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Mayor's message: City acquires part of Rocky Point

November 12, 2008 - Rhode Island

On a recent Sunday afternoon, under bright, crisp October skies, some 2,500 Rhode Islanders traveled to the former Rocky Point amusement park property to get a sneak peek at the 41 acres of shoreline the city recently acquired there.

Rocky Point's rich history as a summer destination dates back to the 1840s, when captain William Winslow brought passengers there for Sunday outings. Train service eventually made it easier to get to the property, which eventually boasted such attractions as a Looff ferris wheel, boat rides, a circle swing that swung in the ocean, and, in the 1930s, installation of a saltwater pool. The Shore Dinner Hall offered park visitors clamcakes and chowder, while two other buildings, the Palladium and the Windjammer, were home to wedding receptions, school proms, and a variety of political functions. The mid-way remained vibrant and teemed with people during the summer months, particularly when concerts were offered there.

The park's owners eventually faced financial difficulties, and, in the mid-1990s, after several attempts to save the park, its storied gate was closed for good.

The history of the park during the past 12 years has been tortured, with several sales falling through and a number of starts and stops. Throughout my tenure as mayor, it remained a priority to ensure that, no matter what happened to the property, public access to the shoreline would be assured. After months of cooperation among federal, state and local agencies, last December, we signed the purchase and sales agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the court-appointed receiver of the property, to purchase the mile of shoreline for \$4.4 million. The purchase, funded through NOAA, the city and RI Department of Management money, became final this summer.

Throughout all this time, the public has anxiously wondered what would happen to the property, and whether they would again have the opportunity to visit the place that held so many memories. On that Sunday, with unseasonably warm weather, we heard many of those stories, and watched as couples wandered hand in hand through the grass, saw young families gather for photos, and saw senior citizens sitting on rocks along the shoreline, gazing at the ocean.

The fate of the remaining 83 acres is still uncertain, and the SBA continues to talk with several parties interested in developing the land. The city has also had discussion recently with several government, environmental and non-profit agencies to see if funds are available to help us purchase more of the land.

Meanwhile, our planning department, fueled by a \$90,000 grant from RIDEM, is moving forward with design, permitting and development phases for our property. The overall goal is to provide public access, along with passive recreation opportunities like fishing, bird watching, hiking and

canoeing/kayaking for our citizens.

Scott Avedisian is the mayor of Warwick.

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