



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

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THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2009 VOL. 2 NO. 1 WATCH HILL, R.I.

## New use proposed for Fort Mansfield

Near the western tip of Napatree lie the few remaining structures of Fort Mansfield, one of several fortifications built in the late 19th century to defend Long Island Sound. Abandoned as militarily indefensible in the early 20th century, it has deteriorated significantly over the decades as a result of battering winds and water, erosion, neglect, and isolation.

Given the open aspect of the site, with spectacular tri-state views, the Watch Hill Fire District, current owner of the site, and the Watch Hill Conservancy, its Napatree partner, are contemplating future use of the fortifications and site as an observation area for wildlife habitat.

A first step in developing a plan for Fort Mansfield's future use will be written and photographic documentation of the site, including detailed investigations of its historical development as a fortification and preliminary mapping of site features. The two organizations will also evaluate the structural condition of the ruins and ascertain how to make the area safer for visitors. All documentation will be gathered and maintained in collaboration with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission and the Coastal Resources Management Council.

The historic fortifications are in need of stabilization from decay and erosion, both to preserve them as historical artifacts and to ensure safety of visitors to the site. Once they are made stable and safe, some portions may be easily adapted for viewing decks with the addition of interpretive signage.

To find out more about how historic fortifications are being used for educational purposes, Watch Hill Fire District and Conservancy officials visited Rose Island in Newport in October. The island's layers of fortifications date back to the Revolutionary War. Here the Rose Island Lighthouse Foundation has developed interpretive nature trails and viewing stations on the site of historic Fort Hamilton, a late 18th and early 19th century fortification. They are creatively using one of the fort's circular bastions as a birding observation platform, being careful to meet safety codes while disturbing the site as little as possible. Similar to Napatree, Rose Island is an important bird nesting site with scrub and small tree habitat for egrets, oyster catchers, ibis, and other shore birds. Nesting season is in the late spring and early summer. In addition, both are important way stations for migratory birds in the fall.

The Fire District and the Conservancy are acutely aware of the delicate balance between conservation of this fragile natural site and stewardship of the historical structures which remain, mute reminders of an active fort and the people who lived and worked there. Both are committed to maintaining that balance as they investigate future uses for the site. *The Watch Hill Conservator* will keep its readers informed as plans continue to unfold.

[J.Y.]



Fort Mansfield photos: Grant Simmons

## SPRING RITUALS ON THE BEACH

*The avian summer residents of Watch Hill start arriving in Watch Hill in late March.*

The first to be seen are the male piping plovers that fly in from anywhere between North Carolina and Mexico. They will then start to make scrapes in the sand, which will become potential nesting locations for their mates. By mid-April, the males on East Beach will be joined by females and they will start to pair off for the season. The East Beach plovers will start laying their eggs by the end of April, whereas the Napatree plovers will not lay eggs until mid-May. By late May, piping plover chicks should hatch on East Beach. The Napatree chicks will hatch in June, around the time the East Beach chicks learn to fly.

In early April, osprey pairs return to the area from South America. The male will start courting his mate by performing aerial acrobatics and bringing her food or nesting materials. By the end of April, the ospreys will lay their eggs.

Around the full moon in May (on May 8 this year) horseshoe crabs will begin to migrate to Napatree to lay hundreds of tiny green eggs in the sand along the high tide line. Two weeks later, around May 24, the crabs will hatch and the swimming juvenile crabs will be washed out to sea. This ritual will be repeated at the full moons of June and July. [J.R.]



Richard Youngken©

### 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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## Save The Bay addresses Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay conservation

Rebekah Kepple and David Prescott

Save The Bay is undertaking an ambitious program to better understand the complexities of the benthic (bottom) community beneath the waters of Little Narragansett Bay. The ultimate goal is to restore valuable shellfishing grounds and eelgrass beds within these waters. An open system such as Little Narragansett Bay presents issues not common in the region's salt ponds. One concern is the dispersal of spat (young shellfish) to unknown locations in the Bay resulting in questionable monitoring success. This study will take a broad look at the benthic environment and help determine feasible sites for shellfish and eelgrass restoration.

