

## **Consultant identifies Portwalk sites likely to hold artifacts**

By Charles McMahon - cmcmahon@seacoastonline.com

PORTSMOUTH — Developers of Portwalk on Tuesday released results of an archaeological sensitivity assessment for the final phase of the major downtown project.

The study, conducted by Independent Archaeological Consulting LLC of Portsmouth, covers the background and historical significance of the parcel at 195 Hanover St. The 13-page report includes schematics, site maps and a listing of reference material. It also includes a slate of recommendations and conclusions.

The assessment identifies three areas where archeological resources are likely to be present. The first is the northeast corner of Portwalk Lot 3 at the intersection of Deer and Vaughan streets, the former homestead of merchant Titus Salter, according to the report. The area was minimally affected by development over the years.

"We anticipate that the back yard will contain deposits related to the Salter occupation and that its household privy might be present," the report states.

The next area is the intersection of Deer Street and Maplewood Avenue, a site once was home to Phoebe Hart. The house is believed to have stood there from the early 1800s to urban renewal of the 1970s. Area 3 is considered to be the noncontiguous extension of the Hart house lot, which may contain resources from at least one privy and elements from a blacksmith shop.

The report recommended the owner and consultant develop a mutually acceptable plan to further evaluate the three areas before construction. Scott Tranchemontagne, spokesman for developer Cathartes Private Investments, said the plan is to do just that.

"We're pleased that the report is complete and has been submitted," he said. "We plan on following the recommendations in the report."

Tranchemontagne said a mitigating circumstance to the recommendation is the fact that Lot 3 is currently a paved parking lot. He said whatever is required in terms of excavation and digging will occur after the parking lot is gone. He said the development team will work with consultants from now to early summer to develop a plan on how to follow the recommendations. As far as what will happen with any artifacts found at the site, he said there have been preliminary discussions on the best way to display them in the future.

"We appreciate the history of this site," he said. "We fully intend to follow recommendations of our consultants."

City Councilor Chris Dwyer, an advocate of protecting historic artifacts beneath the surface of property in the city, said she considered the report a good step in the right direction. Dwyer, along with State Sen. Nancy Stiles, R-Hampton, spearheaded a legislative effort to provide more local control to municipalities regarding subsurface preservation.

The report, which was requested as part of the Planning Board's site review, is only the beginning, Dwyer said. The real effort will be to pass a law that allows the city authority to enforce recommendations of such archaeological assessments, she said.

"It would give us a little more teeth," Dwyer said.

J. Dennis Robinson, a local historian who has been highly critical of Portwalk's treatment of the city's archaeology, said once the land is dug up, artifacts can be lost forever.

"We need to get the importance of history into the DNA of this city if we are going to keep our economy going strong," he said. "History is our life's blood."

<http://www.seacoastonline.com/articles/20111221-NEWS-112210360>