

CRMC plan will guide development on west side

By Joe Baker
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MIDDLETOWN - The state Coastal Resources Management Council expects to formulate new development standards for the west side of Aquidneck Island by spring.

The standards will be adopted as part of the council's Special Area Management Plan - or SAMP - which is being developed to mirror the West Side Master Plan, put together by the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission. The master plan was formulated as an outline for future development of the island's west side, a large part of which is now owned by the Navy.

The management plan will provide a new, more-specific set of guidelines for coastal development tailored for the west side of Aquidneck Island, said James Boyd, a CRMC policy analyst. "If we have a SAMP plan with policies and standards in place, than any development on those federal lands have to be consistent with the plan," Boyd told about 20 island residents during a progress report on the plan's development Thursday night at Town Hall.

CRMC has legal jurisdiction over all development within 200 feet of the coast. But its regulations are generic and apply to the entire state. A SAMP plan considers the specific area and its unique features, Boyd said. The plan is being developed with considerable input from that particular community, he said. CRMC already has developed SAMPs for five different areas around the state, Boyd said.

CRMC probably will have the development standards in place before the SAMP plan itself is completed, Boyd said.

"We recognize there are developments out there going through the local (permitting) process now, and they will be soon on the doorstep of CRMC," Boyd said. "We want to have these standards in place before they come before us."

The priorities of the SAMP plan, as outlined by local officials and residents and stated within the West Side Master Plan, are: preserving public access to the coastline, guiding coastal development and enhancing habitat corridors.

Landscape architect students from the University of Rhode Island have been helping by drafting a potential series of trails for the island. Students presented their preliminary proposals Thursday night.

One trail encompasses northern Portsmouth and, roughly, travels from the Mount Hope Bridge down Boyd's Land to Park Avenue and then around Park Avenue up to Common Fence Point and finally alongside the now abandoned railroad tracks back to the bridge.

The second trail would travel between the west coast in Portsmouth at Corey's Lane through Hedley Street, down Middle Road to Union Street and, eventually, crossing East Main Road to Glen Farm Road. It would end at Sandy Point Beach.

The third trail would travel between Greene Lane Park and run all the way to Sachuest Point.

Boyd said it could take up to two years to complete the SAMP plan.

Numi Mitchell of The Conservation Agency wrapped up Thursday's meeting with a presentation about coyotes on the island.

Coyotes, Mitchell said, are increasing on the island primarily because people "subsidize" them by feeding them. There are about six packs of coyotes on the island, she said. But they are territorial and do not go into another pack's area. They also will stay close to food sources, so if people feed them, they will stay there, opening up an adjacent area for another pack, Mitchell said.

"Every single pack of coyotes on Aquidneck Island is subsidized by people," she said.

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