Water quality issues persist in the lower Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay. Elevated levels of bacteria and nutrients continue to cause the degradation of local waters. Nitrogen is a persistent threat to the health of the watershed. Although found naturally in a healthy estuary, too much nitrogen added to the system causes harmful algal blooms, often resulting in fish and shellfish kills due to hypoxic (low oxygen) conditions.

Where does excess nitrogen come from? Wastewater, failing septic systems, and fertilizers are among the top contributors. Excess nitrogen causes marine plants (phytoplankton and other algae) to grow at very fast rates. When these plants die, they settle to the bottom where bacteria break down the algae through decomposition. Decomposition requires large amounts of oxygen to complete the process that can deprive other marine animals of the oxygen they need to thrive.

In order to help clean up the river and the Bay, both the towns of Westerly and Stonington, as well as those towns further upstream, need to work together to address many of the aforementioned issues. It is essential that both state and local governments work cooperatively and collaboratively, regardless of watershed boundaries.

Another natural way to help with the process of cleaning up our local waters involves the restoration of historic shellfish populations. Shellfish are prodigious filter feeders, often having the capability of filtering out gallons of water per day. Adult oysters alone can filter 50 gallons of water per day. Shellfish beds also create notably important habitats, teeming with life. For some creatures, they provide a food source; for others, a place to hide.

Save The Bay will conduct dive surveys this spring to assess substrate conditions, identify present shellfish populations, and document the abundance of predators and macroalgae. Once the assessment has concluded, potential restoration sites will be selected based upon sediment composition, depth, and water quality parameters (such as dissolved oxygen, salinity, nutrient data, light levels, etc.). Other factors that will play a role in site selection include conflicting recreational and commercial uses and navigational safety issues. Based upon the benthic assessment, Save The Bay, working in conjunction with the NOAA Restoration Center and local conservation groups and shellfish commissions, will plan future shellfish restoration projects.

Rebekah Kepple is Outreach Coordinator, South County Coast, Save The Bay.

David Prescott is a South County Coastkeeper.



Photo courtesy Save The Bay

As part of the assessment process, Save The Bay will continue to build upon its growing database of water quality data. Save The Bay's South County Coastkeeper program recently completed its first full water quality monitoring season in the lower Pawcatuck and Little Narragansett Bay. The monitoring schedule is part of a larger state-wide regimen initiated by Watershed Watch, a program of the University of Rhode Island. Save The Bay has partnered with Watershed Watch to analyze data gathered from the river and bay to help determine the health of the system.

Other organizations such as the Watch Hill Conservancy, Salt Ponds Coalition, and Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed have been testing nearby waterways for years. Our collective hope is to create a readily accessible and cohesive database for the South County watershed. Save The Bay's South County Coastkeeper program, initiated in 2007 and with funding from the Forrest and Frances Lattner Foundation, brings advocacy, habitat restoration, and environmental education to the Westerly region. In working with area partners, the local towns, and the community at large, Save The Bay hopes to raise awareness and promote stewardship of this valuable ecosystem.

## Training and volunteer opportunities 2009

If you are interested in helping the Naturalists of the Napatree Point Conservation Area this summer, here are a number of ways that you can volunteer your time and talents to the Watch Hill Conservancy and the Watch Hill Fire District programs.

### Plovers

If you would like to learn more about the piping plover recovery program in Rhode Island, Wendy Edwards, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service piping plover coordinator, invites you to the Kettle Pond Visitors Center in Charlestown on March 21 at 10:00 a.m. For more information contact the Kettle Pond Visitors Center at 364-9124 or email Wendy Edwards at riplovers@yahoo.com.

### Seabird Monitoring

Monitoring dead seabirds can provide important insights into the health of our oceans. To learn more about the monitoring activities, join a volunteer training session offered by the Seabird Ecological Assessment Network (SEANET) on April 25 at 2:00 p.m. at the Watch Hill Fire House. For information on the SEANET program, please contact Dr. Julie Ellis at julie.ellis@tufts.edu or (508) 887-4933, or visit the SEANET website at <http://www.tufts.edu/vet/seanet> or their blog at <http://seanetters.worldpress.com>.

