

BOROUGH OF STONINGTON
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WARDEN

APRIL 21, 2018

OVERVIEW--- Once again, the past year was a relatively quiet one in the Borough. Aside from a very cold spell in January and a series of weekly nor'easters in March, the weather gods have been relatively kind. Even the Pokémon threat receded a bit. While political and financial turmoil seemed to rule at the national and state levels, local government carried on with a minimum of fuss. In the remainder of my report I'll touch on a few highlights.

FIRE DEPARTMENT--- This time last year, Chief Jeff Hoadley had just completed the state fire marshal certification course, and since then he has worked tirelessly and patiently to improve the safety of Borough buildings and ultimately its residents. Fire code compliance had been neglected in the Borough for a number of years. While meeting the code may seem onerous, it's to everyone's benefit. The Borough is fortunate to have dedicated and well trained volunteers and leaders in the fire department. Remember that they do more than put out fires. Among other things, they respond to motor vehicle accidents, medical emergencies, and water emergencies, of which there were more than a few during that wicked cold snap in January. For the record, in the past year the department responded to 133 calls.

ZONING --- Second only to fire protection, planning and zoning are very important functions of your government. During the past year the so-called dog park matter was resolved, as was the long running discussion of how to proceed with renovation of the historic lighthouse while protecting the residents who live near the lighthouse from unreasonable intrusions. In both cases, what I view as fair compromises resulted from the hard work of the Planning & Zoning Commission with solid professional input from our zoning officer, Tom Zanarini, and Borough Attorney Nick Kepple. I congratulate everyone involved in solving these contentious matters.

ADMINISTRATIVE/REGULATORY ACTIVITY—In February the Borough again passed its annual CRS recertification and thereby maintained the 10 percent discount our residents receive on flood insurance policies. I recently learned that the Borough is one of only three municipalities in the entire southeastern corner of CT that is in the Community Rating System. Our joint Borough-Town storm water management plan was approved by DEEP, and we have begun implementing it.

We successfully completed our audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2017. The Borough's net position—or net worth -- as of that date was \$4,873,044, a decrease of 0.8 percent from the previous year. Also, we continue to receive and respond to queries from the US Census

Bureau in preparation for the 2020 census. Incidentally, the Census Bureau's latest estimate of the Borough's population (July 2016) is 973 and the median age is 56 years.

INFRASTRUCTURE – Cross Street was repaved, as were portions of Front Street and Bayview Avenue. Stone crosswalks were restored on Bayview and Summit.

SEA LEVEL RISE--- Last year I announced that the Town had been awarded a grant to develop a coastal resiliency plan and that the plan was nearing completion. The resiliency plan, which covers the Borough as well as the Town, was completed last summer. It contains a number of action recommendations related to public infrastructure as well as private property. It can be found on the Town website by searching for "resiliency".

Those of you who have followed the stories in the papers about the old breakwater behind Stonington Commons will know that for a couple years the question of who owned the breakwater blocked any action to repair it. That matter was resolved last year, thanks to assistance from Joe Courtney and our state's two senators. The federal government has relinquished ownership, and the breakwater now belongs to the State of CT. With that decision, a small group, including Jesse Diggs, Town Hall staff, and me prepared and submitted a grant request to the Connecticut Port Authority for funds to develop detailed specifications and drawings in order to engage a construction firm to restore the breakwater as an effective barrier. That grant application was successful, and the Town has received \$135,000 to support preparation of construction drawings for the breakwater project. The Town also received \$255,000 from the Port Authority in order to make repairs at Town Dock.

RECOGNITION – Keeping the Borough going as an independent municipality is a team effort involving a small paid staff and lots of volunteers. We don't have a big pool from which to draw volunteers for our boards and commissions as well as people willing to run for elective office. I want to give a big thankyou to the citizens who serve on Planning & Zoning, until recently chaired by Doug Lyons and now by Julia Leeming; the Zoning Board of Appeals, chaired by Bob Montgomery; and the Harbor Management Commission, a joint commission with the Town. Another very important group of volunteers are the fire fighters, who respond not only to fires but also to floods and other emergencies. Our paid staff includes Barbara Perry in the office; part-time zoning officer Tom Zanarini; fire chief Jeff Hoadley; and Sue Cordeiro and Roger Collelo, who keep the streets clear of leaves and snow, as well as maintaining our six parks and responding to fallen tree limbs and other situations of all sorts. By the way, Sue is now in her 36th year of service in the Borough Street Department; Roger and Barbara have worked for us for 16 years. All together they are the corporate memory of this government. I want to thank my colleagues on the Board of Warden & Burgesses and our tax assessor and tax collector for their service to the community. Borough Attorney Nick Kepple has provided wise advice on a whole range of topics. Finally, I want to thank the SVIA, which I sometimes refer to as the

shadow government, for supporting the Borough in many ways, including donating three new benches for Wad Square and one for Wimpheimer Park.

CHARTER REVISION--- Last August I convened the third public meeting at La Grua Center to talk about the future of the Borough. A range of possible courses of action were presented, but they boiled down to three choices: Do Nothing; Revise the Borough Charter; or Dissolve the Borough. By a large majority, the people who attended the meeting preferred the middle road, i.e. revise the charter to make Borough government more sustainable. In November the Board of Warden & Burgesses voted to form a charter revision commission, and in December we appointed 9 regular and 2 alternate members who come from all parts of the Borough. Burgess Shaun Mastroianni was elected chair at the Commission's first meeting in January. I'm not going to discuss what the Commission has come up with, because immediately after this meeting concludes there will be a public hearing at which the draft will be presented. But I will say that the Commission has been hard at work, and I urge you to stay for the hearing.

Before moving on I want to acknowledge the role that Juan O'Callahan played in the meetings that ultimately led to forming the Commission. It was Juan who, during the winter of 2015-16, pulled together a group of citizens to talk about the future of the Borough. Those discussions resulted in the La Grua meetings in the summer of 2016 and again in 2017. Without Juan's initiative we would not have gotten as far as we have.

PASSINGS-- The past year has seen the death of some important members of the community, people who gave in various ways to make this a better place to live for all. Among those we have lost are Bea Allen, Fred Blackall, Winnie Cutler, Jack Gorby, Ed Harrison, Sandy McClatchy, Rita McCreary, Maria Mello, Diane Velez, and Eleanor Perry, mother of the Borough's office administrator, Barbara Perry. I should also mention Paul Cravinho, longtime probate judge for the Town of Stonington. While not a Borough resident, Judge Cravinho was well known and respected in the Borough.

WILLIAM WILLIAMS FUND -- The Borough is exceptionally fortunate to have two charitable funds with which to assist residents who need a little financial help. The older fund is the Waldron Fund, which we will talk about later in the program. The "newer" fund is the William Williams Fund, established almost 100 years ago. Traditionally the warden and clerk-treasurer are the ones who administer the Williams Fund. So far this season we have assisted two residents and disbursed a total of \$1,800. The fund balance stands at \$76,491.

OUTLOOK - It's always a little risky to make predictions about the future, especially at a time when uncertainty and instability seem to be governing principles in Washington. Nonetheless, as the Borough enters its 218th year I am confident that we will continue to be a special place to

live and work as long as we have citizens who are willing to step forward and share the task of governing ourselves.