



**THE WATCH HILL CONSERVATOR**  
222 Watch Hill Road  
Watch Hill, Rhode Island 02891

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THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2008 VOL. 1 NO. 2 WATCH HILL, R.I.

## *From slipper shells to the coal market: kids on the beach*

*Julia Royster*

On July 15, the Napatree Point Conservation Area Investigators program started its second season of free programs consisting of independent sessions that are offered every Tuesday and Thursday through August 21 for kids ages 9-13. Many of the children signed up this year came to at least one session last year, so obviously the kids and the naturalists are in agreement that the program is a lot of fun. While the specific focus of each session is defined by the clues we find on the beach, the program emphasizes field identification and adaptations of all wild things (plants and animals) on the beach: animal tracks, answering questions about horseshoe crab and shorebird “magic,” how the sand moves, how the tides change, where trash comes from, when glass on the beach becomes “beach glass,” how to navigate back to the entrance of Napatree using a GPS unit, and even determining the current price of coal. Some of these areas of interest might seem a little odd, but the kids on the beach make the connections easily.

The inquisitive nature of children is just a blessing and a continual source of entertainment. Not only does it keep us on our toes as naturalists, it also encourages us to ask more questions and find new ways to wow them. My colleague, Steve Brown, and I often turn their questions around and ask them what *they* think before assisting further with an answer. Many times, the logic of their answers was sound, but for different reasons the entire story was not quite spot-on every time.

On the beach last summer, I was asked both how to open a mussel shell and what the inside of a slipper shell looked like. I replied, “How would you open the mussel, and how would you find out what the inside of a slipper shell looks like?” The answer was fairly simple for the Investigators. After attempting to utilize



Julia Royster©

different “instruments” on the beach to open the shells and using the sea gull method (dropping them from a high altitude onto a hard surface), the answer became apparent. The best (most efficient) way to open the shell was to “smash” it. The “smashing” technique worked like a charm and included a small lesson on the physical forces that made the shells break and why mere strength was not enough to open a mussel shell.

On the day we used the GPS units, some of the kids were interested in watching the track that was created during our walk out to the beach. However, the interest, which I thought was already pretty high, skyrocketed when the kids figured out that the GPS units recorded speeds. Needless to say, we had races down the beach the entire way back to the entrance of Napatree that day.

One of the first things that Steve and I tried to teach the kids was what belonged on a beach. Part of learning what *does* belong is determining what does *not* belong. As we walked the beach, all of the kids honed their

*Julia Royster* is a charter naturalist in the Napatree Point Conservation Area Naturalist program. Having just completed her Masters degree in Environmental Science and Management in the Natural Resources Science Department at URI, she is enjoying her second year on Napatree, leading nature walks, monitoring wildlife, and interacting with beachgoers. Her colleagues in the program include Steve Brown, history teacher at Pine Point School, with whom she shares the Education and Outreach Coordinator role, and naturalist interns Hugh Markey, an English teacher at Pilgrim High School in Warwick, Rhode Island, and Sarah Mellick, a junior at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania.

Julia was working in Honduras when Peter August of URI alerted her to the opportunity to work at Napatree. “I thought the job would be a great combination of education, science and outreach,” Royster explains. “Now, in my second year as a naturalist for the Watch Hill Conservancy and The Watch Hill Fire District, I love the job even more. In addition to playing on the beach with kids and inspiring adults, I am able to utilize my science background to write biological reports, make maps of Napatree using ArcGIS (a computer mapping program) and assist with dune management plans for the future. There are several aspects to managing Napatree for future generations and I am glad to have a diverse background that allows me to actively have a part in it.”

### **THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY**

222 Watch Hill Road  
Watch Hill, Rhode Island 02891  
(401) 348-6540

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For information about community events, lectures, concerts, nature walks, educational programs for children, and others, see the Conservancy’s website at [www.thewatchhillconservancy.org](http://www.thewatchhillconservancy.org).

#### **The Watch Hill Conservator**

Joan Youngken, *Contributing Editor*  
Design by Wendy A. Bolster,  
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Nic Silvestri (age 10) participated in the program last year. He shared these comments:

*“I loved looking for all the crabs and snails in the water. And I like seeing the piping plovers also.” What he leaves out is the fact that he also liked to walk in my footsteps down the beach, no matter how much I would weave or how far apart my strides were. He also cut himself with a ray. He decided to pick it up by the mouth and fling it into the water. He won’t do that again!*

Registration for the Investigators program begins in the spring. Watch for further information in the winter issue of this newsletter and on the website of the Conservancy.

