

Fishing pier wins nod of Middletown council

By Matt Sheley/Daily News staff

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It appears that the state has landed a keeper with a proposed fishing pier at the end of Greene Lane in Middletown.

At a meeting Monday night in Town Hall, the Town Council unanimously endorsed the idea from the state Department of Environmental Management.

But Aquidneck Island Planning Commission Executive Director Tina Dolen told the council that support from the Navy would be vital in making the concept a reality.

The Navy owns the property where the pier would be built, and while Navy officials haven't said whether they support the pier proposal, Dolen said Naval Station Newport officials did not raise serious objections during conversations on the matter earlier in the year.

"It's no coincidence that DEM chose that area," Town Council Vice President Charles J. Vaillancourt said, applauding the planning commission's work on its West Side Master Plan. "Anytime we can offer public access to Narragansett Bay, it's one we should take advantage of."

The pier proposal first became public earlier this month, when a DEM report was circulated, indicating the former Midway Pier property ranked highest of more than 20 sites across the state studied for the project.

Long known as a hotspot for bluefish and stripers, the area along Burma Road was home to the Blue Star oyster farm before it closed in the mid-1980s.

In its West Side Master Plan released in November, the planning commission recommended the now unused property be used for a fishing pier along with a kayak launch, playground and picnic area.

Last Tuesday, local leaders met privately with DEM officials to go over the project and discuss what could happen there.

On Monday night, Town Council President Paul M. Rodrigues and Councilman Louis P. DiPalma said the project might be just the thing to kick off the master plan.

Reiterating the town's position, Rodrigues said Middletown welcomed the idea, as long as the state was picking up the price tag, which the planning commission estimated between \$1.59 million and \$1.76 million.

Correcting prior information, local leaders said debris from the soon-to-be-demolished Jamestown Bridge will not be part of the pier project, should it come to fruition.

Previously, other than to note the Navy has no plans for a pier on the property, Naval Station Newport had nothing to say about the project. DEM officials also have said they're withholding from discussions about the concept until Gov. Donald L. Carcieri was briefed on the idea.