

Epic journey

Town eyes solar moratorium

Heavy pressure for solar farms prompts concerns

BY TOM KILLIN DALGLISH
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TIVERTON — At the town council's request, the planning board met Tuesday night, October 7 (after this paper went to press) to consider a recommendation about whether or not to impose a moratorium on solar development in town. Whatever the planning board decides to recommend Tuesday, the town council will have the final say on whether or not a moratorium is imposed.

Solar development proposals in Tiverton have become numerous, and sometimes problematic as residents raise questions, and as the state moves ahead with a "model solar ordinance" for implementation by towns state-wide — one that could, at least in part, supersede Tiverton's own ordinance.

"I am surprised at the level of interest in large solar projects," Mr. Hardy said in an interview Saturday. "I never imagined such a level of activity. Some of us are concerned about the effect of so many proposals on prime farmland. And we are concerned about the impact of large solar arrays on extremely important forests, such as holly oak forests."

The talk about imposing a moratorium seems geared to letting things settle down, while a future course of action for the town is plotted out. Legal issues may be involved, especially if a proposal has received initial town approval.

"A moratorium would not affect any project that has submitted an application and the application has been certified by the administrative officer of the planning board," Mr. Hardy said.

Wingover Farm proposal

It's not an academic issue. Master plan approval was voted by the planning board on September 11, for the installation of an 11 megawatt installation — "by all accounts a large system," said the developer, Douglas DeSimone — on 35 acres of a 72 acre farm known as Wingover Farm in South Tiverton. It is the first solar farm to be given master plan

See **SOLAR** Page 5



With help from Lauren Miller-Donnelly of Allens Pond Wildlife Sanctuary, Joli Machado of Westport gently holds a monarch butterfly for tagging.

Patient crew tags migrating monarchs with great care

BY BRUCE BURDETT

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It might seem an exercise in futility for Lauren Miller-Donnelly and her volunteers from Mass. Audubon's Allens Pond Wildlife Sanctuary in Westport.

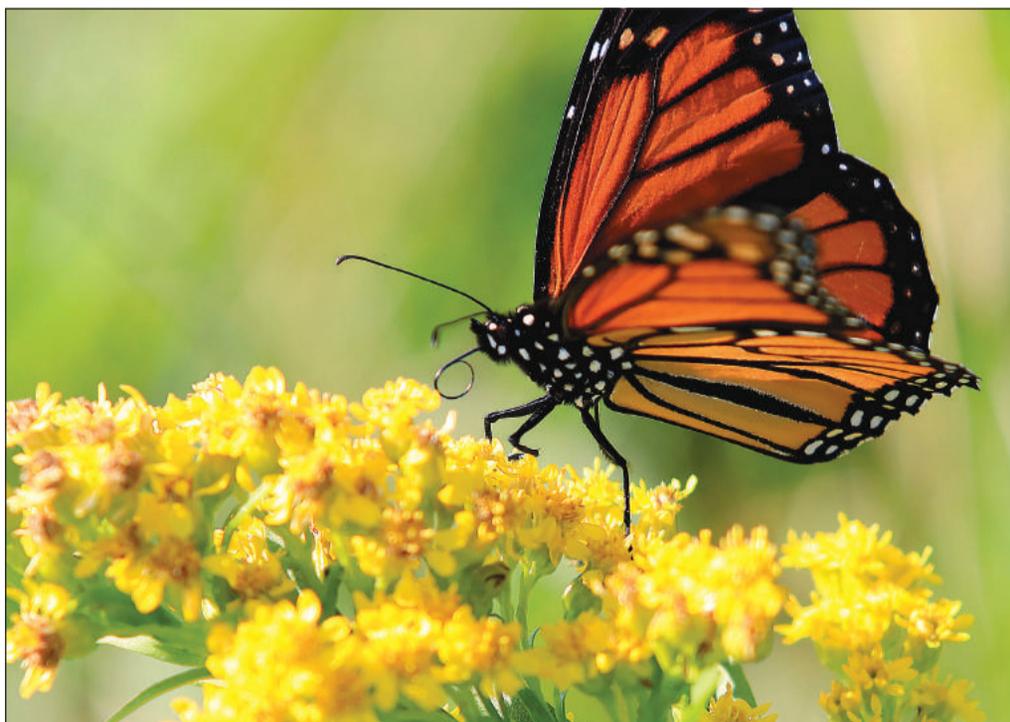
This marks the 12th straight autumn they've been patrolling the south shore — Westport and Dartmouth west to Little Compton — in search of monarch butterflies to tag.

They've managed to tag around 200 per year, probably will do closer to 300 this year, yet not a single one of those tags has ever been retrieved.