For information on the following please contact the Napatree Point Conservation Area Naturalists at [napatreenaturalist@live.com](mailto:napatreenaturalist@live.com) or call 401-439-9891.

### Live Bird Count

If you are an avid birder, whether experienced or not, consider assisting in the collection of live bird data. Birders are needed to help the Naturalists track the species and numbers of birds that utilize the rich natural resources of Napatree Point.

### Monitoring Horseshoe Crabs

Due to the role of the horseshoe crabs in the survival of shorebird populations on Napatree and elsewhere, it is important to monitor their populations. Several volunteers are needed to assist with monitoring and tagging.

### Teaching children

Teaching children offers great rewards. Napatree Point Investigators program seeks interested adults to assist with supervision. The Investigators walk the beach on both sides of Napatree and use nets to catch and study various types of fish, and crustaceans. Volunteers do not need to have a scientific background.

**The Naturalists have a long list of management activities that need volunteer support on the beach this summer**, including monitoring water quality and the wildlife, installing dune fencing, monitoring dune systems, and cleaning up trash. [J.R.]

## Save the Dates

**Saturday, March 21**, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Piping Plover Training, Kettle Pond Visitors Center, Charlestown, 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. For more information contact the Kettle Pond Visitors Center at 364-9124 or email Wendy Edwards at riplovers@yahoo.com.

**Saturday, March 21**, 6th Annual Rhode Island Land & Water Conservation Summit, URI Memorial Union, Kingston Campus, 7:45 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. For information: <http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org/summit.htm>

**Saturday, March 28**, Napatree Point Clean-up. Volunteers will meet at the entrance to the Napatree Point Conservation Area at 9:00 a.m. For details and to sign up, call (401) 439-9891 or email [napatreenaturalist@live.com](mailto:napatreenaturalist@live.com).

**Tuesday, April 7**, Horseshoe crab information/training session. Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center, Mystic, 7 p.m. For more information, contact the DPNC at [infor@dpnc.org](mailto:infor@dpnc.org) or (860)-536-2983.

**Friday, April 10**, Nature walk with naturalists from the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center and Napatree Point Conservation Area. Meet in Watch Hill at the entrance to the Napatree Point Conservation Area. The focus of the walk will be the shorebirds migrating through or settling into the area. 1:00 p.m.

**Saturday, April 25**, SEANET volunteer training, Watch Hill Fire District Fire House 2:00 p.m. For information, contact Dr. Julie Ellis at [julie.ellis@tufts.edu](mailto:julie.ellis@tufts.edu) or (508) 887-4933.

**Saturday, May 16**, Saturday morning family walk program begins, for individuals of all ages who are interested in the outdoors. Meet in Watch Hill at the entrance to the Napatree Point Conservation Area. 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m., every Saturday through September 12.

**Sunday, June 21**, Summer solstice beach walk will focus on the horseshoe crabs and their mating ritual. Meet in Watch Hill at the entrance to the Napatree Point Conservation Area. 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

**Saturday, June 27**, Conservancy Annual Gala, Misquamicut Club Beach Club, Fort Road, Watch Hill, 6 - 9:00 p.m. For information check [www.thewatchhillconservancy.org](http://www.thewatchhillconservancy.org) or call (401) 348-6540.

**Tuesday, July 7**, Napatree Point Investigator Program begins. Tuesday and Thursday mornings through August 27. Registration required. 8:30 - 11:30 a.m.

**Saturday, August 8**, Watch Hill Conservancy Annual Meeting, The Misquamicut (Golf) Club, 60 Oceanview Highway, 10:00 a.m. Speaker: Trudy Cox, Executive Director, Preservation Society of Newport County.

## UPDATE ON WIND POWER

On January 8, Governor Carcieri announced that he had signed an agreement with Deepwater Wind Rhode Island, a New Jersey-based firm, advancing the planning process for the development of a wind farm off the Rhode Island coast. With construction expected to begin by late next year, a key question remains: where?

