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O'Sullivan's Island in Derby to get fishing pier

By Jean Falbo-Sosnovich, *New Haven Register*

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DERBY >> The city has secured a \$325,000 grant to build a fishing pier at O'Sullivan's Island.

The grant was awarded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on behalf of the Connecticut Housatonic Natural Resource Trustee Council, according to a press release from Mayor Anita Dugatto.

Dugatto said although the pier was previously planned, the project was unable to be approved due to ongoing environmental issues at the site.

The Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG), however, was able to secure the funding after conducting extensive analysis of the soils and groundwater. Based on those studies, NVCOG requested a report on potential public health risk from the Connecticut Department of Public Health (CTDPH). Meg Harvey, epidemiologist with the CTDPH and author of the June 2015 Health Consultation for the site, concluded that, "the available site information indicates that the intended construction and engineering work can proceed as planned in a safe manner."

Working with the Board of Aldermen, NVCOG staff developed the project under the direction of Executive Director Rick Dunne and Dugatto. During construction of the pier, a licensed environmental professional will sample and review conditions of all soils excavated and disturbed to properly manage any potential contamination that is known to exist below the surface layer.

Aldermanic President Art Gerckens said "securing this grant is a fine example of local government working together with other agencies to achieve a positive goal. This is a win for the citizens of Derby and will give our fishermen a better opportunity to land some huge stripers."

Construction of the pier is slated for completion by fall 2016.

"This opportunity, the result of successful collaboration among community partners, brings us one step closer to our goal of restoring recreational use to O'Sullivan's Island," Dugatto said.

The project originally was selected for funding in 2010 under the Housatonic River Restoration program, but was not funded due to an inability to secure environmental clearances.

O'Sullivan's Island is not an actual island but rather a strip of land at the confluence of the Housatonic and Naugatuck rivers, and has been used for fishing, picnics and other passive recreation. It has been the site of Brownfields cleanups and PCB removal.

The site also was former home to a Valley fire training school, where contaminants were found. Parts of the site were used as a toxic dumping ground and in 1983 hundreds of 55-gallon chemical drums were unearthed.

The city closed the site in January 2014 after concerns surfaced about whether the site clean-ups done by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1983 and 2008 removed all the contaminants on the recreational areas. Public access to the grassy areas remains restricted.

Preliminary results of soil tests, released last fall, showed that while low levels of chemical contaminants are present in the surface, they don't pose a threat to public health, according to the state Department of Public Health.

Further testing, however, beyond the surface soil and the groundwater is required.

Dunne said while the state determined the site was safe for casual use, and could be reopened to the public, the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection cannot sign off "because the soil below the surface layer is still heavily contaminated beyond state regulatory standards."

Dunne said construction of the pier will be closely monitored.

"NVCOG will have to closely monitor all digging for the fishing pier and dispose of soils contaminated by PCBs and other contaminants that exceed regulatory standards," he said.

"Beyond this project, the NVCOG continues to develop information to help Derby fully remediate the site to acceptable standards and identify sources of funding to pay for the balance of soil remediation that might allow DEEP to eventually certify the site and lift the Notice of Significant Environmental Hazard hanging over the site since the late 1990s."

Dunne said the current estimate to remove remaining PCBs from the site is estimated to cost between \$1 million and \$2 million, but further testing is required to confirm that estimate.

Dugatto said updates on the project will be available on the NVCOG website at www.nvcogct.org.

URL: <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20150903/osullivans-island-in-derby-to-get-fishing-pier>

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