

Wellfleet Non-resident Taxpayers' Association

Promoting community involvement and communication

Fall 2018 eLetter

[Reminder: pay your 2018 on-line or by mail](#)



Paddle Out, off Newcomb Hollow, October 20, 2018

The fall of 2018 will doubtless be remembered in Wellfleet for the tragic events of September 15. On a beautiful late summer day, 26-year-old Arthur Medici and a friend drove down from Revere, MA to go boogie-boarding at Newcomb Hollow. By lunch time, the young man was fighting for his life after the state's first fatal shark attack in 82 years. In a statement expressing the grief felt throughout the town, Janet Reinhart, Chair of the Selectboard, commended the off-duty lifeguards, people on the beach, and first responders who all worked to save Arthur's life, but he died before reaching Cape Cod Hospital.

If you have visited an ocean beach in the past two years, you have seen the signage installed to educate visitors about precautions you should take to minimize your chances of encountering a shark. Reinhart acknowledged that although attacks are rare, "there is nothing we can do to make anyone 100% safe from an interaction with a shark... It has been true in the past and will be true in the future."

At a standing-room-only community forum on September 27 at the Wellfleet Elementary School gymnasium, experts from the Atlantic White Shark Conservatory, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and the Northeast Atlantic Seal Consortium at Woods Hole fielded suggestions and answered questions from the audience. [Video of the forum](#) is on the town website. Some suggestions are unrealistic—for example, culling the seal and shark population would violate federal law; others may be implemented as soon as next summer. At the conclusion, Selectboard member Kathleen Bacon told the audience, "We should not kid ourselves in thinking that we will have the upper hand in dealing with nature.... We have lost a liberty and an innocence, that sense of abandon that one feels diving into the great Atlantic. We are entering an era that will require mindfulness and caution."

In the aftermath of Medici's death, Wellfleet will train lifeguards in the use of hemostatic bandages and tourniquets. New protocols are being developed as to how far out lifeguards will allow swimmers to go from shore, and perhaps most important, telecommunications will be improved on the ocean beaches, including emergency telephone boxes, cellular phone coverage, and better radio communications. Fire Chief Richard Pauley told the Selectboard at its October 23 meeting that he hopes the telephone boxes will be installed by the beginning of next season. When Kathleen Bacon asked whether we could have access to today's state of the art technology, Pauley said that "the technology is available to us, but the issue is coverage; we might not get coverage down on the beach because of the sand dunes."



Residential Tax Exemption

You should have received an email from WNRTA in October informing you that the Wellfleet Selectboard voted on September 11 to join Provincetown and Truro in implementing a Residential Tax Exemption (RTE) for Fiscal Year 2019. As you know by now, your FY 2019 tax bill is about 4% higher than it would have been had the RTE not been adopted.

Why? The RTE gives every *resident*—or in the legal term, *domiciled*—taxpayer a partial exemption of their property's value from taxes. In 2019, the exempted amount – that is, the amount that is subtracted from the assessed value of each property before the tax rate is applied – is \$107,750, 20% of the average assessed value of just under \$540K.



The adoption of the RTE is one of three reasons that our tax bills this year are higher than they were in FY 2018.

First, even if the RTE had not been adopted, the tax rate would have risen from \$7.18 to \$7.41 per \$1,000 of assessed value (a 3.2% increase) to fund increased town expenditures. Second, the assessed value of most properties in town increased by a small amount. Third, because state law requires RTEs to be revenue neutral, adoption of an RTE means that the tax rate must increase enough to make up for the taxes not being collected on the exempted portion of residents' property. In the case of Wellfleet this year, that resulted in the final tax rate being \$7.73 rather than \$7.41—that is, 4.3% higher than it would have been in the absence of the RTE.

As an illustration of the impact of the RTE, the non-resident taxpayer owners of a house assessed at \$600,000 will now pay \$4,777. Without the RTE, they would have paid \$4,579. Thus, the RTE increased their tax bill by \$198 or 4.3%. (If you're trying to follow along at home, note that our final tax bills include a Community Preservation Act surcharge of 3%.)

