

Shed escapes wrecking ball

By MICHAEL PARE

RICHMOND — The first thing Michael Feraco did when he was named the town's new building and zoning official earlier this year was to abolish an order to raze the historical Carriage Shed that stands next to the town hall.

To Feraco, it was not a difficult decision to reach. It was a matter of using some common sense.

"That building is a terrific reminder for my children and their children of a 19th Century place as we enter the 21st Century," Feraco says. "It is a reminder of our past."

Feraco is the first to admit that the historic structure needs work.

But, Feraco says, repairing the post and beam structure can be done at a fraction of what it would cost to put up a new building.

"What is the sense of destroying something like this and putting up a metal frame building," Feraco says. "When you travel away from New England, you don't see construction like this."

A recently completed study by the town's Historic District Commis-

sion estimates that the historic structure could be transformed into a public meeting place for between \$80,000 and \$150,000.

Feraco says the meeting space is needed, as is additional space for storage of town records.

The Carriage Shed was built in 1886 and was used to provide shelter and convenience for local residents to park carriages and tether animals while attending town meetings or visiting the town hall.

The 160-foot long structure was primarily used for storage for equipment and fire trucks, including the first fire truck owned by the town — The Diamond "T."

As the years passed, the building gradually became home to obsolete town equipment. It still houses a Richmond-Carolina fire truck that is used by volunteers.

Today, the building's future remains in question, but the upbeat report by the Historic District Commission and Feraco's action, seem to have the structure on the road to recovery.

Virginia Sarra Hesse, an architect with the Rhode Island Historical

Preservation Commission, wrote up a report on the building.

Hesse believes the structure needs a new foundation, but could be converted for everyday use without much trouble.

"The building looks very solid and is amazingly dry inside," she says.

As a historian, Hesse is particularly impressed with the building's storied past.

"It is especially interesting to see where the horses nibbled away at the studs," Hesse says. "People sure don't tie up their horses to attend meetings anymore."

A needs assessment committee will be formed to study the building and report back to the council.

In the meantime, Feraco has visions of restored Carriage Shed — with plenty of seating capacity for the more popular town meetings. He also pictures his grandchildren visiting there someday, marveling at the history of the place.