

Town of Stonington

Monthly Newsletter



November 2022

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 we organized the Newsletter around different theme areas. Please know, we continue to welcome feedback and new ideas to try. We are also always happy to set-up a time to connect to discuss any existing projects, ideas or areas of concern. For more information on Economic and Community Development, remember to visit the Economic Development Commission's website, and sign-up for their community news at stonington1649.com.

Thank you, Danielle Chesebrough, Stonington First Selectman

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Community Programs



As another year comes to a close, we wish to express our gratitude to all of our partners within the community that assist us in fulfilling our mission! From business that sponsor holes on the new Far Flung Disc Golf Course to residents who “adopt” a child to receive a new pair of snow boots this winter – we THANK YOU!

Energy Assistance Applications Now Being Taken! TVCCA’s Energy Assistance Program helps families and individuals pay their home heating bills. Priority is given to “vulnerable households” with young children, elderly or disabled individuals. Applications are being taken remotely, or in person. Please contact our office and an application packet can be sent to you to complete and return (via drop-box or mail) along with required documentation.

How can we help you? We can screen for a wide variety of federal, state and local programs that may be able to assist your situation – we are here for you! For more information or to make an appointment with a case manager, please call (860) 535-5015 or mbanks@stonington-ct.gov.

Day Trip – Holiday Fun w The Cartells at the Aqua Turf Club, Plantsville, CT - Dec 13th
Stonington Residents \$77/person; Non-Residents \$87/person. Featuring a sing-a-long from The Glamour Girls! Enjoy an afternoon filled with food, fun and music designed to get you in the Holiday Spirit! Roasted Turkey/ Baked Scrod luncheon choices. \$77/Resident; \$87/Non-Resident. To register: <https://stonington.recdeck.com> or email LTheodore@stonington-ct.gov.

3rd Annual Stonington Holiday Decorating Contest - Celebrate COMMUNITY and join the FUN! Sponsored by Stonington Human Services and Stonington Beautification Committee.

ALL Town of Stonington residents, businesses, schools and community organizations are eligible to participate ~ Create a display at your own location ~ 1st and 2nd place awards in each category! No fee to participate! TO PARTICIPATE:

- SEND a picture or video of your display to: ltheodore@stonington-ct.gov
- JOIN the Stonington Holiday Decorating Contest group on Facebook. Your submission will be posted in the respective photo album for voting.
- VOTE by LIKING your favorite(s)! The displays with the most likes by December 22nd will be crowned the 2022 winners!

Recreation Division serves as an advocate for meeting the recreational needs of all the residents within the Town of Stonington by providing youth and adults an abundance of seasonal and year-round recreational opportunities. Residents can participate in camps, clinics, leagues, open runs, trips and fitness programs. For current program listings and information please go to: <https://stonington.recdesk.com>



Input Welcome- 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 - we would love to hear from you!

Project Highlights

Drainage- We've completed the construction of the Allen Street Drainage Project "On schedule and On budget"! The project included the installation of three catch basins, driveway paving and a sub-surface gallery system to collect stormwater run-off. The goal of the project was to intercept stormwater run-off from impacting neighboring properties. The Town roadway had no existing drainage pipe system, therefore we engineered a system of galleries (dry wells – each 4'x4'x4') to store AND infiltrate the stormwater run-off. This infiltration technique meets the newer design methodology required





by the MS4 permit and reduces the installation and cost of a traditional piped system to our receiving waters. The benefit of the project is four-fold: reduction of stormwater run-off, pollutants, cost and assistance meeting our MS4 clean water requirements.

Veterans- We are seeking local veterans who currently reside in or have called Stonington home to take part in on-camera interviews to share their stories as part of the educational/historical component of the Stonington Veterans Monument project. The interviews will explore topics such as the concept of service, transition to civilian life and local insights to pivotal moments in history. The First Selectman's Office will be working in collaboration with SEC-TV in Groton, CT who will be providing studio, editing and staffing time to bring this project to life. Final interviews will be featured on the future dedicated website associated with the monument.



Any help in getting the word out to veterans is much appreciated. Please reach out to Stacey Haskell at 860-535-5050 or shaskell@stonington-ct.gov for more information or to reserve their space.