His sister Delaney (age 12) reported:

*“The beach program is a great way to get kids involved in learning about our beaches. Julia and Steve teach us about what is happening to the beaches and that makes us more aware of what we can do to help save the beaches. I really enjoy learning about and seeing all the animals that live at the beach.” Delaney enjoyed everything: water quality testing, crab hunting, humming to crabs and snails to get them to come out, catching small fish, etc.*

skills of observation. Pretty soon we had them thinking like birds and zeroing in on the bits of rubber and plastic trash that might get caught in the “wrack line” (seaweed along the high tide line) where feeding birds might be harmed.

The kids also picked up on the fact that there is a lot of coal on the beach. When we were all kids, the perpetual question was where to get a little extra money for the candy bar, teddy bear, or cd player we wanted. Kids these days are no different. A few of them asked about the potential value of a trash bag full of coal. Due to the low estimates Steve and I gave them, the coal was left on the beach.

While mussel and clamshells are a-plenty, we were lucky to also find a clam worm and a small eel during one of our outings. The kids were intrigued by a loon that appeared to be a juvenile and would let them get pretty close to it. I think the loon was just as curious about them as they were about it.

Steve and I teach the kids that like trash, some of the animals on the beach are not part of the natural ecosystem. For instance, Japanese shore crabs are bad for the ecology of the beach, because they compete for space and food in the area. If you are looking for crabs, Japanese shore crabs and green crabs are the ones most easily found on Napatree.

The kids learned to tell the crabs apart based on the shape of their carapace (shell), the length of their claws and their coloring.

The horseshoe crab, not technically a crab, is also found in abundance on Napatree. The kids really get into flipping them over to see if they are still alive. Sometimes the crabs get stuck on the beach at high tide, so it is important to always flip them over and help them back to the water if they are alive. The kids observe and learn that horseshoe crabs use their tail (telson) to turn themselves over, therefore it is important not to use the tail as a handle when turning them over. To turn a horseshoe crab over, it is best to use two hands: one on either side of its carapace close to the eyes.

Part of the education program is not just the cool living things, but understanding the rules of the area. The kids learn very quickly that trash should not be left on the beach and that dogs are not allowed except at certain evening hours under the Town dog ordinance (but never without leash). They comment anytime they see a dog on the beach, and they pick up the trash they find. I truly think that this program helps all of the kids appreciate the beach and want to ensure it is preserved into the future. [J.R.]



Julia Royster©

*Napatree Point Conservation Area Saturday Morning Walks*

Every Saturday through August 30, 2008, the naturalists of Napatree will be leading nature walks for adults and families. The walk starts at 9:30 a.m. The meeting place is at the entrance to Napatree next to the Misquamicut Beach Club. For questions and further information please call 401-439-9891 or email [napatreenaturalist@live.com](mailto:napatreenaturalist@live.com).



Julia Royster©

**WIND FARMS**  
**“WHAT GOES AROUND...**

Windmills are hardly a new technology. For centuries, they have harnessed the energy of the wind to power mills, pump water, and, more recently, to generate electricity. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Watch Hill’s landscape was dotted with them, their blades silhouetted against the sky, rising above picturesque shingled or clapboarded structures. They served to provide domestic water to the cottages until Westerly public water was provided in 1901.

Wind turbines may once again become a feature of Watch Hill’s landscape, or, to be precise, its seascape. In early April, the State of Rhode Island posted a Request for Proposal “for a private partner to move forward with the Rhode Island Energy Independence 1 wind power project,” to advance the State’s goal of becoming more energy independent in an environmentally responsible manner by harnessing one of Rhode Island’s “free” and renewable resources: off-shore winds.

An area off Napatree Point has been identified as one of ten possible sites for an extensive wind farm, which, if built, would supply power to National Grid for distribution throughout the region. This 3.7 square mile area has an average wind speed of 7.75 meters per second, among the lowest of the sites being considered for potential development. Of those proposed, two large areas off Block Island have been identified as large enough and having wind speed high enough to provide at least 15% of the state’s supply of electricity, meeting or exceeding Governor Carcieri’s goal.

