

Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association

Promoting community involvement and communication

Summer 2021 eLetter



Moon rising over Lecount Hollow
Photo by Ellen Rothman

Memorial Day weekend was miserably cold and wet all over New England. Was it an omen? While the mainland had one of the wettest Julys ever, Wellfleet saw lots of clouds but not much rain. The water level in the ponds, low from the record heat in June, stayed that way, which made room for the large numbers of visitors who chose the Cape for their first post-Covid vacation. The glorious hydrangeas did not disappoint, and even without the Lighthouse on Main Street, life in town began to seem “normal.” Until July 4th, another rainy holiday weekend, produced a major Covid cluster in Provincetown, where many vaccinated people were infected. The number of active cases in Wellfleet crept up and the masks came out again. The Delta variant has undermined all sense of security, although as of this writing, Massachusetts ranks second lowest in the rate of hospitalization and second highest in vaccination (after Vermont). We have no choice but to wait and see.

Coming Up

On Thursday, August 12, from 7:00 – 8:30 PM, the Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association will sponsor its annual **State of the Town** program. Once again you can participate from the comfort of home thanks to Zoom. The Acting Town Administrator, newly elected chair of the Selectboard Ryan Curley, and other members of the Board will be on the call. This is your chance to hear from and ask questions of the men and women leading Wellfleet. The agenda and zoom info are on the town’s [website](#).

Annual Town Meeting

Wellfleet held its second annual pandemic Town Meeting on the ball field across from the elementary school on Saturday, June 26. More than 250 year-round residents filed past a fence to sit on folding chairs, some under a tent. About two dozen non-voters (nonresident taxpayers and visitors) occupied the bleachers outside the fence. It was hot and humid but the rain held off during the six-hour meeting.

As usual, Town Moderator Dan Silverman ran an efficient meeting, remembering the

names of many of the townspeople and enforcing rules about how often and how long individuals could speak. Acting Town Administrator Charlie Sumner provided as much up to date information as he could on the town's finances, explaining that the accounting problems of the past few years are still being addressed.

The 37 articles on the warrant ranged from whether the town should pay for a new backstop to replace the rusting one at the ball field to approving a proposal to make it easier to add auxiliary dwelling units (ADU's), provided they are used for year-round rentals. The short-term rental tax was raised to 6%. The biggest financial request (\$1,931,866) was to fund a new, advanced wastewater system, which will connect the affordable housing to be built on Lawrence Road as well as the fire and police department buildings and Wellfleet Elementary School. It passed.

Of special interest perhaps to seasonal residents was the vote taken in favor of strengthening the town's animal control ordinance. From now on, dogs must be leashed unless on the owner's property and police will have the authority to write tickets for excessive barking and dog waste. The Animal Control Officer made it clear that the police were not looking to write tickets; they "just want the tool."

On a day when the worst of the pandemic seemed to be in the past, the voters were in a positive frame of mind, confident that Acting Administrator and the Selectboard would straighten out the financial irregularities the auditors found last spring. Approval came for a range of expenditures, including two new full-time firefighters/EMTs, \$12,500 grants to help property owners install "innovative and alternative septic systems," and a consultant to study a filter on Commercial Street to deal with nitrogen from downtown septic systems.

A few days later on June 30th, 30% of the 3,018 registered voters took part in the town election. Voters approved the debt override for the new firefighters, radio replacements, an emergency response vessel—the current one was built in 1994—a new pickup truck, and funding for all the other requests that were approved at town meeting. For a house valued at the current median assessment of \$551,000, the property tax increase will be about \$534 a year.

There were two vacancies on the Selectboard. Incumbent Helen Miranda Wilson was re-elected. John Wolf ran a successful write-in campaign and beat incumbent Justina Carlson, also a write-in candidate. Born in Washington, D.C., John visited Cape Cod on family trips as a child and moved to Wellfleet full-time in 2010. He works as an HVAC and restaurant mechanic and is a licensed commercial captain, who has served on the Marina Advisory Committee. His priorities are financial accountability, transparency of town government, and of course affordable housing.

