

## Planning Board tours site at center of Pine Point dispute



Judy Shirk, a Pine Point resident, stands on Depot Street facing the Lighthouse Inn at Pine Point in Scarborough. Behind her is the inn's current parking strip. Shirk and other residents are opposed to the town's plan to swap Depot Street with the inn for its parking strip. The inn wants its parking closer to the building and the town wants to turn the strip into public beach access. (Staff photo by Tess Nacelewicz)

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**By Tess Nacelewicz**

A bitter wind swept over Scarborough Planning Board members as they stepped over piles of snow on Monday while touring the site of a proposed new parking lot at the Lighthouse Inn at Pine Point.

The bare, wintry scene contrasted with the bustling appearance of the area in the summer, when Depot Street, which runs in front of the inn, is busy with beachgoers and hotel residents.

But Planning Board members said the walk helped them visualize what the proposed new parking lot and adjacent public beach access area that the town plans to construct would look like if the projects were approved.

"I've got a much better perception," said Ronald Mazar, an alternate board member, after touring the site. "For me it's been a big help."

The Planning Board will play a role in both of the related projects, which are the result of a Town Council-approved land swap with the inn that is unpopular with some Pine Point residents. The board will ultimately rule on the inn's parking lot plan while issuing a recommendation to the Town Council on the town's plan for a beach access area, for which a concept plan was unveiled last week.

The parking lot plan will come before the Planning Board for site plan approval at its meeting Monday, Dec. 14, at 7 pm. at Town Hall. The other plan - for the public access area - will be discussed at public forums soon to be scheduled for this month and next.

The Planning Board is required to come up with an advisory opinion on the town plan for beach access - most likely at a board meeting early next year. However, the Town Council has final approval of such municipal building projects, according to Town Planner Dan Bacon.

On Monday, pacing the site alongside the four Planning Board members in attendance was a group of Pine Point residents who bitterly oppose both plans.

The residents object to a land swap approved by the Town Council in July in which the town will trade the paved section of Depot Street running in front of the inn for the inn's parking strip, which currently lies across Depot Street.

Residents contend the swap is unfair to taxpayers, because the town is giving away more land than it's getting. They also don't want to lose historic Depot Street and contend that the swap - which has yet to be finalized - will block water views and restrict public access.

Judy Shirk, a spokeswoman for the Citizens' Research Group, a residents' group contesting the Pine Point land swap, said at the site walk Monday that she and others wanted to question the board about the plans.

However, she said, town planning staff at the site walk told them, "This isn't a question and answer session."

Bacon, who attended the site walk, said that the purpose was not to debate and deliberate.

"It's really so the board has a visual of what's going on," Bacon said. "This is a fact finding."

Residents now hope the board will take their questions on Dec. 14, when the inn's owners, Peter and Nicholas Truman, seek Planning Board approval for their proposed 22-space parking lot.

The parking lot that the Trumans are proposing would be located on what is now Depot Street, which runs right in front of the inn. Currently, the residents of the Trumans' 22-unit inn/condominium building park on a strip of land the Trumans own across Depot Street.

But in the land swap - which Town Manager Tom Hall said could be finalized next week if the Trumans win Planning Board approval for their parking lot plan - the town would give Depot Street to the inn, allowing inn residents to park closer to the building.

In return, the town will get the inn's current parking strip. Supporters of the plan say the town will benefit because that strip can be added to a small, adjacent, kidney-shaped parcel of land the town already owns.

The town plans to combine the strip and the kidney-shaped parcel to create a public beach access area, which as proposed includes a drop-off for cars, a bike rack and other amenities, such as stone benches.

Hall, the town manager, and other town officials formed a task force with a few residents to come up with a concept plan for the new public beach access site. Hall unveiled the tentative plan at a council meeting on Dec. 2.

Pine Point residents have criticized Hall for not making meetings of the task force public. Hall said the task force was not a formal council subcommittee, but simply an advisory group working on a proposal to bring forward to the public for comment.

The proposal now is ready, and Hall stressed that it is only a concept subject to change.

"This is a starting point, as opposed to a finished line," Hall said at the council meeting.

He said the town plans to hold two public forums in the Pine Point neighborhood and a third at Town Hall so the public can view the plan and give feedback.

He said the drawing of the plan will be put up on the wall at the forums and people can make changes on it or even "throw darts" at it if they like. Public input will be incorporated into the final plan, Hall said.

The dates for the public forums this month and next are not yet finalized, but will be soon, Hall said on Monday. He said he hopes the Planning Board will be able to issue an advisory opinion on the plan at its Jan. 12 or Feb. 1 meeting.

He has said he hopes that the project could go to bid in the spring and be completed by the time summer arrives.

"I would like to have it at some basic level up and functioning for the season," Hall said.

The plan is subject to the availability of funding for the project, Hall said. He said some road improvement work slated for Pine Point Road and King Street in the neighborhood is \$30,000 under budget, so it's possible that money could fund the public access plan.

The concept plan shows such features as a drop-off area for two cars at the edge of the public land, and a path winding to the beach. The path would have amenities like a foot-washing area, a bike rack for 20 bicycles and a solar trash compactor. A 4-foot high cedar picket fence would separate the public land from the inn property on one side and an adjacent housing development on the other.

Shirk on Monday said residents have a number of objections to the public access concept plan.

First, she said, she believes the plan is already finalized and the town won't make changes in it. "It's not a concept," Shirk contended.

Among changes she said residents want is 3-foot, open-rail fencing to better preserve views. Residents also believe the drop-off area would lead to traffic jams.

When it comes to the Trumans' plan, among changes that Shirk said residents are advocating is a requirement that the parking for the inn be close to the building, not against the fencing that separates the inn property from the public access portion. Having the parked cars close to the inn would result in less restriction of the public view of the beach and also allow better access for fire trucks, residents say.

They want the Planning Board to hold off on making a decision on the Trumans' parking lot until the board has done the advisory review of the town's public access plan. "The Trumans' site plan review is premature given the required review by the board of the municipal project," the Citizens' Research Group says in a package of materials the group presented to the board.

Corey Fellows, vice chairman of the Planning Board, said the board's purpose in the walk was to look at the Truman property, because that project is what is before the board now. However, he said, it was useful for board members to be able to view the adjacent proposed public access site to get "the full context" of both properties.

Bacon said that under town ordinance, the Planning Board only has the authority to give its opinion regarding municipal and school projects. "The Planning Board acts as an advisory board to the council," Bacon said.

In addition to Mazur and Fellows, the other two Planning Board members at the noon site walk Monday were Anne Littlefield and John Chamberlain.

Fellows said other board members were unable to attend for illness and business reasons.

