to see a lawsuit from someone with hearing loss, or a heart attack be the final straw that stops the horn.

In the meantime, let it be known my dislike for the noise has nothing to do with my gratitude for the department.

**Connie Slick
Jamestown**

Pier

Continued from page 13

Preservation Association, whose former volunteer spokesman, Anthony DeLuca, said the group had several missions.

"We wanted to make sure that 1987 law was repealed, that there weren't any monies applied for the purpose of building a fishing pier park and that the deteriorating remnant was removed on a timely basis," he said.

DeLuca said his group opposed the fishing pier on the grounds that "it would have been built 150 feet away from [the] lowest-lying section of the Jamestown bridge, and it would have been made of wood, which we think is a danger for the bridge because a hurricane surge would destroy the fishing pier and smash it into the bridge piers. Our other concern was the amount of

money — \$5 million — that the fishing pier would have cost. Our state bridges are the worst in the country and our roads rank second or third in their need for money to repair them. The state is short some \$300 million a year for the next 10 years in what they need to spend on bridges, roads and ramps. There simply isn't enough money to build a lavish fishing pier when our infrastructure is crumbling before our very eyes."

Sullivan declined to speculate on the future of the fishing pier, adding, "The only thing my staff and I are committed to at this time is a very responsible design for parking accommodations at Plum Beach Point on state-owned land, along with the creation of some viewing areas. If a fishing pier is not built at that site, there still is capacity to build a stairway to the beach, which would allow the public to have access to public waters.

There is clearly some community opposition, to which we will remain sensitive, but there are those who don't want 'those people' in their neighborhood. However, it is state property, and we believe the public has a right to access the waterfront on that property."

"We have a plan," Sullivan continued, "to build 10 public fishing piers across the state over the next 10 years. The Van Zandt pier in Newport is the first one nearing completion and the next one would be the 'Green Lane' pier on former Navy land on Aquidneck Island. Many of our citizens don't have access to a boat, and many of them fish not just for recreation, but for sustenance. So, we are planning a well-thought-out system of access piers to accommodate all of the public."