

Wellfleet Non-resident Taxpayers' Association

Promoting community involvement and communication

Winter 2019 eLetter

[Reminder: please pay your 2019 dues on-line or by mail](#)

Except for a catastrophic cold freeze at the end of January, which caused six- and seven-foot icebergs to float up the Harbor all the way to Duck Creek, so far it has been a quiet winter weather-wise in Wellfleet. The good weather makes it likely the expanded Outer Cape Health Center, the home since 1966 of what many of us still call AIM (the Association for Improving the Medical Resources of Outer Cape Cod) and the oldest standing community health center in Massachusetts, will reopen by summer. Meantime, on Main Street, initial architectural drawings and bids have been received for a 40' X 13' addition to the side of Preservation Hall in the center of town.

Incremental progress is being made on the affordable housing front: on March 22 Habitat for Humanity of Cape Cod closes process of the acceptance of **[applications](#)** for two single family houses to be built next fall on town-owned land at 2082 State Highway. A bigger project to build 30 to 40 affordable rental units across from the elementary school will come before Town Meeting on April 22nd.



Photo courtesy of Bruce Katcher

Short-term rental tax is here

As you know from the brief email we sent a few months ago, at the end of 2018 the Massachusetts became the twelfth state to enact a tax on short-term rentals (including Airbnb), which will affect non-resident homeowners who rent their Wellfleet property. Effective July 1, 2019, all operators of short-term rentals must register with the state **[Department of Revenue](#)** and collect state occupancy excise tax of 5.7% (the same rate at which hotel and motel rooms are currently taxed). The new law applies to all leases/agreements entered into on or after January 1, 2019. In addition to the state tax, there will also be a local occupancy tax, which in Wellfleet will be 4%. On the Cape and Islands, an additional 2.75% tax will be charged for the Water Protection Fund. The total in Wellfleet is 12.45%.

The law defines a short-term rental as any apartment, home, or condominium

where at least one room is rented out through the use of advance reservations for a period of less than 31 consecutive days to the same renter. The law applies regardless of how the property is rented – i.e. directly through the owner or via a broker, Airbnb, or any other platform. A rental of 14 days or less per calendar year is excluded from the tax. Property owners are now required to carry liability insurance of at least \$1 million per rental property.

Andrew Gottlieb, Executive Director of the Association for the Preservation of Cape Cod, expects the new tax to double the motel-hotel excise tax revenue on the Cape. Wellfleet and Provincetown officials estimate that their towns will get as much as \$1 million each in additional revenue when short-term rentals are taxed at the same rate as hotels and motels. Wellfleet Town Administrator Dan Hoort told the *Banner* that “any funds received from the new tax will end up in free cash at the end of fiscal year and voters will decide how these funds are spent at the Annual Town Meeting the [following] spring.”

More information is posted on the Town of Wellfleet [website](#).

Recreational cannabis

But not quite yet, in Wellfleet. At its March 12 meeting, the Selectboard approved a Host Community Agreement for two cannabis businesses. (There may ultimately be three retail shops in town.) David Pike of Coral Gables, Fla. and his attorney told the Board they have signed a lease for the former South Wellfleet General Store, where Nature’s Alternative previously considered having a “pot shop.” They are seeking to open a recreational marijuana retail business called Cape Cod Cannabis there by May, a timetable which the Selectboard thought was probably overly optimistic.

Pike told the Board he was going to make sure the business did not have a negative impact on the community; he will mitigate traffic issues wherever he can, and offer a significant contribution to the needs of the community beyond the 3% local tax established by state law. “We are enthusiastic about giving back to the community the maximum the state’s allowing,” he said. He estimated that “the amount the business would contribute to the town would probably exceed \$300,000 a year.”

Erin McDonald, proprietor of Gillyweed Gardens and a member of the High Dunes Craft Cooperative, and her lawyer also appeared before the Board seeking approval for the cultivation of marijuana on her two-acre property at 165 Paine Hollow Road, where she has been growing organic vegetables and flowers for five years. She plans to market her product to local dispensaries rather than selling it onsite. Her lawyer explained that they were seeking “a special subcategory of cultivator license that’s designed to give opportunities to established farmers to enter into a market that is going to be dominated by much bigger dollar players. This is an opportunity for the local farmer to supplement his or her income with a crop that will be slightly more profitable than the vegetables and flowers.”

