

DEVELOPERS HAVE EYE ON AQUIDNECK ISLAND

Local officials support Pa. group's plan to build a 1,500-slip marina village in Portsmouth, R.I.

By Beth Rosenberg
STAFF WRITER

If a proposal by a Pennsylvania-based real estate development group becomes a reality, Portsmouth, R.I., will someday be home to what developers say will be one of the largest marinas in New England.

The O'Neill Properties Group, of King of Prussia, Pa., is looking to build a "world-class" 1,500-slip marina with megayacht capabilities as part of a sweeping plan to develop 5,000 acres

world-class marina here in Portsmouth to attract a wide variety of vessels, [including] megayachts. We plan on making a substantial effort to provide them with all the tools they would need to include this as one of their stops."

The marina proposal is incorporated into a larger Melville Marina Village plan — a section of the West Side master plan — which delineates a water's-edge boating/residential development that would include restaurants and marine-related re-

Portsmouth and Middletown. "It's the primary economic center of the plan — a draw for the whole Northeast."

An analysis indicates that the waiting list for slips in the area exceeds even what would be provided with the new marina, Dolen says. The master plan cites a 2002 Rhode Island Marine Trades Association study that shows that between 1996 and 2002 the state's boat registrations increased 23-percent faster than the rest of New England or the nation.

If approved as it stands, the 1,500-slip marina would be unusually large for the region, experts say. "Fifteen hundred slips is actually a large marina, especially in the Northeast, which doesn't tend to have huge marinas with a lot of slips," says Brooke Fishel of the Washington, D.C.-based Association of Marina Industries.

Mary Ann Edwards, president of the Portsmouth Town Council, says officials in her town wholeheartedly support the plan.

"[Planning, zoning and town council officials are] all very involved and we're very enthused about this plan," says Edwards. "It's going to control the destiny of Portsmouth."

"As far as infrastructure, they're going to require a great deal of water for washing down those megayachts. They're going to have to have, I would think, more than one pumpout station there for the megayachts. That all has to be in the works before this comes to reality," Edwards says. "We're just keeping our eyes on it and we hope that it happens and it brings a lot of business to the town."

"That will keep our taxes down," she says. Edwards says she hopes the mari-

na will be up and running within the next 10 years.

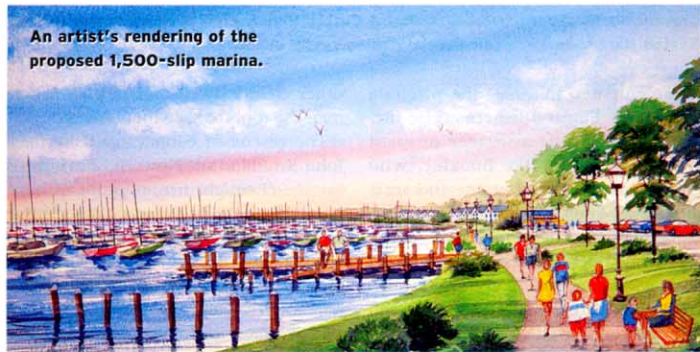
The 350-page master plan promises that the Melville area of Portsmouth "will increasingly be recognized as one of the most important national concentrations of recreational boatbuilding, boat technology and high-end boat services."

"This will be linked to a well-planned marina complex at Weaver Cove that continues the tradition of Narragansett Bay as a boating haven," according to the plan.

Other proposals cited in the plan include: public walkways and open space that would line the cove, the establishment of alternate transportation routes to help quiet congested roads, additional mixed-use and "affordable" housing developments, and a shoreline walking trail along the bay.

This will be O'Neill Properties Group's first foray into marina development, Corridan says, adding that the group intends to work with an experienced marina developer for that portion of the plan. He declined to name the partner. O'Neill Properties Group is developing a 15-acre enclave of the Carnegie Abbey Club on Narragansett Bay into a waterfront condominium tower surrounded by 24 Nantucket-style cottages. Corridan says the O'Neill Properties Group has extensive experience in waterfront development, including "the reuse of used and abused property," such as the area of the proposed marina, which was once owned by the Navy.

"We see this as a vibrant and beautiful marina village on the bay," Corridan says. ■



An artist's rendering of the proposed 1,500-slip marina.

that span nearly 10 miles of the west coast of Aquidneck Island. The plan was announced in November when the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission released its West Side master plan, a two-year study of the island's western shore.

"We are studying the recent build-out of marinas around the world in Spain and in Europe that have all the latest technologies," says Stephen Corridan, a partner in O'Neill Properties Group. "Our plan is to build a state-of-the-art,

tail shops. Marina slips would extend into the cove and feature a convenient docking location for future ferry or water shuttle service. The plan also calls for sport-fishing and competitive-sailing facilities.

The marina, however, is the focal point of the entire project, local officials say. "The marina is a key aspect of the plan," says Tina Dolen, executive director of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission. Aquidneck Island comprises the city of Newport, and the towns of