



76 Riverview Ave.
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May 3, 2022

To: Members of the Groton Town Council
From: Liz Raisbeck and Kris Kuhn
Co-chair and Steering Committee Member, Groton Conservation Advocates

Re: Nips Tax funds coming to Groton

We are speaking to you today about the recent windfall to the town from the tax on nips liquor bottles. The town is expected to receive \$33,000 from just the first six months of taxes collected. We can assume the annual take will be in the neighborhood of \$60,000 or more. GCA asks that you consider a few suggestions for spending those funds.

The nips tax was a solution to the nips problem sought by the bottling and reclamation industries so that they wouldn't have to develop a new recycling system for the tiny nips bottles. A nips tax stream has been designed to create a new dependency that will discourage towns or the state from outlawing nips. Unfortunately, the tax, while bringing welcome funds into the towns, will do nothing to decrease the vast number of these nonrecyclable bottles (673,578 were sold in Groton over the six month that generated the \$33,000), most of which are flung onto the ground as yet more plastic waste in a world overflowing in plastic garbage.

We hope that the spotlight on the enormous harms from single use plastics soon will lead to public policy that effectively addresses the nips problem. Such policy ideally should be an outright ban. Short of that, we may look toward future reconsideration by our state legislature of a 25-cent redemption fee for nips, as was proposed last year in the initial version of Connecticut's bottle bill. Replacement of the nips tax by a redemption fee of course would make the current windfall only a temporary one, but would have the huge benefit of decreasing nips litter.

With this in mind, we recommend that the Council disperses the nips tax receipts across a number of programs or as seed funding so no single program or two becomes dependent on the nips tax as a sole source of support.

Most important, we suggest that the Council dedicates the nips tax receipts toward work that addresses environmental concerns and focuses on plastics. It would be appropriate to use these funds to induce people to reduce their use of plastics in every way possible. We encourage the town to put a substantial

portion into school-based campaigns that devise creative ways to “reduce and reuse” so we don’t have to “recycle.” Our youth are the next generation of leaders so let’s enlist them as an army battling plastics pollution.

Groton has abundant talent to engage in the design of such valuable educational opportunities. As one example, Michael Whitney, a UConn professor of marine science at Avery Point, is collaborating with David Aldridge, Executive Director of SCRRRA, Eric Magers, the founder of Seaside Sustainability out of Gloucester, MA, and local high school faculty in the design of a program titled “Marine Debris Education and Prevention in Diverse Environmental Justice Coastal Communities.” With a focus on single use plastic debris, this proposal describes “a two-year project that will actively engage and educate a diverse high school student target audience, collaborate with teachers and community partners, accomplish marine debris prevention through student-driven projects, and raise community awareness about marine debris.” This project has the potential to expand into a sustained and more widespread “Green Scholars” curriculum developed by Magers and successfully implemented in numerous school systems.

Councilor Franco recently circulated a picture of a large fish sculpture full of plastic debris that could be an effective visual reminder that marine life ingests plastics. As another potential project, the town could create signs that promote reusable bags; such signage could be a strategic and town-wide public reminder and result in real behavior change. These are examples of a wealth of potential proposals that could be solicited by the town and engage residents across the community.

As a final note, we hope the Council will consider using any uncommitted nips tax receipts to start building back the \$0 balance in our open space acquisition fund. While we have heard people say that we can’t really do anything with \$10-30,000, we certainly can in five years with \$100,000 in matching funds for a critical open space acquisition.

The town’s plastics ordinance has been a critical measure to address plastics pollution and we applaud the Council’s action to make it happen. We hope that the nips windfall will be used to continue this crucial work. Thank you for considering our suggestions as you contemplate the welcome task of how to allocate the nips tax funds.