

Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association

Promoting community involvement and communication

Fall 2021 eLetter

Not too early to [pay your 2022 dues](#)

A few days after Ida, one of the most powerful and rapidly intensifying storms to hit the United States made landfall in Louisiana. It brought torrential rains to the Northeast, including Cape Cod, with a total of 9.5 inches recorded in New Bedford, but there were no deaths reported in Massachusetts. A tornado touched down in Dennis and the rain caused a few dune collapses along the backshore in Wellfleet.

With another month left in the 2021 Hurricane Season, an early season Nor'easter brought hurricane force winds to the Cape on October 27th.



Dune Collapse in South Wellfleet, Sept 5 2021

The damage was widespread. In Wellfleet, where the strongest gust was 83 mph and there were record-high waves, the fierce storm uprooted trees, knocked down electric wires, eroded beaches, damaged roofs, and tore off shutters, leaving the town without power. It took 1,500 utility workers several days to get the lights back on. Select Board member Janet Reinhart was one of many in Wellfleet who reported their houses shaking. The stairs at Marconi Beach survived but the much-loved autumn olive trees at Baker's Field did not. The town posted this message on its website: "We tried to save the trees at Baker's Field ... After the storm on 10/27 roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of each shrub had to be removed. Subsequent deterioration was then discovered within the shrubs. It was determined they were no longer safe and needed to be taken down." Sad end to the season.

Money Matters

Did you wonder why your tax bill from Wellfleet arrived later than usual? The town's finances are in such a chaotic state that it seemed impossible to set the tax rate this fall. The Special Town Meeting scheduled for the first week in December was postponed until January. After a week of meetings with a team from the state Department of Revenue (DOR), interim Town Administrator Charles Sumner gave the Select Board good news: The DOR had come up with a way to allow the town to set its tax rate and bills to be mailed. The fiscal 2022 residential tax rate has been set at \$7.78 per thousand; it was \$7.86 last year. Tax bills should have been sent on November 18 (payable by December 20, 2021).

That is the good news. Much work remains to be done and short-term borrowing is likely. So much information is missing that it is not yet possible for Sumner and his team to close the books on Fiscal Year 2021 or 2022 or put together a budget for Fiscal Year 2023. "We're driving the bus backward to July 1, 2019, reviewing every transaction, correcting

errors and omissions, which are more far-reaching than we might have imagined,” Sumner told the Select Board. “Uncovering the problem is like peeling back the layers of an onion.” Two interim town accountants are going back to July 1, 2019, and reviewing every transaction. In Sumner’s words, “They’re in the trenches, doing God’s work.” With help from DOR, Sumner is evaluating the town’s funding plan and projecting revenues and expenditures in order to develop a five-year financial forecast “that tries to evaluate if there are any weaknesses and problems that have to be addressed.” Under normal circumstances, he said, he would already have it done, but he is lacking the data to complete it.

Unlike the town, the Wellfleet Seasonal Resident Association ended the fiscal year with a small surplus. In 2020, WSRA made a donation to the Wellfleet Tree Committee to plant new trees on Main St. This year, the Board made contributions to the [Fleet Fund](#), the [Affordable Housing Trust Fund](#), and the *Provincetown Independent’s* [Local Journalism Project](#). With its limited resources, WSRA does not accept applications for these occasional grants.

Affordable housing

The 2020 Annual Town Meeting voted to create an Affordable Housing Trust Fund. On October 12, 2021, the Select Board agreed with former Town Administrator and chair of the Trust Fund Harry Terkanian that, in spite of the town’s financial disarray, 80 percent of the revenue from the Short-Term Rental (STR) tax should be earmarked for affordable and workforce housing. In 2021, the town netted about \$855,000 from the tax. Next year, the STR tax rate in Wellfleet will increase from 4 to 6 percent, the maximum allowed by the state.

The shortage of affordable year-round housing has not caused a drop in the town’s population. According to the 2020 census, all four towns on the Outer Cape have gained population since 2010, with Wellfleet leading the way at 30% (and Provincetown 25%), reversing a trend that can only partly be attributed to the pandemic. The growth rate in Wellfleet was the second highest in mainland Massachusetts—from 2,750 to 3,566 permanent residents. The number of permanent residents under 18 grew from 369 to 394, a 7 percent increase. In the same time period, the town lost 42 residential units for reasons that remain unclear. On August 18, 2021, the *Provincetown Independent* reported that “a 29.7-percent increase in population and a 1 percent decrease in housing units is a stunning combination for Wellfleet. The Outer Cape has always been a literal, as well as a metaphorical, outlier; this decade’s census data simply drive home the point.”



From POAH/CDP’s winning proposal

The town has several initiatives underway to increase year-round housing for middle-income families. After a long process and with a vote of 7 – 1, on November 8, the Lawrence Road Task Force selected Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), a national non-profit, and Eastham-based Community Development Partnership (CDP) to develop the six-acre town- owned site on Lawrence Road. The \$20.2-million proposal has 24 townhouses with two or three bedrooms housed in seven buildings and 22 smaller units housed in a single building.

The Task Force will forward the recommendation to the Select Board for a vote on November 23, 2021.

Another smaller step toward addressing the housing crisis came in October when, 15 years after the Wellfleet Housing Authority chose Community Housing Resource, Inc. of Provincetown to develop eight units of affordable housing on five acres of town-owned land on Paine Hollow Road, the longstanding issues with abutters were finally resolved and the project is moving forward.

