

Groton Conservation Advocates

February 2018 e-Newsletter

Working to preserve the quality of life and ecological health of Groton through public education and political action.

Poquonock Reservoir

An Update on Protecting Trees at Bluff Point State Park by Eugenia Villagra



GON Airport and Bluff Point State Park under green stripes

Back in 2015-16, the Connecticut Airport Authority (CAA) recommended that Bluff Point's tallest trees be removed to accommodate airplanes landing at Groton-New London Airport. In response, local and state environmental advocacy groups (including a few of us pre-GCA advocates) proposed that a far more thorough environmental impact study be concluded to lessen the project's impact on the environment given CAA plans to remove *40 acres* of trees in various locations at the park. Click [here](#) for the full back story. Now, more than a year later, still no news about the status of the project. So, what's going on?

Our requests for information from the CAA yielded no response. Thanks to Dave Kozac (Office of Long Island Sound Programs at CT DEEP, Bluff Point's owner), who contacted Colin Goegel at CAA on our behalf, we got our answer: the final Environmental Assessment has not yet been, but will likely be, released this February and posted on the [CAA study website](#). If approved, the final EA will allow the project to proceed to the next stage where specific plans and required permits can be considered.

Groton Redevelopment by Liz Raisbeck

Thanks to Groton's new town manager, John Burt; a relatively new town planner, Jon Reiner; and economic development staffer, Paige Bronk, the town of Groton is moving hard and fast to revitalize downtown Groton, but with a more progressive approach than in the past. GCA is heartened to see that the town is focused on the **redevelopment** of the U.S. Route 1 corridor rather than more suburban sprawl.

This change in focus is in part the result of a study conducted by Reiner a year ago that demonstrated that young professionals prefer [mixed-use developments](#) where housing, shopping, and entertainment are combined. We believe there is real opportunity to redevelop the Route 1 strip malls into a much more appealing area if the town makes it financially attractive to move to mixed-use zoning. We have been regularly showing up at the Zoning Commission's twice-monthly meetings with suggestions about mixed use, public transportation needs, and open space.

The Town's economic development push also includes selling off surplus properties. GCA is paying close attention to the fate of the **Mystic Education Center** (former Oral School) on the eastern edge of town, a beautiful



An architectural vision of mixed-use development

state-owned property overlooking the Mystic River that has been unoccupied for years. We have talked to both state and town administrators who confirmed that the sale of the property will include keeping the forested portion in open space and open to the public for walking. The RFP window closed February 15th, but according to Paige Bronk “there has been significant interest by multiple groups.” We are interested to see what entity and proposal will win the bid to redevelop that property.



Getting Acquainted with Groton Government by Liz Raisbeck

Building a relationship with Groton government is a key goal for GCA. We have met with eight of the nine new town councilors, one by one, sharing our mutual interests and concerns regarding balance between economic development and environmental protection. These meetings have revealed a promising convergence of values and ideas related to Groton’s future. We look forward to also meeting with the leaders of the town commissions on conservation, planning, zoning, and economic development.

In late January, we attended a constituent meeting held by Senator Heather Somers (R). Among other topics, we asked for her support of a [constitutional amendment](#), which stipulates that any legislative conveyance of state land to local government or private entities must be preceded by a public hearing and pass with a 2/3 majority vote. She replied that “her caucus” (the Rs) supports such an amendment and she does too. This was good news as Sen. Somers attempted to convey the Mystic Education Center to the Town in the last legislative session but was blocked by supporters of the amendment.

Groton Zoning Commission Regulation Rewrite by Jim Furlong

The [town’s zoning regulation rewrite](#) has been my main focus for more than two years. In the first phase of the rewrite, directed at the Water Resource Protection District, the Zoning Commission (ZC) widened and stiffened the required buffer—now doubled to 100 feet—so that it better protects the Groton reservoir system, including feeder streams. Furthermore, new language significantly stipulates that nothing in the amended zoning regulations “diminishes an applicant’s separate responsibility for addressing...the Town’s Inland Wetlands Regulations.” The new zoning regulations took legal effect August 1, 2017.

Now, the ZC is drafting regulations dealing with permitted uses in 47 protected green areas of the town. These areas cover more than 3,700 acres, including over 1,100 acres belonging to Groton Utilities. Town planners have proposed to divide green acres into two categories: Green Recreation Lands and Green Conservation Lands. The proposed rules on permitted uses are now stricter for the conservation areas than for the recreation areas. At this writing (Feb. 7) I have some objections to the proposed categorization of land and to permitted uses on both types of land, and I’ll communicate these objections to the Commission with recommendations for changes.

