

Town of Stonington

Monthly Newsletter



January 2023

There have been many positive happenings in Town thanks to the dedicated work of our Town staff, elected officials, volunteers and extensive nonprofit and business community. We are once again grateful to all who have contributed to our Newsletter. This month you can find featured interviews, conducted by Stonington resident, student liaison, Morgan Browning, with Deputy Director, Public Works and the former Chair of the Town's Economic Development Commission. For an overview of all Town Communication please visit our website, which hosts an overview of all Town communication channels, including the Economic and Community Development Commission's dedicated website & newsletter at stonington1649.com. Thank you, Danielle Chesebrough, Stonington First Selectman

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-Getting to Know Us-

A look at the people behind our Departments and Boards.

By Morgan Browning

Economic Development Commission, Retiring Chair, Dave Hammond

The Economic Development Commission (EDC) is made up of 12 hardworking members who strive to grow the tax base, while preserving the residential character of the Town. The Chair of the EDC has been Dave Hammond, a generous volunteer and father. Mr. Hammond has been a committed volunteer in our town since his two boys were very young. He started to help out with his son's extracurricular activities such as sports and Cub Scouts. As Mr. Hammond became more involved in the Stonington Public School systems, he came to a further understanding of how important it was to keep the school funded.

Prior to becoming Chair, he was a strategic planner at Pfizer for 22 years, and he worked for various other companies for 15 years prior to Pfizer. Mr. Hammond participated in the EDC as an active member for nine years and was nominated to be the chair five years ago, in 2017.

When Mr. Hammond is not working; he is out visiting his two boys, who are both now college students at Bentley and Cornell. His son is also running for Cornell University and Mr. Hammond and his wife often travel to watch the races and visit their son and his team. Hammond states that even though he is retired, much of his time is spent supporting his boys through college, which he loves. Mr. Hammond will be stepping down as Chair of the EDC in January, and all who worked with him expressed their gratitude for his leadership and wish him well in his next chapter!

Learning More About the Economic Development Commission

During our interview, I started off by asking Mr. Hammond, “What has surprised you most since taking on the role as Chair on the EDC?” Hammond replied that he did not anticipate how challenging it is to advance work in a municipality in an efficient way. The EDC consists entirely of volunteers with limited time, yet it seeks to account for diverse public opinion and input, adding an important step in an effort to gain support for ideas that benefit the Town. He says that it was very different entering into a municipality vs. a corporation, which is understandable due to his wealth of experience from Pfizer. A corporation such as Pfizer does not weigh importance on public input, while a municipality and its Commissions, such as the EDC, revolves largely around it. The EDC works to make the Town better for the people, which means they really appreciate hearing from the community members of Stonington.

Mr. Hammond feels that the EDC members are extremely aligned. I was very intrigued during this interview to learn that the EDC does a goal setting process each year to keep the Commission productive and efficient. Entailed in this process is a meeting in which 30 projects are pitched by various members. Then 10 projects are chosen based on priority of what will be most beneficial to the Town. All 12 members have a voice in this meeting.

Mr. Hammond said he hopes that the public knows that the EDC’s ideas and actions are informed by the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), the strategic plan for the Town. The POCD was written with a generous amount of public input. The EDC’s main job is to come up with recommendations and plans for the Town, but they do not have any power in the Town to regulate laws. Their main goal is to consider all 18,000 residents in the Town and keep their best interest at heart.

I asked Mr. Hammond, “Are there any big things that the EDC is working on and what effects will they have on the community?” He said that the EDC is currently working on revitalizing downtown Pawcatuck. They are currently working to attract investments to the downtown area to refurbish vacant lots and buildings. The EDC has already seen some accomplishments in Pawcatuck, including contemporizing zoning regulations and revised floodplain construction guidelines within FEMA rules to attract investment. The EDC also works with owners of blighted and under-performing properties to realize upgrades, residential development, or new commercial businesses.

They are also working on making the Town villages more vibrant, while maintaining open space in the Town. For example, some of the highway exit areas do not establish a welcoming feel to Stonington, and so they are working to brainstorm ways to make the exits 90 and 92 more inviting.

