



Newport *this week*

Vol. 39, No. 10

THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2011

BORN FREE

Council Gets Update on Island Traffic Study

By Tom Shevlin

Planners from the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission and associated Aquidneck Island Reuse and Planning Authority updated city councilors here Tuesday on a range of projects which could well wind up shaping how we get around and enjoy Aquidneck Island.

The meeting, which was divided into two parts, began with a presentation from AIPC Executive Director Tina Dolen, who reviewed the initial findings of a two-year transportation study aimed at increasing alternative transit options and relieving traffic problems on the island.

The Aquidneck Island Transportation Corridor Study was compiled by the AIPC and consultants VHB Associates. Since May of 2009, VHB has been collecting input from residents of each of Aquidneck Island's three communities, and using that information to identify priorities for improving the island's traffic system.

Interviews were also conducted with representatives from Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth planning, DPW, and police departments; Newport Department of Economic Development; Naval Station Newport; Old Colony & Newport Railroad; Newport County Chamber of Commerce; Newport Dinner Train; Newport Accessibility Advisory Group; the Edward King House and others.

The study is the culmination of a nearly two year process started in May of 2009 that aims to develop a "balanced comprehensive multimodal transportation plan for



Where does this road go? (Pictured at center of photo, above) Nowhere. The AIPC, however, has been working on a concept that could bridge the gap between state and local officials on what to do with it. (Source: Google Maps)

Aquidneck Island."

That plan, once finalized later this year, will include most notably, recommendations for short, medium and long range transportation improvements suitable for inclusion into municipal and statewide capital improvement plans.

The study area included the following roadways: Route 114 (West Main Road); Route 138 (East Main Road); Burma Road; America's Cup Avenue and Memorial Boulevard; Admiral Kalbfus Road; Coddingtown Highway; Route 138A (Aquid-

neck Avenue); and Route 214 (Valley Road)

And while the bulk of the envisioned projects are still a long way off, several projects currently underway can trace their implementation to the study.

Already, work is being conducted to improve left turns off of West Main Road at Cory Lane, Hedley Street, King Charles Drive, Raytheon Drive and Union Street. West and East Main roads are also being primed for traffic signal retiming; and road safety audits at 16 loca-

tions are studying how local communities can reduce the number of traffic accidents across the island.

Throughout the process, the study has been highly data-driven. A critical piece of that has been input from the community. Over 500 comments were received during public meetings, and another 300 were tallied over the Internet. Still more were collected through some 1,200 postcard surveys seeking in-

See Traffic on page 3

TRAFFIC CONTINUED FROM PG. 1

put on the island's existing multimodal transit options.

For Newport, the study recommends a variety of possible transit improvement options from the mundane to the transformative.

On the more practical end, ideas like providing additional bus service along route 60 as well as limited service to TF Green and Kingston Station would appear to be among the most easily achieved. Other suggestions like providing real-time bus information and branded bus shelters; strengthening and expanding island-wide multimodal centers; creating additional park-and-ride facilities; and implementing rapid bus service are only slightly more ambitious.

For tourists and those in town who cringe at the thought of driving through downtown Newport during the summer, the study also recommended the establishment of a Newport jitney service which could provide direct transportation from downtown to the beaches. The study also recognizes the city's harbor shuttle service, and advocates for the revival of the Providence-Newport Water Ferry during the summer months.

And, as we first wrote in December, one of the study's more ambitious plans calls for significant improvements to the Pell Bridge interchange that would finally remove the so-called Road to Nowhere, extend Halsey Street, and introduce a series of roundabouts.

In Middletown, reconfiguring Two Mile Corner – perennially one of the island's highest crash locations and the second worst bottleneck areas, according to an online survey – would cost \$4 million.

Other suggested improvements focus on making the island more bicycle friendly by connecting missing links between suitable roads, installing uniform signage, introducing shared-use paths along certain roads like West Main and Burma roads, and placing others like East Main Road and Memorial Boulevard on so-called road diets.

On the pedestrian front, the study recommends upgrading existing sidewalks and installing new ones at Coddington Highway, Admiral Kalbfus Road, and along Aquidneck and Valley roads.

Adding crosswalks with countdown timers at heavily crossed areas like America's Cup Avenue, and

creating an island-wide crosswalk and sign standardization were also mentioned.

Of course, each of these concepts would come with a range of price tags, and it remains to be seen which projects could be afforded given the worrisome financial picture facing the state.

How expensive would some of the projects be? Revamping the Pell Bridge interchange, for example, would cost an estimated \$34 million, according VHB.

Meanwhile, other projects, like making Burma Road into a viable north-south corridor would cost an estimated \$20-25 million to improve the existing two-lane road, and \$40 million to expand it to four lanes.

The second half of the meeting focused on the current status of the Navy Hospital property just north of the Pell Bridge.

Councilors Justin S. McLaughlin, Jeanne-Marie Napolitano, Kathryn E. Leonard, Charles Y. Duncan, City Manager Edward F. Lavalley, and Planning Director Paige Bronk all took part in the meeting. Mayor Stephen C. Waluk and Councilors Henry F. Winthrop and Naomi L. Neville were unable to be in attendance.