

Groton Conservation Advocates

January 2019 e-Newsletter

Happy New Year!



GCA's First Year by Liz Raisbeck

A start-up organization has many challenges. Often mere survival is at the top of the list. But as GCA is an all-volunteer organization with several different areas of expertise, a compatible team, and a lot of commitment to the cause of protecting Groton's environment, we have had a very successful first year! Here's a quick overview.



The Merritt Property Swap

Our biggest challenge this past year was the Town's plan to build a new middle school on the deed-protected conservation property next to the high school known as the Merritt property. When we learned of this plan in late 2017, we knew we had to get involved. Under the previous town manager and town council, a deal had been made to swap the 20-acre Boulder Heights (seen in picture above), aptly named, for the more ecologically valuable 35-acre Merritt property so the school could be built. We sent you several action alerts about this conflict. Many of you came to the hearing in February and objected to the unequal land swap. We suffered the glares of numerous school personnel and parents who thought we were trying to torpedo their school. But in the end, we helped the town find a much more valuable property "of equal size and value," as required by law, on the west side of town next to the Kolnaski school. We invite you to explore the beautiful King forest and rock outcroppings with a stream and wetlands nestled in the heart of intense

residential development. It is a boon to the neighborhood and protection at last for a property that has been on the Conservation Commission's list for decades.

And...Boulder Heights was added to the swap so that 55 acres are now protected instead of the originally proposed 20.

CT's Land-Protective Constitutional Amendment

GCA does not expect to take on state-wide issues often, but the proposed constitutional amendment to provide transparency, a public hearing, and a two-thirds vote by the state legislature before it sells, trades, or swaps land seemed too important to Groton to ignore. Acting as a local assistant of the Connecticut Forest & Parks Association, GCA took a number of steps over several months to encourage "yes" votes on Question #2. We faced a real challenge to educate the voters about the complex language in the amendment and make them aware of equally baffling language on the ballot itself. Q2 was also overshadowed by Groton's controversial Question #3, the complex proposal to change the Town's charter. We provided a steady stream of alerts to our supporters, sent letters to the editor of The Day, displayed 100 eye-catching yard signs around town, visited both Bluff Point and Haley Farm to talk to walkers and pass out palm cards advocating "Vote Yes" on Question #2. We also held an information session and stood at Groton's seven polling stations on Nov. 6th. We were very pleased that Groton voted YES by a margin of 83% and passed across the state by 85%. (Continued on p. 2)



A number of issues that we wrote about in our last newsletter simply have not fully “ripened.” A final decision on redevelopment of the **Mystic Education Center** should be made public very soon. The Connecticut Airport Authority has gone silent on **plans to cut Bluff Point trees**, although we think news of that, too, could appear any time. We are watching the hearing notices for proposed developments in town, but so far they appear to involve only a few houses. Finally, we are currently conducting a round of **meetings with Town councilors** with suggestions for actions they can and should take related to: promoting **mixed-use redevelopment** along Rte. 1; reducing the use of single-use plastics and publicizing **Groton’s litter problem**; promoting energy efficiency; and getting started on a plan for **climate change resilience** in Groton.



Groton and Coastal Resilience by Jessie Stratton

As residents of one of Connecticut’s 24 coastal towns, we well know the appeal of living close to the sea, but a changing climate is bringing new challenges that will increasingly impact the value and uses of coastal properties and the sea itself.



We are called to respond to these challenges in two primary ways: first, by mitigating the causes of climate change by reducing the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and second, adapting to become more resilient to the inevitable impacts of a changing climate.

Research at the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA), located at UCONN’s Avery Point Marine Sciences campus here in Groton, provides important information about and guidance for efforts to adapt to the changes we already see and those we know will come. As required by law, the Department of Marine Sciences has developed a sea level rise projection model that indicates that the state and municipalities should prepare for 20 inches of sea level rise by 2050 and further rises after that – the amount of which will depend on the level of mitigation efforts between now and then.

In addition to sea level rise, the primary impacts of the changing climate for Connecticut’s coast include increased storm frequency and intensity and water temperature increases that affect marine species, salinity and water quality. Changing precipitation patterns are resulting in rainstorms that drop far more rain than in the past—rain bombs rather than showers. When those

heavy downpours flood our inland waterways, the confluence of the mouths of those rivers and the Sound become prone to even more dramatic flooding and during nor’easters often back up through several tide cycles.

Addressing these realities is daunting and fraught with economic, legal, and human challenges along with the environmental and scientific ones; but not addressing them will leave us even more vulnerable to nature’s changes. 95% of Connecticut’s population resides within 50 miles of the coast, and 64% of the state’s insured property is located in the coastal area. An astounding \$542 billion in assets are at risk to coastal storms and flooding.

Recommendations that the Town of Groton helped develop in 2011-12 were never implemented and are now outdated. Groton Conservation Advocates plans to meet with members of the Town Council early in 2019 to request that a new committee on climate resiliency be established to review the town’s earlier work, access updated research and information from CIRCA and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, and use such to advise the town as to what the impacts of climate change are likely to be and ways in which the town could act to mitigate them.

As the report issued in 2012 noted, “Groton offered a unique mix of federal, state and municipal coastal climate changes issues, including inundation from sea level rise at the Navy Base, Groton-New London Airport, Groton Reservoir, state parks such as Bluff Point, vulnerable commercial areas such as downtown Mystic and developed coastal barrier beaches.”

This “unique mix” includes many of Groton’s most valuable assets and it is in everyone’s interest to understand their vulnerability and actions we might be able to take to better protect them.

GCA Taking on Roadside Litter by Jim Furlong

GCA is in the early stages of a campaign to reduce roadside litter in Groton.