The EDC is also working on creating Cultural Districts in the Town, which would be state recognized. The Town must make an application, meet the state's criteria, and then be officially recognized. Some places that would be highlighted with a cultural district would be the Nathaniel Palmer House and the arts galleries in the Stonington Borough.

Overall the Economic Development Commission plays a large role in the ongoing development of the Town. Though they do not have the power to directly regulate laws in the Town, they work to make the most beneficial recommendations possible. Thanks to the work of Chair, Dave Hammond, and all the other generous members of the EDC, the finances and development of the town continue advancing and making yearly improvements.

Deputy Director of Public Works, Tom Curioso



Mr. Curioso has spent his whole life in Stonington. He began to work in the construction trade from a young age. In 1986, Tom heard there was an opening for a truck driver in the town and he successfully got the job. Mr. Curioso began working as a seasonal employee and soon became a full-time worker for the town of Stonington. Quickly, Mr. Curioso made connections with individuals in the town through helping them in times of need, then later rekindling past relationships through his kids growing up in the school district.

When Mr. Curioso is not spending his time committed to Stonington, he loves to travel with his wife including locations such as Italy, Austria, and the Czech Republic. Considering he spent a

lot of time working in construction, Mr. Curioso expressed “I love to look at the architecture of the buildings and think about how these buildings were made before technology.” He explained during the interview how he feels like a completely different person while on vacation; he is very relaxed and free of worry, since he is so far from home.

Learning More About Public Works

After 10 years away from the town, Mr. Curioso returned as Deputy Director of Public Works in 2015. Mr. Curioso says the biggest change he saw from working in the town in the 80’s as a truck driver compared to his new role in 2015 was how organized things had become due to technology. He says that work is more organized, such as equipment tracking, reliability of the equipment, and the scheduling of work that needs to be done, which ultimately makes his job more efficient.

Diving into the work that Mr. Curioso and his team does, he shared people may be surprised by how much of the town Public Works is responsible for. The Public Works does projects big and small, including sidewalk repair and highway maintenance. The department oversees 114 miles of road, takes care of all down buildings besides the public schools, and maintains all of the athletic fields for the school systems. They also oversee sights when homes collapse, installing sandbags, and clearing routes for ambulances, which is the more human and personal side of the work that Public Works does.

Interested, I asked Mr. Curioso “How do you choose what projects for Public Works to focus on?” He informed me that every year the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is put together. Discussed in this plan is finding issues in the town that need immediate attention such as roads that are flooding easily due to drainage issues or clearing structures that are hazards to residents. Then an operating budget is presented, which is divided up into a balance for maintenance, fields, equipment, and road repair. Lastly, Mr. Curioso voiced that the next project that Public Works is working on is upgrading handicap ramps for wheelchairs. This is one of the many things that Public Works and Deputy Director of Public Works, Mr. Curioso, is responsible for in the town of Stonington.

-Town Department Updates-

A Look back at the Month of January

Department of Assessment- Revaluation and Benefits Programs

2022 Revaluation:

Preliminary valuation notices were sent out in the beginning of December. The informal hearing process was just completed in late January. Property owners were given the opportunity to meet with either staff of Vision Governmental Solutions or the Department of Assessment. To give all property owners time to meet with us and adequate time to finalize all valuations, the Department of Assessment has received an extension to file the 2022 Grand List. The Grand List will now be signed and completed by February 28, 2023. Final valuation notices will be sent out within ten days of the Grand List being signed. The Board of Assessment Appeals will now meet in April. Petitions to the Board of Assessment Appeals will be due by March 20, 2023.

Benefit Programs:

The Department of Assessment would like to notify all residents that the Homeowners-Totally Disabled Program and the Additional Veteran Program opens for applications February 1st, 2023. The application period for the Homeowners ends on May 15, 2023 and the Additional Veterans ends on September 29, 2023. Both of these programs are income based with the maximum income for a single person being \$40,300 and for married couples \$49,100. Please contact the Department of Assessment at 860-535-5098 or assessor@stonington-ct.gov for more information or to schedule an appointment

Department of Solid Waste- New Food Waste Collection Pilot Program



For 30 years the Town of Stonington has utilized the Pay-As-You-Throw program. The (PAYT)/yellow bag method of charging for trash disposal, based on the amount disposed of, is recognized as the single most effective action a municipality can take to reduce waste, increase recycling, and reduce climate impact. The average Connecticut resident generates 740 pounds of trash per capita annually compared to 389 pounds per capita in Stonington. The Town of Stonington is honored to be a part of the solution to assist Connecticut in

reaching its waste diversion goals.

