

THE WESTERLY SUN

Westerly • Stonington • Chariho • Mystic

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JUST DUCKY



Sun file photo

A good crowd was on hand for the 25th Annual Duck Race last year on the Pawcatuck River Bridge.

Annual Pawcatuck River Duck Race returns April 25 for its 26th year

WESTERLY — It's back: the 20,000-strong flotilla of rubber ducks that draws multitudes to downtown Westerly-Pawcatuck for the festivities of the Ocean Community Chamber Foundation's annual Pawcatuck River Duck Race.

The clock is ticking. The race, in its 26th year, takes place Saturday, April 25. The beloved community tradition draws thousands of spectators each

year and raises vital funds for local programs and initiatives.

A total of 20,000 rubber ducks will "race" down the Pawcatuck River, each tied to a numbered certificate purchased through the chamber and local schools and non-profits. For just \$5, participants receive a chance to win from more than 90 prizes, including a grand prize of a family trip to Disney World or \$2,500 in cash.

The event also features a Corporate Duck Race, where local businesses compete for a \$1,500 cash prize. With only 150 entries available, the race sells out quickly and adds excitement ahead of the main event.

Festivities begin before the race and include food, music and family-friendly activities, making it a full day of fun for all ages.

Sponsorship opportunities are available at a variety of levels, offering businesses visibility while supporting the community cause.

From individual duck sponsorships to premier Tidal Sponsorships, options abound. Ducks can be purchased directly through the Ocean Community Chamber.

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WESTERLY

Proposal for town to take over senior center is part of Westerly's budget

Public hearing on plan is set for tonight

By Gabriel Anthony
URI Community News Lab

WESTERLY — Residents will get a chance to speak on the proposed fiscal year 2026-27 budget, including the town's takeover of the senior citizens center, at tonight's public hearing.

The hearing will begin at 6 p.m. in the council chambers at 45 Broad St. Following the hearing, the council will hold its second budget workshop.

At the first workshop on Thursday, the council approved multiple changes to the town manager's proposed budget, including unanimously accepting the Board of Finance's recommendation for

the town to take over the senior citizens center located at 39 State St. The change is projected to cost the town \$96,528.50.

Westerly has one of only two senior citizens centers in the state that is not operated by the city or municipality, Town Manager Shawn M. Lacey said. The town already owns the building, which is valued at \$1.1 million.

"We are falling very short on the service we're providing our seniors, and this is long overdue for us taking it over for the short dollar amount," Lacey said at the workshop.

The new budget for the center will be \$474,653, but it will generate an estimated \$100,000 in revenue for the town, in addition to the \$180,000 already generated that goes back to funding free

activities, Lacey said. The council also unanimously approved the creation of a new restricted line for the center, which will hold \$13,471.50.

The takeover also will help the town solve its lack of human service programs, Lacey said.

"We have no human service program in town," Lacey said at the workshop. "Nothing. There is nothing. We don't have it. We rely on everyone else to do it, and we have no control over it."

The town could enhance the center's transportation program, as it bought and owns the buses, Lacey said. It may not be able to do the same for the meal program because it is controlled by the state, which concerned council Vice President Mary E. Scialabba.

"Some of the seniors, that's their

only meal," Scialabba said at the workshop. "And they're not allowed to take anything home with them if they can't finish that meal."

The council also approved increases for a handful of subsidies, the largest of which was unanimously given to the Westerly Ambulance Corps, which received an additional \$50,000, bringing its funding to \$250,000.

"To me, to go to \$250,000 or something, it's still a deal for the town," Lacey said at the workshop.

The Ambulance Corps seeks to reduce repeat hospitalizations through a program called Mobile Integrated Health, where paramedics go into citizens' homes to help with medications, wound

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CHARIHO

Bond will call for single elementary school

By Joseph Volpe
Sun staff writer

WOOD RIVER JCT. — After lengthy discussions over the past few months, the Chariho School Committee has authorized bond language that asks district voters to approve building a unified Chariho Elementary school.

The committee passed the measure, 8-2, on Tuesday.

The approved bond language follows the Chariho Act, meaning each town will pay its portion of the bond based on student enrollment, and the one-third split language was not incorporated into the bond. It also means that when the bond is presented to voters in November, it will be based on votes for the district in aggregate, or the total number of votes for and against among the three towns.

Chariho Superintendent Gina Picard said the bond should have no issues getting passed because it adheres to the Chariho Act, and the resolution from the school committee approving it passed by majority vote.

As for what's next, she said a bond package will be created for the General Assembly, and that Rhode Island Reps. Tina Spears and Megan Cotter have confirmed they will be supporting the bond, and that she will be reaching out to state Sens. Victoria Gu and Elaine Morgan very soon. After the General Assembly votes, a question will be drafted for the ballot, approved by the secretary of state, and then presented to voters in November.

The bond language was revised from the version that was circulating around the committee in February, including an increase in the principal amount, going from \$110.2 million to \$116 million. Karen Grande, the lawyer advising the committee on the bond, explained that this uptick came from recommendations by the school committee's consultants, in terms of what can be built and possible reimbursement opportunities under state housing aid regulations.

Another substantive revision included in the passed bond language was the possibility of constructing two buildings for the one unified elementary school, based on geological aspects of the possible location for the school.

"The head architect looked at everything and said what if we did a Pre-K through (grade) 1, and then a grade 2 through 5, and that's where the two buildings on one campus design came up," Administration and Finance Director Gregory Zenion said. "With that being said, you are looking at a bond that gives you options. The reason it went from \$110 to \$116 million is very simple: with the new design, you have more money per square foot for the smaller schools."

The proposed location for where the school would be constructed is the Charlestown Elementary School property, but the district needs to complete all the land studies the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) requires to confirm.

"Where Charlestown Elementary currently resides, the property has a lot of ledge in the back. In order to ensure that we can utilize that land, we had to separate out the structure," Superintendent Gina Picard

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133rd year, No. 199
\$1.50