Sharks—Still here

Even before the fatal shark attack in Wellfleet last fall, town and National Seashore officials were emphasizing the importance of “shark safe” swimming. Since the death of Arthur Medici, even veteran surfers and stalwart swimmers are

alarmed. Working with the Outer Cape towns, the National Seashore, and the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy, the Woods Hole Group is conducting a \$49,000 study of proposed shark and human mitigation alternatives. At an initial meeting in February, the group discussed the following short-term strategies that have been tried or implemented around the world and/or proposed by the local community during public forums. To:

- * improve communications at the beaches by installing emergency call boxes
- * increase lifeguard coverage
- * increase the number of Emergency Medical Technicians on beaches
- * continue public education and outreach
- * provide first-aid training for community members and staff
- * reduce, to the extent possible, emergency response time, and
- * expand white shark research.



Over the next few months, the Woods Hole Group will review emerging technologies and strategies and analyze proposed alternatives, including tagging, remote detection, adaptive camouflage and other tech-based alternatives, as well as barrier-based alternatives such as rigid

plastic mesh or netted enclosures, and biological-based alternatives.

Risk-based, human decision making will also be considered.

A complete list of alternatives to be studied is available on the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy [website](#).

An easy solution seems unlikely. On March 3, the front page of the *Boston Globe* carried a [story](#) with the headline “Consensus lacking on strategies to prevent Cape shark attacks.” It began, “There will be tourniquets and blood-clotting bandages on the beaches this summer, packed inside medical kits in case of attack. Beach parking lots will have 911 call boxes, while roving EMTs will patrol remote areas that ambulances cannot easily reach.” Maybe; maybe not. The Woods Hole Group expects its report will probably not be completed until September. At that point, it will be shared with the public; decisions to implement any strategy will be made at the individual town level.

Wellfleet has already decided to install land-line call boxes at its four ocean beaches. The town is also sponsoring “Stop the Bleed” trainings to teach lifeguards and residents how to make a tourniquet and pack a bite wound.

At Town Meeting in April, voters will be asked to approve funding for a small vehicle that can get to a victim more quickly than beachgoers sprinting across the sand.

At a recent State of the Town meeting, Wellfleet’s Town Administrator Dan Hoort told the audience that he had “called town counsel [KP Law] and asked what I should say we’re doing. They said, you may not like it, but as a town you are better off if you do nothing. If you do stuff and you start to give people the impression that they are safer in the water, and they’re not, you then become liable if something happens again. It’s not something I wanted to hear.”

“We’re working collaboratively to make science-based decisions using available technology, and I think we’re moving absolutely in the right direction,” said Representative Sarah Peake, a Provincetown Democrat. “I understand it’s a scary thing,” she said. “It’s a change in the way people behave in the water. But we are proceeding with all due diligence and with the appropriate sense of urgency about having a plan in place this summer.”

Brian Carlstrom, superintendent of the Cape Cod National Seashore, told the *Globe* his agency is adding six call boxes and more pointed signage, similar to the kind that warn hikers about bears and mountain lions in the West. It is critical to continue warning beachgoers about sharks, he said, even though attacks are so rare — much rarer than drownings, not to mention car accidents.

“This is an ongoing effort to inform the public that this is a natural, wild environment — a great place to recreate, but you have to do so with caution,” Carlstrom said.

The spring eLetter will fill you in on decisions made at Town Meeting, the work of the Parking Task Force, the status of the Blasch House, and the extension of the rail trail. It will also include the slate of WNRTA’s summer programs.

A reminder that Town Administrator Dan Hoort sends out a monthly report. If you would like to receive it, sign up [here](#). Past months are now posted under News and Announcement on the T.A.’s [page](#).

We do not have the resources to solicit annual dues by mail or email; we count on you to pay your dues early in the calendar year. Now would be good.

Annual dues are \$25 for a single membership or \$35 for a family/household membership per calendar year. Dues and individual donations are WNRTA’s only sources of funding.

To renew by credit card or paypal:

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

New members, please [join on-line](#) or please download the [WNRTA membership form](#) and mail it with your payment to:

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

THANK YOU!

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