Currently, Stonington's household trash (yellow bags including food waste) is transported to the Wheelabrator waste-to-energy facility in Lisbon, where it is incinerated to make renewable energy. Last year the Town sent nearly 12,000 tons of waste to Wheelabrator, and it is estimated that food waste comprised 25% of the total residential tonnage. In addition to wasted food being heavy, wet and expensive to dispose of, if landfilled it also drives up methane and carbon emissions. The latest federal data shows that more food reached combustion facilities and landfills than any other material in our everyday trash.

Once again, the Town of Stonington is proud to be a leader in the State of CT with another innovative program to help further reduce the waste delivered to aging facilities within the State. The Town of Stonington is grateful to have been awarded a grant from the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to launch a pilot program to divert household food waste from the waste stream. Stonington residents are encouraged to participate in the new voluntary pilot program to separate food waste from their yellow bags. Food waste collection is easy! Simply place your food scraps in the provided green bag, cinch and tie the drawstring, then place the bag in the pail out on your regularly scheduled curbside trash pick-up day. FE Crandall Disposal will be collecting the green bags in a dedicated truck, separate from the Municipal Waste and Recycling trucks. Once collected, the food waste is then transported to Quantum Bio-Power in Southington, CT. The facility uses an anaerobic digester to transform consumer food waste into biogas that powers CT communities and further turns the waste into compost.

All households should have received a mailer with instructions and 2 free green bags. Bring the mailer to the Solid Waste Department in the Town Hall and you will be provided a FREE 4 gallon lidded green compost pail and 50 FREE green bags. If you did not receive or have

misplaced your mailer, you can still receive your free pail and bags by simply providing your street address. Since mailing the flyer, the department is pleased to say that over 1,000 residents stopped by one of the past pail distribution events or the Town Hall for their food waste collection kit (pail, bags, instructions).

Please be encouraged to try the new program and for further information visit reducethetrashct.com/stonington/ Thank You Stonington!

Planning Department

The Department of Planning manages Stonington's land use decision-making, permitting and enforcement processes and provides technical assistance to several local boards and commissions. The Department is involved with long-range planning initiatives such as the Plan of Conservation and Development. The Department also leads Community Development efforts, often administering special grant-related projects.

Responsibilities also include enforcement of the Town's Zoning and Inland Wetlands regulations on behalf of relevant commissions. The Department includes 5 full time employees – Director of Economic and Community Development, Town Planner, Zoning/Wetlands Official, and 2 Land Use Application Facilitators. An additional position to support the Grants and Floodplain Management was approved during the last budget cycle and is currently posted to be filled.

Zoning Regulations Comprehensive Update

The Stonington Planning and Zoning Commission is excited to begin the task of comprehensively rewriting the Zoning Regulations. The Town's regulations were adopted in 1961 and have not been comprehensively updated since 1979. With the help of the Town's consultant, FHI Studios, this project will be done in 2 phases:

- Phase 1 will consist of a holistic reorganization of the regulations to improve readability, consistency and eliminate sections that no longer comply with state statutes.
- Phase 2 will consist of potential changes to the many specific rules that make up the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map. These could include changes to zoning district boundaries, allowed uses and bulk (dimensional) requirements.

While both phases will include ample opportunities for public input, Phase 2 is where the need to hear from the public is even more crucial. No substantive changes will be made without hearing

from residents and business owners. The Commission is holding virtual workshop meetings on the 4th Tuesday of each month. As the Zoning Regulations are complex and cover a host of issues this is expected to be a roughly two-year process.

Online Permitting

The Department of Planning is currently working with the firm OpenGov to develop an online land use application process. Currently online permitting is only available for Building Permit applications. Online permitting is expected to be available later this year.

