

# Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association

*Promoting community involvement and communication*



## Spring 2022 eLetter

**It's time to pay your 2022 dues –**  
please do so [online](#) or by mail

*Martha Reese Flanagan*

### Meetings in person! Mark your calendars!

WSRA is returning to in person meetings at the Council on Aging, 715 Old Kings Highway, this summer. On Thursday, July 21, 7 pm, we will hold a meeting on housing and its consequences for all of us. On Thursday, August 11, 7pm, our annual meeting and State of the Town, with Wellfleet's new town administrator Richard Waldo and Selectboard members, will take place. These are your chances to really learn what is happening and to get your questions answered!



*photo by Phyllis Bretholtz*

### Housing and Real Estate

Unless you live under a rock, you know the residential real estate market has been tight and housing costs have skyrocketed. Wellfleet has a particularly virulent version of these market conditions and it is causing repercussions throughout town. You may notice it most acutely because housing-related staffing shortages have caused some stores and restaurants to open fewer days or hours. It is also harder to find contractors because their workforce finds housing scarce or unaffordable. The Community Development Partnership, an Outer Cape nonprofit focused on the local economy, ran a series of public service advertisements last year that captures the problem. Each ad starts with, "We can't afford to lose the people who can't afford to live here," and proceeds to recount the

challenge faced by a Wellfleet firefighter, a medical assistant at Outer Cape Health, or a local school teacher. (See the accompanying example).

WSRA has organized a forum to explore the housing challenges in Wellfleet and how they have (or may) impact seasonal residents, and steps we can take as seasonal residents to help to address this problem. The forum will be on July 21st at 7:00 pm at the Council on Aging building, 715 Old Kings Highway.

We can't afford to lose the people  
who can't afford to live here.



**Justin Kinshaw**  
Firefighter/Paramedic  
Wellfleet

Justin is a lifelong Cape resident. He dreams of giving his daughter a stable place to call home without having to move frequently. But it's hard because the cost of housing here is often more than even a firefighter can afford.

At the Community Development Partnership, we are advocating for more accessible and affordable housing options. The voice and votes of community residents are the most effective way to influence town housing policies. Use your voice and your vote, because our communities are better and stronger with people like Justin.



community development partnership

[www.capecdp.org](http://www.capecdp.org)

## Wellfleet's Financial Mess and the Way Forward

Remember what it is like to do your taxes when you cannot remember the categories, or

find some receipt you know you need? Or have you had a job where you were supposed to track a budget with actual expenses, but you don't know how to do it? Multiply that by thousands and you will understand the problems Wellfleet's town government has faced over the last few years. At the May 31, 2022 Select Board meeting, acting town administrator Charlie Sumner and his accounting wizard assistants explained what the mess was, how the town got there, and what its current administrators are doing about it. This recitation of the facts and problems took nearly three mind-numbing hours, unless the minutiae of municipal accounting practices is something that excites you. You are welcome to go to the town website to watch the video of the meeting. And/or you can read the key take-aways here.

Personnel changes have been extensive. Wellfleet has had five different town administrators since 2014, three assistant town administrators in that amount of time. Since 2017, six accountants have come and gone, and four different treasurers since 2015. The complications became even worse when the town changed accounting software in 2019 so that categories/numbers from one system did not transfer over to the other. While the problems and financial irregularities have taken nearly a year to sort out, at least there is no evidence of malfeasance or stealing. It has been the use of worst (not best) practices, lack of training, and little oversight.

These problems multiplied because of the ways the town government has funded expenses over the decades, using reserves from one fund (say beaches) to pay for something else (perhaps a new police cruiser). When a particular financial bucket was emptied, it was never "backfilled." Funds were doubled-posted, or not posted at all, or put in the wrong categories (as in the town did not make \$77,000 from registering firearms as was in the accounting). Money moved from one bank account to another became another \$100,000 in revenue, rather than just a transfer. Because of the software change-over, amounts were posted to the wrong account by some departments, but not by others. Exacerbating all of this has been decisions to keep tax increases down by using debt exclusions to pay for services—that is taking on debt to pay for a very specific projects, rather than an override to assess taxes in excess of the normal maximum 2.5 percent annual increase.

The town's "unusual" practices, as Sumner put it, went on and on. As he concluded: "Wellfleet has been an outlier in how we managed the budget to fund the services we want. We cannot do it by raiding special purpose funds, and we need overrides on a regular basis."

