

Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association

Promoting community involvement and communication

Spring 2021 eLetter

It's time to pay your 2021 dues -

please do so [online or by mail](#)

For those of us who were lucky enough to spend childhood summers in Wellfleet, the opening of a “pot shop” in the South Wellfleet General Store is hard to assimilate. There have of course been many other changes—the reincarnation of the Ye Olde Helpee Selfee Laundramat into a series of popular restaurants, the relocation of the Wellfleet post office to Route 6, the opening of Cumberland Farms (now replaced by a much larger store), the construction of public toilets at the ocean beaches, more recently the removal of the bust and diorama from the eroding bluff at Marconi Station—but nothing has quite the impact of the complete transformation of the place where we bought last minute supplies for s’mores, post cards to send to friends at camp, and—who remembers?—filled the station wagon with gas.



*South Wellfleet General Store, 1950's
Courtesy of the Wellfleet Historical Society and Museum*

There has been a lot of activity in Town Hall over the past few weeks. In the biggest news, Town Administrator Maria Broadbent, hired just last August, has resigned as has the new town accountant. Personnel matters are not allowed to be discussed publicly so the Selectboard did not explain the reasons behind Broadbent’s departure. An auditors’ report submitted in March found “several major deficiencies in the town’s financial and accounting activities.” Broadbent had promised that the Selectboard would learn more in May but it is still waiting to hear the details. Michael DeVasto, chair of the Selectboard, issued a statement assuring residents “that all department heads and staff continue to work professionally and collaboratively” to get the business of the town accomplished. On April 27, the Selectboard appointed Fire Chief Rich Pauley to serve as acting Town Administrator until an interim and then permanent new TA can be hired. Interviews for an interim TA were scheduled to begin on Wednesday, April 28. In addition, because departmental budgets were not completed properly, the Selectboard voted to postpone the

annual Town Meeting until June 26th (with rain dates of June 27, 28 or 29). The meeting will again be held outside on the elementary school baseball field. Town elections will take place on June 30th. The Selectboard election is uncontested; in fact, there was only one candidate for the two open positions until Justina Carlson, who had opted not to run for re-election, changed her mind and will run as a write-in candidate.

Bridges

If you headed to the Cape in April, you are aware that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers did maintenance work on the Sagamore Bridge. The backups were a harbinger of summer to come. Finished early, the Sagamore is now fully open and the Corps has moved on to the Bourne Bridge. There is only one travel lane in each direction 24 hours a day throughout construction, which will end by Memorial Day. All lanes on the Sagamore are now open.

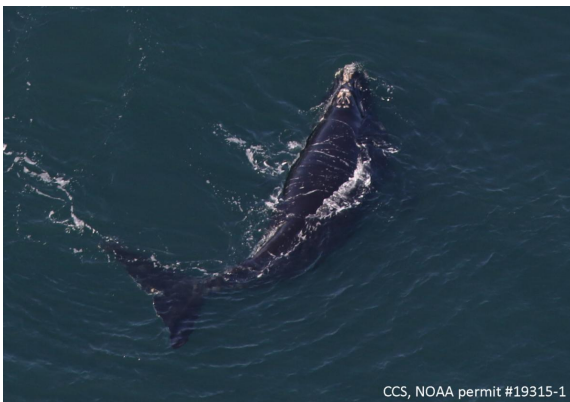
Cannabis Comes to Town



Cape Cod Cannabis at former South Wellfleet General Store, April 2021

Cape Cod Cannabis, the first store to sell recreational marijuana in Wellfleet, had a “soft opening” on April 17. The store is located in the longtime home of the South Wellfleet General Store. There are parking spaces for 26 cars; the dispensary, which will have a parking attendant on duty, will operate by appointment only. Two more dispensaries—one next to Dunkin Donuts in the Cove Plaza on Route 6 and the other in the old bank building on Main Street just off Route 6—are scheduled to open soon. The dispensaries have agreed to pay three percent of their annual gross sales to the town as a community impact fee for five years.

Spring in the Bay



Right whale calf in Cape Cod Bay, Courtesy Center for Coastal Studies

It has been an eventful few months for the Outer Cape’s marine mammals. The action began in late January when a pregnant dolphin was stranded in a patch of reeds in Wellfleet Harbor necessitating the year’s first stranding rescue on the Cape. The healthy dolphin was released in Herring Cove in Provincetown later the same day. Nicole Hunter of the [International Fund for Animal Welfare](#) told the *Provincetown Independent* that “the vast majority of Cape Cod strandings happen in Wellfleet because there is a lot of tidal fluctuation here. An area here could have 11 feet of water at high tide or none at low tide, so when animals swim into marshes and shallow places here, they can easily become stranded.”