The advantages of wind power are clear: Rhode Island has bountiful wind resources, probably capable of supplying a significant portion of the state’s need. In recent years, wind turbine technology has advanced considerably, to the point that harnessing wind power is potentially both feasible and economical. While there is no perfect site, studies are ongoing in both public and private sectors, assessing each of these ten areas to identify advantages, risks, challenges, and areas of concern.

**...COMES AROUND.”**

The construction of a wind farm off Napatree, regardless of the positive effect in terms of a renewable energy supply, would not be without aesthetic, economic, and



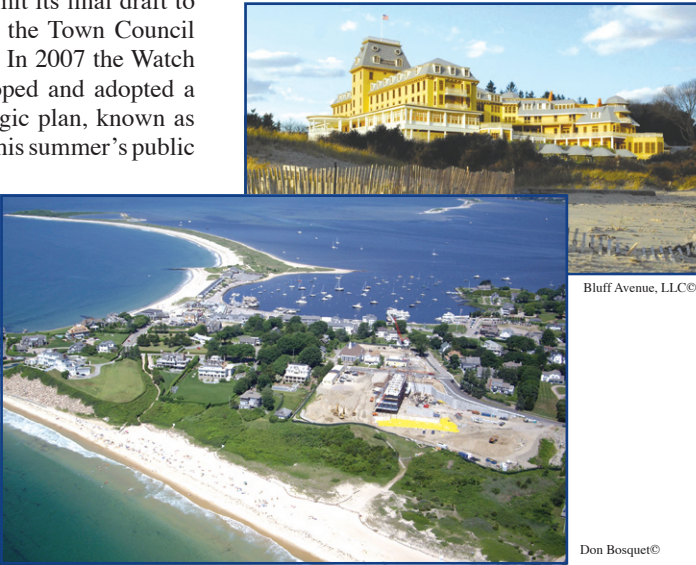
**Late Breaking...**

*Watch Hill Fire District*

The 107<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Watch Hill Fire District was held Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup>. Elections were held for officers to serve for the year ahead. These include Edwin L. Russell, who was reelected Moderator; Penelope B. Kelly, who was reelected Deputy Moderator; George C. Moore, Jr., who was reelected Clerk; and William H. White, who was elected Treasurer. Charles S. Whitman III and Andrew J. Parsons were elected Members at Large of the District Council, the governing body of the Fire District. New members were also elected to serve on the Finance Committee and the Park Commission. Three long-time officers of the District, former Moderators Robert J. Brockmann and Frederick B. Whittemore, and C. Sheppard Desillier, long a member of the Fire Department and of the Board of Fire Wards, were honored with receipt of the District’s new Citizens Service Awards. The meeting agenda also included presentations on the Conservancy’s underground utility project and the proposed conservation easement over Fire District land at the Napatree Conservation Area.

*Westerly Comprehensive Plan*

The Westerly Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, which has been meeting over the past two years to rewrite the town’s Comprehensive Plan, held a second series of public forums earlier this year to invite public comment on the latest draft of the plan. During the summer of 2007, the Committee held a first series of vision sessions, focus groups, and interactive public workshops, and in the early autumn circulated a community survey to 1,000 randomly selected Westerly households. Based on this and the more recent input, the Committee plans to submit its final draft to the Planning Board and the Town Council as early as mid-October. In 2007 the Watch Hill Fire District developed and adopted a Watch Hill 5-year strategic plan, known as *Watch Hill Vision 2012*; this summer’s public forums provided an opportunity for the Watch Hill community to reiterate its commitment to the *Vision 2012* recommendations, which it seeks to have included in the Westerly Comprehensive Plan.



Bluff Avenue, LLC©

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*Communications*

Since matters of importance to the community, sometimes involving the opportunity for public input at meetings of the Town Council or of the Planning and Zoning Boards, etc., may arise between issues, the *Conservator* invites its readers to provide their email addresses for occasional updates and alerts. Please contact the Conservancy at [www.thewatchhillconservancy.org](http://www.thewatchhillconservancy.org). Our intention is to use this potential communication link judiciously and not to flood you with unnecessary information.

*Conservancy Gala*

The Conservancy’s annual fundraiser, the kick-off party for the season, took place at the Beach Club of the Misquamicut Club on Napatree Beach on Saturday, June 28<sup>th</sup>; it was a great success. Approximately 350 people participated in the festivities, which included both live and silent auctions. A convertible Smart Car was the highlight of the live auction, while the silent auction of 22 items ranged from meals and theater tickets to jewelry and sailing cruises. All of this was accompanied by the usual excellent food and drink prepared by the Misquamicut Club.