Tree cutting at Lecount



Tree cutting on LeCount Hollow Rd, July 15, 2021
Photo by Ellen Rothman

Informed that David and Chellise Sexton of Eastham, the owners of 420 Lecount Hollow Road in South Wellfleet (known as "Cook's by the Ocean") were running a private parking operation last summer, former Town Administrator Maria Broadbent sent a warning of potential violation of the town's zoning ordinance. In mid-June of this year, neighbors

noticed heavy equipment doing large-scale tree removal at the same site. On June 15, then-Building Inspector Paul Fowler issued a cease and desist order to the Sextons. The work violates both the town's bylaws and the CCNS regulations. "The principal reason the Seashore was established was to maintain the ambiance and character of the Outer Cape and its natural environments," said CCNS Superintendent Brian Carlstrom. "It's pretty obvious this is counter to that. We are watching it closely." The Sextons have appealed Fowler's order; the ZBA will hear their case at its meeting on September 12. It seems likely that, if the ruling is upheld, they will follow the owners of the illegally cleared property on Old Wharf Rd and take the town to court.

Nature news

Dolphins

On Monday, July 26, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) was alerted that seven dolphins were stranded off Lieutenant Island. One of the animals died; two managed to escape to deeper waters. The IFAW team took the remaining four to Provincetown in the group's custom-built mobile clinic and later released them at Herring Cove Beach.

Mosquitos

Anyone spending even a few hours on the Outer Cape this summer has been assaulted by more mosquitos than ever before. Why? It seems that the massive swarm is due to standing seawater behind Duck Harbor beach on the Wellfleet-Truro line. After a strong storm late last winter, water from the Bay breached the dunes at Duck Harbor. See the YouTube [video](#) in the spring eLetter. Salt water flooded in but did not drain back out, creating perfect conditions for mosquito larvae. Since mosquitos can travel up to 10 miles, and the Mosquito Control Project did not receive the permits it needed to treat the standing water with larvicide until late June, the results can be felt all over the Outer Cape. The Mosquito Control Project, based in Yarmouth, has traps around the Cape. In the Herring River basin, where the swarm originated, the traps have amassed 2,000 mosquitos per day since May. Gabrielle Sakolsky, superintendent of the Cape Cod Mosquito Project, told the *Provincetown Independent*, normally "if we have a trap that gets over 200 mosquitos, I consider that a problem. This is historic."



From RC Fleetian [video](#) of Duck Harbor overwash, March 1, 2021

Thanks to the [Provincetown Independent](#) for its excellent reporting on the causes of the mosquito swarm. Beginning with the first issue in September 2019, the *Independent* had done a great deal to improve coverage of the Outer Cape. Since we do not live here all year and their hardworking staff does, we rely on them to keep us up to date on stories we sometimes miss. Regrettably, we have not always cited them when we edit and pass those stories on to you. Your best bet: get a [subscription](#) and help the Outer Cape's only locally owned newspaper fulfill its mission of reporting and producing real community news.

Sharks

The Atlantic White Shark Conservancy's hosted a preview of research plans for 2021 at its new [Chatham Shark Center](#). State Division of Marine Fisheries shark researcher Greg Skomal explained that the focus this summer is "to find patterns that lead to predictability, and ultimately, forecasting."



Researchers are building on a population study by Skomal and shark conservancy scientist Megan Winton that identified 407 sharks over the period 2014-2019. Seasonal broad-scale movements are emerging from the more than 179 sharks still carrying active acoustic tags that emit a unique identifying signal; the more than 100 receivers nearly encircling the Cape and along the South Shore are able to detect, identify and log that signal; and the real-time receivers at major beaches from Truro to Chatham. "A lot of this is tightly linked to water temperature," Skomal told the *Cape Cod Times*.

The water is still cool in June and detections are slow. As the water warms in July, detections average 2,500. High season arrives for sharks and people in August, with around 15,000 detections. October is nearly as busy, followed by a sharp drop-off in November as the ocean cools off. Years of tagging has shown that with a few exceptions, great whites are gone by December—a great time for safe surfing.

"We found the sharks spend a lot of time in the trough between two sandbars," said Skomal. "If you are managing a beach, or lifeguarding and you know a little about the ... bathymetry of your area, you might be able to get a sense, based on the data we're collecting, of what areas might be more vulnerable to the presence of these animals."