Record Scanning

The Department is currently working with the firm Merritt Graphics to digitize six decades' worth of land use application files. This project will protect historical records, create a searchable database, streamline department functionality and free up much needed space in Town Hall.

Land Use Applications

Recent land use decisions include the following:

- Approval of a Special Permit application for modifications to Winn Development's previously approved Affordable Housing residential development at 27 W. Broad St. & 15 Cogswell St. Modifications include reduction in number of units from 82 to 70, reduction in building size by 25,000SF, modification to building design, and increasing to the percentage of income-restricted affordable units from 70% to 90%. The development will now be an age-restricted development requiring at least one resident to be at least 55 years of age.
- Approval of a Zoning Variance application seeking to vary Flood Hazard Substantial Improvement requirements for the redevelopment of an existing commercial structure at 6 Mechanic St., Pawcatuck.

The Department and the Town's various land use boards are currently reviewing several development applications including the following:

- Inland Wetlands and Watercourses application for construction of a new 80 room hotel at 321 Liberty St., Pawcatuck.

- Site Plan application for 2 retail buildings, including a drive-thru for a retail use, at 376, 380 & 384 Liberty St. (Project originally approved in 2006).
- Master Plan, Site Plan and Coastal Area Management applications for various changes to Mystic Seaport's Master Plan including alterations to the Velvet Mill to accommodate public exhibit space. Public hearing is scheduled for 2/7/23.



Community Project Highlights

Route One Sidewalk Project – Office of Policy and Management Grant

The Town received a \$600,000 grant from OPM to design and install a sidewalk on the Route One Corridor between Spellman Drive and Mayflower Avenue. The Town has requested easements from property owners to establish the connection between the downtown Pawcatuck village and Stonington High School. BL Companies was hired to assist the town in the design of the project and a bidding package with 100% construction plans and bids/bid alternates are currently under review at both DECD and DOT. The Town has placed an advertisement to receive bids on February 2, 2023. <https://www.stonington-ct.gov/finance-department/files/0-itb-2022-012-pawcatuck-sidewalk-project-request-for-bids>. Once received, the bids will be reviewed and the award of bid process and notice to proceed will be commenced. Construction should begin this Spring.

Establishment of Cultural Districts

Through four community conversations and an ongoing series of subcommittee meetings the establishment of local cultural districts is being explored and researched. This geographically

designated area could be a resource to both the Town and Borough for future grant money to bolster our local Arts & Culture community. An ordinance establishing the districts is required. The vote to establish the districts will be held at the Town Meeting on February 27, 2023 at 7pm in the SHS Auditorium.

Alternative Energy Fair



Members of the Climate Change Task Force, Economic Development Commission and Community members and the Director of Economic and Community Development are collaborating on an Alternative Energy Fair to be on March 25, 2023 as a way to provide the general public with a plethora of information on alternative energy for their homes and businesses. For more information please see: 2023 Energy Fair

— This is Stonington (stonington1649.com)

Mystic Boathouse Park

A Licensed Environmental Professional, landscape architect, on-call civil engineer, geotechnical engineer, groundwater monitoring service and waterside engineer have all been contracted for through separate procurement procedures as required by the State of CT Brownfield Grant Program for the Boathouse Park Project. All of these separate disciplines are needed to coordinate different aspects of the project to remediate the land, move the Lovelace house, demolish the shed, build the parking lot, and acquire the permits to build the Mystic Boathouse Park. The Director of Economic and Community Development alongside the Mystic Boathouse Park Committee are overseeing the project, with support from the Board of Selectmen. Public meetings are held each month (usually on the First Monday at 6pm) and are posted on www.stonington-ct.gov.

Circus Lot

The Stonington Economic Development Commission, working alongside Town staff, have been working for years to help realize the full potential of the *Circus Lot*.

This is an exciting potential project for the Town of Stonington as it could allow public riverfront access and create an attractive public space for residents and visitors. After years of due

diligence, we are excited to share that on February 15th we will hold a Community Conversation at the Pawcatuck Fire House, to share a conceptual plan for a public park ([details here](#)). The objective for this conceptual design is to further engage the public on potential future uses of this site and discuss possible next steps.