The impact of the RTE on the tax bills of residents is more complicated, because the tax reduction resulting from the exemption is offset by the higher tax rate necessitated by adoption of the RTE. (Keep in mind that everyone pays the same tax rate.) The size of this offset increases as the assessed value increases. Residents with properties valued at \$200,000 will have their taxes reduced by \$792; those with properties valued at \$500,000 will owe \$693 less as a result of the RTE. Presumably, these are the resident homeowners that the three members of the Selectboard who voted for the RTE are hoping to help. We recognize that for homeowners with low or moderate incomes, this is a significant amount of money.

Even resident homeowners with higher assessed valuations, however, will see significant tax savings. The owners of property assessed at \$1,000,000 will see their tax bill reduced by \$528 as a result of the RTE. Only the handful of residents whose homes are assessed at more than \$2.6 million will have higher tax bills with the RTE than without it. In other words, while the higher taxes paid by non-residents make possible lower reduced taxes for resident homeowners with lower incomes, they also provide tax breaks to residents who are relatively well off.

Proponents of the RTE have argued that the exemption will only be given to those who apply for it, and that many residents who don't need it might decide not to apply. That may be true in the future, but in the rush to implement the RTE this fall the town decided to grant the residential exemption to all residents with no application required. We are told that an application will be required to receive an RTE for FY 2020.

There are numerous arguments for and against the adoption of the RTE in Wellfleet and nearby towns. Members of the WRNTA Board hold a variety of positions on the issue, which we will not attempt to summarize here. In the coming months the Board will explore possible ways to respond to this change in the taxing structure in Wellfleet and will sponsor an in-person discussion in a public

forum next summer.

We have also been meeting with other part-time/non-resident taxpayer groups on the Outer Cape to discuss their responses to RTEs. We have already heard from a number of you with suggestions on how we should move forward. As always, but especially on this issue, please let us know what you think by writing to info@wnrta.org.

Sea Turtles

Anyone who spent Thanksgiving in New England knows that the temperature hit record lows. One result was that 227 turtles caught by the cold snap-- most of them juvenile Kemp's ridley, the smallest of the tropical sea turtle species--washed up on Bay beaches in a three-day period. Only 54 of the turtles were alive. Robert Prescott, director of Massachusetts Audubon Society's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, told the *Cape Cod Times* that "all but one of the 82 sea turtles found on Thanksgiving Day were frozen solid... It was like they were flash-frozen, flippers in all weird positions like they were swimming." When temperatures moderated slightly on Friday, more turtles were found alive. More than 500 sea turtles having been rescued on Cape beaches already this year, and Prescott thinks the number may reach 1,000 before the end of the stranding season around Christmas.

Preservation Hall

The expansion of Preservation Hall has begun. Only seven years after the repurposed building opened, its programs have expanded to the point where it has outgrown the space in the former church building. Over the winter, a 40' X 13' multi-purpose room with full basement will be constructed on the side facing the bank. The plans are [on-line](#).



Parking Task Force

The Chair of the Selectboard appointed eight year-round residents to serve as a Parking Task Force charged with "the study of and recommendations for parking throughout town, including beaches and outlying areas." The PTF meets every other Wednesday at 4pm at the Council on Aging. Anyone is welcome to attend. White Crest was discussed at [the September 19 meeting](#), which included a detailed presentation on Cahoon Hollow and the Beachcomber. Since then, the emphasis has been on the marina and Main St. area and on the necessity of surveying all stakeholders in town. At the October 17 meeting, Steve Snyder, President of Hectronic USA, made a detailed presentation on the technology his company could provide to assist in managing the town's on- and off-street parking facilities. The focus was on the addition of pay parking at the wharf and/or downtown using kiosks, rather than individual meters, which cost more to install and maintain. All of the [agendas and minutes](#) are on line, as are [video recordings](#) of the meetings.

Monthly Updates

To promote communication among all members of the Wellfleet community, Town Administrator Dan Hoort has started emailing a monthly update on the activities of the Wellfleet Selectboard and Town Administrator. If you wish to receive the newsletter, you can join the mailing list [here](#).

Dues and Donations, please

WNRTA does not send a bill for annual dues. We simply ask members to pay their dues as soon after the new year as possible. Dues are modest—\$25 for an individual, \$35 for a family each calendar year—but they are all that keeps us afloat.

To pay online, please go to <http://wnrta.org/join/>

If you prefer, you may send a check to:

WNRTA
PO Box 1323
Wellfleet, MA 02667-1323

If you would like more than one member of your household to receive email from WNRTA, please send their names and email addresses (along with yours) to info@wnrta.org. photo by Phyllis Brethholtz



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