Short-Term Rentals- As a follow up to our two previous meetings, we will be offering an opportunity to come together to discuss what approach to Short-Term Rentals may work for Stonington on December 8th at the Velvet Mill. We plan to continue to explore new formats for engagement through small group discussion followed by a broader group engagement.

Depending on the outcome of this meeting, there may be another meeting on this topic. Refreshments and food from local businesses will be available. If you are unable to attend, we will post outcome summary and welcome input after the meeting. More details can be found on the Town website [here](#).

Project Spotlight- 2022 Revaluation

Preliminary valuation notices resulting from the 2022 Revaluation Project will be sent in the middle of December to all residential properties. As such, we thought the below information would be helpful in advance.

What is a Revaluation?

The process of performing all the necessary Market Analysis and Valuation steps to determine accurate and equitable market values for all properties within a municipality.

Why?

Revaluations are performed every five years per Connecticut General Statutes 12-62(b)1. The real estate market is in constant fluctuation so as a Town moves farther away from the date of their revaluation, their values and assessments become outdated and this creates inequity.

What is the goal of a Revaluation?

The goal of any Revaluation project is **not** to raise or lower taxes. **The goal is the fair and equitable administration of the local property tax.** A successful revaluation project ensures that all property in Town is valued equitably and accurately so that all property owners are responsible for their fair share of the property tax.

How is a Revaluation Accomplished?

There are two main components to a Revaluation Project.

- Statistical Analysis
- Property Inspections

Every Revaluation Project entails extensive statistical analysis. The Department of Assessment, in conjunction with a mass appraisal company, studies market sales over a two-year period with most weight attributed to the sales within the immediate past year. A study of the valid market sales allows us to establish valuation models which will be used to estimate the value of all properties that have not sold. Additionally, current and local building costs and data are also analyzed to assist in the valuation model so that unit costs and costs per square foot for building improvements can be calculated for those properties that have improvements done in between revaluation projects. Physical inspections are an integral part of the revaluation process as well. All properties that are sold are inspected to ensure that the sale was a valid market sale and that all data for the property is accurate. Field review is also done to ensure equity across town and the accuracy of our data. Additionally, the state requires that the Department of Assessment fully

inspect every property once within a ten-year time frame. This requirement is normally accomplished in conjunction with Revaluations in some capacity.

Stonington 2022 Revaluation Project

- The Town of Stonington awarded the residential project to Vision Governmental Solutions. It was determined that due to concerns attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty of its trajectory and mutations, the office would rely primarily on data mailers to fulfill its inspection requirement.
- A data mailer is a document which can statutorily (CGS 12-62(4)) replace a physical inspection if both the exterior measurements and interior construction detail are confirmed by the property owner.
- The office sent out data mailers in the fall of 2021. Thanks to the cooperation of all residents and property owners, we had a 85% return rate. The remaining 15% of properties that did not return a data mailer were inspected by our Deputy Assessor.

How did that impact the Town?

- Contractually, Vision would have charged the Town \$27 for each property inspection. That would have cost the Town an additional \$215,136. Between the phenomenal efforts of our property owners and Assessment Staff, the Town achieved over \$200,000 in savings!

Vision Governmental Solutions Role

- In addition to their assistance with the statistical analysis and modeling, Vision inspected all building permits and properties that sold.
- Sales Verification forms were sent to all properties that sold. The verification forms asked questions to ensure the transaction was a true market sale and verify construction detail. Any sale that was determined not to be a valid transaction were excluded from the sale set.
- There were 232 valid market sales between 10/1/2021 – 9/30/2022.
- Vision inspected each of those sales and those were all used in the final analysis to determine building rates, depreciation tables, and land curves.
- Vision also did a full field review of every property in town. During field review, exterior data is confirmed as well as neighborhood characteristics.
- Field Review is an important step in the revaluation process. Vision, in conjunction, with the Director of Assessment and Deputy Assessor, completed field review throughout the spring and summer of 2022. It ensures consistency across Town and that comparable

properties are valued equitably. It also serves as a quality control measure on the data in the Assessment Department. If any data is incorrect (i.e. story height, outbuildings, etc.), it allows the opportunity for it to be corrected before the valuations are finalized.

What is a Market Sale?