March brought what the [Center for Coastal Studies](#) called a “bright spot in dismal reality” when three mother-calf pairs of North Atlantic right whales were spotted in Cape Cod Bay. On March 3, 2021, CCS scientists saw the season’s first right whale in the Bay. Three

weeks later, an aerial surveillance team counted 89 right whales in the Bay, including the three mother-and-calf pairs. These 89 whales represent exactly one quarter of the estimated 356 North Atlantic right whales remaining in the world. Each year, they stop off in Cape Cod Bay while migrating between calving areas off the coasts of Georgia and Florida and feeding grounds in the Labrador Sea. Last year, more than half of the population of the Critically Endangered species passed through the Bay.

“This sort of thing is special, not only because we have a remarkable density of whales,” said Charles “Stormy” Mayo, director of the CCS Right Whale Ecology Program, “but we also have very active feeding. It’s demonstrably a nursing area ... and in addition to that, we’ve had several mating groups. All of that goes on here in our little bay. I’ve had some of the most amazing views of right whales that I’ve ever had, right there on the beach” in Provincetown, he said. “And on flat, calm days — when it’s glassy calm, with hardly any waves — it’s actually possible to hear them breathing.”

The calves’ arrival is a rare bright spot in a dire situation. “This does not mean anything hugely different for the population’s future,” Mayo said. Whale experts agree that, for the critically endangered species to survive, its reproductive rate should hover around seven percent. But the rate instead averages between two and four percent. Only 22 calves have been born in the last four years and those few calves have struggled to survive.

In early April, two stranded harbor porpoises were rescued in Wellfleet Harbor. Harbor porpoises have a unique body shape and coloration and are much smaller than the dolphins that usually get stranded in these waters. They usually strand alone so this was atypical. IFAW affixed a temporary satellite tracking tag to the female’s dorsal fin and then released both animals in calm conditions in Provincetown.

A strong storm on March 1 caused an unusual overwash at Duck Harbor, which a local videographer captured and posted on [Youtube](#).

New Shark Research

On March 31, 2021, the *Boston Globe* reported on the results of a [study](#) led by the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy [AWSC] and published in the journal [Wildlife Research](#). The study provides the first evidence that white sharks off Cape Cod spend almost half (47%) of their time at depths of less than 15 feet but frequently travel further out, alternating between the surf zone and deeper offshore waters. “White sharks are regularly spotted off our coastline during the summer and fall, the peak of Cape Cod’s tourist season,” said lead author Megan Winton, a research scientist at the Conservancy, “but until now we didn’t know just how much time they spent in shallow water close to shore.” Cynthia Wigren, CEO of AWSC, said “The results of this study have greatly improved our understanding of white shark behavior near swimming beaches. It’s important to remember that the overall risk posed to humans by white sharks is low, but people should be aware that white sharks are present along Cape Cod’s beaches during the summer and fall and proactively modify their behavior to reduce their risk.”

News in Brief

Progress on Affordable Housing

On March 9, the Selectboard unanimously approved the largest affordable housing initiative in the town’s history when it issued an RFP for the 46-unit 95 Lawrence Road project. Bids from potential developers are due on June 15. With the median home value in Wellfleet up 12 percent from a year ago to \$644,750 (Zillow), market rate housing is out of reach even for families making more than the median income in Barnstable County (currently \$61,850 for a two-person household). The project will reserve at least half of its units for households making no more than 80 percent of the county’s median income.

Covid

The Outer Cape has five of the most vaccinated towns in Massachusetts. As of the end of April, vaccination rates were 69 percent in Wellfleet, 68 percent in Eastham, 71 percent in Truro. Provincetown is number two in the entire state with 93 percent. Vaccination rates are strong in all age groups.

Chequessett Neck Golf Course Saved

After lengthy and at times contentious negotiations, on February 5 the Selectboard signed an agreement with the Chequessett Club to give the club \$6.7M towards the cost of elevating low-lying parts of its golf course (holes 2 through 5) that would otherwise be flooded in the first phase of the Herring River restoration project, the largest wetland restoration in New England. Construction will close the course for two years beginning in 2022, so get out there and play this summer.