As the state and Deepwater Wind work out the details of terms and conditions of the business end of things, Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Management Council will be developing a zoning plan for off-shore waters, a process which will help to determine the appropriate site for the construction of wind turbines within an Ocean Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). Rhode Island will be the first state to zone its waters, a process that will be key, not only to siting a wind farm, but to protecting fishing grounds, marine and bird habitats, transportation and navigation routes, and more. The SAMP will specify management goals, recommend policy, and reflect the contributions of the scientific community, state, local, and regional government agencies, and community groups.

The waters off Napatree are within the proposed Ocean SAMP boundaries; *The Watch Hill Conservator* will be following this process and continue to keep its readers informed. [J.Y.]

## 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: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:  
THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY  
222 Watch Hill Road  
Watch Hill, R.I. 02891

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.



## Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan

Chaplin B. Barnes

For the past three years, the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, appointed by the Westerly Town Council in late 2005, has met to update the Town's last Comprehensive Plan, prepared in 1991 and adopted in 1992, and to prepare a new Plan.

In this connection, readers may recall that, in looking forward to the preparation of the new Westerly Plan, the Conservancy and the Watch Hill Fire District developed a strategic five-year plan, *Watch Hill Vision 2012*, which presented the District's views on a wide range of planning issues affecting Watch Hill. That strategic plan, approved by the District Council in September 2007, was subsequently submitted to the Comprehensive Plan Committee, as a guide to its deliberations.

A Comprehensive Plan, which under the state's Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, is required to be adopted by each city and town, and updated every five years, provides the basis for rational decision-making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality. According to the statute, it is to be "a definition of goals and policies relative to the distribution of future land uses, both public and private, and it should form the basis for land use decisions to guide the overall physical, economic, and social development of the municipality." As such, a municipality's Comprehensive Plan affects all aspects of its development and operation.

Specific elements required to be considered in a municipality's plan are enumerated in the statute: goals and policies; land use; housing; economic development; natural and cultural resources; services and facilities; open space and recreation; and circulation (i.e. traffic and transportation). Goals are to be identified for each of these elements, together with specific objectives and action items for implementation.

The 14-member Citizens Advisory Committee includes a broad spectrum of the Westerly community, including three members of the Town Council, members of the Finance, Planning, and Zoning Boards, and representatives of a variety of private organizations and interests; Conservancy Executive Director Chaplin B. Barnes is a member. Ex officio members of the Committee are the Town Planner, Assistant Planner, Zoning Official, Town Manager, and Town Assessor. A private consultant also advises and supports the Committee.

The Committee, whose bi-weekly meetings are open to the public and at which the public is invited to speak, has sought public input through a number of different approaches. At the beginning of the process, the Committee and its consultant held Vision Sessions with Town department heads. There followed five focus group meetings and two rounds of Interactive Public Workshops. The first round of workshops focused on the identification of local issues and the second addressed goals and objectives developed by the Committee. Interviews were scheduled with elected and appointed public officials, state and local leaders, and other citizens. Further information was gleaned from a Community Survey mailed to a randomly selected representative number of Westerly households. A volume of correspondence was also received.

At the July 2008 Public Forum, the Committee presented its "Vision" and 10 Goals and Objectives. As stated:

"The Vision of the Town of Westerly is to preserve Westerly's quality of life for all generations as a friendly and safe community with a distinctive heritage, extraordinary cultural and natural resources and fiscally-sound government."

The 10 Goals, intended to be broad, overarching, umbrella statements were as follows:

**Goal 1:** Protect and enhance Westerly's **natural resources** including open space, the river and shoreline, wildlife habitat, and watersheds, for purposes of future enjoyment, recreation and assurance of sustainable water supply.

**Goal 2:** Promote **transportation** strategies that ensure the safe and efficient flow of traffic within Westerly to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.

**Goal 3:** Pursue development of Westerly's strategic geographic location and extraordinary **transportation assets** – its rail station, airport and river – as focal points for revitalization and economic development, in balance with the needs of the affected neighborhoods.