Working with the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, University of Massachusetts doctoral candidate Brian Legare has again set up over 50 acoustic receivers in a grid formation at Head of the Meadow Beach in Truro and Nauset Beach in Orleans. As a tagged shark swims through the array of receivers, its position is determined by triangulating signal strength between multiple receivers. "Think of it as an E-Z Pass system for sharks," Winton said.

A lower tech, less expensive technology, which could provide an added layer of protection for swimmers and surfers during unguarded hours, was demonstrated on July 15 at Lecount Hollow Beach by [Cape Cod Ocean Community](#), a Wellfleet-based non-profit devoted to establishing safer beach recreation using technology to coexist with sharks. Designed by [Moosh Systems](#), CCOC's warning system uses flashing red and white lights and an audible alarm. Mounted on private property on a dune above the beach, the system is designed to go off whenever it receives phone notification that a tagged great white has pinged off a real-time receiver located on a buoy off the beach.

The plan is to have the phone number for the Moosh Systems beacon included in a call tree of organizations and individuals who are notified whenever a shark tagged by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries gets close to one of the real-time receivers. Heather Doyle of Cape Cod Ocean Community said, "When [the lifeguards] are not here, nobody's getting the information."

Right whales

According to WBUR, scientists are cautiously optimistic after the birth of 17 North Atlantic right whales this season, six of which were born to first-time mothers. It's not quite the birthrate researchers would like to be seeing, but it's "better than it's been."

Blasch House

With few options left and their house at 1440 Chequessett Neck Road less than 14 feet from the edge of an eroding scarp above Cape Cod Bay, Mark and Barbara Blasch, who built the 5,817 square foot house in 2010, have put it on the market for \$5.5 million. The rate of erosion of their bluff is now about six to seven feet a year. If you want something bigger, the old Duck Creek Inn on Main Street is still on the market for \$3.25 million with 28 bedrooms, 33 baths and 8,910 square feet. No erosion problem there. Other housing options in Wellfleet are less expensive but still a serious problem as the upcoming Story Slam will make clear.

Story Slam Housing Angels in Story and Song

According to statistics in Seth Rolbein's latest "[Cape Cod Voice](#)," the housing situation in Wellfleet is dire indeed:

- Single-family home median sales price, April 2020: \$625,000
- One year ago: \$439,900
- Percent change in one year: Up 42.1 percent

He asks “Know anyone on Cape Cod whose income has gone up 42.1 percent in the past year?”

On Wednesday, August 11 at 5PM outside at Preservation Hall, a “[Story Slam](#)” will add color to those numbers. Local storytellers will share the challenges and joys of finding home in Wellfleet. Local musicians will also entertain. \$20 donation to benefit for the Wellfleet Affordable Housing Trust. Advance [reservations](#) recommended. Bring a lawn chair or blanket. WSRA is a co-sponsor.



The Wellfleet Public Library

The library is still offering curbside services but is now also open for limited browsing. Everyone must wear a mask while in the building. Visits are limited to 30 minutes. Computer use is by appointment only. For hours call (508) 349-0310 or go to wellfleetlibrary.org. Sadly, the Friends of the Library have canceled their book sales again this year, and they cannot accept any donations at this time.

PorchFest

On Saturday, August 28, [PorchFest](#) will return with a self-guided walking musical tour through the heart of Wellfleet featuring unplugged, acoustic music



The Wellfleet Conservation Trust

The WCT is planning its 14th annual guided walk on the morning of September 11. This year’s walk will be in the area bounded by Gross Hill Road, Ocean View Drive, and Long Pond Road. It will be almost exclusively on dirt roads and paths, about 2.4 miles in length with some moderate hills. The walk is FREE and expected to take about 2.5 hours. To register and for further information, please visit the WCT [website](#) or Facebook page.

Oysterfest Cancelled

Wellfleet Shellfish Promotion and Tasting (or SPAT), the nonprofit behind OysterFest, made the difficult decision to cancel Wellfleet’s famous festival for the second year in a row because of the uncertainty of the pandemic and the safety of all of those involved. OysterFest will return in October 2022, SPAT said.

Fourth of July Parade—Scheduled for September 4 over Labor Day weekend!

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](#)

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!