North Light alternative energy project faces last hurdle

By Olya Evanitsky



The plan to erect a windmill and install solar panels near the North Light — a project in the works for five years that has faced many obstacles — appears to be inching ever closer to realization.

In a meeting of the North Light Commission on Monday, June 6, Vice Chair Robert Gilpin reported that most of the project's local approvals and paperwork requirements have been met and that a permit from the Coastal Resources Management Council is all that's needed to move forward.

The project calls for the construction of an up-wind, horizontal-axis, three-bladed turbine on a 30-foot tower and the installation of a 5-foot-by-10-foot photovoltaic array adjacent to the lighthouse. North Light Commission members and supporters of the project say that the windmill will reduce the fuel needed to run the North Light's generator by 80 percent and that it will reduce air pollution through the use of renewable energy.

The state Department of Environmental Management's Water Quality Certification Program has reviewed the proposal and determined that, as long as its guidelines are followed, the proposed windmill and solar panels will be in compliance with water-quality regulations.

Because the windmill would be located in a coastal zone and is not, by definition, a permitted use, a special exception permit application was filed with the CRMC in April and is under a review that will include a yet-to-be-announced public hearing.

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation, which is providing a $400,000 grant to help rehabilitate the lighthouse, has recommended support of the application. The state Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission also gave its blessing and, in April, submitted a letter to CRMC stating that "as proposed the work will have no adverse effect on the historic character of the North Light."

Based on past experience, Gilpin said he assumes that the CRMC application will take at least until August to get approved.

Upcoming dedication ceremony: On July 5 at noon, a public ceremony will dedicate the North Light's new brick apron as well as two recently installed granite benches. Maureen Sullivan, a resident of New York City, donated one bench to commemorate her fiancé, Derek Sword, who died in the World Trade Center attacks. An inscription on the bench reads, "Sit and enjoy a friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss, for these things are the things I dearly miss." The lighthouse commission purchased a matching bench to commemorate the other lives lost on Sept. 11.