Market Value is defined as the amount a typical, well-informed buyer would be willing to pay for a property on the open market, with no undue forces affecting the sale. In order for a sale to be considered a valid market sale the following must be considered:

- The buyer and seller are motivated and well informed, acting in their own best interest
- The property has been listed on the open market
- Payment is made in cash or in terms of financial arrangements, its equivalent
- The negotiated price is unaffected by atypical financing or extraordinary sales concessions

How do Market Sales affect Mass Appraisal?

It is important to note that mass appraisal is different than single fee appraisal. While the valuation concepts are similar, the process is very different. In a revaluation, the Town is conducting a mass appraisal of all properties and to do so, a model must be built which will then be applied to all properties (sold and unsold). In a single fee appraisal, specific comparable sales are identified and defined adjustments are made based on those sales to the subject property to arrive at an appraised value. In mass appraisal, all sales within the municipality are analyzed to properly determine base construction rates, land values, and market adjustments. Therefore, no singular sale or group of sales were used to determine values for individual properties. The goal of mass appraisal is to ensure that all properties in Town are equitably valued and furthermore, that all properties of a certain type or style are comparable in value.

What if there are no comparable sales to my property?

If there are no comparable sales, cost data is analyzed to determine what the cost would be to replace your building. Then appropriate depreciation is applied and the land value added to approximate what the market value would be.

Do all properties in Town change at the same rate?

It is a common misnomer that when a Revaluation project is completed, all property values change at the same rate. In any given market, certain types of properties will be more or less desirable or in demand. Accordingly, there will always be shifts within Town in every Revaluation. There may be some neighborhoods that were more attractive to prospective buyers, or a certain style of home. It's also important to keep in mind that the new values are being compared to a value that is five years old. The 2017 values represent a very different market and

what properties were desirable then, may not be so now. So, not only will there be differences in the values within the current market, but different properties will also see a different rate dependent on how their property was valued in the last revaluation.

What are Comparable Properties to my own?

When the valuations are complete, property owners will look to comparable properties to decide if their value is fair and equitable. Often, property owners will look immediately to their neighboring properties. However, those may not truly be comparable. When deciding what is a comparable property the following should be considered:

- Location
- Style of home
- Age of home
- Quality of construction
- Size of home
- land size and type

For example, a 2000 square foot Colonial built in 1900 on a half acre of land should not be compared to a 1500 square foot Cape Cod built in 2003 on five acres, even if they are on the same street.

That is the process but how does this project impact Stonington?

Over the past two years, the real estate market has impacted society drastically. It is an issue that has been widely reported on throughout the country and often in the news. We have been in a ‘seller’s market’ since the middle of the pandemic. COVID-19 had many effects on our society and economy as well as people’s lifestyle choices. The government dropped interest rates to record low levels in efforts to spur an economy that had been forced to shut down for an extended period of time. Additionally, there was a large exodus from cities and urban areas. Many decided to sell their properties in those areas, opting for locations where they could have yards, places for themselves and/or their children to go outside safely. In a lot of these cases, moving out of the city was cheaper or at least comparable.

Stonington is a waterfront community and is often coined as a “destination spot” with the Village of Mystic, the Borough, Mystic Seaport, Mystic Aquarium and Old Mystic Village. Even with the surge of recent development, there is still a lot of preserved land and nature conservation areas throughout Town. It is a very desirable location for a variety of reasons and the Town did experience a large influx of new residents. Residential property owners will see their values increase. How much or at what rate they increase will be dependent on the property as discussed

earlier. Every Revaluation redistributes the tax burden dependent on the market changes, so there will be areas of town or types of properties that will see a larger increase than others.

How does the Grand List relate to my tax bill?

The Grand List represents the total net worth of the town. It is an annual account of all taxable and tax-exempt property. The Grand List is an important part of the budgetary process but it is important to remember it is only one part of the equation.

Once the Grand List is finalized, that provides the Board of Finance with the total amount of assessments in Town on which taxes may be collected. It helps the Board of Finance to determine what additional revenue they need to raise by taxation to meet the Town's budgetary needs. As such, it has an inverse relationship with the mill rate. If the Town's budgetary needs stay largely the same and the Grand List increases, the amount the Town needs to raise by taxation is less so the mill rate goes down. Conversely, if the Grand List decreases, then the amount the Town needs to raise increases and the mill rate goes up.

