

Study to focus on trash in two island towns

By Matt Sheley/Daily News staff

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A consultant is studying the future of trash disposal in Middletown and Portsmouth.

The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission recently brought in DSM Environmental Services of Ascutney, Vt., to look at both communities and come up with suggestions for possible improvements, separately and together.

The study was launched after the Navy told Middletown it will not be renew the lease on the Burma Road transfer station at the end of the year. Portsmouth also wants to address problems at its Hedly Street trash facility.

The cost of the study is being paid by the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation, the quasi-state agency that operates the Johnston landfill.

The study is expected to be finished by the end of September, according to Tina Dolen, planning commission executive director.

"The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission's goal is to assist both of the towns in analyzing potential cost-saving solutions for both the individual communities as well as providing a regional alternative," Dolen said.

Middletown was informed late last year by the Navy that its long-running lease for the Burma Road facility would not be extended, because the trash plant was not part of the Navy's strategic plan for the site overlooking the East Passage of Narragansett Bay.

Around the same time, Portsmouth officials decided to take another look at their transfer station, especially with space at such a premium.

The towns agreed to work with the planning commission to take a broader view of the situation. Dolen said Newport also was contacted about the matter, but said it was satisfied with its waste disposal and recycling services.

Dolen said DSM will take an in-depth look at the trash disposal and recycling offered by both operations and come up with possible alternatives. Those include curbside pickup and pay-as-you-

throw.

DSM has worked with cities and towns across the country, Stratton Mountain in Vermont, the World Bank and the United Nations.

As part of the review process, Dolen said users of both transfer stations will be able to participate in a survey next month. Focus groups also will be formed in each community to get additional insight on the matter.

Monday, town, state and planning commission officials met with DSM for the first time to go over ideas and talk about what might be accomplished as a result of the study.

Portsmouth Town Administrator Robert G. Driscoll said he would like to see a better program for recycling and new options for handling yard waste, such as grass clippings and brush.

"I think we're very eager to see where this winds up and the recommendations they can make," Driscoll said. "It makes sense to look at the towns individually and collectively."

Middletown Town Administrator Gerald S. Kempen said it is unlikely the community would be able to vacate the Burma Road transfer station by the end of the year.

The Navy originally had asked Middletown to be out by April 1, but the lease was extended until the end of the year. Given the state regulations for closing transfer stations and other issues, Kempen said that process could take at least year or two.

"It's going to be a lot more than just shutting the gates and locking them," Kempen said. "We're waiting to see what the report comes up with, but clearly, any change is going to be difficult. We'll just have to see what they come up with and what we decide."