*Ocean House*

The Ocean House Hotel construction project celebrated a milestone on July 11<sup>th</sup>, when a “topping off” ceremony marked the placement of the highest beam of the new structure, located at the pinnacle of the cupola. The new cupola of the reconstructed hotel will assume the form of the one that capped the historic structure between 1908 and 1938. The public was invited to attend and to sign the top beam before it was raised into place.



**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

**FOR MEMBERSHIP IN  
THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY**

Member name: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone & email: \_\_\_\_\_

INDIVIDUAL: \$25

No: \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

BUSINESS: \$75

No: \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

FAMILY: \$100

No: \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPORTER: \$250 - \$499

No: \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SPONSOR: \$500 - \$999

No: \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

PATRON: \$1,000 - \$2,499

No: \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

BENEFACTOR: \$2,500 - \$5,000 or more

No: \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER CONTRIBUTION Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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Please include names of family members 18 and under. If you are making gifts of memberships, please include the names and addresses of those to receive these gifts.





## THE CONSERVATION EASEMENT: *A flexible tool for land preservation*

*Chaplin B. Barnes*

As an alternative to acquiring property outright, a land trust such as the Watch Hill Conservancy may achieve the goal of protecting natural areas and open space by the acquisition of more limited legal interests in the land. A *conservation easement* is a popular mechanism much used throughout the country. Sometimes referred to as a *conservation restriction*, it is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or governmental agency that permanently restricts the use of the land in order to preserve its conservation values.

Since the land remains in the possession of the landowner, it allows him or her to continue to exercise all property rights not precluded by the agreement, as well as to sell it or leave it to his or her heirs. For instance, the owner of farmland might give up the right to further develop his or her property, while retaining the right to grow crops. The owner of a scenic residential parcel might give away the rights to develop additional structures on the property, while maintaining lawns, gardens, and existing improvements. An easement over property providing habitat for rare or endangered species of animals and/or plants would generally prohibit all development.

An easement may apply to an entire parcel of property or only to a portion of it. Each easement is individually crafted to fit the circumstances of the land and the objectives of the landowner and the acquiring agency; easements therefore offer great flexibility. While easements are deemed to provide public benefits, such as the protection of habitat or scenic vistas, public access to the property is not a requirement.

Easements are established by legal documents, executed with the same formality as deeds of title to property, and, as deeds, are recorded in the land records of the jurisdiction in which the land involved is located. They are established as permanent restrictions, effective in perpetuity, but may, as provided in the instrument, be amended by mutual agreement of the easement grantor and easement grantee. An easement, like other deeds, defines with great precision the actual

property that it covers, and the easement's bounds are generally established by land survey. To provide a base line from which to monitor that the terms of the easement are being adhered to, the acquiring agency prepares an Easement Documentation Report, which identifies in detail the conditions of the land at the time of conveyance.

The easement holder accepts the easement with the understanding that it must enforce the terms of the easement, as determined by the landowner's wishes and the circumstances of the land. These terms are spelled out in the deed, in whatever detail the parties agree upon. The agreement binds both parties together to uphold the provisions of the easement, and the easement holder also makes a financial commitment to provide the stewardship funds required to enforce it, including the costs, if necessary, of legal action.

A landowner generally donates an easement to a land trust or governmental entity, in which case the gift may qualify the donor for a tax-deductible charitable donation. In some circumstances the land trust or governmental entity will purchase the easement, or the parties may enter into a transaction that involves both sale and gift.

As noted by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), which serves as an umbrella organization to promote and facilitate land conservation, "Easement values vary greatly; in general the highest easement values result from very restrictive conservation easements on tracts of developable open space under intense development pressure. In some jurisdictions, placing an easement on your property may also result in property tax savings."

The LTA, of which the Conservancy is a member, comments further that "perhaps the most important benefit" of creating a conservation easement is that it can be "... essential for passing undeveloped land to the next generation. By removing the land's development potential, the easement typically lowers the property's market value, which in turn lowers potential estate tax. Whether the easement is donated during life or by will, it can make a crucial difference in one's heirs' ability to keep the land intact."

