

Bird sanctuary awarded grant for Gray Craig

Money not going to town

By Mary E. Cronin
Daily News staff

MIDDLETOWN — The state has awarded a \$400,000 grant to the Norman Bird Sanctuary — not the town of Middletown as the governor's office announced last week. The grant is to help the bird sanctuary buy part of the neighboring Gray Craig Estate.

Tracey Divine, a spokeswoman for Gov. Edward D. DiPrete, said today the information the governor's office announced last Wednesday was wrong. That press release said, "A grant of \$400,000 to the town of Middletown will allow the town to purchase the 48-acre Gray Craig Estate."

But after checking again with the state Department of Environmental Management this morning, Divine said the grant is actually to the adjacent bird sanctuary.

The Newport Daily News learned about the error this morning from Barry Murphy, advisory committee chairman for the bird sanctuary. Murphy said after learning about the governor's announcement, he checked into the situation. DEM finally told him the grant was in fact to the bird sanctuary.

Town officials, when contacted about the governor's statement last week, expressed surprise about the grant.

The \$400,000 grant is to come from funds in the 1986 Open Space and Agricultural Land Bond, the governor's office said.

Gray Craig, located on Paradise Avenue, is an 81-acre estate purchased by a group of local businessmen about three years ago. The developers had planned to renovate the existing buildings and construct new units to create a total of 56 dwelling units on the property, but the bird sanctuary, which abuts the estate, was concerned the project would adversely impact the environment.

Consequently, almost a year ago, the sanctuary began talking with the developers about buying part of the land and/or developmental rights.

The main manor house and about 26 acres were sold to former Massachusetts resident Charles Dana III. The deed recorded in the Middletown Town Clerk's office Monday said Dana bought the property for about \$1.95 million.

Murphy said while there are 14 acres in the northeast corner of the estate that the sanctuary and developers are talking about, the sanctuary is also considering buying additional land, development rights and easements to help preserve the area and protect the drinking water supply. Murphy said there is talk about buying 33 to 48 acres, thus, the governor's statement of buying 48 acres.

Oops! Gov. DiPrete's office goofed

To the Editor:

I am writing in regard to Mary Cronin's article titled "Town gets Gray Craig Grant" which appeared on the front page of the Sept. 28, edition of The Daily News. Unfortunately, the state's press release, the document upon which this article was based, was erroneous. I would like to correct the record and hopefully eliminate any misconceptions that might have been created as a result of the article.

On June 2, 1989, the Norman Bird Sanctuary applied for a \$400,000 state grant to be used, if approved, for the purchase of conservation easements within Gray Craig estate. The \$400,000 award, discussed in Ms. Cronin's article was in actuality given to the Norman Bird Sanctuary in response to their application. The town of Middletown did not apply for state funds for this purpose.

Receipt of the \$400,000 is contingent upon an agreement between the developer (Gray Craig Associates) and the Sanctuary. When an agreement is reached, the Sanctuary will be seeking additional funding support from both private and public sources, to include the town of Middletown. The expected purchase price of land and conservation easements, as well as exact acreage, are still under negotiation. Hopefully, an agreement will be reached in the very near future, so that details of the transaction can be provided to the public.

Barry J. Murphy
Advisory Committee Chairman
Norman Bird Sanctuary