Mark Your Calendars!

Tuesday, February 27th, 6 pm, Town Hall Annex

The Town Council (TC) will hold a public hearing to review the 2016 TC vote to select the Merritt property as the site for the new middle school because of claims that the meeting was not properly noticed, leading to speculation that the decision is invalid. Also controversial is that Boulder Heights, the property being swapped for the Merritt land, is supposed to be of “comparable value” and many consider it to be inferior. Councilor Moravsik’s remark at the Feb. 6th TC meeting was, “I think we ought to reconsider that issue.” Read more about the swap in this June 2016 Day article, [Groton Looks at open space options in exchange for Merritt Property](#).

We hope that in addition to reading the news you will
BECOME A MEMBER.

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Above photographs taken by the Connecticut National Guard on Tuesday, October 30, 2012, during an aerial assessment of damage caused along the Connecticut shoreline by Hurricane Sandy.

World Class Resources in Groton by Jessie Stratton

The Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation ([CIRCA](#)), a partnership between the CT DEEP and UCONN, was created in 2014 to help Connecticut's coastal and riverine communities address the challenges posed by a changing climate. The Institute, charged with conducting the research necessary to provide updated estimates of sea level rise out to 2050, is housed at UCONN's Avery Point campus in Groton. Its executive director, Dr. James O'Donnell, is also a Groton resident. CIRCA recently published sea level rise projections that indicate a rise in sea levels in Connecticut perhaps as high as 50 centimeters (about 20 inches) by 2050.

These projections, as well as CIRCA's research on changes in precipitation and storm patterns and frequency, guide their work on developing and pilot testing strategies to help communities adapt to these changes and become more resilient. CIRCA works directly with Connecticut's cities and towns to help them assess their vulnerabilities and to evaluate and begin to implement the best strategies to address them. It also provides grants, on a competitive basis, to help fund this work.

Many shoreline communities have availed themselves of this assistance and have – or are in the process of – developing detailed plans to help them prepare for the likely impacts of a changing climate. GCA is strongly encouraging Groton town officials and staff to take advantage of this extraordinary resource and host a series of meetings with CIRCA so Groton can benefit from their expertise as well.

Baker Cove Canada Geese Project by Eugenia Villagra

The ECCD (Eastern Connecticut Conservation District) contacted GCA last December about a new project funded by the EPA's Nonpoint Source (NPS) grant program to reduce pollution (bacteria) in Baker Cove. The state has identified resident Canada geese as a potential source of fecal coliform bacteria and the water quality issues and shellfish bed closures that result. Last October, ECCD met with local stakeholders such as area golf courses, Groton-New London Airport, city and town officials, and environmental organizations to urge them to participate in project objectives such as building public awareness of NPS pollution through outreach & education, resident Canada goose flock reduction, and establishment of riparian buffers. Since outreach and education is where GCA comes in, here's what you need to know:

A **free workshop** on Canada goose biology, behavior, associated environmental problems, and management options is planned for **Wednesday, March 28, 6:30 - 8:30 pm at the Town of Groton Public Library (Rooms 1 & 2)**. GCA will be there and, if you're interested, we hope you will too. Read more about the [Canada geese project](#).



An adult Canada goose can deposit one to two pounds of feces per day, which contain fecal bacteria and nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, contributing to water quality degradation such as reduced oxygen levels.



SPECIAL ZONING COMMISSION MEETING

Discussion Topics: Mixed Use-Town and Village Centers

Wednesday, February 21 @ 7:00 PM (not the usual 6:30 PM)

Town Hall Annex Community Room : 134 Groton Long Point Road

[Agenda](#) For more information about the zoning regulation rewrite project, go to the Zoning Commission's [new website](#).

You Can Help!

Please...

- Get involved! Click [here](#) to add your name to our e-mailing list or [become a member](#).
- We know you're busy. Could you [make a donation](#)?
- Write to us at groconadv2017@gmail.com with your ideas or concerns.
 - [Visit our website](#) to learn more about GCA

Thank You!

GCA Steering Committee

Jim Furlong, Liz Raisbeck, Zell Steever, Jessie Stratton, Tom Tobin, and Eugenia Villagra