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TER ISLAND • VILLAGE OF DERING HARBOR

## Who pays for Taylor's Island shore repairs?

**Town Hall** | Debate continues on dipping into \$300K waterways fund

BY CARA LORIZ | EDITOR

It's time for the town to put its money where its mouth is on Taylor's Island.

That was the message from Taylor's Island Preservation Committee Co-chair P.A.T. Hunt after a discussion at Tuesday's Town Board work session on how much of the town's waterways funds would be used to pay for a \$120,000 bulkhead replacement project needed to protect the Coecles Harbor island from shoreline erosion.

In late 2008, Ms. Hunt's committee secured a Department of Environmental Conservation permit to rebuild the bulkhead and remove some of the deteriorating concrete seawall for restoration as a kayak landing area; the town approved a wetlands permit for the project in December.

While the clock ticks on bidding, contracting and performing the work authorized by the permits, which are good for two to five years, Ms. Hunt is trying to secure funding for the repairs, planned for completion prior to any significant restoration work on the island's Smith-Taylor cabin, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Earlier this year, her efforts to attract federal stimulus money got a lukewarm reception from the town, and no town funds are earmarked in the austere 2009 budget for the shoreline project.

But some of the town's accounts have been growing for years. Mooring fees collected from boaters using the town's bay bottoms to anchor their vessels have accumulated to the tune of \$300,000 — that's the number Waterways Management Advisory Council (WMAC) Chairman John Needham men-

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REPORTER FILE PHOTO

This aerial photo from 2006 shows the island's "toppled over" concrete seawall, as P.A.T. Hunt describes it. The repair work was listed as the number one parks priority in 2007 but the town continues to debate how to pay for it.

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tioned Tuesday.

So why not use money from the waterways fund to preserve the shoreline of town-owned Taylor's Island?

"We respect the Taylor's Island project and want to be supportive of it," Mr. Needham said, referring to the WMAC. "But we don't want the waterways fund to become a waterfront fund."

On Monday night, the committee heard Ms. Hunt's request for funding, which she reiterated at Tuesday's Town Board work session.

"I said it last night. We're looking to the town to care for this property they've owned since 1997," she said, referring to the date when the town received the island as a gift. In 2006, the town adopted a five-year parks master plan listing Taylor's Island, and specifically stabilizing the existing bulkhead, as the top priority for 2007, she noted. "We're 12 years down the road ... We want to restore this jewel in Coecles Harbor."

She said that volunteers at the island have welcomed 454 visitors on "docent days" and that boats land on the island throughout the summer for family picnics or to see the cabin. "People really appreciate this property. I'd like to see the town show appreciation for Mr. Taylor's gift by lending a hand." Mr. Taylor's grave is located on the island near the most threatened part of the shoreline, Ms. Hunt told the Reporter after the meeting.

Chairman Needham explained the WMAC position, "Most everybody's aware of the renovations going on



CARA LORIZ PHOTO

Taylor's Island is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and has belonged to the town since 1997. Plans to tear down the Smith-Taylor cabin were stopped by grass roots supporters who later established the Taylor's Island Foundation.

at Taylor's Island and the work P.A.T. Hunt is doing. It's a very expensive proposition. There is a sizable waterways 'fund.' That fund is that size for a reason. We've come up with simple, inexpensive solutions to problems." He said that the \$300,000 fund is "a nice buffer" for the town should Suffolk County stop funding dredging projects around the Island. County dredging projects on the East End

have been fewer and farther between in recent years.

"Taylor's Island is an extraordinary situation," Mr. Needham continued. "It belongs to the town. It has historical significance, cultural significance, aesthetic significance. It warrants consideration — how do we save this? We took a poll of the members of what their feelings were about a financial commitment." That poll indicated a

low of \$24,000 to a high of \$60,000; two members indicated the need for a project of lesser scope.

Ultimately, the Town Board holds the purse strings on the waterways fund. Councilman Ed Brown, who initiated the Taylor's Island discussion during "around the table" comments at the end of the work session, said that the committee vote averaged to

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\$43,500 without input from two members.

Mr. Brown said that when the island was acquired, it warranted town support. “Here it is 12 years later ... the town has an asset out there that is right now managed by volunteers ... P.A.T. has worked extremely hard. I think she needs to have a little more input here.”

Both Ms. Hunt and Mr. Needham used the town code description of the waterways fund to support their positions. The code calls for the revenues from mooring fees to be applied primarily to administrative costs “and to projects and services associated with the management, protection and enhancement of town waters and town-owned underwater lands.”

Councilman Glenn Waddington commented that “an argument can be made” that “you are protecting the bottom land” through restoring the shoreline of Taylor’s Island. “If that island were washed away, it would probably cover up some of those existing eel bed beds we’re trying to establish.”

Councilwoman Chris Lewis said that an even better case can be made that the project enhances the waterways by providing a destination for kayakers and other boaters.

Councilman Peter Reich cautioned that the town owns “about a quarter of a mile worth of other bulkhead,” including structures at Shell Beach and Mabel’s Creek, “most in pretty sad shape.”

Emory Breiner, who also attended

the WMAC meeting, commented, “Some of this seems like deliberate opposition. Some people with moorings don’t want their money spent on it? They got something for their money — part of the town bottom.”

Mr. Needham responded, “Emory, you raise an interesting point. How is that different than when a member of Goat Hill pays a fee to use that course. They expect that money to go into that course.”

Mr. Breiner responded that he didn’t like mooring holders arguing, “Oh, I gave so much money to the town’ as if they didn’t get anything for it.”

Mr. Brown emphasized that although the WMAC did not support fully funding the project, “the waterways people have asked us to put in some money.”

“Ideally I’d love to see the whole project done but whatever we can get done I’d like to get done,” Ms. Hunt said.

Mr. Brown encouraged his colleagues to support Ms. Hunt’s effort and act. “At some point somebody’s got to have the courage to say, ‘let’s help or let’s not,’ — have some answers for this gal every once in a while.”

Supervisor Jim Dougherty commented, “I spend most of my time now making very miserable decisions about parceling out” meager resources. “It’s a tough era.”

Ms. Hunt appealed to the board. “I want your appreciation. I feel that I have it. I need more.”

Mr. Brown asked that Taylor’s Island be placed at the top of next Tuesday’s Town Board agenda.