

BOROUGH OF STONINGTON
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WARDEN

MAY 2020 (5.14.20)

OVERVIEW--- Until March, the past year had been a “normal” year, with no dramatic or unusual occurrences. All the traditional events clicked by – Fourth of July parade, Blessing of the Fleet, holiday stroll; and approvals were in place for all those things to happen again this summer and fall. Then coronavirus came to the United States, or at least that’s when we really became aware that it was here, and life changed dramatically. We learned new terms like social distancing, and we began wearing face masks. We stopped shaking hands and stopped gathering in groups, whether for private or public purposes. Which is why there is no annual Borough meeting this year, perhaps for the first time in over 200 years. Borough government continues to function, but in a quieter and less visible way. With patience and luck and clear thinking, we will get through this and meet again in 2021.

FIRE DEPARTMENT--- The volunteers of the Borough Fire Department continue to keep our residents and those of surrounding communities safe. In the past year they responded to 126 calls, 62% of which were located in the Borough. Incidents included everything from hazardous material spills to motor vehicle accidents to water emergencies to actual fires, demonstrating the wide range of issues our fire department trains for and handles with skill. A growing number of calls are so-called medical assists, that is, helping the ambulance corps respond to emergencies. Wearing his fire marshal hat, Chief Hoadley has again been very active with annual inspections and following up on discrepancies he found last year. He is required by law to inspect every year all places of assembly and buildings with three or more apartments.

ZONING --- Second only to fire protection, planning and zoning are very important functions of your government. Zoning has been relatively calm this past year, but busy nonetheless, with 65 permits processed and several enforcement actions taken. Revisions to the Borough zoning regulations, that have been in the works for a year, were completed and approved in March.

ADMINISTRATIVE/REGULATORY ACTIVITY— In June of last year the Borough successfully passed our five-year “verification visit” – basically an audit -- by FEMA. That means we will continue to receive the 10 percent discount on federal flood insurance premiums through FEMA’s Community Rating System.

Participation in the CRS program imposes a significant administrative burden, but I believe it is worth the effort. Over half of the Borough is within the 100-year flood zone and about 40% of the Borough’s structures carry flood insurance.

The joint Borough-Town storm water management plan is working well. The report for 2019 was recently submitted to DEEP. You can find it on the Borough website.

We completed our financial audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019. The Borough’s net position—or net worth -- as of that date was \$4,308,416, a decrease of 0.2 percent from the previous year. Our unassigned fund balance (cash reserves) stood at \$348,774, an increase of 23% from the previous year.

The 2020 federal census is now underway. If you haven’t done so, please respond to the letter you received from the Census Bureau. You can do it on line in 10 minutes or less.

You may have noticed the metal tags on many trees in the Borough. They are the result of a new tree inventory that was completed during the past year. For the record, there are about 220 public trees in the Borough. Ten of them have been marked as “trees of special interest”, for example the tallest tree or a particularly fine example of a species.

INFRASTRUCTURE – A new standby generator was installed behind Borough Hall in December, which will allow the hall to serve as a place of refuge in the event a major storm knocks out power to the Borough. Part of Water Street, from Trumbull down to the Point, has been rebuilt.

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, not to mention people willing to run for elective office. I want to give a big thankyou to the citizens who serve on Planning & Zoning, which was until a week ago chaired by Julia Leeming and now by Don Maranell; the Zoning Board of Appeals, chaired

by Tony Crane; 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/marshal Jeff Hoadley; and Sue Cordeiro and Roger Collelo, who keep the streets clear of leaves, snow, and ice as well as maintaining our six parks and responding to fallen tree limbs, clogged storm drains, and a variety of other problems. Sue, the highway department foreman, is now in her 39th year of service in the Borough Street Department; Roger and Barbara have worked for us for 18 years. And Jeff Hoadley has been a member of the fire department for 46 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 for their service to the community. Borough Attorney Nick Kepple continues to provide wise advice on a whole range of matters.

CHARTER REVISION--- After two years of meetings and discussion, the proposed charter revisions were approved by the voters in last May's election. A major provision of the revisions is the reduction of the Board of Warden & Burgesses from 7 members to 5, which takes effect with our next election in May 2021.

PASSINGS-- Each year I note the passing of some important members of the community, people who gave in various ways to make the Borough a better place to live for all.

Among those we have lost this year are Robert Baum, Susie Knox, Polly Dyer, Marie-Louise (Coco) Knapp, Sarah (Miss Ray) Coker, Betty Croteau, Jan Lindberg, Harry Muller, Rita Hoadley, Alisa Storrow, Maria Simao, Ann Preivity, Dennis Souza.

WILLIAM WILLIAMS FUND -- The Borough is very fortunate to have two charitable funds with which to assist residents who need some 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 100 years ago. Traditionally the warden and clerk-treasurer are the ones who administer the Williams Fund. Since last April we have assisted several residents and disbursed a total of \$1,850. The fund balance stands at \$77,641.

Last year I reported that the trustees of the Waldron Fund and the administrators of the Williams Fund were exploring the possibility of merging the two funds in order to achieve more efficiency in their operations. We have been assisted in this discussion by the generous efforts of attorney Beth Leamon, who specializes in wills and trusts. Beth petitioned the court of probate for permission to merge the two funds and create a combined Waldron-Williams Charitable Fund. We received court approval for the merger in February. Our intent is that the new fund would be governed by three trustees to be elected at the annual meeting, as is the case of the existing Waldron Fund. Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 problem, the current trustees have not been able to meet to work out governing documents for the combined fund. Until that is accomplished, the two funds will continue to operate as independent units with the current trustees in place.

OUTLOOK - Stonington Borough enters its 220th year in good shape fiscally and physically, but a bit shaken socially. Our financial reserves are strong and our infrastructure is in relatively good shape, but the institutions that bind the community together are dark. Many of those institutions are small not for profits – the library, SVIA, La Grua Center, COMO, and Holy Ghost Society, to name a few. Other institutions are the churches and restaurants where we gather. Finally, there are the shops where we find some of the necessities of life. When COVID restrictions are lifted, and it is safe to venture out, we need to support these places and bring them to life again. In doing so, we will be bringing the Borough back to life again.