In and around Watch Hill, many hundreds of acres have been protected as open space in recent years by the Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation, the Westerly Land Trust, the Westerly Municipal Land Trust, the Watch Hill Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy, and

the Audubon Society of Rhode Island. Many of these acres are preserved by conservation easements. Currently in Watch Hill, the Conservancy has been exploring with owners of property along Ocean View Highway the possibility of their donating conservation easements of a certain width, generally 100 feet back from the road, in order to preserve the rural values of the road from further lot development along its frontage.

It has also been proposed that the Watch Hill Fire District, which owns more than 90% of the Napatree Conservation Area, might convey an easement to the Conservancy, legally committing both organizations to maintain the natural and conservation values of that unique resource, as well as public access; the Conservancy and the Fire District are already partners in the current Napatree Conservation Management Program. The possibility of such an easement was presented to the voters at this year's Annual Meeting of the Fire District in July, and it was agreed that the discussion should be followed up with a mailing to the voters, providing further information and soliciting their mail vote on the issue. [C.B.B.]

*Chaplin B. Barnes, a lawyer, is a Vice President and the Executive Director of the Watch Hill Conservancy.*



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*A conservation easement ... permanently restricts the use of the land in order to preserve its conservation values.*



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environmental consequence. Stakeholders from coastal Rhode Island have expressed concern that a large wind farm near Watch Hill could have a negative impact on tourism, changing the view from beaches and other coastal properties. Concerns have been raised (and duly recorded in the "Rhode Island Stakeholders Final Report", February 2008, Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources) about the effect of wind farms on wildlife, migrating birds, and marine habitat and fishing grounds. Other areas of concern include impact on maritime traffic, recreational fishing and boating, and commercial fishing; lighting and other warning signals; interconnections to the existing utility grid; and risk assessment.

Can we expect to see a wind farm off Napatree? Not anytime soon. Rhode Island may be the first state to have wind farms in its off-shore waters, but it will be a long process, with many factors to be considered. Environmental impact statements will be done on a site-by-site basis, as proposals are submitted. Feasibility studies, design and installation, and upgrading of transmission capability will cost billions of dollars, funding which may be difficult to obtain in the current economy. Public support, while not essential, is certainly desirable, and may be difficult to obtain.

As stewards of Napatree Point Conservation Area, the fragile habitat it supports, and the variety of birds and wildlife that call it home, The Watch Hill Conservancy will be paying very close attention as studies continue, proposals are submitted to the state for their consideration, and public debate moves forward. [J.Y.]



## EAST BEACH: *Privately managed for public use*

In the early hours of a summer morning, Watch Hill's East Beach is serene and quiet, with a few walkers and runners taking advantage of the solitude. And, despite the much larger numbers of people who enjoyed the beach the day before, it's free of litter, thanks to the efforts of the East Beach Association (EBA). The EBA is composed of members of the beach neighborhood and others from the community who have strong emotional ties to East Beach. Throughout the summer season they engage in a balancing act: accommodating public use of one of Rhode Island's most beautiful beaches while serving as stewards of a remarkable resource.

EBA was founded in 1970 to preserve the recreational and ecological values of East Beach. "One of our jobs," states George Markham, President of the East Beach Association, "is to make a day at the beach as stress-free and restorative as possible. That includes alleviating the stress of homeowners whose property includes the beach."

East Beach is neither a state nor town beach, nor is it a private beach club. Above the mean high tide line, it is privately owned; the public has access by right to the area below mean high tide, and is essentially the guest of adjacent property owners above it.

"The beachfront property owners don't begrudge the public the use of the beach above the mean high-tide," continues Markham. "It's a beautiful place; they understand. Who wouldn't want to be there? But maintaining it is a challenge. We have a crew who manages to keep ahead of the litter; that's the biggest job during the summer months, of course. At some other beaches in Westerly, people are ticketed by the police if they leave trash behind. Unfortunately these private property owners don't have access to that level of regulation and enforcement."

Beyond the obvious aesthetic benefits of a litter-free beach, a cleaner beach provides a safer nesting place for the *threatened* piping plovers. Litter is a double threat to these tiny creatures: if they ingest bits of plastic or paper, it impedes digestion, and they can starve or become so weak that they are more vulnerable to predators, which may be there in higher numbers, attracted by food scraps.

"This was one of the factors that played a part in our decision to clean the beach twice daily," Markham explains. "According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, it has most likely had an impact on reducing predation. The plovers are expected to come off the endangered species list in about sixteen years. By helping to increase the population of these birds as effectively as we can, we hope to allow the property owners to gain more control over the way the habitats have to be managed in as short a time as possible." As a consequence of the EBA's efforts, the plover



Richard Youngken®

population on East Beach is among the highest on coastal Rhode Island.

