

# Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association

*Promoting community involvement and communication*

## *Winter 2022 eLetter*

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

After a powerful Nor'easter struck the Cape on the last weekend of January, a photograph of a house near collapse at Ballston Beach in Truro went viral; it appeared on television, social media, in local and national newspapers. What drew little or no attention was the damage done to Wellfleet's vulnerable backshore, which had already taken a hit from the hurricane force winds that ravaged the Cape in late October. In the weeks since then, several cottages north of LeCount Hollow have been moved or razed. The beach at Lecount is inaccessible except to a few diehard surfers willing to climb the sheer face of the bluff. The violent storms of this fall and winter brought the climate crisis home to Wellfleet's seasonal and year-round residents.



*Photo by Ellen K Rothman*

### **Override coming**

At the end of the year, the team that has been working with Wellfleet's Interim Town Administrator Charles Sumner since last summer to make sense of the town's chaotic finances reported that more than 1,000 errors had been found and corrected in the town's FY 2020 accounts. Sumner told the Selectboard that the work "keeps leading to more and more issues and problems and questions." He assured the Board that the accountants had found "nothing of a criminal nature." What they saw, he said, "were signs of lack of training, high turnover, and some competency issues."

Things did not improve when work began on the 2023 budget in January. At the Annual Town Meeting on April 25, 2022, voters will face the need to approve at least a \$1.3 million Proposition 2½ override to fund the shortfalls in last year's budget, maintain town services, and cover necessary capital projects. Under state law, overrides require the approval of two-thirds of voters at town meeting and a simple majority at the annual town election a few days later. At an online form in February, Sumner explained that for at least the past three years, the town has relied on "one-time revenues," rather than on overrides, to finance its operations. The result, he said, has been instability in the town's finances and depletion of the ambulance and beach funds. No money was reserved for new police cruisers, dump trucks, and other predictable capital expenses. In 2021, there were 12 items on the warrant for such capital expenditures. "Most communities would not consider that the best basis of operation," Sumner told the forum.

The draft operating budget for FY 2023 showed a \$1,946,000 deficit as of late February. The approval of an override to cure that deficit, along with the delay in certain purchases, would put the town “back on track,” he told the forum. There will also be several other overrides on the warrant—for two new police officers, two new firefighter paramedics, a debt exclusion for a new fire engine and for a new fire suppression system necessary to keep Wellfleet Elementary School open.

## Old Wharf Road



*Photo by Susan Reverby*

A little over a year ago, one day after Great White Realty Group purchased a site at the intersection of Old Wharf Road and Route 6, it cut down three-fourths of the trees on the lot, removed topsoil and began preparing the site for use as a staging yard by GFM, a Dennis-based contractor—all without the necessary permits. The neighbors alerted the Building Inspector who issued a stop-work order. GFM began using the site to store dump trucks, 10 wheelers, and other heavy equipment, creating dust, noise, and traffic, while the owners’ lawyer appealed the order to the Zoning Board. When the ZBA upheld the order, Great White appealed to state Land Court.

The situation on Old Wharf prompted the Planning Board to consider amending the town’s zoning bylaw to require special permits for similar enterprises. At the January 5 meeting of the Planning Board, chair Gerry Parent said “As long as I’ve been dealing with zoning, I never envisioned the intensity of that contractor’s yard and what it’s going to do,... In my mind, if that hole is not plugged quickly, that could happen again.” He pointed out the obvious problem: “A piece of equipment to a landscaper is a lawn mower,” while “for a contractor in an excavating business, it’s a 40-foot tractor and an excavator.” The Board voted to hold a public hearing about requiring a special permit for a contractor’s yard in time for a by-law to be considered at the April town meeting.

According to *The Provincetown Independent*, court documents indicate that the case will be “fast-tracked,” with a trial expected in about 16 months.

## New plastic comes to the Cape

Plastic “shock tubing” used to transmit a charge to underwater explosives during a dredging project in Boston Harbor last summer has been turning up on Outer Cape

beaches. No one knew where this novel litter was coming from until Laura Ludwig, manager of the [Center for Coastal Studies Marine Debris and Plastics Program](#) in Provincetown, figured it out. By the end of February, beach cleanups and other volunteer efforts had removed more than 2,000 feet of the tubing from Cape beaches.



*Photo courtesy Laura Ludwig*

According to an Army Corps of Engineers press release, "the shock tube is made from low-density polyethylene and is considered safe for humans to touch, but small pieces can create health problems for birds or other animals if ingested."

When Ludwig showed a reporter from the *Cape Cod Times* the result of a recent beach cleanup on the Outer Cape, there was plenty of shock tubing but also a bucket of straws, next to one full of plastic cigar tips. The mix also included nip bottles, balloons, single-use water bottles, and granola bar wrappers. Ludwig underscored the value of the data provided by the tubing. "You can trace the likely source of some of this stuff," she told the *Times*, "but this shock tubing gives us the actual source of the stuff. Because it never existed on our beaches until last summer."

People can help by reporting any sightings of shock tubing on Cape beaches to Todd Randall at the Army Corps ( 978-318-8518 or [todd.a.randall@usace.army.mil](mailto:todd.a.randall@usace.army.mil) )

There are 16 beach cleanups around the Cape each year. To volunteer, contact [lludwig@coastalstudies.org](mailto:lludwig@coastalstudies.org).

