

Redevelopment of Navy land will move on to next phase

By Matt Sheley

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The Aquidneck Island Reuse Planning Authority finally is official.

A notice of the establishment of the local redevelopment group was posted in the Federal Register earlier this week, meaning the process to determine the future of 260 surplus acres owned by the Navy on the west side of the island can move to the next phase.

“This officially begins the planning process of the redevelopment work that’s required by the Department of Defense’s Office of Economic Adjustment,” said Tina Dolen, executive director of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, which has served as the contact point for the process so far.

“What’s great about this process is that, working through a consultant, each community will have a redevelopment plan that suits their needs, whether it’s job creation, taxes, recreation,” she said.

A public workshop and tour of the sites has been scheduled for July 28 at 3 p.m., starting at Middletown Town Hall, 350 East Main Road.

In early 2008, the Navy indi-

cated it no longer had use for properties it held on the west side of the island, including the former Naval Hospital in Newport, the former Navy Lodge property and some parcels along Burma Road in Middletown and Tank Farms 1 and 2 in Portsmouth.

Since then, the local communities have discussed ways to shape the future of the sites when they are released, a process that has been delayed several times at the request of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs on behalf of the Narragansett Indian tribe.

The reuse planning authority will guide the release and redevelopment of the west side properties, a process expected to take 14 to 18 months.

Newport is represented on the reuse planning authority by city Planning Board Chairwoman Naomi Neville and Newport Redevelopment Authority member Bill Corcoran; Middletown by town Planning Board Chairman and Aquidneck Island Planning Commission Chairman Arthur S. Weber and Planning Board member Jan Eckhart; and Portsmouth by that town’s Redevelopment Authority Chairman Fred Faerber and Redevelopment Authority Vice Chairman Keith Humphreys.

Weber, who will serve as chairman of the reuse planning authority, said that, as early as this week, the authority could hire a reuse coordinator from a list of seven candidates.

“It presents the opportunity for each of the towns to mirror the roadmap laid out by the West Side Master Plan,” Weber said, referring to a plan developed under the auspices of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission and approved by all three communities.

“For Middletown, there’s been significant interest in passive recreation, for Newport, there’s a real opportunity for economic growth with the hospital property, and then Portsmouth has any number of ways they can go with the tank farms.”

Having representatives from all three communities working together toward the future was a “win-win,” Weber said, especially with growing talk of more island-wide efforts.

“This is true consolidated planning,” he said. “That’s the best thing, having people working together and striving for the same thing about what’s best for the island.”

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