

Officials consider seeking allocation to build Stonington Veterans Monument

- [By Jason Vallee Sun staff writer](#)

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STONINGTON — An aggressive fundraising campaign over the past six months has helped organizers collect over \$80,000 for the construction of the Stonington Veterans Monument, but with pandemic conditions handicapping fundraising and inflation threatening to increase costs, officials are considering seeking an allocation to help bring the project to fruition.

The town's residents and businesses have responded well to requests for funding, Stonington First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough said this week, but construction hinges on being able to take advantage of a \$178,000 turnkey price for the granite. The design is also moving full speed ahead, she said, with the Stonington Veterans Monument Committee expected to determine in January how each of the eight sides of the monument will be decorated.

"We have been very fortunate to have such an unbelievable response from the community, but I do fear that with all the challenges brought by the pandemic, our town residents may be tapped out in terms of what they can offer," Chesebrough said. "It is something I would consider bringing before the Board of Finance for discussion as part of the upcoming budget process."

The request, Chesebrough said, would be a one-time allocation that would be included as part of the capital budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year. She said the monument

committee would still be responsible for regular care and maintenance, and said the amount requested would be dependent on how much money is needed by the time a budget is passed.

With roughly \$80,000 already committed, organizers have raised just under half of the overall cost for construction of the monument. As of January 2020, the turnkey price was \$178,808 from the Barre Vermont Granite Company but those costs are likely to rise if it takes longer to raise the money.

Chesebrough praised the efforts of volunteers, including VFW Post 1265 member and Pawcatuck resident Anthony Lombardo, who brought the concept forward in 2017, and town Executive Administrative Assistant Stacey Haskell, who spearheaded the fundraising campaign over the past six months.

“There have been so many people who have been instrumental in getting it to this point, and they have truly done what they can. That is why I am willing to bring it before the Board of Finance,” Chesebrough said. “I am hopeful that we can further reduce the need before we reach that point, and I hope the fundraising efforts so far will be enough to convince them that it is worth providing the remaining funds to build this for our residents.”

The proposed monument would be octagonal in shape and cover approximately 100 square feet, with a surrounding sidewalk around the foundation to be built by the town. Once built, officials said the names of 7,000 past and present Stonington residents who have served in a branch of the military would be added. The names of residents not yet recognized who serve their country would then be added as part of a ceremony each year.

Lombardo, a Korean War Army veteran, said it has been difficult to raise the money in the middle of a pandemic. Given the challenges, however, he said the community has been supportive, and he praised so many for backing the project in any way they could.

“The timing for fundraising couldn't be helped considering all the obstacles that have surfaced in the past two years. Despite this fact, the patriotism of the project team moved ahead to reaffirm again our citizen duty in recognizing over 7,000 men and women who have honorably served our country.”

Lombardo had taken interest in creating a moment after learning that Pawcatuck residents could not be honored by the monument at Wilcox Park in Westerly, even with the downtown serving both sides of the river.

He said he wanted something more to honor those in Connecticut who have served, especially since there is currently no way to publicly recognize those who have served since World War II.

“Time is fleeting for many in our community and the Stonington Veterans Monument is a time capsule for all of us to remember in the future those who were not too busy to stand for righteousness and liberty,” Lombardo said.

Those still wishing to make a donation may do so by check to the Town of Stonington (write Stonington Veterans Monument in memo line). Checks can be dropped off in the Town Hall drop box or mailed to 152 Elm St., Stonington, CT, 06378. Donations can also be made through VFW Post 1265, 160 S. Broad St. in Pawcatuck, or through the organization's Venmo account to @KenVFW1265.

For more information on the project, visit stonington-ct.gov/selectmens-office/pages/stonington-veterans-monument-project.