## **Water quality**





Photo by Ellen K Rothman

The [State of the Waters report](#) issued annually by the [Association to Preserve Cape Cod](#) (APCC) evaluates water quality in the Cape's ponds and lakes, bays, and drinking water supplies. The 2021 report issued in late December 2021 identified Wellfleet's municipal water system as the only one among 20 on Cape Cod with "poor" water quality. Town officials called the findings flawed since they were based on one incident of contamination found during routine testing and immediately remedied. "There was one event," Water Commissioner Jim Hood told *The Provincetown Independent*, and it was widely reported. During routine flushing of lines in September 2020, the town's water system operator found a cracked well head at the Coles Neck well field north of town that allowed bacteria into the water. For the next four days, the 290 homes served by the system were required to boil their water. The well head was repaired and the water was treated with chlorine. The state Department of Environmental Protection's concerns were satisfied. "The bottom line," said Water Commissioner Curt Felix, "is that Wellfleet's water quality is outstanding."

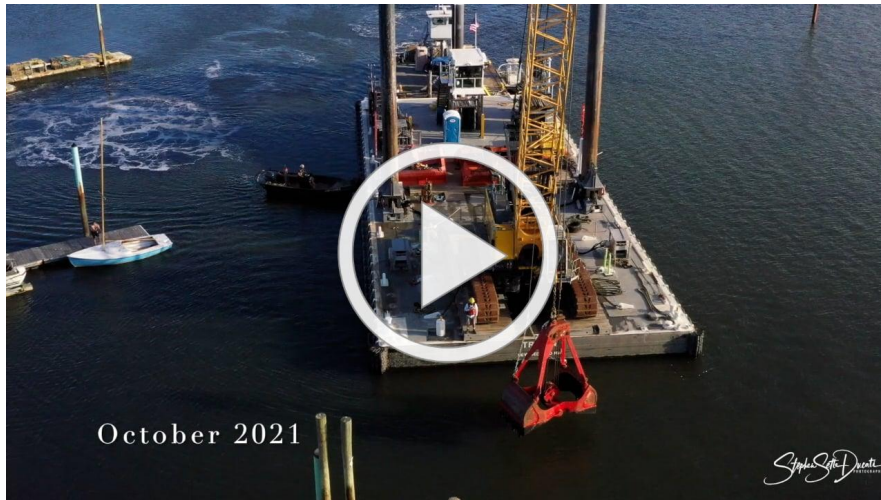
Whatever the particulars in Wellfleet, the "State of the Waters" continues to deteriorate. To no one's surprise, the APCC report found continued degradation of both marine and freshwater water quality. According to the APCC website, for the Cape as a whole, only six of 47 bays and estuaries were rated as having acceptable water quality, while 41, or 87%, received a grading of unacceptable. Last year's report had 38 receiving a failing grade, or 79%, and in the 2019 report, 68% failed.

## NEWS ABOUT TOWN

### Solar panels

On December 9, 2021, the switch was flipped on 2,400 solar panels that have been sitting unused atop Wellfleet's 7.4-acre capped landfill for the past two years. The project started in 2013, when the town meeting passed a new by-law allowing ground mounted solar arrays. A dispute over the title to land for a utility pole went to Land Court, which was snarled by the pandemic. Recently, the court cleared the title and the system was turned on. It cost the town nothing to build the array, which will generate \$30,000 a year in lease and PILOT payments from the solar contractor, and an annual reduction of \$15,000 in the town's electric bill from Eversource. Because Wellfleet elected to take the deal typically offered to host communities in the early 2010s, the agreement does not pay the town's \$160,000 electricity bill although it will get a discount from Eversource.

## Dredging



*Video by Stephen Sette Ducati*

The second portion of a three-part project to dredge Wellfleet Harbor was completed at the end of the year. With almost 100,000 cubic yards of silt—77 trips in a flat-bottomed boat—removed from the inner harbor to the federal disposal area in Cape Cod Bay, fishing boats have again been able to dock in the harbor. Once permits have been obtained, the mooring field will be dredged, bringing the long-awaited project to a close. So far the tally is \$10 million in federal, state and local funds.

### **Picnic tables at the pier**

Most seasonal residents are familiar with the tables outside Mac's On the Pier. In November for the first time the Select Board voted to formalize the arrangement. Owner Mac Hay will pay \$7,500 per season for the use of the town-owned property on which his fourteen picnic tables sit. The fees will go to the Marina Enterprise Fund, according to the license agreement.



### **Blasch House sold**

To the surprise of many Wellfleetians, in late November Mark and Barbara Blasch sold the 5,817-square-foot house they built in 2010 on an eroding coastal bluff between Cape Cod Bay and Wellfleet Harbor for the asking price of \$5.5 million. The buyer was New York lawyer John G. Bonomi, Jr, a partner and general counsel at Deloitte, the international accounting and consulting firm.

In 2019, Coastal Engineering told the town's Conservation Commission that the bank was eroding at the rate of six to seven feet per year. In 2020, the *Provincetown Independent* reported that between 12 and 14 feet remained between the foundation of the house and the edge of the steep east-facing cliff.

As reported in past WSRA eLetters, during the past two years, the Blasches unsuccessfully sought permission from the town to protect the house – located at the western endpoint of Chequesset Neck Road - by building a 240-foot sea wall. The Cape Cod National Seashore opposed the request, and the Conservation Commission denied it. The Blasches took the case to Barnstable Superior Court, which already has 70 entries in the lawsuit. Bonomi has not gone public with his plans for the house, which sits ever closer to the edge of the bluff.

### **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!**