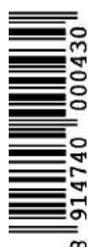
"When that first one is recovered someday, that will be so amazing," she said.

But, "really, I see it as a success one way or another. Doing this helps raise awareness. So many people have been involved over the years and they spread the word

See **BUTTERFLY** Page 3



A monarch butterfly feeds on nectar from goldenrod — fuel for the flight to come.



On the front lines

Chris Herren's groundbreaking program will train officers who handle opioid cases

EAST BAY LIFE



Grinnell's Beach gets a 'sail pavilion'

BY TOM KILLIN DALGLISH
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RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

Shade sails unfurled and mounted over Grinnell's Beach, capping renovation efforts.

TIVERTON — A graceful final touch capped completion of the Grinnell Beach improvements last Wednesday as the shade sail pavilion was fitted with high density polyethylene "sails" that will provide up to 1,500 square feet of shade for the concrete pad installed at the beach.

The "shade sail pavilion" was designed not only for beach goers, but also as an enjoyable spot for people walking or biking along Main Road, said Patricia Hilton, who spearheaded the committee that found the funding for, and organized the effort to renovate Grinnell's Beach.

The pavilion is easily accessible to walkers and bikers along Main Road, and to nearby Coastal Roasters. It was also very important that it be handicapped accessible for anyone with restricted mobility, Ms. Hilton said.

"The beach committee considered a stick-built wooden structure, but comparing costs and especially its location, this polyethylene shade sail pavilion made much more sense," Ms. Hilton said.

Estimates on a similar sized wooden structure were two to three times the cost, and in terms of surviving a significant storm, there really was no comparison. You take down the sails and the posts can withstand significant wind and water.

"The contract cost of the shade sails was \$47,000, although the biggest part of the expense is what you don't see, it's underground," Ms. Hilton said.

"The concrete footings for the posts are enormous, there's about 260 cubic feet of

cement underneath the slab that anchor the posts, and one thing the committee learned is that concrete is really expensive. The structure was funded with the grant money and private funds that the committee raised."

The idea for the beach renovation began with the original community outreach and design work done by the Rogers Williams Community Partnerships Center a few years ago, to convert the gas station site into a municipal park that tied in with Grinnell's Beach, Ms. Hilton said.

"The sails are commercial grade HDPE (High Density Polyethylene) fabric with UV additives," Ms. Hilton said.

"The sail manufacturer is Apollo Sun-guard, based in Sarasota, Florida. It took about two hours for the original installation, which was done by the contract installer," she said. "It takes a little longer the first time that they're installed as the steel cabling system that holds them taught needs to be tensioned. Going forward it should take less than that to put them up and down."

"The fabric and the posts are extremely durable," she said. "The posts are hurricane rated to withstand wind speeds up to 160 mph, the sails are rated to 90 mph. The posts come with a 20 year warranty and the sails, 15 years. They have been installed at

state, local, and federal government facilities, professional sports stadiums, military installations, and outdoor concert venues."

The sails will probably not remain up through the winter, "although they do just that in many other locations," Ms. Hilton said.

"We put them up now because we needed the contractor to do the initial installation and the cable-tensioning. Plus, we wanted everyone to have a chance to see what they looked like," Ms. Hilton said.

"My guess is that the normal season for them will be May through October. Putting the sails away for the winter will only extend their life."

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BUTTERFLY: Team hopes to track long distance flyers

From Page 1

that these beautiful butterflies are struggling throughout their range.

They are indeed in trouble for lots of reasons — herbicides that kill their vital energy snacks (golden rod, clover ...), loss of the milkweed plant which is the only plant on which they lay eggs, bad weather, habitat loss ... the list goes on.

This fall, their tagging trips have met with an encouraging sight — monarchs in abundance flitting about the flowers and even filling the short trees while resting in places like Gooseberry Neck. Some were actually born nearby on milkweed plants. Others come from points east and north Mattapoisett, New Hampshire, Vermont ...

Mid-summer heat which may have pushed the season forward a bit, and a general lack of violent storms may have played a part in it, "but whatever the reason it's quite a sight.

There are simple reasons that monarchs like to pause here on their epic journey south to Mexico and Central America, Ms. Miller Donnelly said.

"They love to fly over land and they hate flying over water."

And in Westport and Little Compton, their journey is abruptly interrupted by an ocean that they could not hope to cross.

"They get out to places like Gooseberry, Sakonnet Point and they pile up, trying to figure out where to go next."

But in the meantime, these are good places to ponder such matters.

"We've got the open fields, they pause awhile, realize that heading due south is not an option, then meander over to Little Compton."

