

## **PENDLETON HILL/BOOMBRIDGE RD. NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

The first Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, March 6, 2023 in the First Baptist Church on Pendleton Hill Rd. at 6:30pm. There were 9 people in attendance. Emily Lewis facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge attended as well. Two members of the Planning and Zoning Commission and one member of the Economic Development Commission were among the attendees.

### **What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?**

- Feel like I live in Vermont!
- Quiet
- No streetlights or traffic.
- Good services – particularly the road crews. Streets are plowed quickly- fallen trees removed quickly etc.
- The Transfer Station staff are great!
- Schools are good – Small, but offer plenty of opportunities to participate in activities such as sports (in other school facilities). Happy that Wheeler was adding Shop to the curriculum. Feel like the school administrators and teachers really have the well-being of North Stonington students in mind as evidenced by all the effort to provide programs, classes and activities that the students seek.
  - Opportunity for new uses in the space where the former school was demolished
- Everyone is open and welcoming in town. Elected officials are very accessible.
- Can easily go to nearby towns for goods and services and other activities and then get to come home and enjoy living in the country.

### **How can we protect what we love?**

- Residents need to participate whenever they can – sign up to receive meeting notifications and agendas and attend the meetings that interest them. The Zoom option gives people more opportunity to participate or at least listen in to stay informed. The town has great volunteers that chair the meetings and allow people to actively participate. Town form of Government has potential that we don't take advantage of.
- Ed and Belinda Learned – who own a farm off East Clarks Falls Rd. feel preserving the secondary road classification for certain roads is important given the frequent use by farmers and the potential for accidents should there be more traffic.  
*(Group discussed traffic concerns on back roads and along Rte 184 – both used by farmers. Concerned about the traffic impact from the proposed Great Wolf Lodge at the Casino as signs on the highway direct southbound traffic from RI to Exit 93 for travelers going to the Casino.)*
- Farmland can be protected through the sale of development rights to the State so that the farms will always remain farms. Mentioned Ann Renehan – former resident in Clarks falls – she was a pioneer in getting people to sell their development rights and a great example of how an individual can accomplish something so important.

- There are younger farmers now - more diverse type of farms and farming. There are also more farmstands as well throughout town.
- Farmers market is an excellent addition to the town and has brought attention to the Hewitt farm property. Many did not know it was there and/or open to the public.
- Need to get young people more involved. Discussed the possibility of a Government Studies class at the school that requires students to attend some of the municipal meetings as an assignment.
  - Why don't more people participate?
    - Most agreed that most young people are not interested in attending meetings- this interest does not develop until they are older and have "skin in the game" so-to-speak (i.e. kids in school – own a home and pay taxes etc.) In general, people whether young or older, are busy and cannot easily participate – or are involved in so many activities that they don't have the time or energy to attend a meeting in the evening.
    - Being on a Commission or attending meetings means you may have to take on responsibilities. This scares some people.
    - Bigger issues have been taken care of – like building the new EMS building and renovating the schools, demolishing the old school etc. Some smaller tasks remain like building an Animal Shelter or addressing some of the zoning issues concerning the lake properties, so maybe the lack of participation is a sign that people are simply happy with what is going on in town and don't have any concerns to air at a meeting.
- Protecting water resources is important. What can be done?
  - Consider developing a town water system.
  - Wild and Scenic River Designation discussed. This designation is special – North Stonington is fortunate to have 2 of its rivers included in this Wild and Scenic River System. The designation opens up opportunities for funding for initiatives to protect the rivers.
  - Consider creating a "no-build" zone adjacent to rivers, lakes and streams – or a 100ft no clear zone.
- Consider hosting joint meetings with Planning and Zoning, Conservation Commission and Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commissions to improve relations between the 3 commissions... Need to be on the same page.

Discussed the need for "affordable housing" and the availability of housing that is affordable. Suggestion made to offer a tax break to lower-income families/individuals who currently live in town so that they can afford to still own their homes and remain in town (rather than move to senior housing in another town).

- A lot of empty houses – but not for sale. People's second homes or investment properties? Contributes to the difficulty young people have in finding homes.
- Accessory Apartments are a great way for families to earn extra income while providing much needed rental housing in the community.

The Town's history is very much a part of what we need to protect. This includes our scenic roads, barns and abundant historic housing – all of which need greater recognition. **Small narrow roads** worth

protecting as they contribute to the rural feel of the town. *(Add to list of rural characteristics)*. Barn tour a great way to see some of the hidden gems in town.

- Happy that the Gristmill was bought and is being preserved, but now there is no longer any public access to fishing on Clarks falls pond by the Dam.

### **Threats:**

The availability of large tracts of undeveloped land increase the threat of 8-30g housing developments or large developments like amusement parks; and as farmers get older, the reality of some selling their land to developers for residential subdivisions becomes greater.