Things are now on the road to stabilizing. However, the bottom line is that at town meeting on June 11th voters were asked to accept an override. The override did pass so that drastic cuts in services will not happen. As the *Provincetown Independent* (June 15, 2022) summarized the consequences of the voting: "town meeting voters approved...a \$24.9-million operating budget, a \$1.1-million capital budget, a \$2.2-million sprinkler system for the elementary school, and \$400,000 in Proposition 2 1/2 overrides for two new police officers and two firefighters or EMTs." As Charlie Sumner noted, "property taxes on a house of median value (\$619,000) would rise by \$546."

One final note. Part of the difficulty of keeping various administrators and town employees has been the lack of affordable housing to buy or rent. We'll be devoting one of our public meetings this summer to exploring the housing issue.

## **Elections and the Wellfleet Selectboard**

Several recent elections have led to changes in the Selectboard. Michael DeVasto was elected to a second three-year term, and Barbara Carboni, an attorney and town planner and land use counsel for the Town of Truro, was elected to her first term. On June 21, a three-way contest among Jude Ahern, Tim Sayer and former Selectboard member Kathleen Bacon led to the election of Bacon to fulfill the last two years of Selectboard member Helen Miranda Wilson's term. Wilson will leave the board at the end of June after multiple years of service.

**WELLFLEET  
SPECIAL TOWN ELECTION OFFICIAL RESULTS  
June 21, 2022**

	RESULTS
<b>SELECTBOARD - Two years, vote for one.</b>	
Judith M. Ahern	111
Timothy Sayre	225
WRITE IN: Kathleen Bacon	418
All OTHER WRITE INS:	5
BLANKS	25
TOTAL	784
<b>QUESTION NO. 1 \$518,820.00 Override</b>	
YES	574
NO	209
BLANKS	1
TOTAL	784
<b>QUESTION NO. 2 \$672,700.00 Override</b>	
YES	502
NO	276
BLANKS	6
TOTAL	784
<b>QUESTION NO. 3 -Police Dept. Staff</b>	
YES	486
NO	291
BLANKS	7
TOTAL	784
<b>QUESTION NO. 4 -Fire Dept Staff</b>	
YES	541
NO	238
BLANKS	5
TOTAL	784
<b>Question 5- Fire Suppression for the school</b>	
YES	642
NO	135
BLANKS	7
TOTAL BALLOTS	784
Total # of Registered Voters: 3038	
Turnout: 25.80 %	

## Herring River Restoration Project Nears Implementation

*from John Portnoy, PhD, FHR Board member and retired ecologist with Cape Cod National Seashore*

With the recent decisions of both Wellfleet and Truro Conservation Commissions, nearly all environmental permits are in hand to allow the largest wetland restoration project in the history of New England - right here in Wellfleet. After 100 plus years of diking, drainage and consequent habitat degradation, and after decades of scientific research, tides will be restored to the 1100-acre Herring River estuary through the gradual opening of a new bridge in place of the dike at the end of Chequessett Neck. State and federal funding is available for large components of Phase I, including the bridge, low road elevation and vegetation management, that will restore over 500 acres of tidal marshes. Work on the bridge could begin this winter, and is expected to be completed over two winters, to avoid interfering with seasonal fish migrations and summer traffic. Even in winter, vehicle passage will continue across the river via a bypass bridge during construction.

Extensive shrubs and trees, which have invaded the salt marsh since seawater was blocked back in 1909, will be cleared before tides reach the marsh surface. This also includes the dead vegetation that has already been killed by over-washed seawater in the Duck Harbor portion of the estuary.

For those unaware, the 1909 diking of the Herring River, and subsequent wetland drainage between the dike and Route 6, has caused radical environmental change and resource degradation including: wetland subsidence (up to one meter), surface-water acidification, summer oxygen depletion, bacterial contamination of shellfish beds, loss of greenhouse-gas storage and high methane emissions, and the general loss of hundreds of acres of native fish and wildlife habitat. Tidal restoration, and consequent re-connection with the marine environment, will over time re-establish naturally excellent water quality and sediment supply and restore estuarine habitat for finfish, shellfish, marsh birds and mammals including people.



The Herring River was diked in 1909 in part to control mosquitoes. It didn't work. Instead, the drained marsh has subsided so that heavy rains, or currently the over-washes at Duck Harbor, leave stagnant pools ideal for mosquito breeding. In addition, degraded water quality makes it nearly impossible for small predatory fish that normally eat mosquito larvae to access floodwater breeding sites.

