

Winter eLetter 2018



photo by by Sam Harper

On March 2, the second of two hundred-year storms in a month pummeled the Cape. Winds over 90 MPH and record high tides left thousands of Cape Codders without power, uprooted trees, and caused significant erosion to east-facing beaches.

Until then it had been a meteorologically quiet winter on the Outer Cape but in Wellfleet, several issues were arousing controversy.

Medical marijuana dispensary

How many times have you driven on Route 6 in South Wellfleet past the foundation of what years ago was slated to be a storage facility and wondered if anything would ever be built there? Now the 1.5-acre lot near the turn off for Marconi Beach is likely to become a medical marijuana dispensary. After a 4-0 vote by the Selectmen on February 13, Atlantic Medicinal Partners Inc. now needs just the approval of the Zoning Board of Appeals before receiving a special permit under the town's Medical Marijuana Overlay District bylaw. Located in a commercial district and within the overlay district, the dispensary will be open seven days a week from 8 AM to 8 PM year-round, selling marijuana grown and processed in Fitchburg. AMP will pay the town 3% of its gross sales revenue, which by law must be used for expenditures connected to "the perceived harms from cannabis" (e.g. not the July 4th parade). AMP

expects this to include revenue from the sale of recreational marijuana. An article will appear on the Town Meeting warrant to amend the zoning bylaw to regulate the sale of cannabis for recreational use, which becomes legal in Massachusetts in July 2018. Residents of Old Wharf Road have raised concerns about traffic. A public meeting is tentatively scheduled for March 21.

White Crest parking lot

At the 2016 Town Meeting voters approved funding for “the planning and permitting required to increase the size of the back lot at White Crest and to build a modern rest room facility on that location.” The Selectmen asked the engineers to develop a two-phase plan—the first for a total of 600 spaces, the second for 1,000. On February 21, 2018, the Town Administrator received the final plans. Due to space and grade constraints, the expanded lot would have 460 spaces—an addition of 268 spaces to the 192 the design shows there now, or two and a half times the current number.

A loosely organized group of people, most of whom are seasonal residents of the area who therefore cannot vote (or speak) at Town Meeting, have expressed concern about the impact of the project on traffic and the environment. They object that voters will be asked to approve borrowing \$1.6M for a project that has not been reviewed by the Planning Board or the Conservation Commission. Nor has the National Seashore been involved in the process. Only one traffic study has been done—by the Cape Cod Commission in June of 2012—and it found safety and traffic flow deficiencies at the turn off from Route 6 onto LeCount Hollow Road, citing “heavy traffic and high speeds of Route 6 traffic traveling on a curve in the vicinity of the intersection. This traffic is particularly difficult and dangerous for left-turning vehicles out of LeCount Hollow Road.” No traffic study has been done of Ocean View Drive, which is already heavily used by cyclists and pedestrians as well as cars heading to the beaches. Because the project requires borrowing, it requires a two-thirds majority at Town Meeting. If approved, construction would begin in the fall of 2018.

Cahoon Hollow

The Selectmen have decided to close the town landing at Cahoon Hollow. After runoff from a heavy rain storm last August caused the parking lot and dune to collapse, partly consuming a car, officials determined that the time, money and manpower required to make the lot safe would cost more money than the town was willing to spend.



photo by Ellen Rothman

There will still be lifeguards on duty and a pedestrian path to the beach. The town recently informed abutters that it intends to issue a request for proposals to anyone interested in leasing and maintaining the 25 parking spaces in front of the Beachcomber. The Beachcomber plans to continue to run a free shuttle from White Crest.

Dredging the harbor

In February, Town Administrator Dan Hoort and Bob Wallace, a member of the Finance Committee, travelled to Washington DC to advocate for federal help dredging Wellfleet Harbor. They focused on the following four points:

1. **Safety** Although Wellfleet is a member of the Cape & Islands Maritime Response System and a designated Harbor of Refuge, the Harbor is inaccessible at low tide, approximately six-eight hours a day.
2. **Aquaculture** The “black mayonnaise” in the Harbor is having an adverse impact on shell fishermen and poses a threat to an industry that is vital to the economy of the Outer Cape.
3. **Maintenance dredging.** The town is developing a maintenance dredging program to maximize time before federal funding would be needed again.
4. **State support** The state will help with funding but the federal portion must be completed first.