There they encounter the Sakonnet River — "No way around that one so they have to fly across, hopefully when the weather is good, to get to Sachuest Point" in Middletown and on to the west and south.

The fragile creatures have a monumental trip ahead of them and they are hardly speedsters, Ms. Miller Donnelly said.

They must make frequent flower pit stops for energy — this sometimes requires side trips to hunt flowers down.

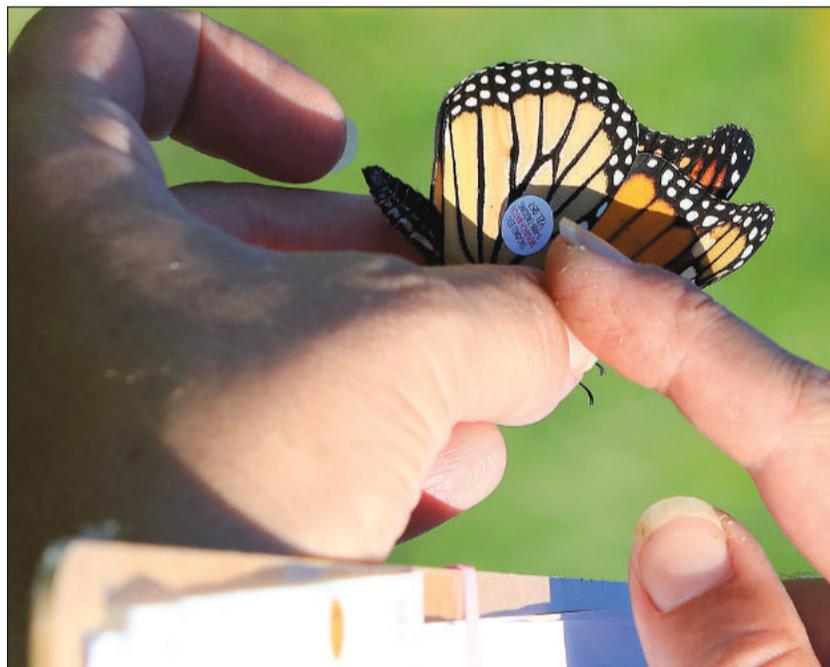
And they won't fly at night like many of the migrating birds.

Tagging with care

Before monarchs can be tagged they must first be netted — if the butterflies are focused on flowers they can be easy to catch.

Still, the trick is to catch them with a downward swoop of the net when they are on a flower, distracted and drinking nectar — "You don't want to just flail away at them in the air.

Helping the researchers is the fact that monarchs have more robust wings than most butterflies, but it is still easy to damage a wing, leg or antenna.



They then carefully grasp the monarch by the body and keep the wings folded together to prevent flapping as they remove it from the net.

"Then comes the trickiest part," attaching the tiny white tag to the center cell of the right hind wing.

You develop a method, Ms. Miller-Donnelly said. She favors using a fingernail to pry the sticker-like tag from its backing and then pressing the tag against the wing.

The tags are virtually weightless and don't impede the monarchs' ability to fly at all, she said.

On each sticker is a code — three letters, three numbers. And instructions ask anyone who finds the butterfly and tag to con-

tact 1-888-tagging or email the information to tag@ku.edu

That gets the information to the University of Kansas Monarch Watch, an organization dedicated to learning about and protecting the butterflies — monarchwatch.org

Putting the tags in the same place makes it easier for researchers in Texas, Mexico and other places to spot the little white dots. They then record the information, and send them on their way.

"The data from these recaptures are used to determine the pathways taken by migrating monarchs, the influence of weather on the migration, the survival rate of the monarchs, etc," says Monarch Watch. The more

that is learned about them, the better the chances of helping their survival.

Many perils await the butterflies as they head south, Ms. Miller-Donnelly said. They can be driven off course by storms — really big storms can devastate a migration. And they need constant refueling from favorite fall flowers like goldenrod and butterfly bush.

She said some of those setting off hatched a month or more ago; others may only have hatched within the past day or two.

Because it is devoted to monarch butterflies, Monarch Watch is also a defender of milkweed, the only plant on which monarch caterpillars can survive.

"Monarch butterfly populations are declining due to loss of habitat," says Chip Taylor, director of Monarch Watch. "To assure a future for monarchs, conservation and restoration of milkweeds needs to become a national priority." The group even gives milkweed plants away to those who can put it to good use.

Ms. Miller-Donnelly said monarchs are doing better in the Westport, Little Compton, Dartmouth area in part because large areas of open land have been preserved and are lightly used — frequent mowing also cuts down milkweed.

