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**Back to home page:**

Historic listings sought for Taylor's Isle

**News-Review**

Publication Shelter Island Reporter

**North Shore Sun**

Date March 09, 2006

**Suffolk Times**

Section(s) Top Stories

**Shelter Island Reporter**

Page 0

**Go directly to:**

Byline

**Archive Search**

Brief Photo:21542,left,;

**Classifieds**

By Cara Loriz

**Digital Edition**

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By Cara Loriz

The town-appointed Taylor's Island Preservation and Management Committee is in the process of forming a non-profit foundation to oversee the restoration, conservation and use of the town's historic property near the Mashomack shoreline in Coecles Harbor.

The group is also seeking "historic place" listings for the property from the state and federal government. Actual renovation work, meanwhile, will not begin for some time.

The group is led by P.A.T. Hunt and includes town Supervisor Alfred Kilb Jr., who began lobbying to preserve and restore the property before taking office, when then-Supervisor Art Williams proposed tearing down the cottage on the Island, parts of which date back to the 1800s, and replacing it with a rustic open-air shelter. It had served as a summer rental home until the town acquired it from the estate of S. Gregory Taylor in 1998.

The Town Board is expected to authorize the committee to seek state and national historic registry listings for the property with a resolution at its regular meeting tomorrow, Friday, March 10; the board is also expected to authorize the payment of the several hundred dollars in fees and costs required for the town to submit an application to establish a non-profit fund-raising organization to seek money for the restoration of the Island.

Taylor's Island Committee members Roni King and Ms. Hunt attended Tuesday's Town Board work session to report on the committee's work and to request the two resolutions.

Ms. Hunt said Tuesday that local woodworker Mike Loriz, who has experience restoring an old building, had volunteered his time to inspect the cottage on Taylor's island and found it in surprisingly good shape. He told the group that it will not require expensive structural repairs during the renovation, Ms. Hunt said.

The committee last had its own meeting on February 28. Like other committees, it meets in Town Hall and follows a prepared agenda. But this group's meetings have appeared different from others at the outset. Ms. Hunt gathers the members at a hexagonal table she puts together from the two extra side tables. The effect is a round table, with each member appearing to be an equal in the effort to preserve the house and property.

Ms. Hunt reported that several members had spent Saturday, March 4 cleaning up the house, removing old rugs, decaying ceiling tiles and musty furniture using a Highway Department truck to haul the debris to the town dump. While cleaning the kitchen, she found a brass dogtag embossed with the words "Southampton Dog Tax 1912." She will let Louise Green of the Shelter Island Historical Society know about the find.

Actual restoration work will be long in coming, Mr. Kilb suggested. "You're nowhere near" being ready, he said. "You need a much more intense survey of the structure, crawling under the building from one end to the other." He volunteered to work with Keith Clark to find Islanders knowledgeable in repairing older structures to begin the survey. Mr. Kilb commented that it's hard to predict the construction features of the house that was "probably built out of somebody's head."

Committee member King reported that Ed Shillingburg, an attorney, has signed on to represent the group, pro bono, in its effort to gain IRS 501c3 non-profit status. Ms. Hunt noted that the attorney and history buff is "a big fan of the Borax King," Francis Marion Smith, who built the existing Taylor's Island house.

Part of the non-profit application process requires a determination whether or not the group will raise at least \$10,000 annually for the project. Ms. King and Mr. Kilb both think the group will likely exceed that amount and will need Mr. Shillingburg to plan the application accordingly.

"We need three directors for the foundation," Ms. Hunt announced. She said the IRS requires groups applying for 501c3 status to have a board of directors with a minimum of three officers. She, Ms. King and Barbara "Buzz" Clark agreed to serve. A member of the Town Board should also serve on the board of directors, Mr. Kilb said, but Town Board members "want you to manage" the project.

To learn about the pitfalls of getting the site listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the group invited Greg Nissen of Camp Quinipet to speak. Mr. Nissen is in the process of attaining historic registration for the camp's 19th-century Wellesly Hall and has also applied for a state grant to restore the building.

Ms. Clark asked, "If we do go through with the registry, what restrictions will there be?"

Mr. Nissen explained that the Department of Interior standard for the National Registry of Historic Places is "not at all restrictive" -- only sites designated historic landmarks by local governments face burdensome restrictions, he asserted. He warned, however, that should the group apply for state grants in addition to seeking the registration, there may be strings attached. "If you accept state money, you have to enter into a historic covenant" that may restrict future building use and guarantee public access.

"Our concern is we want to use sustainable technology," Ms. King said, explaining that the group hopes to power the old house with solar panels and possibly a windmill -- "green" technologies that may not visually fit into an historic setting. Committee member Mike Laspia commented that government agencies often find the use of sustainable energy attractive in a grant application.

"If you're only listing on the Historic Register, you can put up solar panels and windmills as much as you want," Mr. Nissen concluded.

He suggested that there's "not too much to the historic registration application" and emphasized that the registration is intended to commemorate "not the building but the whole story that the property tells." He offered his assistance in completing the application and gave the committee names of state contacts who will process the applications.