We've had preliminary talks with members of the Town Council, Department of Public Works, Conservation Commission and police force. Progress is not yet visible to the public, but seeds have been planted.

We believe a good start toward keeping roadways cleaner would be to post a limited number of no-littering signs on town and state roads. Groton, to our knowledge, has none at present, even though littering is a finable offense under state law.

The message on signs is yet to be determined.

We've had a number of suggested candidates, most of them from the town Department of Public Works, under Director Gary Schneider. They vary in tone from stern to philosophical to funny. The list below shows only the slogan, not the caution against littering that would accompany it.

The suggestions so far: Be part of the solution, not the pollution; Feed the can, man; Slam dunk the junk; You think we like picking up after you? (with a photo of a mom and dad); I hate that empty feeling inside (seen on a



A display of the litter Jim found after picking up trash along a section of Fishtown Rd. near his home.

GCA Again Asks Zoning Commission to Heighten Protection of Haley Farm by Jim Furlong

GCA has renewed its request to the Zoning Commission (ZC) to upgrade the proposed zoning classification of Haley Farm in view of a new development affecting the farm.

The commission, currently working on an update of the town's zoning regulations, has tentatively classified Haley Farm as a "Green Recreation" area in contrast to the more highly protected classification of "Green Conservation" envisioned for Bluff Point. GCA has argued at ZC meetings that Haley Farm and Bluff Point are geologically similar, sensitive coastal areas linked by a bridge that effectively form an integrated 1,000+ -acre nature preserve.

The unity and equivalent environmental quality of Bluff Point and Haley Farm were emphasized in November

trash receptacle); Put trash in its place; Join the green side (with image of Darth Vader); If you litter, the future will be bitter; Reuse, Reduce, Recycle; Fill me up buttercup (seen on another trash receptacle)

You can't afford to be trashy (with mean-looking picture of a police officer); Green city, clean city, my dream city; Don't trash our future, recycle; Stop littering. The earth is

not your garbage can; Here today, reused tomorrow; Connecticut is too great to litter; Give a hoot, don't pollute (with a picture of an owl, of course); Every litter bit hurts; You are the only cure for litter; The world outside your car is not your personal ashtray; Litter and you're rubbish; Can it for a greener planet; Proud people don't litter; Recycle your trash or

trash your earth; Fight dirty. Keep our parks clean; Be clean, be green, be a recycling machine; Money does grow on trees, recycle paper; Take care of the earth and she will take care of you; Your mother does not work here; There is no Planet B; Litter Is Unlawful; Groton Cares. No Littering.

**Reader, if you have a message of your own, please share it with us at this email address:
groconadv2017@gmail.com**

when the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) announced that both are among state-owned properties chosen as a preferred site for a national research reserve. The reserve would join a national network of 28 such areas—called National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERR)—that are linked by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). At present, Connecticut is only one of two salt-water coastal states without a NERR.

DEEP said that Long Island Sound, which it called the state's greatest natural resource, contributes \$7 billion annually to the regional economy. The NERR program, once adopted, "can help provide the information decision-makers need....[and] enable new directions and initiatives by leveraging nation-wide programs."

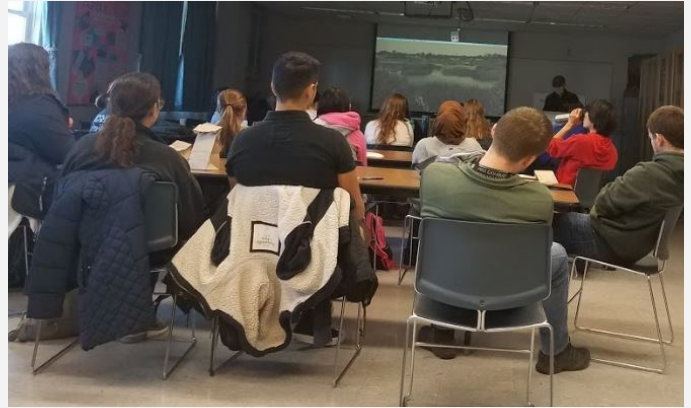
In view of the plans of DEEP and NOAA for both Haley Farm and Bluff Point, GCA again has asked the Zoning Commission to upgrade Haley Farm's protected status to that of Bluff Point.

GCA Participates in UCONN Alternative Break Program

by Eugenia Villagra

Last September, an Alternative Break trip director contacted GCA with a request that we take part in a weekend-long immersive experience for 22 students from Storrs and Avery Point on the topic of local coastal environmental issues and advocacy. We gladly accepted. Between 8-10 am on Sunday, Nov. 11th, Jim Furlong, Liz Raisbeck, Jessie Stratton and I took turns talking about and taking ques-

tions on: when and why we became environmental advocates and formed GCA; the on-going problems of pollution and sea-level rise in Long Island Sound; the critical importance of advocacy in protecting open space and the quality of Groton's air, drinking water and the resources of Long Island Sound; how to be effective advocates; and finally, some specifics on the projects we have undertaken since forming a year ago. The session went well and they invited us back again next year!



PLASTIC BAGS AND STRAWS HURT/KILL WILDLIFE

by Eugenia Villagra

Please take an [Online Survey](#) TODAY to support the reduction of single-use plastic in Groton!



Photo by John Cancalosi

Kristin Distanto, GCA member and newly-selected Town conservation commissioner, is helping the Conservation Commission conduct a survey of Groton residents and businesses to gauge community support for a Town initiative to reduce the use of single-use plastic straws and shopping bags. Read all about it in [The Day's article](#) published on Dec. 21st. **The deadline for completing the survey is noon Monday, January 7th.**

Click [here](#) to take the survey online. It's easy and takes only two minutes to complete.

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!