Clearcutting Case

As reported in our summer eLetter, the Zoning Board of Appeals upheld the cease and desist orders issued in June by the town's former Building Inspector against David and Chellise Sexton for clearcutting trees near the entrance to Lecount Hollow Beach. Like every town within National Seashore, Wellfleet long ago adopted zoning bylaws that strictly limit the cutting of timber. In addition, the Cape Cod National Seashore (CCNS) does not permit new or expanded commercial uses within the park. In September, the Sextons filed suit in Land Court seeking to reverse the ZBA's unanimous decision in the case. At the same time, the National Park Service is considering taking action against the Sextons. Lauren McKean, Park Planner at CCNS, told the *Provincetown Independent* that "the Sextons' violations of the rules, which include charging people to park on their land, are egregious enough to justify the taking of their property by eminent domain." CCNS has the legal authority to do this although it has never been exercised and would be difficult given the requirement to pay fair market value for any land taken.



After clearcutting, Jun 2021

Residential Tax Exemption

The Select Board has voted to raise the RTE in Wellfleet from 20 to 25 percent, 10 points below the maximum allowed by the state. Eastham is the only Outer Cape town without an RTE, which is designed to reduce the taxes of year-round residents by excluding from taxation a portion of their property's assessed value. When Edward Miller, editor of the *Provincetown Independent*, noted in its October 28 issue that a survey of the [Truro Part-time Residents Taxpayers Association](#) showed that "opposition to the RTE is vehement and unabating among respondents," WSRA president Susan Reverby and secretary Jim Campen wrote to the editor of the paper to clarify that "The positions expressed in discussions of the RTE at the WSRA board meetings have ranged from resigned acceptance to strong support. No one on [the WSRA] board opposed Wellfleet's adoption of the RTE, although others in the seasonal resident community may feel differently. There was broad agreement among board members that the virtue of the RTE is that it modestly redistributes the property tax burden away from local homeowners struggling to make ends meet and onto those with greater ability to pay because of higher incomes and greater wealth (even though it does this imperfectly). We see our role as sharing information and facilitating discussion, not taking positions on town issues. The WSRA's stated mission is 'promoting community involvement and participation.' We do not define ourselves in terms of our taxpayer status. It was partly in order to avoid any confusion on this issue that in 2019 we changed our name from Wellfleet Non-Resident Taxpayers Association to Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association."

Town Administrator Search

The Select Board had 11 applicants for seats on the search committee for a new Town Administrator. Five residents and town employees, including interim Town Administrator Charles Sumner and Fire Chief Richard Pauley, will serve on the committee.

New Building Inspector Departs

Once again Wellfleet is without a permanent, full-time building inspector. Vincenzo Tirone, the former building commissioner in Monson, started work in mid-October. Three days later, he resigned. What he told the *Provincetown Independent* would surprise none of us: "I was not expecting how difficult the housing market was going to be. Houses are extremely expensive and then you see a house, and it goes under contract." Finding affordable housing will doubtless prove a challenge not only for filling the building inspector's job but hiring a new Town Administrator.

Historic Building Survey

The Wellfleet Historical Commission has hired preservationist Lynn Smiledge to update a 1980s survey of historic buildings in town. The 2021 survey will focus on houses associated with the working class, African Americans, and indigenous peoples, all of whom have traditionally been overlooked.

20 Briar Lane Saved

In April 2020, the town's historical commission imposed an 18-month demolition delay on the 175-year-old house at 20 Briar Lane. The order expired on October 8, 2021, but last summer, Mac Hay, founder and president of Mac's Seafood, quietly purchased the historic house to keep it part of the town's dwindling supply of year-round rental housing. Past owners of the house included a 19th-century sea captain and the keeper of the Cahoon Hollow Lifesaving Station (now the Beachcomber). Once Hay completes some renovations—new windows and doors and a new septic system - he plans to continue using it for year-round apartments.



Bookstore Restaurant owner dies

Caroline Jeanette Parlante, the founder and proprietor of the Bookstore & Restaurant on Wellfleet Harbor, died at the age of 86 at Cape Cod Hospital on October 17, 2021 from sepsis due to Covid-19 pneumonia. She and her husband came to Wellfleet in 1957; seven years later, they opened a coffee shop and her father moved his bookstore there from Railroad Avenue. The restaurant became a Wellfleet institution, remaining open all year even after her husband's death in 1976. A single mother of four, Caroline Parlante worked days at the restaurant and shucked scallops on the pier at night.

Food pantry

It's easy for seasonal residents to forget that food insecurity was a very real problem on the Outer Cape before, during, and after the pandemic. 150 households (360 individuals) each year rely on The Wellfleet Food Pantry to help make ends meet. In spite of the loss of an important fundraising opportunity for the pantry when OysterFest was cancelled, a home delivery service has been started in coordination with the Wellfleet Council on Aging to serve elders who are unable to access the pantry. Like so many of the town's non-profit organizations, the food pantry needs our financial support. Tax deductible donations can be made by sending a check to P.O. Box 625, South Wellfleet, MA 02663 or [online](#).

Dues and donations, please

WSRA counts on its members to pay dues without receiving an annual invoice. Dues and individual donations are WSRA's only sources of funding-- \$25 for a single membership or

\$35 for a family/household membership per calendar year.

To pay by PayPal:

- Renew your [Family Membership](#)
- Renew your [Individual Membership](#)
- Make a [Donation](#)

You may also mail your payment to:

WSRA
P.O. Box 1323
Wellfleet, MA 02667-1323

If you would like more than one member of your household to receive email from WSRA, please [email](#) us!

THANK YOU!