**Goal 4:** Ensure **economic development** strategies are focused on helping locally-owned business prosper and encourage entrepreneurial activities.

**Goal 5:** Encourage a broad range of **housing** options that meet the needs of all income and age levels and allow citizens to live in, work, retire and contribute to the community.

**Goal 6:** Support an **infrastructure** that balances growth and development with conservation, specifically as related to water, wastewater treatment, energy and communications.

**Goal 7:** Preserve the **unique character and heritage** of Westerly, the diversity of its historic settlements, and aesthetic qualities of residential and commercial development consistent with our history and culture.

**Goal 8:** Balance the sometimes competing aspects of Westerly as a resort community comprised of four key elements: seasonal homes and residents; a year-round residential community; a short-term tourist destination; and a regional service and retail center.

**Goal 9:** Ensure **institutions** critical to Westerly's future growth, safety and prosperity are generously supported and sustained.

**Goal 10:** Encourage **regional solutions** that take advantage of opportunities to improve economic competitiveness, infrastructure, transportation, communications and emergency preparedness.

Each of these goals has its own set of Objectives and Actions.

Elements of the new Comprehensive Plan which will be particularly welcome to the shoreline community are its recommendations as to the protection of historic and cultural resources and the natural environment, and its various references to protection of the shoreline, the salt ponds, the Pawcatuck River, and greenspace.

Also gratifying will be the Plan's objective "to respect and support the special character and viewpoints of Westerly's constituent neighborhoods."

The draft new Comprehensive Plan also recommends that other Historic Districts in Westerly emulate Watch Hill's recently adopted Bay Street architectural design standards (approved by the Town at the initiative of the Conservancy), by enacting similar legislation in their historic neighborhoods.

As the three-year process draws to a close, the Committee is currently refining its recommendations and preparing the new Comprehensive Plan. After a final public forum, scheduled for Saturday, March 7, 9 a.m., Henry J. Nardone Conference Center, Westerly Hospital, the Plan will be submitted, before summer, to the Westerly Planning Board and Town Council, for their approval. Following Town action, the Plan must receive final approval from the Rhode Island Division of Planning. [C.B.B.]

## Piping plover nesting in Watch Hill

Julia Royster

Piping plovers have been nesting on the beaches of Watch Hill since at least the 1920s, according to journals from Harry S. Hathaway, Rhode Island's preeminent field ornithologist of the time. After the hurricane of 1938, populations increased in Watch Hill due to the availability of newly created habitat, according to Christopher Raithel, Principal Wildlife Biologist with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). Raithel has observed piping plovers nesting on both East Beach and Napatree since he started with RIDEM in 1979.

The plovers have been afforded federal protection under the Endangered Species Act since December 1985 when they were added to the Endangered Species List as a federally threatened species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service started partnering with local land owners in Watch Hill to manage the piping plover populations in 1992. Since that time,



East Beach has fledged chicks (i.e. surviving to the stage where they can fly) every year. While the populations have fluctuated on the various beaches where the birds nest, over the past five years, East Beach has been the most productive beach in Rhode Island. In 2008 a total of 68 chicks hatched there and 47 of those fledged. Napatree, on the other hand, has been struggling with low productivity in recent years.

Prior to the 2008 season, 2005 was the last time piping plover chicks fledged on Napatree. In 2006 and 2007, tidal overwash and predation claimed both nests and hatched chicks. In 2008, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Piping Plover Coordinator Wendy Edwards recorded that two-thirds of the nests on Napatree were predated and one-third hatched, and of the eight chicks that hatched, half of them were lost to predators, some of which were likely gulls.

Edwards believes that having the Naturalists of Napatree Point Conservation Area on the beach during the nesting season has helped improve the success rate of the chicks on Napatree. Edwards asserts that "increasing education is one of the most useful tactics to help with plover recovery." Education programs not only teach visitors about plover biology, but also about how humans and their pets can adversely impact the plover population. According to Edwards, "the more piping plover volunteers we have on the beach to provide education about plover biology and protect the plover nests, the better off the piping plovers will be."