In the course of a long day, Dan and Bob met with Congressman Keating, who was already very familiar with the situation, and Senators Warren and Markey. Senator Markey said that in a private meeting with the new head of the Army Corp of Engineers, he had stressed the importance of dredging Wellfleet Harbor. They also met with representatives from the Army Corp of Engineers, who made it clear that they couldn't promise anything but welcomed a personal visit and information on Wellfleet Harbor.

While the government was operating on a series of Continuing Resolutions, nothing could be done. Now that a budget agreement has been reached, the legislators were optimistic that funding could be found for dredging the federal channel.



Endangered Atlantic right whales return to Bay

Observation planes have been flying tracks across the Bay since 1996. In mid-January, they spotted about 10-15 Atlantic right whales feeding on zooplankton, the first of these endangered creatures to return to the Cape this year. Cape Cod Bay is the principal winter feeding resource and social grounds for right whales.

photo courtesy Humane Society of the United States

“It’s the motherlode of North American right whales,” Charles “Stormy” Mayo of the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown told the *Banner*. Last year [we saw] close to 300 individuals out of a population of 450.” 2017 was a disastrous year. There were only five individuals for calving. “They all come to Cape Cod Bay as a nursery ground. After they left here there was high mortality in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, in total 12 or 13 individual carcasses in terrible shape... a minimum of 17 individuals in the population died.” And things are even worse this year. Off the coast of Georgia, where the whales normally give birth, no calves at all have been seen. Michael Moore, director of the Marine Mammal Center at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, told the *Boston Globe*, “When you have high mortality and zero reproduction, it’s catastrophic. It couldn’t be any worse.” Emily Green, an attorney at the Conservation Law Foundation, concurred: “The fact that not a single right whale birth has been recorded this year is a stark and tragic reminder that the status of the

right whale population is utterly dire. If these patterns continue unabated, the population is on a fast track to extinction.”

Georgie Gatch

We remember with fondness longtime WNRTA member Georgeanna (Georgie) White Gatch, who died in New York on New Year's Eve. Georgie, her husband Mac and their three children moved often. They began vacationing in Wellfleet in the 1960s; from then on, the barn they converted into a summer house became the family's base.

by Phyllis Bretholtz



photo

Georgie loved Wellfleet's natural beauty. She was a stalwart member of the WNRTA board. She could be counted on to show up at meetings, come bearing cookies, and offer wise counsel. She generously lent her VW "bug" convertible to WNRTA so that both the oldest and youngest members could take part in Wellfleet's July 4th parade. Her full obituary was published in the [New York Times](#) on January 3, 2018. A memorial at the Chapel of St. James the Fisherman will be held this summer. We will miss her.

Dues and donations, please

WNRTA dues are modest—\$25 for an individual, \$35 for a family—but they are what keep us afloat. To pay online, please go to <http://wnrta.org/join/>.

If you prefer, you may send a check to:

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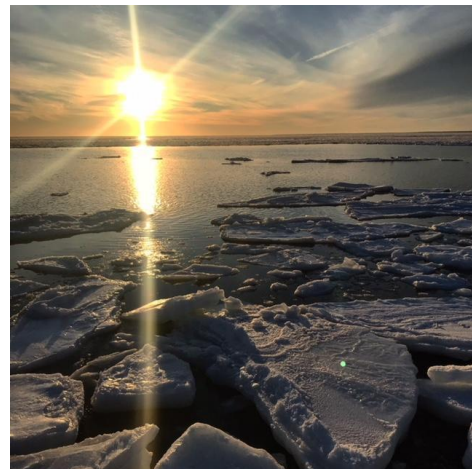


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