

NEWS from Mill Cove Conservancy

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BEGINNING THE THIRD YEAR

In helping MCC prepare for the March 16 Appeal before the Warwick Zoning Board new board member Jan Reitsma reviewed all MCC documents. He then wrote this brief summary of our position that captures what we are about wonderfully.

The Mill Cove Conservancy (MCC) seeks to preserve the historic, cultural and environmental qualities of the Mill Cove neighborhood, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan adopted by the City of Warwick. Through cooperation with responsible agencies and officials, we want to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan and related regulations are implemented and enforced so as to provide adequate protection of public safety (especially from storm damage), the environment (especially from erosion, runoff and pollution), the character of our neighborhood (from overly dense or oversized development) and the fiscal health of both the neighborhood and the City (from unnecessary fiscal impacts relating to flood management and/or cleanup of pollution).

The MCC is not anti-development, nor interested in making life difficult for people trying to use and enjoy their property. We are trying to make sure that the qualities that attract people to our neighborhood will be there for future generations to enjoy. This cannot be done unless we are affirmative in protecting these qualities and, at the very least, apply and enforce regulations that were adopted for that purpose.

In recent years, several residential developments, specifically foundations, have received local approval even though they do not appear to actually meet common-sense, minimum requirements that would protect the dwellings from significant storm damage, such as has been incurred during past hurricanes. Inadequacies include foundations on slabs instead of pilings, depth of foundations well short of the frost line, inability to either withstand or accommodate storm surge, etc. In addition, it seems that not enough attention is being given to storm water impacts

from the increase in impervious area near the shore.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency defers to local government and is reluctant to override its decisions. It has clearly indicated, however, that it agrees that more aggressive flood protection is needed, both in the review of individual applications, and through proactive hazard mitigation planning. We believe that the City has fallen behind in this regard and is allowing development to occur in a manner that is contrary to the provisions of Comprehensive Plan and to the spirit, if not the letter, of applicable federal, state and local regulations.

We are concerned that failure to enforce the rules allows development to "cheapen" to the point that it can rapidly fill in our remaining open space, encroach too closely onto the shore, reduce public access, interfere with the dynamic barrier beach and other coastal processes that define this special area, and compromise efforts to restore water quality in Mill Cove and its tributaries such as Buckeye Brook. For this reason, we have no choice but to challenge decisions we believe fail to provide the protections that we as citizens have a right to expect. We are hopeful that we can sit down in the near future with City officials and others to address our concerns in a more proactive manner.

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WELCOME TO THE BOARD

**Laura Conlin
Ginny Leslie
Jan Reitsma**

**AND SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE BOARD
Wenley Ferguson**

**AND SCHOOL ONE INTERN
Kaytlin Kincaid**

These folks have a wealth of experience to bring to our work, and we are delighted to have them on board!

MCC STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*We work to build the Mill Cove Neighborhood.
We work to preserve the environment.
We work to build within Federal and State Regulations*

WHAT WE ASK WARWICK TO DO:

At the March 16 appeal, we asked that Warwick City administrators implement these changes in City practice:

1. *Clear guidelines to ensure effective City approval and monitoring of the designs and construction of foundations in V zones*
2. *A proactive Warwick plan to reduce the National Flood Insurance premiums paid by Warwick citizens.*
3. *Clear guidelines to ensure that the decisions of the Building Official, the Building Department and the Zoning Board are consistent with Warwick's Comprehensive Plan.*
4. *Clear procedures to support citizen input to the City's decisions related to development in residential neighborhoods.*

WHAT TRIGGERED THIS EXTRAORDINARY APPEAL BY MCC?

Last November, members of MCC became concerned about the design of many new foundations around and near Mill Cove that, to a layman's eye, did not look like they were built to withstand the hurricane waves that have twice in the past century destroyed buildings on Conimicut Point. MCC hired Scott Tezak, a nationally recognized structural engineer who specializes in disaster damage, to look at this. He determined that our concern was legitimate, because the foundations he examined did not meet the requirements well.

During this investigation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which sets the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) guidelines, including requirements for foundation design, conducted a limited examination and concluded that the foundations they considered met *minimum* requirements. This meant the City would not have to take extraordinary steps in regard to the foundations already constructed. **BUT**, the same review led FEMA to strongly urge Warwick to be much more careful in reviewing and inspecting foundations in the Velocity zone in the future and to not allow what they have allowed in the past.

REDUCE FLOOD INSURANCE PREMIUMS

Importantly, we found during this investigation that, if Warwick goes beyond merely meeting FEMA's minimum requirements, Warwick citizens will reap a tremendous bonus. Federal flood insurance premiums paid by Warwick residents can be reduced by up to 45%.

Warwick's 1,718 flood insurance policy holders pay nearly \$1.2 million on property worth \$220 million (before the reassessment!). This places

Warwick in the top five of New England coastal cities for insurance. Yet, Warwick is not even among the 50 New England cities (three in Rhode Island!) that are working to decrease their risk and the premiums paid by their citizens, even though FEMA made a \$250,000 grant to Warwick for that purpose.

Because of Warwick's overall poor record, Warwick citizens must pay the highest level National Flood Insurance rates possible. And more important than the savings is the lack of participation increases Warwick's risk of casualties and property damage from a storm disaster!

When Warwick reforms its permitting practices and begins to take other proactive, planned steps to reduce the risk faced from flooding, premiums WILL go down. We ask you to join our urgent request to Warwick officials to do whatever they can to make Warwick less damage prone and to reduce the premiums of those insured by federal programs. Good preservation of our lives and property is certainly part of good conservation!

You will find a form letter on our website (www.millcove.org) that will make it easy for you to contact Mayor Scott Avedisian and the Councilperson from your ward. Send it now.

SOME GOOD NEWS

In mid-March The Mill Cove Conservancy received a \$5,000 grant from The Rhode Island Foundation to help defray the costs of our investigation of foundation construction on Conimicut Point and Mill Cove. The Foundation recognized the value of raising public awareness to the problem of building improper foundations in an area of Warwick that experiences severe damage from major hurricanes. A grateful thank-you to The Rhode Island Foundation for their support of our work.

JOIN NOW

Mill Cove Conservancy is a completely voluntary organization. Your yearly dues and contributions make our work possible. Dues are **ONLY \$10 per individual—\$20 per family**. Make your tax deductible check payable to Mill Cove Conservancy. Mail to Rick Young, MCC Treasurer, 41 Spadina Avenue, Warwick RI

A SPECIAL THANKS TO

Ed Azevedo for baking the delicious birthday cake, beautifully decorated with the Conimicut Point Lighthouse, for the celebration of MCC's birthday! It was very much appreciated by all!

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