Planting milkweed is one way to help, she said, but is most effective when large patches can be created (the butterflies are much less likely to discover individual plants),

"For people with normal size yards, probably the best way they can help is to provide the flowers butterflies like," she said, "especially those flowers that bloom in late summer and early fall."

ABOVE: Lauren Miller-Donnelly uses a swipe of the net to collect a monarch butterfly without damaging fragile wings.
LEFT: Tiny tag provides tracking information to anyone who might find it.

SAKONNET TIMES

(USPS #477-340)

1 Bradford St, Bristol
245-6000 • 253-6055 (fax)
Mailing address: P.O. Box 90, Bristol, RI 02809
Published continuously since 1967.

A weekly publication of East Bay Newspapers,
1 Bradford St., Bristol, R.I. 02809

POSTMASTER send address changes to:
Sakonnet Times, 1 Bradford St., Bristol, R.I. 02809

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News deadline noon Tuesday
Advertising deadline noon Tuesday

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For subscription or newsstand information contact:

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Index

Around Town.....	9
At the Libraries.....	11
Legals.....	13-14
Obituaries.....	14-15
Opinion.....	6
Police Report.....	8
Religion News.....	11
Seniors.....	12
Sports.....	13

District 11 candidates share platforms at League forum

Sound off on gun laws, immigration, abortion rights and more

BY JIM MCGAW

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PORTSMOUTH — Candidates for the Senate District 11 seat sounded off on everything from the line-item veto to immigration legislation during a forum hosted by the League of Women Voters of Newport County Thursday night at Town Hall.

The forum featured the incumbent, Sen. James Seveney (D) and his challenger, Stephanie Calise (R). The district encompasses parts of Portsmouth, Tiverton and Bristol.

The two candidates running for House District 72, Rep. Kenneth Mendonça and Terri Cortvriend, also participated in the forum.

League member Adrienne Haylor served as moderator and asked the candidates a series of questions, including their single most important legislative proposal to benefit their district.

Ms. Calise said she would work toward enacting the office of state inspector general. "I feel this (position), which is independent of government, has the authority to detect waste and fraud to protect every taxpayer. We're not getting a return on our investment for taxes," she said.

Sen. Seveney said his top priority remains the same: to establish a consistent funding stream for substance abuse prevention statewide and in local communities. "Nearly all the money we spend on prevention ... comes from federal grants," he said. "There's money out there to be had; all we have to do



PHOTOS BY RICHARD W. DIONNE, JR.

Sen. James Seveney (second from right) answers a question posed during the League of Women Voters of Newport County's legislative candidates' forum Thursday night. His challenger for the District 11 State Senate seat, Stephanie Calise, is at right. At left are Rep. Kenneth Mendonça (House District 72) and his opponent, Terri Cortvriend, who also participated in the forum.

is fix the law to get that stream in place."

Gun laws

On whether he was satisfied with Rhode Island's current gun laws, Sen. Seveney said he was not, but that there have been some positive changes made in the legislature.

"I am a gun safety/sensible gun ownership proponent. I was the Senate sponsor of a ban on bump stocks," said Sen. Seveney. "I understand very clearly what high-powered

weapons and high-volume fire can do, which we've all seen."

Ms. Calise said the weapon itself is not the problem. "I don't support legislation that circumvents people's constitutional rights," she said.

She referred to the so-called "Red Flag" bill as a possible "witch hunt." Signed into law by Gov. Gina Raimondo earlier this year along with the ban on bump stocks, it allows a judge to order firearms removed from people if police provide evidence the owners are a danger to themselves or others.

"Without due process, that person could essentially be considered guilty before he or she has the chance to prove otherwise," Ms. Calise said.

Abortion rights

Asked for her stance on the Reproductive Health Care Act that would codify the protections of Roe v. Wade into state law, Ms. Calise said while she supports the U.S. Supreme Court's decision, she has some problems with the local bill.

"I don't believe a lot of what's been said about this legislation," she said. "I don't ... agree with partial-birth abortions. I would never want my child to cross over the state border to have an abortion without me not knowing what's going on."

Sen. Seveney labeled himself pro-choice. "It's a privacy issue and a fundamental freedom that a woman has the right to decide

what to do with her body — period," he said, adding that partial-birth abortions "is not part of the discussion" and that the local bill doesn't expand on Roe v. Wade.

Immigration legislation

On whether Rhode Island needs additional legislation regarding immigration, Sen. Seveney said he supported a bill allowing Rhode Island Dreamers with current or past DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status to apply for and receive driver's licenses regardless of what happens at the federal level. Other than that, he said no additional legislation is necessary.