EBA also works diligently to restore dunes along the beach. The Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) gives them permission to erect dune fencing in order to maintain a healthy dune system, which serves as a storm buffer against erosion.

Funded entirely by the community, the EBA maintains a crew of seven full-time people in the summer and maintains over two miles of beach. Its annual budget of \$45,000 is tight, and does not include recovery from major storms. "After the April 15 storm of last year," recalls Markham, "we removed over 20 large dumpsters of debris and trash from the beach. It was a huge and expensive effort."

"I like to think that East Beach Association is good at what we do, and that we've made a difference in people's lives over the years: maintaining this unique spot that is so dear to so many people and working hard to provide a wonderful experience for beach-goers," states Markham. "The challenge is in doing it better. We are undertaking new initiatives as well. This year we're conducting usage surveys, so we can get a sense of year-to-year change. We're employing new methods of dune restoration, and last year we started substituting wooden fence stakes for conventional metal, to eliminate health hazards from rust. As far as I know we're the only beach management group in the area doing this. We don't just reactively maintain the beach, we go a step further to set new standards for beach management."

Chaplin Barnes, Executive Director of the Watch Hill Conservancy, which, with the Watch Hill Fire District, manages Watch Hill's other beach at the Napatree Conservation Area, credits EBA with having assumed a critical role as both managers and conservationists. "The Association plays a major role in maintaining the quality and the structure of East Beach. It makes a great contribution to the quality of life in Watch Hill and the experience of visitors to the beach." He notes that the EBA, like a number of other Watch Hill non-profits, is a represented on the Board of the Conservancy.

For more information about the East Beach Association, contact: George Markham at 401-348-5068. [J.Y.]



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## WATCH HILL TO BURY UTILITY WIRES, REMOVE POLES

*“...the village will look better, ...our utilities will be less vulnerable to storm damage. It’s a good investment all the way around.”*

As announced at a recent meeting of the Westerly Town Council, the Watch Hill Conservancy, in collaboration with the Watch Hill Fire District, will soon begin the process of burying utility wires in the Village of Watch Hill. The project, which will be privately funded, is expected to begin in the fall of 2009, removing electric, telephone, cable, internet, and fire alarm lines and poles from the streetscape.

“We will remove eyesores from Bay Street and the hill,” promises Grant Simmons of the Conservancy, who also serves as Park Commissioner of the Watch Hill Fire District. “Right now we’re looking at visual pollution, congested air space. Without the poles and wires, the district can be much more attractive.”

Much of the research and planning have already been done. In the fall of 2007, Project Development Manager Ruven Liebhaber was hired to direct the process. In December, the engineering firm of Cherenzia Associates was selected to conduct planning studies and mapping, to determine the location of lines relative to properties boundaries, rights of way, and site features that would determine the placement of trenches. Reports will be submitted to National Grid for approval.

Verizon and Cox Communications, which share use of the existing poles, must also approve the plan. National Grid will determine procedure for trenching and installation of underground conduits and cables, then the Watch Hill Conservancy will solicit bids for the actual construction work.

National Grid reports that the Watch Hill project is the first of its magnitude ever to be undertaken in the state. The work will be completed in two phases. Phase I will include Bay Street and Fort Road, and will be the more complex and expensive phase. “These areas are in the flood plain, so are more complicated, and different regulations apply,” explains Simmons. The cost of the full project has yet to be determined, but Phase I is estimated to cost roughly \$3.5 million.

“Phase II, which will include Larkin Road, a portion of Lighthouse Road, Bluff Avenue, and Plimpton Road, are on higher ground, so will be more straightforward,” Simmons continues. A total of 73 poles will be removed, 35 of them in Phase I.

Chaplin Barnes, Executive Director of the Watch Hill Conservancy, asserts that every effort will be made to minimize disruption, especially along Bay Street. “Work will not begin until autumn, and will finish before summer,” he states emphatically. “We do not want to hamper summer activities or make it difficult to enjoy the village in the peak of the season.”

“Look at Lighthouse Road and parts of Ocean View Highway,” suggests Simmons. “Poles have been removed there with private funding, and it’s made a real difference. When we’re finished, the village will look better, and, as importantly, our utilities will be less vulnerable to storm damage. It’s a good investment all the way around.” [J.Y.]



