

Greene Lane area in Middletown eyed for state fishing pier

By Matt Sheley/Daily News staff

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MIDDLETOWN - A new fishing pier, built with part of the old Jamestown Bridge, is being considered by the state for an area off Greene Lane.

The spot with a panoramic view of the East Passage ranked at the top of the list of 22 different sites around Narragansett Bay, according to a recent study by a Pawtucket engineering firm.

Because Gov. Donald L. Carcieri had not been briefed on the proposal, Department of Environmental Management spokeswoman Gail Mastrati said the state was withholding comment on it. Details including the price tag, time frame and design of the new structure were unavailable.

Town Administrator Gerald S. Kempen said the town was working to set up a meeting with DEM in the next couple of weeks to discuss the concept, which would need local approval to move forward.

"It would be a nice resource for all three communities, but it's very early in the process," said Paul M. Rodrigues, Town Council president. "To me, it would be important to learn what it's going to cost the community because we need to take care of our existing infrastructure, not necessarily add to it. Obviously, we'd like to hear more about the project and if there will be a significant expense."

Town records indicate the area just south of the Portsmouth line at the end of Greene Lane - including the dirt parking lot along Burma Road and existing Midway Pier - are owned by the Navy.

The property was once home to Blue Gold oyster farm, until that business went bankrupt in the mid-1980s.

In the fall of 2000, the location was considered by two businessmen for an aquaculture farm, but that proposal never got off the ground.

At the time, state officials said extensive work was needed to clean up that offshore area, including removing underwater debris, such as concrete anchors and heavy line left behind by the oyster

farm.

In the wake of those problems, the state Coastal Resources Management Council toughened up its regulations governing such shellfishing projects, requiring they post a performance bond to correct any problems they may create.

Today, the area is a popular fishing spot for striped bass and bluefish, whether from the concrete pier or along the rocky shoreline. The parking lot along Burma Road is currently undergoing an environmental project to clean up contamination left behind from a former Navy facility on the site.

The more than 100-page report from Gordon R. Archibald Inc. indicated the Midway Pier area was attractive for a new fishing pier because of its central location, scenic beauty, high water quality, parking and potential availability.

Another important factor in the firm's recommendation was the fact the West Side Master Plan, spearheaded by the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, suggested the area be transformed into a waterfront park, including a fishing pier, kayak launch, playground, picnic spot, restrooms and other offerings.

While the Archibald study did not specify whether that whole vision for the site would be pursued, the idea itself was supported. The other top site for a new fishing pier, according to the report, is in North Kingstown, near the location of the bridge, which is being torn down.

"The Burma Road Middletown site, while largely unimproved, appears to offer a good 'blank slate' for the potential development of a moderately sized recreational fishing facility," the report said. "In addition to the excellent fishing at this location, it appears that the abandoned pier could be rehabilitated and possibly extended by floating dock or fixed-pier structure."

Bob Krekorian, a spokesman for Naval Station Newport, said the Navy does not have plans for a fishing pier at the site.

Kempen said he first about the project in a Feb. 20 letter from DEM Director W. Michael Sullivan. Along with Rodrigues, Kempen said he liked the concept of a new fishing pier on the west side of town, but wanted to hear more details.

"I think it's a fantastic opportunity to get a jump start on the vision recommended for the site in the West Side Master Plan," Kempen said. "It would be open to the public and available to everyone

and would really fit well into what the master plan has suggested for that area."

The state has promised to build a new fishing pier when the Jamestown Bridge, which is used for fishing, is demolished. Previously, the state discussed using the North Kingstown side of the existing bridge, but it was determined the 66-year-old structure had deteriorated too much to be used.

In January, state officials said money has been set aside to pay for construction of a new fishing pier.

Preparations for tearing down the bridge started earlier this month; the actual demolition is expected to start in late April or early May.

"My initial reaction would be that the town wouldn't absorb the cost of this at all because part of the expense of demolishing the old bridge includes removal of debris, which we would be helping (the state) save money on by including that in the project," Kempen said. "Hopefully, that's the way they're looking at it, too."