

Groton Conservation Advocates

...a nonprofit 501(c)(4) organization dedicated to the protection of Groton's natural resources

January 2020 Year-in-Review e-Newsletter



Sunset over West Cove, Groton. Photo by Jessie Stratton

2019 a Great Year for GCA!

By Eugenia Villagra

Inside this issue four articles will bring you up-to-date on GCA's advocacy work on climate change, the single-use plastics ban, and the Mystic Education Center redevelopment plan. On page four, you'll find an invitation to **party with us**, check us out on Facebook, and get more involved.

Highlights of the Year:

- GCA assisted Groton's Conservation Commission (CC) publicize their plastics survey, whose results demonstrated strong public and business support for a single-use plastics ban, a key to garnering support for a ban. We also urged the Town Council (TC) and the CC to take a stronger stance on banning polystyrene in the plastic ordinance. (See page 2)
- Plan launched to reconstitute a climate-change working group and advocate for solar panels on the new school buildings. The Groton Resiliency and Sustainability Task Force was established and sworn in in February 2019. (See page 3)
- During the Zoning Commission regulations rewrite, we successfully lobbied the ZC to reclassify Haley Farm to a higher level of protection—Green Conservation—like Bluff Point. GCA also successfully advocated for a 550 sq. ft. limit on buildings on Green Conservation zoned land and a 3% limit on Green Recreation zoned land.

- Candidate endorsements for Nov. 2019 TC election.
- GCA incorporated in the State of Connecticut and applied to the IRS for, and was granted, 501(c)(4) status, which enables us to lobby as a nonprofit social welfare organization.

- Check out our new logo!

Other Advocacy issues:

- Lobbied the CC, the Town's Tree Advisory Board, to update and enhance tree protections in Groton. This concern followed the extensive tree cutting near the bottom south side of Rt. 1. Town staff said the trees were cut to build a stormwater drainage system for the new middle school. The increased frequency and intensity of storms has led to a need for enhanced drainage systems, which means more tree cutting, reducing CO₂ uptake.
- The proliferation of mountain biking trails in state parks in Groton (Bluff Point, Candlewood Hill Wildlife Management Area, and Haley Farm) is a growing concern. Bikers make illegal new trails all over the parks.

Town of Groton Ordinance Bans Single-Use Plastics

By Liz Raisbeck

The Groton Town Council made history on January 7, 2020, when it passed a progressive ban on single-use plastics for the town, 8-1. The strongest proponents were Mayor Granatosky, Aundre Bumgardner, Joe Zeppieri, Portia Bordelon and Conrad Heede; Juliette Parker voted no. Unfortunately, the ban does not apply to the City of Groton, which is governed separately, nor to Groton Long Point. Since there are no real commercial operations on Groton Long Point, that should not be a problem. This ban would not have happened without supporters like **YOU** who showed up at hearings and meetings and wrote to the Town Council supporting a plastics ban.

The ban covers single-use carryout bags (in-store bags for produce and meat are still allowed), plastic straws, stirrers, and polystyrene cups, bowls and trays. Washington D.C. is working on a polystyrene ban that goes further, covering packaging material (like “peanuts”). Maine has banned polystyrene across the state. Groton school cafeterias, which rely on Styrofoam® products to serve lunch to our school children, will be phasing it out this spring.

A key player in Groton’s plastics ban was the Groton Conservation Commission (CC). Well over a year ago, the CC began researching plastic bags, their hazards and level of usage. It also studied the comparative cost of replacements for various kinds of single-use plastics, creating a chart showing that alternatives cost only a few cents more or the same amount. The Commission then surveyed 483 Groton citizens and businesses about their views on banning single-use plastics. To their surprise, they found that 90% of the individual and 79% of the business respondents had no problem with banning plastic bags. Almost 50% of the businesses offered to help pass a ban.

Next steps: The Town Council has referred the newly-passed ordinance to the Groton Representative Town Meeting (RTM), which is empowered only to take no action or vote it down within 45 days. It will take up the issue at its next meeting on February 12th. If all goes well, businesses will have a six-month period for stores to clean out their old inventory. At a recent meeting of the RTM, a few reps expressed strong opposition to the ordinance. While we are optimistic it will not be voted down, GCA will be calling on our supporters once again to write a short letter to the RTM in support of the ordinance. We are so close to success! We can’t leave any stone unturned to assure this ordinance goes into effect. It will be a real boon to the environment and bring about a cleaner, more attractive Groton. Click [here](#) to read The Day article on the ban.



Liz, GCAs plastic ban advocate, testifies at the Jan. 7th meeting.

GCA Follows Development of Mystic Education Center Project

By Jim Furlong

Redevelopment of the state-owned Mystic Education Center (MEC, aka Oral School) is underway and Groton Conservation Advocates is following the matter closely as there are several environmental issues to keep an eye on. The abandoned school is situated on 77 acres, a stone’s throw north of I-95 on the hill that overlooks the west bank of the Mystic River, about a mile and a half from downtown Mystic.

Paige Bronk, Groton’s Economic and Community Development Manager, announced at a public gathering Nov. 7 that Respler Homes LLC was designated “Preferred Developer” for the MEC over several companies that also responded to a Town of Groton Request for Proposals posted in December 2017. The town and state are partnering to redevelop the property declared “surplus” by the State in 2011.

Of the 77 acres, the Respler company plans to transform the 40 hilltop acres—which includes several old buildings—into a mixed-use “village” of 750 new residential rental units. The old buildings will be repurposed into office and commercial space, a daycare center; the Pratt Recreation Center building with the Olympic-sized pool will be rehabilitated. The other 37 forested acres, rising from River Road, will remain as open space and be owned and managed by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for passive recreation. The 77 acres are adjoined on the west by a 7.89-acre state parcel that the RFP said has been slated for development.



