

DREAMLAND THEATER

Borrowing from Red Sox Nation and one of its slogans prior to the Sox winning the World Series in 2004, “We Believe,” disciples of the Dreamland Theater had their prayers answered this year.



The Independent file

Haim Zahavi, the former owner of the 177-year-old theater at 17 South Water St., finally gave up his two-and-a-half-year quest to renovate the building into a film house, luxury condominiums and restaurant.

At first, Zahavi failed to sell his property to prospective buyer Rick Ulmer, owner of Food for Here & There and the Rose & Crown. On June 15, Ulmer said he wanted to purchase the property to restore the building’s movie theater, build a multiuse community space on the second floor and a moderately-priced restaurant on the third.

Ultimately, Ulmer couldn’t round up enough investors to help him acquire the property. The efforts of Selectman Michael Kopko, Nantucket Film Festival Founder Jonathan Burkhart, Christy Cure and Susan Carey, and others to get the town to acquire the Dreamland through purchase, gift or eminent domain resulted in a special Town Meeting on July 26 at which a vote of 255-182 failed to glean the 292 positive votes for the required two-thirds majority.

However, Zahavi did find a buyer in the Nantucket Dreamland Foundation, Inc., which bought the property for \$9.8 million on Oct. 3. The Foundation, consisting of summer residents Philippe Laffont, Barry Sternlicht and James Pallotta hired Selectman Patty Roggeveen to head the foundation and Architect Graham Gund to design the new theater. Other than restoring the movie theater aspect to the building, the NDF has yet to commit to additional uses of the building.

— By Peter B. Brace

ESTHER ISLAND AGAIN

On or about April 19, Esther Island once again became the fourth island in the Nantucket archipelago when the Patriots Day storm barged its way through the narrowest stretch of Smith’s Point, separating it from the main island.



The Independent file

The cut in the beach, which endures today, occurred at high tide when ocean swells generated by the storm and 64-mph winds produced 18- to 20-foot waves that overwashed the 200-foot wide barrier beach protecting Madaket Harbor. The channel eventually widened to around 175 feet and is known to be at least 15 feet deep at low tide.

Misidentified as a nor’easter by most Nantucketers, this southwester resulted from a low-pressure system that moved up the Atlantic Seaboard and strengthened north of Long Island, N.Y., according to the National Weather Service office in Taunton, Mass.

Immediately following this two-day storm that soaked the island with 1.8 inches of rain on April 18 and 19, Marine Superintendent Dave Fronzuto issued a warning for boats to stay out of this new route to the ocean.

Esther Island’s moniker did not happen at the hands of this storm. The former western extremity of the island first severed all ties to Nantucket at the hands of Hurricane Esther in 1961 with its sustained winds of 110 mph. This hurricane formed the original Esther Island around 200 yards west of the new cut. By 1988, though, waves, wind and shifting shoals filled in the gap between Esther Island and Nantucket. For the last 27 years, the owners of summer cottages near the end of Smith’s Point were able to reach their properties by four-wheel-drive vehicles. Now they can only reach their newly isolated summer sanctuary by boat.

— By Peter B. Brace

ALTERNATE BROUHAHA

A three-month rift between two former Planning Board alternates, Charity Benz and Jason Flanagan, and existing alternate John Wagley jarred the Planning Board last winter and dragged on from October 2006 through January 2007.

An Oct. 23, 2006 letter sent by the Planning Board to the alternates alleged poor attendance and inappropriate behavior at meetings and around staff members. The board charged them with arriving to meetings late, leaving at will and without notice, and contended that one of three had been under the influence at more than one meeting, but didn’t specify which alternate.

The allegations also included distracting meeting behavior such as whispering, humming, reading newspapers, conducting private business and sleeping, along with hostile and disrespectful treatment of staff members with inappropriate phone calls, racial biasing, failure to sign Planning Board decisions in a timely manner, unprofessional refutation of staff research, public criticism of the board’s actions and a lack of participation in Planning Board matters.

Seeking redemption from the board’s stinging accusations, the alternates hired Boston attorney Joel B. Bard to help restore their reputations. A public hearing called for by the alternates held in the other business segment of the Jan. 8 Planning Board meeting solved nothing as all three alternates walked out on the hearing, stating that Bard advised them to do so because they would not get a fair hearing.

That hearing went on without the alternates as Town Attorney Richard Hudson read the protocol for the hearing followed by former Planning Board chairman Donald Visco’s addressing each now-empty alternate seat one at a time, asking if they wanted to partake. With no responses, Visco closed the hearing.

Though the alternates threatened the board with lawsuits, the issue petered out with Flanagan’s resigning in late winter and with Benz’s June appointment to the Finance Committee that forced her resignation. Wagley now shares alternate duties with Diane Coombs.

— By Peter B. Brace

RECORD-SETTING EAL ESTATE TRANSACTION

When 11.9 acres on Eel Point Road sold this summer for \$26.5 million, it marked the highest price paid for a single real estate transaction in Nantucket’s history.

The record price was paid for vacant land — not for a house, hotel, business or large estate — and underscores not only the value of undeveloped land on Nantucket, but its scarcity as well.

It also represents another high point for the preservation of open space on the island.

Two contiguous waterfront lots at 135 and 137 Eel Point Road were sold Aug. 28 by Eric and George Frost, trustees of Calm Water Trust, to Nantucket Lot 51, a limited liability corporation.

The new owner of the property wishes to remain anonymous, although his purported interest in the property is to keep it unspoiled and free from the development plans already approved by the Planning Board before the sale. The beachfront property runs from Eel Point Road to the calm waters of the north shore. With the purchase, the landowner’s property now borders 40th Pole to the west which, combined with the previous sale of the former Rand property 60 acres to the east of 40th Pole, is a blend of private/public conservation efforts that seems to work out well for everybody — the landowners, the public and the environment.

“Indications are that he has a strong conservation ethic,” Land Bank executive director Eric Savetsky said. “It’s fantastic that the neighbor bought that land and doesn’t have the intention to develop it [to the extent of the prior Planning Board approval]. The purchase of the land to the west of 40th Pole adds to the pristine quality of the area.”

The previous record price for a single island real estate transaction occurred a year ago — \$21.6 million for two lots totaling 4 acres in Shimmo.

— Steve Sheppard