As a result of the 2022 Revaluation, the Stonington Grand List will increase. Final totals are not yet available as the commercial project is ongoing and the Motor Vehicle and Personal Property Lists have not yet been completed. However, overall, residential property owners will see their valuations increase over their 2017 assessment.

It is important to keep in mind that in between revaluations, market fluctuations are not considered. Assessors are tasked with valuing properties at a snapshot in time. What was the market on October 1, 2017? What was the market on October 1, 2022? When taxpayers receive their new valuations, they need to remember that the increase does not represent an increase from the prior year (2021). It is an increase over a five-year span.

What do I do if I believe my assessment is incorrect?

- When you receive your preliminary notice of valuation, you should first look at comparable properties to your own and see if your assessment is within the same range.
- If you believe it is not, the notice will provide directions on how to set up an informal hearing with Vision Governmental Solutions where you will have the opportunity to sit with a representative and discuss your property's specific valuation. All informal hearings will be conducted at the Stonington Town Hall throughout December and January.
- Final valuation notices will be sent out after informal hearings have concluded, and the 2022 Grand List is signed.

- If you do not receive a satisfactory result from the informal hearing, you will have an opportunity to file a petition with the Board of Assessment Appeals. The final valuation notices will have information about the appeal procedure.
- The petition to the Board of Assessment Appeals is due by February 17, 2023. The Board meets during the month of March.
- If you also are not satisfied with the Board of Assessment Appeals decision, you may follow suit in Superior Court.

Sustainability Efforts

Stonington achieved Sustainable CT's Bronze certification in early November. Awards are given to communities that demonstrate significant achievements in at least twelve sustainability impact areas, ranging from vibrant arts and culture to resiliency planning and inclusive housing.



Working closely with the First Selectman's Office, the Department of Economic and Community Development oversaw a multi-year process of assessing, gathering and analyzing Stonington's existing and prospective programs and plans. Many Town Departments and Commissions provided data, allowing *Team Stonington* to plan and accomplish specific objectives within the Sustainable CT framework.

Stonington's actions included, but were not limited to, creating a brownfield inventory and redevelopment plans; inventory and promotion of local products and services; provide resources to support local business; creating a watershed management plan; enhancing pollinator pathways; mapping tourism and cultural assets; developing agriculture-friendly practices; preserving natural resources; assessing climate vulnerability; benchmarking and tracking municipal energy use; promoting the C-PACE energy program; developing and promoting community gardens; innovative practices related to solid waste management; and strengthening municipal capacity to address homelessness.



Sustainable CT is celebrating its fifth anniversary this November and has seen strong momentum with 129 municipalities now participating in this program, representing nearly 90% of the state's population. Collectively, 62 municipalities have earned Sustainable CT certification, with 24 municipalities earning it for 2022.



In November, Stonington also received bronze designation from the national SolSmart program for its success in making it faster and more affordable for homes and business to utilize solar. SolSmart is a U.S Department of Energy funded recognition program for communities that have taken proactive steps to reduce solar costs and barriers, and promote the energy saving use of solar power.

This was thanks in large part to the dedicated efforts of Julia Parry, a resident volunteer on our Climate Change Task Force, working in partnership with our Planning and Zoning and Building Department teams. This is one step, among many, needed for diversifying energy sources within the community.

The Stonington team is working to achieve more Sustainability related objectives. Stay tuned for upcoming information on our '**Energy Fair**' (March 2023) and other exciting initiatives. Anyone interested in getting involved across a range of sustainability initiatives, please contact the Selectman's Office or the Director of Economic and Community Development. You can also read more on our [Sustainable Stonington](#) webpage.



With the holiday here, we wanted to share a message from our Solid Waste team on recycling, as well as some very exciting news regarding the launch of a new program...



The Solid Waste Department would like to remind residents to be mindful of the materials they use this holiday season and to follow simple recycling tips to ensure the holidays are as green as they are merry. Holiday parties, decorations, cooking and gift-giving mean the average household will generate 25% more waste than average between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day. However, much of what is thrown away can be recycled or repurposed. Follow these holiday recycling lists to make it easy to correctly sort and recycle the right materials, so you can focus on holiday fun!

