

# Town gets Gray Craig grant

By Mary E. Cronin  
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MIDDLETOWN — The state has awarded Middletown \$400,000 toward the purchase of 14 acres of the Gray Craig Estate.

At the same time, the owners of the Paradise Avenue estate are preparing to

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sell the main manor house and 26 acres to a private investor from Massachusetts.

Robert Kempenaar, one of the owners of Gray Craig, said he and the developers will finalize the sale of the home Friday.

Kempenaar and his partners bought the 78-acre property about three years ago for about \$3.5 million. They will retain 38 acres and four of the buildings now on the property.

The state grant was announced by Gov. Edward DiPrete's office Wednesday.

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## Estate

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The Norman Bird Sanctuary applied for the grant on behalf of the town and has worked with Kempenaar on the possible sale to Middletown, the sanctuary director said.

The sanctuary first got involved when it learned that Kempenaar and his partners planned to renovate the current structures and build a few new ones for a total of 56 dwelling units there. Sanctuary officials and members were concerned that the development would adversely impact the sanctuary and the surrounding environment including Nelson's Pond, a drinking water resource.

Sanctuary director Lawrence Taft said today that he has worked with the state, town and developers about buying the land and easements. Taft himself applied to the state Department of Environmental Management for the state grant that was awarded under the 1986 Open Space and Agricultural Land Bond.

Taft said that the easement and development rights and land purchase will cost about \$1.15 million in total. He is hoping the town will contribute \$400,000 of its \$900,000 open space bond money still avail-

able, and that the bird sanctuary can raise about \$300,000 on its own. The sanctuary has also applied to several foundations for grants and is looking for private donations, Taft said.

"What we're looking to do is protect the significant areas of the property and direct any future development from the wetlands and the ridges," Taft said.

Kempenaar said that the 14 acres he will sell to the town is in the northeast corner of the estate and could be used by the sanctuary for some of its programs. The sale to the town would include development rights and easements.

Middletown Town Council member Peter O. Grimes, chairman of the town's Open Space Study Committee, was unaware of the grant this morning. Grimes said that his committee has talked with Taft about buying the estate or part of it, but they must talk more.

But if Middletown bond money were to be spent on land acquisition, Grimes said, the town would have to be sole owner of that property. He said that the town could perhaps have the sanctuary manage the property.

Kempenaar said that the developers and sanctuary officials are finalizing an agreement now that would allow the sale to the town to go through and that would limit the number of units to 24.

The main house and 26 acres are being sold to Charles Dana, who along with his family has been leasing the house for several months. Dana moved to the area from South Dartmouth, Mass. Kempenaar would not disclose the sale price.

Kempenaar said the developers could possibly sell the remaining buildings on the property and will not know if he will proceed with plans to develop the property for another 30 days or so.

## Corrections

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