For those less familiar with the parcel, the “Circus Lot” is a 5.6-acre parcel of land (roughly half the size of Wilcox Park) located at the terminus of Noyes Avenue along the Pawcatuck River. The property is presently owned by the town of Westerly, which acquired the land when it took over the Pawcatuck public water system, however, plans for a production well are permanently shelved. Within the deed, the Town of Stonington retained the rights to construct and operate a park at this property. The opportunity for the Town of Stonington to acquire almost 6 acres of undeveloped space with over 550 linear feet of Pawcatuck River frontage for general public recreational usage for the deeded reverted price of \$35,000.00 is an amazing opportunity. Costs to create the proposed park are estimated to be around \$2.2M, which will be another key focus of the community dialogue on next steps.

This concept plan was made possible thanks to a federal National Wild and Scenic Rivers System grant, passed through the Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association, along with Town funding set aside for the Circus Lot.

Short-Term Rentals

We held the fourth and final Community Conversation on STRs in January, during which we welcomed input from community members on the final draft of a possible Town Ordinance. This was following months of input both during Community Conversations, as well as through emails, calls and additional in-person meetings. As we have previously shared, we wanted to take a unique approach to tackling this complex issue. While it is not always feasible, the issue of addressing STRs in the community offered us an opportunity to engage residents and allow that engagement to drive the process of drafting this Ordinance.

The key question we have asked is- what is best for the community of Stonington, both today and for the future? And with that in mind- does this Ordinance strike the right balance for our community?

The final proposed Ordinance should be shared in the coming week(s) and will then go to a Town Meeting for vote, to be scheduled for February 27th.

Town Meeting- While still to be officially scheduled, we will likely be holding a Town Meeting on February 27, as noted above. The five items will include: updates to the Town Parking and Traffic Regulation Ordinance; a new Short Term Rental Ordinance; establishment of a Cultural District Ordinance; update to the Flood Prevention, Climate Resiliency and Erosion Control Board Ordinance; and establishment of an Affordable Housing Commission.

Budget Update

Budget season kicked off with a January 31st Capital Improvement Program (CIP) half day meeting. We are grateful to the many Town staff members who have been working behind the scenes to prepare their operating and CIP budgets. Please stay tuned for more information on the upcoming Board of Finance, budget meetings that will take place over the coming weeks starting in mid-February.

Department of Human Services



Our mission is to foster a more collaborative community by connecting residents with resources, support and facilities that provide the framework for a healthy, fulfilling life in the Town of Stonington.

Do you have an idea for a program that may benefit residents in Stonington – social services, recreation, senior services or youth and family services-based? Please reach out to Human Services Director, Leanne Theodore (email or phone) - we would love to hear from you!

FEBRUARY IS AMERICAN HEART MONTH

1 in every 3 deaths in the United States are related to cardiovascular disease. This #HeartMonth, explore shareable resources from CDC to help you and your peers make heart-healthy choices and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. cdc.gov/heartmonth

Heartsaver® CPR First Aid AED Certification Class coming soon! Follow us on social media and regularly check for new program additions at <https://stonington.recdesk.com>.

Car Repair Costs Weighing You Down?

Thanks to received American Rescue Plan funds, we may be able to help! Limited funds are available to assist eligible residents that are currently struggling to get to work, school, medical appointments or other critical locations due to unsafe conditions with their vehicle. For more information, please reach out to: LTheodore@stonington-ct.gov.

SAVE THE DATE! Spring Fest

Saturday, May 6th from 11:00am-1:00pm in the Stonington Human Services parking lot. Something for ALL ages! Connect with friends, neighbors, first responders, non-profit / civic groups and service providers. Past Events Have Included: Crafts; Face Painting; SPD K-9 Odin; Give-A-Ways; Pediatric Vision Screening; Plant Sale; Blood Pressure Checks; Touch-A-Truck; Car Seat Checks; Field Games; Rock Wall; Life Star Landing; Karate Demo and much, MORE! Local artisans and vendors welcome – for more information, reach out to: LTheodore@stonington-ct.gov.