Tidal restoration will both improve low-tide drainage to get floodwaters off the wetland surface and greatly improve water quality for fish; however, as an interim measure to control the mosquito nuisance, the Cape Cod Mosquito Control Project and Cape Cod National Seashore are cooperating to limit mosquito breeding at Duck Harbor during this spring and summer.

How quickly will the marsh recover? Overall the plan is to restore tides gradually, managed adaptively through continued monitoring and evaluation of system response. Full restoration may take decades. However, after just two years of unintended restoration of tides and seawater at Duck Harbor, some salt-marsh plants, killifish (major mosquito predators), and even American eels have “re-discovered” the Herring River estuary.

## More on the Herring River

Wellfleet nature writer Robert Fitch published a beautiful radio [commentary](#) on the new walking trail through the Herring River Overlook that is accessed via a new, small parking area just before the road heads down to the dike on Chequessett Neck Road. Fitch describes it as a chance to walk through many different eco-systems and to watch the changes the Herring River Restoration Project will bring. Consider adding it to things to do in Wellfleet from now on.

## New Things are Opening Up

Not just the flowers and pollen bloom in the spring/early summer. Hog Island Beer has taken over the Trailside Restaurant site on Route 6 and should be opening soon. A new bagel place has replaced the pizza restaurant on Route 6 just across from the entrance to Marconi. The beloved Fox and Crow is moving into the space previously occupied by The Well on Main Street. And the Farmers' Market is back as well as many of your favorite stores and restaurants! The “pot” shops never closed.



*Photo by Phyllis Bretholtz*

## Land Use and the corner of Old Wharf and Route 6

The ongoing legal battles among the town of Wellfleet, the neighbors along Old Wharf Road, and the GFM company have continued. GFM bought the land on Route 6 at Old Wharf, and began clearing all the trees, grading the soil, and operating a building site without proper permitting. In late May, the *Provincetown Independent* reported that the town has not enforced the stop work order that was issued by the building inspector and upheld by the zoning board. In June, the lawyer for the Old Wharf neighbors reported that there was an initial conference in land court happening. Stay tuned.

## COVID reporting

With so many people doing home antigen testing for COVID, rather than PCR testing that is sent to a lab, it has been difficult for epidemiologists and health departments to really track the extent of disease. On June 16, Wellfleet's health and conservation agent Hillary Greenberg-Lemos announced a [website](#) to allow outer cape residents in Provincetown, Truro and Wellfleet to report their home test results. Any questions can be sent to the health agent at [Hillary.Lemos@wellfleet-ma.gov](mailto:Hillary.Lemos@wellfleet-ma.gov) or call her at 508 349 0308.

## In Search of Housing: Maurice's Maybe

The ongoing search for affordable housing in Wellfleet and the Cape in general continues. Given the almost total built out of land within Wellfleet's borders, finding new spaces for housing remains an ongoing problem. On May 26th, the *Provincetown Independent* reported that the "select board signed a purchase and agreement for the 21.25 acres at Maurice's Campground last month, but town officials say there's a lot to figure out before the Sept. 10 town meeting. That's when voters will consider authorizing the \$6.5-million purchase, seen as a step toward addressing the town's lack of affordable housing." There should be more information available on this as it gets closer to the next town meeting in September.

## Lawrence Road Affordable Rental Community

On Monday June 27 at 7 pm, the Community Development Partnership (CDP) will be hosting a [Q & A session via Zoom](#). The Preservation of Affordable Housing, Inc. (POAH) and the CDP have proposed to build and manage an affordable rental community at 95 Lawrence Road.

This community will include forty-six rental units on a six-acre site. Most of the units will be income-restricted at income levels ranging from 30% to 60% of Area Median Income (AMI) and will serve the housing needs of families and seniors from Wellfleet and the surrounding communities.

[Registration](#) is required for this event. The event announcement and further details can be found on the [CDP website](#).

## Dues and donations, please

WSRA counts on its members to pay dues without receiving an annual invoice. Dues and individual donations are WSRA's only sources of funding-- \$25 for a single membership or \$35 for a family/household membership per calendar year.

To pay by PayPal:

- Renew your [Family Membership](#)
- Renew your [Individual Membership](#)
- Make a [Donation](#)



Photo by Trudy O'Connell

You may also mail your payment to:

WSRA

P.O. Box 1323  
Wellfleet, MA 02667-1323

If you would like more than one member of your household to receive email from WSRA,  
please [email](#) us!

**THANK YOU!**

Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Assoc. (WSRA) | PO Box 1323, Wellfleet, MA 02667

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