Ardith Schneider©



Ardith Schneider©

## DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES



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Ed. note: A recent article in the *Watch Hill Conservator* (“It’s Not Just About Open Space”, Vol. 1 No. 1) briefly described some of the architectural styles to be found in Watch Hill, and promised further information about some of the means by which Watch Hill’s architectural heritage can be preserved and enhanced. One such tool, design guidelines, was the topic of a recent interview with Richard Youngken, preservation planner and principal of Youngken Associates of Wakefield and Newport.

***Is it true that most of Watch Hill is listed in the National Register of Historic Places but not regulated by design review?***

Most of the residential and commercial sections of the Watch Hill Fire District are listed in both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. These “registers” are simply lists of buildings, sites, and districts that, like Watch Hill, have been deemed historically and architecturally significant at the state and federal levels. Historic resources within a district are provided a level of protection from adverse impact that might result from state or federally permitted and/or funded projects. There is no similar protection from privately funded projects. Cities and towns in Rhode Island are enabled by the state law to adopt local historical zoning districts that can regulate the appearance of alterations to historic buildings and new construction. The Town of Westerly has so far not adopted historical zoning for any historical areas in Westerly, including Watch Hill.

***What do you mean by design standards/guidelines?***



Richard Youngken©

Design standards or guidelines are typically sets of architectural parameters which alterations or new construction need to meet to receive an approval for a building permit.



Richard Youngken©

***Why do we need design guidelines?***

Design standards and guidelines are useful in assisting the Town and the Watch Hill community to retain the historic and more recent architectural qualities that make the district unique and authentic. Without them, the Town Planning Board would have little on which to base their site plan review of new projects, other than standard landscape, circulation, and parking configurations. While some may argue that individual projects should be allowed to incorporate whatever design influence they see fit, wholesale change could be discordant and contrary to the current appearance of Watch Hill (for example).

***Are there existing guidelines for Watch Hill?***

At the initiative of the Watch Hill Conservancy, the Town of Westerly adopted design guidelines and standards for the Bay Street waterfront commercial zone (the business section of the Watch Hill Historic District) in 2006, following a lengthy review and hearing process.

***What kinds of things do these guidelines and standards address – landscape, paint colors, building materials, etc.?***

The design guidelines and standards address the architectural components, materials, roof line, massing, and landscaping of the buildings. They also incorporate widely accepted historic preservation standards to protect the few remaining historic buildings on the street. They do not cover paint colors, as these can change from time to time and are not permanent.

***Do the guidelines have any legal teeth?***

The design standards/guidelines for Bay Street are set down for the Town of Westerly Planning Board to use in approving projects through their development plan review oversight. The Planning Board must determine if the project under review meets the standards and guidelines set out by the zoning code. If it doesn’t, the Planning Board may deny approval. In some cases the Planning Board may waive a requirement, or the applicant may seek a variance before the Zoning Board of Review. Such flexibility is considered important to allow for unique conditions and circumstances.

***Is there an example of the design guidelines being used in Watch Hill now?***

Currently, the Westerly Planning Board is reviewing Phase III of Russ Waldo and Jim Hennessey’s Napatree Point mixed-use project located off Larkin Road at the edge of the Bay Street waterfront commercial zone. Phase II of their project at the intersection of Larkin and Bay was already in approval phase when the 2006 design guidelines and standards were adopted. Mr. Waldo and Mr. Hennessey did, however, incorporate some of the design standards into this project, resulting in a simplified and more compatible version of their original plan with the addition of a first floor arcade and upper level deck system. The gambrel roof flanking Bay Street helps to de-emphasize the height of the building.

***How does the public have access to the design standards/guidelines?***

The design standards for Watch Hill’s Bay Street area are listed within the Town of Westerly’s zoning code section and are easily accessible via the Internet. They can also be obtained from the Town’s Zoning Official or Town Planning Department. In the future, if there is interest, the Watch Hill Conservancy may publish the design standards for distribution.

***What is planned for the future?***

In conformity with Watch Hill’s strategic plan, *Watch Hill Vision 2012*, the Watch Hill Conservancy is contemplating the publication of a design or style booklet for Watch Hill and Bay Street to celebrate the architectural character and quality of Watch Hill’s village and residential neighborhoods.

[J.Y.]