While her team tracks both Napatree and East Beach plover populations, Edwards has typically seen higher rates of public use on Napatree than on East Beach. According to Edwards, "if the public is not respectful of the closed nesting areas, the piping plovers are more likely to hop on and off of their eggs." Members of both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff and The Napatree Point Conservation Area staff observed people walking through the closed areas during the 2008 season and helped educate visitors as to the impact they were having. Studies have noted that the average piping plover will leave its nest when a person comes within 177 feet of it; some will leave if an individual comes even as close as 984 feet. Dogs as far away as 328 feet of a nest have been shown to cause the birds to leave their nests, leaving the eggs untended. When nests are untended, eggs can get either too cold or too hot and may fail to hatch, and predators are provided an opportunity to strike.

Edwards identified food left on the beach and the feeding of predators, such as gulls, as contributing factors to plover predation. "Leaving food on the beach can attract predators and feeding the gulls keeps an active predator of plover eggs and chicks near the plover nesting sites." Additionally, Edwards noted that "leaving dog 'poop' on the beach is another factor leading to predation," as dog waste tends to attract other animals. It is therefore important to the success of the piping plovers on all beaches that dogs are kept on leashes during the hours they are permitted on the beach during the summer (May 1 – September 1, 6 p.m. to 8 a.m., under Westerly ordinance), and that their deposits are picked up and removed.

As part of its arsenal to protect the plovers, the Fish and Wildlife Service has traditionally provided special "exclosures" – wire circular fencing with a mesh top – to reduce predator access to nest sites. But Edwards notes that these protective areas also appear to attract predators. The Service will therefore be abandoning their use in 2009 and relying on smart cameras to identify predators. Without the protection of the fencing, Edwards notes that the dog restrictions and visitor awareness will become even more important than in the past. [J.R.]



Photos by Julia Royster

## Watch Hill Style

### Book project underway

Watch Hill is a visual delight, from its iconic Merry-Go-Round to its long stretches of sandy beaches, and from the distinctive profiles of the Lighthouse, the Chapel, and the Ocean House to the many summer cottages on the bluffs and ridges, among the ponds, and along the shore.



Richard Youngken©

The mission of the Watch Hill Conservancy is, in part, to “promote the preservation of the natural and built environments of Watch Hill”. Definition of the architectural character of the community is key to its understanding and appreciation, but can be very elusive. The Conservancy, working with preservation planner Richard Youngken, has spent much of the winter looking closely at some of Watch Hill’s architectural gems, identifying elements that contribute to a “Watch Hill style”.

“Watch Hill has a very distinctive look,” states Youngken. “People familiar with other resort towns along the New England coast could be driven to Watch Hill blindfolded, and after a quick look around them would know right where they were. It’s more than the landscape; it’s also the distinctive character of the architecture.”

Youngken has assembled photos and composed text describing what makes Watch Hill look as it does. From garden gates to porches, windows to roof lines, he inventories various architectural details, then describes how they work together to produce an identifiable style.

“That’s not to say that all houses here look alike,” he explains. “A number of very important architects and builders, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, have taken these elements and used them in their own ways, giving us a range of buildings that are each unique, yet related.”

“It’s that use of detail, texture, form, and landscape that makes Watch Hill’s summer cottages so distinctive,” he continues. “It’s important to understand what makes up that ‘look and feel’ so we can appreciate it and recognize it as something that needs to be preserved, as well as being respected in new design.”

***“In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.”***

Senegalese environmentalist Baba Dioum, quoted by Ronald Lee Fleming, founder and president of the Townscape Institute, at the Annual Meeting of the Watch Hill Conservancy, August 9, 2008

He also comments, “This is a work in progress. Although this year we are producing a book on Watch Hill style, I see this as only a beginning. The research and photography of the architecture and landscape setting will continue. There is simply a treasure trove of material, much of which has been overlooked by architectural historians or other scholars.”