The Nice List: What to Recycle

- Cardboard - Should be clean and dry. Please flatten your boxes to facilitate disposal
- Paper boxes - Includes gift, shoe and shipping boxes
- Plain wrapping paper and gift bags – Can be recycled, however, NO glitter, foil or decorations, these items will go in your Stonington yellow bag
- Holiday cards and envelopes - Remove any embellishments and remove batteries from electronic greeting cards and shoes.
- Discarded textiles can be placed out with your regular trash in a Stonington Pink bag. We also have a Goodwill bin at the Transfer Station. Also, keep in mind to donate to the local thrift stores who provide so much to our community.
- Plastic bottles and jugs - Emptied and rinsed, flatten plastic bottles to save room and make them less likely to blow away
- Metal food and beverage cans - Emptied and rinsed

The Naughty List: What to Reuse, Donate or Discard

- Decorations including lights – Unusable decorations and inoperable lights can be thrown into a Stonington yellow bag. Consider donating working lights and decorations.
- Trees – Artificial trees can be brought to the Transfer Station. There will be a curbside holiday tree pick up for real trees for 1 week in January. Stay tuned for details!
- Ribbons and bows – Reuse as much as possible! Unusable can go in a yellow bag.
- Cellophane wrapping – Discard in a yellow bag.
- Fancy gift bags and wrapping paper – Reuse gift bags when possible. Decorated (foil, glittery, decorated) wrapping paper will go in the yellow bag.

- Packing materials - Bubble wrap, plastic air pillows, foam sheets and packing peanuts should be disposed in a yellow bag. Styrofoam is not recyclable and should be broken up and placed in the yellow bag or large pieces can be taken to the Transfer Station.
- Electronics or anything battery-powered – Do not toss old phones, laptops, tablets, TV's, toys or other items with a battery into your trash or recycling. If you're replacing electronics, it's best to keep the discarded item out of the waste stream. Consider donating working electronics to a charity. If the item is unusable, the Transfer Station accepts electronics for recycling at no charge for residents.

Additionally, we have some BIG NEWS! As we reflect on what we're grateful for and how we can make a positive impact this holiday season and beyond, we should consider addressing **food waste**. National studies of municipal solid waste have shown that food accounts for more than 20% of a household's total waste. When the more it weighs the more we pay, eliminating heavy, wet food waste from Stonington's trash would be environmentally and fiscally conscientious.

To help Stonington residents remove food waste from their yellow bags, which are incinerated at Wheelabrator Lisbon, the Town of Stonington is excited to announce the **Stonington Food Waste Curbside Collection** is slated to start in January!! All households will be receiving a

mailer in early January detailing the program, made possible by a much-appreciated Sustainable Materials Management Grant from the CT DEEP. The contracted trash hauler, F.E. Crandall Disposal, will be picking up green bags (Town supplied) that residents have filled with separated food waste from the non-recyclable trash of their yellow bag. Stonington's food waste will now be brought to Quantum BioPower where it will be turned into renewable energy and further composted. We look forward to kicking off ***Waste Not Stonington!***



Town Staffing

The **Department of Administrative Services** may be less known as a lot of our work involves supporting Town staff and departments. The department includes Human Resources, Information Technology and Health and Safety, as well as general administration for the Town. One of our

goals is to attract and retain the talent that will meet the current and future needs of the Town of Stonington in order to provide high quality service to our Town residents. We have been busy recruiting over the past year, especially due to retirements of dedicated Town employees and have hired 14 fulltime employees in calendar 2022. If you are interested in employment with the Town of Stonington, our current openings can be found on the Town website [here](#).



In November we had a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and honor the great work of our Stonington Police Department, along with their loved ones who support their work daily.

Chief DelGrosso had the honor of swearing in four officers for promotion within the Stonington Police Department at the Mystic Seaport Museum. When you see them out in the community, please join us in once again congratulating

Sergeant Rodgers, Lieutenant Marley, Captain Schneider and Deputy Chief Olson on their well-deserved promotions, and thanking all the men and women that do so much for our community through their work at the Stonington Police Department.



We would like to close this newsletter, with an immense thank you to all our first responders for their tremendous efforts this month. During a recent fire in downtown Mystic, responders came from across our region, from Norwich to Westerly. Many of our local responders were supporting community events from Thanksgiving through the weekend, and then all reported in to help extinguishing the fire, evacuate individuals and keep streets clear throughout the night.



If you see them out in the community, please join us in once again thanking our many Fire Departments, EMS, Police, Dispatchers & Department of Public Works.

Thank you Stonington!