Ms. Calise said illegal immigration is a state problem that needs to be dealt with. "It's a drain on the state and it's the onus of the Rhode Island taxpayer," she said.

General agreement

Both candidates generally supported a constitutional amendment allowing the governor to veto individual line items in the annual state budget, as well as proposed legislation to allow in-person early voting, and a more independent review of redistricting which the state takes up in two years. Candidates said the early voting bill would go far in improving voter turnout.

Ms. Calise, however, said she wanted to see more details before throwing her full support behind the bill.

"Too early is too early," said Ms. Calise.

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SOLAR: Some say town should re-think solar rules

From Page 1

approval since the town's solar ordinance was adopted last March.

The magnitude of the Wingover proposal is reflected in some of the proposal's details. It will consist of perhaps 34,000 fixed panels, it will run 1,300 feet along Crandall Road, it will exist in a residential area zoned R-80, 20 acres of trees will be removed, the applicant is building a 10,000 gallon cistern to augment neighborhood fire suppression.

"Like many of the people I have spoken to over the past few weeks, I had a sunny, naive idea about green energy and how it will be taking shape in the future," Julie Munafo said, in a written statement requesting a moratorium on solar development that she read to the town council on September 24, about two weeks after the Wingover master plan approval.

Ms. Munafo spoke from very personal experience.

An artist now living in Jamestown, she grew up on Wingover Farm, on which her mother still lives. She knows from childhood its rolling open fields that can be seen to the west as one drives along south Crandall Road, and its stone wall and woods at the back past the family's 18th century Ruben Hart farmhouse, and the small pond that lies even further beyond.

"Because this is all so new, few of us have ever seen what a solar farm actually looks like," she said. "When I first saw the facility proposed for Wingover Farm I was absolutely shocked, not only by how massive it was, but by the way every unique and defining trait had been wiped off this beautiful historic farm."

"Calling it a solar farm is misleading," Ms Munafo said, "and doesn't represent that these facilities are actually factories that manufacture electricity at the scale of a utility grade power plant, something that does not belong in a residential neighborhood."

The call for a moratorium comes scarcely seven months after Tiverton's solar ordinance went into effect last March. At that time what was then the new Tiverton solar ordinance was greeted positively. It generated interest locally in solar development.

"Several developers of solar ground arrays have approached the planning department to express their interest," said Planning Board Chairman Stu Hardy when the ordinance was in its final stages of approval.



An estimated 101.7 acres (over two lots) in the area of 350-394 Brayton Road is proposed to host ground-mounted solar panels. The area is zoned R-80 and is just north of the area that had been previously proposed for a motocross track.

The only "definitive plan," said Mr. Hardy, at the time last March when the ordinance was adopted locally, was a medium-sized (an estimated half a football field in size) ground-mounted array at Ferolbink Farm.

But the Ferolbink proposal has since been put on a back burner in favor of a more modest proposal.

Meanwhile, in the past seven months at least four large solar power proposals have been placed before the planning board, Mr Hardy said, and a fifth for Lake Road was presented to the town council by developers last spring, who've never been heard from since their first pitch to the council.

In addition to the Wingover proposal, the others Mr. Hardy identified are:

- **Brayton Road Proposal.** A ground-mounted solar project in the area of 350-394 Brayton Road, sited on two lots, approximately 101.7 acres on Brayton Road (see photo above).

- **Fogland Solar proposal.** A project referred to as Fogland Solar, part of a larger subdivision, with 80 feet of frontage on Main Road, a single lot of 19.12 acres to be in solar or approximately 836,352 square feet (662,900 usable). After the useful life of the solar installation, say the developers (Kevin and Deborah Sanford), and the removal of the panels, the land would be donated to the Nature Conservancy and permanently restricted for open space and conservation.

- **Stafford Road proposal.** Sited on the east side of Stafford Road at the intersection with Old Stafford Road, the proposal "just came in the door," Mr. Hardy said. He did not know the exact acreage, but said "it's large."

The solar proposals now before the council and planning board didn't exactly come out of the blue.

Several years ago two energy compa-

nies made public presentations to the town council to locate ground-mounted installations at the town's industrial park, but never followed through with specific proposals after making their pitches. A third company did the same. All three moved on and haven't been heard from again publicly.

A ground-mounted solar installation at Ferolbink Farm was briefly considered earlier this year, but was abandoned in favor of a proposal for a more modest roof-mounted display.

Then, on March 12, 2018 the Town Council unanimously adopted a comprehensive solar ordinance, that has guided an array of proposals that have been made in town.

According to the town building and zoning office, an estimated 4-6 building permits are pulled each month for roof-mounted solar displays,

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