The results of Youngken’s preliminary work will be published by the Conservancy by early summer, illustrated with photographs by Youngken, Deb Stallwood of Wakefield and Wendy Bolster of Puffin Enterprises, who is designing the book. The Conservancy received funds from the Alfred M. Roberts, Jr. Charitable Foundation in support of the project.

[J.Y.]



Richard Youngken©



Photo courtesy Save The Bay

## Erosion and sea level rise: a question of numbers

According to a recent report by the University of Rhode Island’s Sea Grant program, “the majority of Rhode Island’s south shore is eroding over the long term, with an average annual rate of retreat of 1 to 2 feet...Sandy shores can recede as much as 30 feet in a single severe hurricane.”

While some areas, such as Matunuck in South Kingstown, have lost as much as 300 feet of shore to erosion since 1939, others, like Watch Hill’s East Beach, have lost considerably less. But no stretch of shoreline is immune to the risk of erosion and the damaging effects on the ecology, physical property, scenic views, or economy of waterfront communities. Erosion rates may be rather predictable, but a single storm can destroy a barrier beach, forever altering the direction of water flow and intensity and accelerating the erosion process in adjacent areas.

Debates over sea level rise as a recent result of global warming vs. cyclical patterns of environmental forces will no doubt remain lively, even as we observe, measure, and experience the changes in the shoreline. Regardless of the cause, communities and town, state, and federal agencies are working together to research causes and ways to mitigate the effects, and to plan development and infrastructure with the numbers in mind. The results of their research and planning efforts are voluminous, and revised regularly. While the *Conservator* will strive to keep its readers informed, the following sites provide detailed and important information:

- The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council: shoreline change maps and Special Area Management Plans for Rhode Island’s south coast can be viewed at <http://www.crmc.state.ri.us/maps/shoreline.html>
- [tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends](http://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends): for graphs of sea level data for coastal locations around the country.
- The University of Rhode Island Sea Grant Program: Articles on coastal erosion and sea level rise can be found at [seagrant.gso.uri.edu/factsheets](http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/factsheets) [J.Y.]



Richard Youngken©

## UPDATE: WATCH HILL UNDERGROUND UTILITY PROJECT – JANUARY 2009

Ruven Liebhaber

Since the Watch Hill Conservator last reported (August, 2008) on the Conservancy’s initiative to remove and relocate underground the overhead utility lines in the Watch Hill village area, major strides have been made. As previously announced, the objective of the project is to beautify the core area of Watch Hill and to buffer it from frequent storm-related outages. The project area is bounded roughly by Bay Street, Fort Road, Larkin Road, Bluff Avenue, and Plimpton Road. Detailed planning is underway, with full plans due to be complete by June.

Assuming funding is in place (an estimated \$3.5 million for Phase One, which includes Bay Street, Fort Road, and part of Larkin Road), construction of that portion of the project could begin in September.

Last summer and fall all of the utility services in the entire two-phase project area were surveyed by Cherenzia Associates, civil engineers. In total there are 73 utility poles, serving 39 residences and 30 commercial buildings, some including condominiums. Existing and future utility supply requirements were determined, building by building, for each unit served. With this information, National Grid prepared an initial design for the underground routing of electrical services. Locations for pad-mounted transformers were proposed. Conservancy committee members Chaplin Barnes and Grant Simmons (the latter, also Park Commissioner of the Watch Hill Fire District), and Ruven Liebhaber (Project Development Manager), reviewed the locations for efficient and aesthetic placement. Property owners were consulted about easements for the routing and equipment. In all, when the 35 poles are removed in Phase One, there will be only nine transformers and no overhead wires.

Currently, National Grid is completing the electrical design work. Verizon and Cox Communications are beginning to design their routings, which generally will follow National Grid’s. Lines will be buried all the way to the electric meter at each residence and commercial structure. Landscaping and roadways disturbed by the construction will be fully restored. Cherenzia will coordinate all of the design plans and prepare submission to the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) for regulatory approval; a preliminary review has already been successfully completed.

A determination as to the timing of construction will be made in early summer.