

New Shoreham Town Council Meeting
w/ RI Rep. Spears, RI Senator DiMario, and Town Lobbyists from Mayfourth
Town Hall, 16 Old Town Road, Block Island
Wednesday, April 23, 2025
3:00 PM

Present: First Warden Keith Stover, Second Warden Nancy Dodge, Town Council members William McCombe, and Margaret O'Neill. Also present were Interim Town Manager Amy Land, via Zoom RI Senator Alana DiMario, RI Representative Tina Spears, Town Lobbyists Rick McAuliffe and Jeffrey Taylor and Town Solicitors James Callaghan and Nick Solitro. Town Clerk Millicent Hight was present for the recording of minutes. Town Council member Tristan Payne was absent.

First Warden Stover called the meeting to order at 3:01 p.m.

1. Discuss, act and receive report on 2025 legislative agenda Representative Spears, RI Senator DiMario and Town Lobbyists:

a. Status of current bills:

i. Local property tax relief

Interim Town Manager Land noted that New Shoreham has requested enabling legislation, House bill 6090, to allow property tax relief to be granted to homeowners that provide year-round housing. Jeffrey Taylor noted that the bill was heard last night in Committee and it was well received. The Senate bill has not yet been submitted. Senator DiMario explained that it will be included in the next round of bill submissions.

ii. Landing Fee

It was noted that the Landing Fee legislation was submitted to the Senate with the old resolution requesting a \$1.75 landing fee instead of the revised \$1.00 fee. The House bill was submitted under the revised resolution requesting a Landing Fee of \$1.00. Jeffrey Taylor suggested having a Town representative attend the hearings.

iii. School Bond

The school bond legislation has received no opposition, and it has been referred to the House Finance Committee. Approval is expected on both Senate and House bills from the respective Committees within the next few weeks.

iv. Water District – limiting obligations to Water District only

The water district bill, limiting the obligation to provide water to those in the district only, has been presented before Committee at which concerns have been raised. There has been opposition from the Rhode Island Builders Association stating that there is already legislation that lets a Water Resource Board, through hearings, have the ability to deny applications for specific cause. Jamestown, who was originally included in the bill, has been removed, which is beneficial, as there is litigation pending regarding the issue in Jamestown.

Ms. Land stated that the current legislation sets forth a standard which New Shoreham could never meet. She explained that the practical and financial implications of providing water throughout the island would be untenable. Additionally, she noted that the language is contradictory to and undermines New Shoreham's Water District enabling legislation. Mr. Stover stated that the proposed bill addresses fiscal stability and risk mitigation.

b. Non-owner occupied property tax act

Mr. McCombe stated that the non-owner occupied property tax act would have a very big impact on the Island. Representative Spears stated that the State is looking to raise money to cover the \$½ billion shortfall. She stated that she would advocate for the additional tax to go back to the Town. It was noted that the League of City and Town's have supported the bill, though advocating for the funds to go into services that support municipalities.

It was noted that the Town opposes the bill for the following reasons:

- Against the state taking a bite of the local property tax.
- Opens a new precedent allowing the state to levy property taxes.
- The Island community is made of many second homeowners who volunteer their time and energy for the Town and are very important to the economy.

Ms. Dodge stated that she was surprised to have the bill introduced, by the Town's representatives, without communication to the Town, when it targets the Block Island community.

Mr. McCombe stated that he is in favor of opposing the legislation. The Council concurred.

c. Hotel tax as it pertains to short-term rentals

Rick McAuliff reported that there are a number of bills adding the hotel tax to short-term rentals. He noted that he was afraid that the State will take the tax and not send it back to the municipalities. Discussion ensued.

Rick McAuliff noted that Middletown has submitted a bill for enabling legislation to allow municipalities to increase the local hotel tax up to 2% by local ordinance, with the tax going back to the municipality.

d. Housing initiative: Enabling legislation allowing a 2% tax on property sales on amounts over \$900,000 to be maintained by the municipality, restricted to affordable housing

The housing initiative bill is being held for further study.

e. School funding

Mr. Stover stated that basing state funding for the school on a per capita basis absolutely does not support the Town and there should be some baseline funding plan implemented.

Mr. McAuliff stated that following regarding additional items:

- A call between Cindy Pappas of the Block Island Housing Board and RI Housing was held discussing the uniqueness of Block Island when it comes to median

income, the cost of living and the census records. RI Housing has a site visit planned in May or early June.

- Senator Reed is still sorting out the availability of appropriations funding. House appropriations appear to be stopped for non-profits but still may be available to municipalities. Senate funding may be capped by project at 15 to 20 projects per Senator.

Ms. Dodge moved to adjourn at 4:10 p.m. The motion was seconded by Mr. McCombe and it carried.

Ayes: 4 (Stover, Dodge, McCombe, O'Neill) Nays: 0 Absent: 1 (Payne)

Millicent Hight, MMC
Town Clerk

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