Blasch House

The Conservation Commission has again denied permission for the construction of a 241-foot stone seawall in front of the Blasch house at the end of Chequessett Neck Road. The latest action came on February 17 at a court-ordered remand hearing. Built in 2010, the 5,817-square-foot house is now 12 to 14 feet from the edge of an eroding coastal bank just north of “the Gut,” the narrow strip of sand and marsh separating Wellfleet Harbor from Cape Cod Bay. In the last two years, the coastal bank has lost six to seven feet per year; as a result, the house is now at risk of collapsing.

In December 2019, the Conservation Commission rejected the owners’ plan to build a 240-foot stone seawall; they appealed and the matter remained in Barnstable Superior Court until early February 2021 when it was sent back to the Con Comm, which took it up again on February 17th. At that virtual hearing, Superintendent Brian Carlstom of the Cape Cod National Seashore, in which the house is located, urged the Commission to deny the permit and called the design of the house itself “flawed and deficient.”



*Sandbagging at Blasch house, December 2020
Courtesy of the Provincetown Independent*

According to the Commission, installing the seawall “is likely to lead to significant erosion on abutting properties — the land to the south is a sand dune which protects Wellfleet harbor,” said conservation agent Hillary Greenberg-Lemos. The vote was 5-0 to deny the notice of intent for a seawall but the owners have permission to use sandbags temporarily to slow erosion of the bank as an emergency measure.

Marina Mooring and Slip Fees

The increase of 15 percent over three years will be implemented in stages, starting with a three percent rise in 2021, 5 percent next year, and 7 percent in 2023. Fees have not increased in nearly a decade, Harbormaster Will Sullivan told the Selectboard. “The marina needs a lot of work.”



Short-term Rental Tax

After a year’s delay, the state Department of Revenue has released data on the tax on short-term rentals first levied in 2020. The Cape’s high season accounts for 90 percent of

annual room tax revenue. In the last two quarters of 2020, Wellfleet had \$657,000 from short-term rentals, Provincetown \$1.4 million, Truro almost \$585,000, and Eastham \$760,000. With rental housing already nearly impossible to find for the 2021 season, these numbers seem certain to go up, providing the Outer Cape towns with a much-needed source of income.

Old Wharf Road

On April 8, 2021, the Wellfleet Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) held a Zoom meeting to reconsider the application of the Great White Realty Group for a special permit to use their site at the intersection of Old Wharf Road and Route 6 for open storage of sand, loam, t-base [finely crushed recycled asphalt]and stone, screening of topsoil, and keeping of heavy equipment.

The company had clear cut the site without permits in January. At the April meeting, more than 100 abutters and their lawyer, David Reid, argued that the planned activities did not meet the definition of a “contractor’s yard” allowed on this property but rather was “industrial use” that requires special permits. The neighbors and ZBA members raised concerns ranging from pollution, toxic leaks, water safety, traffic dangers, and noise to the owners’ failure to seek permits *before* they cleared the site leaving ten-foot-high piles of sand and almost no trees.



Old Wharf Rd and Route 6 after clearing

The ZBA determined that nearby properties, including homes, small retail establishments, and the Cape Cod National Seashore would “be damaged by having the proposed use as the result of increased commercial vehicle traffic, construction noise, and construction dust.” The Board also cited concerns with the dangers of the intersection, possible environmental degradation of water and air, and the lack of actual contribution to “diversity of services or housing opportunities available locally” and voted 5-0 to deny the special permits. The company has appealed the ZBA’s finding. Stay tuned.

Rail Trail Extension

In response to opposition from the town’s [Bike & Walkways Committee](#), the state Department of Conservation and Recreation has decided that at present it will construct only the first phase of the Cape Cod Rail Trail extension—from LeCount Hollow to the state-owned Wellfleet Hollow Campground. The Commissioner of DCR informed the Selectboard that the agency is deferring any feasibility studies to the town and other parties. With input from the public—over 80 pages of letters and emails—the Bike & Walkways Committee is undertaking a detailed analysis of available options for a bike route through Wellfleet to Truro.

Beach Parking in 2021

Stickers for the beach and transfer station are available only [online](#). Details are on the town’s [website](#). There will be day parking allowed at White Crest, \$30 per day per vehicle, payable by credit or debit card.

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 join, renew or pay by credit card or paypal, use the appropriate link below:

- * [For Individual Memberships \(\\$25 dues\)](#)
- * [For Family Memberships \(\\$35 dues\)](#)
- * [To give a donation](#)

New members, [join online](#) or download the [WSRA membership form](#) and mail it with 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!