Plan of redevelopment envisioned by Cross Key Architects; Fuss & O’Neill

The company envisions building an access road to the village from Cow Hill Road; Oral School Rd. will not be the principal access road. A portion of a 17-acre tract of private land that has been optioned or acquired by Respler will be developed for that purpose.

Jeff Respler told GCA that he hopes to break ground in about a year after winning the necessary approvals from Groton land-use commissions, among others. A master plan still needs to be drawn up. The Day published [a story on the Respler project](#) November 7th.

Energy and Climate Change: Local and State Developments



<https://www.killinglyenergycenter.com/>

New Fossil-Fuel Power Plant Planned

By Kris Kuhn

Along with Groton Conservation Advocates' robust focus on local issues, there looms an overarching concern: climate change. Visible effects of increasing greenhouse gases are accelerating at an alarming pace along our own shores, statewide, regionally, and globally.

Recognition of a climate crisis has catalyzed significant responses by our elected state officials, including Governor Lamont's goal of 100 percent carbon-free electricity by 2040 and the provision by our legislature in 2019 for the development of 2,000 megawatts of wind-powered electricity.

Yet, there remains an overwhelming obstacle to meaningful progress toward a carbon-free future: the ongoing expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure in our state. Nowhere is this more glaring than the planned construction of a new natural gas burning power plant in Killingly, Ct. Located on 70 acres in the upper northeast corner of the state, the planned Killingly Energy Center (KEC) is set to be a 650-megawatt electric generating facility that could power up to 500,000 homes. Build out is scheduled to begin *this spring* and the estimated construction cost is upwards of \$600 million. At full capacity, the plant would produce 2.2 million tons of carbon dioxide annually – thwarting any hope of reaching a carbon-free energy grid by 2040. Worse yet, KEC is *not needed* – our electricity supply in the state actually exceeds demand. This new plant would lock in higher greenhouse gas emissions, divert crucial investment away from carbon-free energy sources, and worsen climate change impacts for years.

Residents in Killingly and advocates throughout the state have opposed the KEC plant plan since its inception. By the time Lamont took office, plans for the plant were well underway. He alone holds the power to halt construction, but thus far he has waffled, saying only that he is “skeptical” about KEC. **Lamont's leadership to halt the Killingly project now is crucial to a sustainable future.** He will need to hear from constituents statewide.

In 2018, GCA also worked hard to garner local support to pass the Constitutional Amendment to protect open space. Once again, GCA must expand its focus beyond town lines to impress Lamont with this crucial message.

Executive Order 3 and the Governor's Council on Climate Change

By Jessie Stratton

The legislature will convene February 5th for a “short session,” which GCA will monitor for energy and environmental issues of concern to our members. House Bill 7251, which would have postponed damaging changes made in 2018 to [Connecticut's net metering law](#) and make the economics of installing solar electric and other renewable generation far less economic, did not pass the Senate. Fortunately, parts of the bill were included in HB 5002, an omnibus bill that became Public Act 19-35 AN ACT CONCERNING A GREEN ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION that temporarily preserves numerous provisions and funding that promote deployment of renewable energy. GCA will work with other entities this session to pass legislation to provide more permanent support for encouraging renewable power.

GCA is working with the Town Council and our legislators to pursue legislation to build on some of the provisions in PA 19-35, which will help the town install more renewable generation and create a microgrid to provide power to key town entities in the event of an extended power outage.

Groton Climate Change Task Force

GCA members met with Mayor Granatosky early in 2019 to request that a new committee on climate resiliency be established to review the town's 2014 resiliency work, access updated research and information from CIRCA and CT DEEP, and advise the town as to what the likely impacts of climate change will be and recommend ways the town could act to mitigate them. On Feb. 20, 2019, the Town Council created the Groton Resiliency and Sustainability Task Force, and five citizens from the town were appointed to the Task Force in March: Frank Bohlen, Sarah Kelly, Zell Steever, Jessie Stratton, and Victor Villagra. The Groton Resiliency and Sustainability Task Force held its first meeting on April 24, 2019. Mayor Granatosky appointed Zell Steever President, and Maggie Jones and Mickey Weiss were added as alternate members later in the spring.

Since then, the task force met with town department heads and local utilities to learn about their current plans regarding resilience and emergency response and what they see as needs. On November 6, 2019, members of the task force reported to the Town on their work to date and future work plans.



Follow GCA on FACEBOOK!

By Kristin Distante



Facebook is a great outreach tool for GCA. Our new page is packed with interesting articles, vivid photos and videos accessible at the click of a mouse. We can share material and ideas coming in from all over the web and disperse our news and information back out there. During the recent town election, we gained following from most of the GCA-endorsed candidates. As we keep up-to-date with current issues, the page is steadily gaining “likes,” “views,” and followers. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words, and links you to more information and raises awareness about global warming, plastic pollution, the Killingly gas plant and other topics of interest to GCA. To find the page, go to Facebook.com and search for Groton Conservation Advocates. We encourage you to check it out, like, share, follow and join the conversation! The page is managed by volunteers Kristin Distante and Julia Meylor Simpson.

YOU'RE INVITED!

GCA IS HAVING A PARTY FOR OUR SUPPORTERS

DATE: TO BE DECIDED...

HIGH CABIN-FEVER SEASON

TIME: 5 PM

PLACE: MAÑANA CAFE

MORE DETAILS SOON!

You Can Help!

- **Get involved! Click [here](#) or go to grotonconservationadvocates.org/partners-1/ to add your name to our e-mailing list.**
 - **We know you're busy. Could you [make a donation](#)?**
 - **Write to us at groconadv2017@gmail.com with your ideas or concerns.**

Thank You!

GCA

