

JANUARY 19, 2017

Coalition Meets With Governor's Chief Of Staff

On Wednesday, Charlestown Town Council President Virginia Lee and Vice President Julie Carroccia along with Westerly Town Council President Jamie Silvestri and Westerly Councilman Jean Gagnier led a delegation of Charlestown and Westerly residents representing some of the groups impacted by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) plan to a meeting at the State House. The delegation met with:

- Brett Smiley, Governor Raimondo's Chief of Staff
- Lisa Vura-Weis, Deputy Chief of Staff, and
- Gabe Amo from Community Affairs and Outreach

At the conclusion of that meeting, the delegation met with:

- Senior staff in US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse's Providence office, George Carvalho and Karen Bradbury
- Stuart Malec from Congressman Langevin's office

Besides Virginia and Julie, present from Charlestown were:

- Three members of the Narragansett Tribe: Dinalyn Spears, Narragansett Tribal Planner; Lorraine Keyes, and Steven Smith
- Charlestown residents Kim Coulter, owner of Stoney Hill Cattle Farm; Michael Rzewuski, a four+ decade resident of Shumankanuc Hill; Karen Jarret, President of the Charlestown Land Trust; Carla and Russ Ricci, owners of the Amos Green Farm; and Tom Gentz, past Charlestown Town Council President

In addition to Westerly Town Council representation by Jamie and Jean, participants included

- Derrik Kennedy, Westerly Town Manager
- Kelly Presley, Executive Director and Sheila Beattie, Board Chair from the Westerly Land Trust

State Representative Blake Filippi was also in attendance at the meeting with the Governors' staff.

In anticipation of the meeting, Virginia, Julie and other volunteers had prepared a presentation and handouts for the Governor's office (these are linked at the bottom of this page). The FRA's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) fails to identify critical impacts:

- Narragansett tribal land and sacred burial sites
- Hundreds of acres of active farms
- Nearly 1,800 acres of park lands and other conserved open space including the Carter and Grills Preserve
- The Wild and Scenic Pawcatuck River
- The EPA designated sole source aquifer that is the source of drinking water for both towns
- Important wildlife habitat including the USFWS “Great Thicket”
- Three historic sites listed on the historic register
- Private homes
- The environmental justice issue of destroying low and moderate income housing in the villages
- Property contaminated by the United Nuclear Facility and currently used passively in The Nature Conservancy’s Francis Carter Preserve
- Residents’ housing and land value reduction for the next 30-50 years or more

Westerly had additional concerns regarding:

- The safety and integrity of the Town’s main drinking water wells
- Loss of economic development opportunities in the Downtown
- Disruption of one of the Town’s natural water retention ponds
- Loss of recreational greenspace for the community

The delegation’s goal was to bring these deficiencies to the attention of the Governor so that she could be fully aware of the negative impacts in Charlestown and nearby Westerly and Richmond. Keeping the high speed rail in the current right of way will avoid all of these impacts, save the state of Rhode Island millions of taxpayer dollars and still allow for modern high speed rail transportation to link Providence to Boston and New York.

The delegation requested that based on these deficiencies and flawed conclusions in the “Bypass” section of the EIS, the Governor write a letter to the FRA by January 30th requesting removal of the “Old Saybrook to Kenyon Bypass” from the FRA’s EIS and long term plans for the North East Corridor.

The delegation requested that Senators Reed and Whitehouse and Congressman Langevin each write a similar letter to the FRA before January 30th to stop the bypass.

At the meeting, the Narragansett Indian Tribe presented a letter to the Governor opposing the FRA proposed bypass and requesting support from her and each of the RI congressional delegation to *“Keep the railroad on its current right of way. Support the extension of the comment period on the Tier 1 Final EIS to April 1, 2017. Continued consistent communication with the Governor’s Administration as we move forward on this issue.”*

Next

Steps:

Show your support to Stop the Bypass:

- **Write letters to the Governor** and to Senators Reed and Whitehouse and Congressman Langevin requesting they write a letter to FRA to omit the bypass and keep the fast train on the current railroad right of way before Jan 30th.
- **Write to the Federal Railroad Administration** and others before the January 31 deadline.