

Chatham mulling 3 bids to use Marconi buildings

November 6, 2006

CHATHAM, Mass. --Town officials are reviewing three bids to renovate the historic buildings built by inventor Guglielmo Marconi -- turning what was created for a global wireless communication network into affordable housing, a fishing association headquarters or a museum.

Marconi, who invented the wireless telegraph, built the 15 brick buildings overlooking Ryder Cove in 1914. Chatham has been considering what to do with the buildings on 104 acres since purchasing them in 1999 for \$725,000.

The buildings -- appraised with the property at nearly \$3 million in 1999 -- are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. But they are considered too small for most town uses and many commercial operations.

Last month, selectmen authorized town project consultant Alan McClennan Jr. to begin talks with the three organizations that submitted bids to renovate and use four buildings.

The Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association has proposed spending \$2.3 million to \$3 million to create offices and public spaces for educational and scientific work. Chatham Marconi Maritime Center Inc. wants to raise \$226,000 to \$439,000 to create a marine radio station and communications museum. And the Chatham Housing Authority said it would cost up to \$639,000 to convert two brick residences into affordable housing.

All three organizations are asking for a 99-year lease and \$1 annual rents.

Selectman Chairman David Whitcomb said the board had hoped bids would cover the cost of rebuilding roads, a new septic system, parking and hiking trails -- projects estimated at \$2 million.

Whitcomb said the board also had reservations about giving private organizations such long leases with almost no compensation.

Information from: Cape Cod Times, <http://www.capecodonline.com> ■