Energy Assistance Applications Still Available

TVCCA's Energy Assistance Program helps eligible residents pay their home heating bills during the cold winter months. Priority is given to "vulnerable households" with young children, elderly or disabled individuals. Applications are being taken remotely or in person. Please reach out to: ADavis@stonington-ct.gov and an application packet can be sent to you to complete and return along with the required documentation.

Has a friend/family recently been experiencing memory issues and/or diagnosed with a mild cognitive impairment, Dementia or Alzheimer's Disease? We are here to help! Please reach out and our case managers would be happy to set up a meeting in our office OR conduct a home visit to offer warm, caring, educational and HELPFUL solutions to support your situation.

Blossoms & Butterflies – May 1st [Day Tour: Massachusetts]

Start the day with some free-time to shop in Yankee Candle. After, head down the road to Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory and Gardens for a guided tour. Magic Wings opened its doors in 2000 and is an 18,200 SF facility that includes an 8,000 SF glass conservatory filled with butterflies, moths and tropical vegetation. The sound of the waterfall, peaceful music and hundreds of butterflies fluttering freely through the air creates a tranquil and serene atmosphere.

Lunch will be served at the Deerfield Inn. End the day with a stop at the Bridge of Flowers located in Shelburne Falls, MA. This is a one-of-a-kind landmark made from a former trolley bridge. Over 500 varieties of annuals and perennials are planted and tended by volunteers. Each season has different sights to see. Be sure to bring your camera for some great photo opportunities! Stonington Resident: \$130/person; Non-Resident: \$150/person

Young Adults Social Club

Open to young adults with disabilities. Each session includes an opportunity for socialization while enjoying games, crafts and music, with a focus on various life skills and lessons. This group meets at a different location within the area in order to familiarize participants with what their community has to offer. Space is limited and pre-registration is required. For more information, please contact Kristen King – Kking@stonington-ct.gov.

PSA: If your child or a loved one is suffering from nicotine addiction, please contact your healthcare provider. You can also dial 211 for addiction resources.

****If you are having a mental health emergency you can dial 988 direct to speak to someone 24/7. Call 911 if you are having thoughts of self-harm.****

Stonington Rec Camp



Held at **Spellman Park in Pawcatuck** (behind Stonington High School), our camp takes full advantage of on-site sports fields, playground, hiking trails and school facilities for safe, fun-filled weeks of **summer time adventure!** The program is open to campers **entering Grades 1-6 in the Fall of 2023**, running **Monday-Friday** (rain or shine) **June 26*-August 18** from **8:00am-4:00pm**.

Join for any 1 (or more) of the [8] weeks we are in session!

- **Early Bird Full Summer Rates:** \$725/Resident; \$875/Non-Resident
- **Early Bird Weekly Rates:** \$125/Resident; \$160/Non-Resident

Week 1 - (6/26-6/30) **Color Wars**

Week 2 - (7/3-7/7) **Around the World**

Week 3 - (7/10-7/14) **Shark Week** (it will be Wet & Wild!)

Week 4 - (7/17-7/21) **Mission Impossible**

Week 5 - (7/24-7/28) **Back to the Future**

Week 6 - (7/31-8/4) **Shipwrecked**

Week 7 - (8/7-8/11) **Sports Spectacular!**

Week 8 - (8/14-8/18) **Campers Got Talent**



Climate Change Taskforce- Do You Know? Paper Consumption

Do you know that Americans now use about [31.5 million tons of printing and writing paper each year](#), or about 660 pounds per person? This requires 535 million trees and 12 billion gallons of oil. We use **30%** of the global paper supply, although we account for only **5%** of the world's population. But interestingly, research shows that printing is not the main paper consumption category. Wrapping and packaging represent well over 50% of global paper consumption! Since we already know that paper and paper waste have a huge environmental impact, here's a quick list of reminders on actions you can take in your household:

- Get your newspaper and magazine subscriptions online, and use the library or an e-reader for books and periodicals
- Go "paperless" on all your bills, bank and insurance statements and investment accounts
- Think before you print, and use both sides of paper (even for doodling or shopping lists)
- Use re-usable bags for groceries, lunches, and shopping
- Group your purchases for home delivery to minimize packaging and transportation costs!
- Minimize use of disposable paper plates and cups, napkins, and towels in the home

Thank you Stonington!