

# The Newport Daily News

## Israeli minister sees possibilities in Newport visit

The city's planned technology business incubator could attract companies from Israel.

**By Sean Flynn**

Staff writer

NEWPORT — Israel's economic minister to North America visited Newport on Tuesday expecting to hear a presentation about a planned technology business incubator and to pay a visit to Touro Synagogue.

She got more than she expected.

"I was pleasantly surprised; there is real opportunity here," said Nili Shalev, who is based in New York City and represents Israel's Foreign Trade Administration of the Ministry of Economy.

Newport received almost \$1.7 million to convert the longvacant Sheffield Elementary School on Broadway into a center to foster start-up companies. The city will match the funding from its federal Urban Development Action Grant revolving fund, for a total of about \$3.3 million for the project.

"We like the idea of attracting cybersecurity companies to the accelerator (center)," Shalev said. "It is a promising area for us. We will try to do some matchmaking with Israeli and U.S. companies. We can collaborate with both industrial and academic interests here."

She attended a luncheon at The Mooring restaurant, hosted by the Newport County Chamber of Commerce and arranged by The Mayforth Group of Providence. Those she spoke with included: Molly Donohue Magee, executive director of the Southeastern New England Defense Industry Alliance; David Smith, chairman of the graduate program in Salve Regina University's Department of Justice Administration and Homeland Security; and Jody Sullivan, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce.

"It all depends on the partnerships we can set up," Shalev said. "The location is great, and it's midway between Boston and New York."

The minister said she would work closely on the effort with Avi Nevel, who is vice chairman of the Rhode Island District Export Council, a leader of the New England Israel Business Council and owner of Nevel International LLC. He participated in all the discussions Tuesday.

“Avi has spent 30 years in Israel and 30 years in Rhode Island, so he has strong connections to both places,” Shalev said. “Without him, there would not be the amount of collaboration that already exists between Rhode Island and Israel.”

One example of that cooperation: Pawtucket-based Hasbro has worked with the Israel-based company Vivo Text on

**POSSIBILITIES A8 ‘I think it’s an exciting opportunity to maybe engage with another country on mutual economic development.’ JEANNE-MARIE NAPOLITANO**

Newport mayor



Nili Shalev, left, Israel’s economic minister to North America, talks during a luncheon at The Mooring restaurant in Newport on Tuesday. Looking on is Newport Mayor Jeanne-Marie Napolitano.

**Dave Hansen** | Staff photographer

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product development.

“I think it’s an exciting opportunity to maybe engage with another country on mutual economic development,” said Mayor Jeanne-Marie Napolitano, who met Shalev in City Hall with Council Vice Chairman Marco T. Camacho, Councilman John Florez, Interim City Manager Joseph J. Nicholson Jr. and city Economic Development Director Paul Carroll.

“Israel is interested in developing its cybersecurity sector, as we are,” Napolitano said. “Perhaps we can bring people here from Israel to work in the technology center.”

“This is an opportunity for us to proudly showcase Newport as a possible site for international cooperation,” Camacho said. “It’s great to see an Israeli delegation here. It’s promising for our efforts to develop the technology center.”

Called Newport TechWorks, the new business incubator center will offer short-term lease options and resources to entrepreneurs and small businesses serving the region’s defense firms. Sometimes referred to as “Sheffield TechWorks,” the center also is expected to attract technology firms found in the cybersecurity, marine, climate change, environmental and digital industry clusters. The development is expected to create 108 jobs.

The 33,600-square-foot building at 513 Broadway has been vacant since Sheffield School was closed in June 2006.

“We don’t have many natural resources in Israel, so we have to innovate, innovate and innovate,” Shalev said. “We are now recognized as a high-tech state.”

She said 600 Israeli companies now have offices on the East Coast of the United States.

Carroll told the Israeli delegation that contracts with architectural, structural engineering and landscape companies are nearing completion, so work can begin soon on transforming the school into a technology center. He is targeting a grand opening in the fall of 2016.

The Newport County Development Council, the Chamber of Commerce’s nonprofit

foundation, is administering the grant that is funding construction of the center.

“Israel’s representatives see great potential here,” said Sullivan, the chamber’s executive director. “I think this could be an incredible opportunity for us.”

Keith W. Stokes, president of economic development and planning for the Mayforth Group, and Rick M. McAuliffe Jr., chairman of the Mayforth Group, were involved in the discussions between Shalev and city officials. Stokes wrote the successful grant application on behalf of the chamber for the Sheffield School funding.

After the meetings in City Hall and The Mooring, the delegation toured Touro’s visitors center and synagogue, accompanied by Bea Ross, president of Touro’s Congregation Jeshuat Israel, and Diane Hurley, chairwoman of the Touro Synagogue Foundation.

“Every Israeli knows something about Touro Synagogue,” Stokes said. “How can we use that knowledge and their familiarity with Newport as a tourist destination to develop business opportunities? The purpose today is to let them know that we have business assets that their companies should be looking at.”

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