Mashantucket Pequot tribal Nation trying to diversify their assets. They own large tracts of t=land in key commercial areas in town. There is a Bill currently under consideration that would give tax exemption on all properties owned by the Tribe regardless if they are located on the Reservation. The impact to the Town's Grand List would be significant if this occurred.

### **Closing thoughts:**

Will likely feel the ripple effect of the Pandemic for years to come – not sure how it has fully impacted the town, but the last 10 years of growth has been small and incremental and very much in keeping with the “character” of town. Definitely need to highlight the successes and our assets in this new POCD.

## **WYASSUP RD. NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

The second Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, March 13, 2023 at the Grange on Wyassup Rd. at 6:30pm. There were 21 people in attendance. Bing Bartick facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge attended as well. Many of the residents that attended currently or formerly served on a Town board or Commission or Committee. (Conservation Commission, Planning and Zoning, Juvenile Review board, Hewitt farm Committee, Historical Society, Board of Finance, Affordable housing Committee and the Tax relief Committee. Keeping North Stonington Affordable was also represented.)

### **What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?**

- The People – Sense of Community even though everyone is spread apart. Everyone knows each other and many are well versed in the history of town. Strong family lineages.
- Schools are great – students well supported by staff.
- Love the sound of the forest and close to the ocean. Great blend of ecology.
- Enjoy the “ruralness” and the convenient location between several other larger urban areas like Providence, Boston, Hartford, new haven and New York.
- Variety of wildlife; rural setting and the privacy it brings; stonewalls and abundant trails.
- Farms and open farmland.
- Character and topography make it feel like we are in Vermont.
- The quiet!
- Like having areas where they can fish and hunt.
- Neighbors don’t bother each other – but are always willing to lend a hand if needed- supportive and engaged community.
- Lack of traffic.
- The great library and the fact that it draws people of all ages.

### **How can we protect what we love?**

- All identify with the “character” of town and want to preserve it by keeping it clean, balancing economic development for the sake of broadening the tax base, with conservation of all the things that residents cherish.
- Need to know your neighbors and build relationships and networks of supportive friends.
- Need things to happen at the local level. Fair, NoSto Fest, Historical Society events and library events are all great ways to interact with people and get to know other residents in town. The more events, the more people will talk and get to know each other.
- Manage growth to protect “ruralness.” Need good planning and members of boards and commissions with some degree of expertise to protect rural setting.
- Make the town more affordable for young adults and seniors.

How can we facilitate the growth of affordable housing?

When thinking about creating “qualified affordable housing” or even “housing that is naturally affordable” Still struggle with where to put it and whether we want it at all. Only 31 towns in CT have the required 10% qualified affordable housing. These are mostly the urban towns that have public utilities. North Stonington does have some qualified affordable homes and many homes that are considered “affordable” but that do not count toward the 10% requirement. North Stonington is vulnerable to predatory development which is not the way to diversify the housing and get to the 10% threshold.

The desire is to create housing suitable for seniors, young adults just starting out and/or general renters etc. in more walkable areas with access to goods and services. There are a few issues with achieving this though:

- North Stonington does not have the density to attract a grocery store or pharmacy or other similar stores. Also lack public transportation (think transit-oriented development)
- The lack of public water and sewer infrastructure is a limiting factor. Limited areas for a package plant to support denser residential development. Limited options to tie into neighboring systems.
- Discussed the need to identify specific areas in town where affordable housing and/or multi-family housing would be acceptable and actually possible to build. Land must be available and inexpensive (or free) if it is to be a qualified affordable housing development. What town-owned land is available? Would like to have some control over the appearance of the housing.

Some felt the best way to make something affordable is to increase the wealth in the community. Need to find ways for folks to earn enough or maintain wealth in order to be able to stay in town vs. focusing our attention on creating affordable housing. Discussed other programs such as rental assistance or tax breaks (or capped tax rate for those on a fixed income) to help people afford their homes. Also thought we should figure out how much “housing that is affordable” we have before building any more. Another concern expressed was that there was no guarantee that local families would be the ones to move into affordable houses if they were built.

Like many other towns North Stonington is ageing and needs the vitality that young people bring! Affordable housing for younger residents is therefore important – and it can easily blend in with existing housing.

#### **What would make your neighborhood better? What is missing?**

Need regulations on the use of guns (target practice etc.) in residential areas. AR15’s are not being used for “hunting.”

Speeding and littering were identified as issues that would benefit from more policing and signage, though there was not a lot of confidence in the effectiveness of no littering signs, nor a lot of support for speed humps. Ideas were suggested such as installing trash barrels along certain roads (though difficult to keep clean); hosting a trash pick-up day; install cameras to monitor speeding (but can’t write a ticket from a camera in CT); encourage walkers/cyclists to be more visible and aware of their surroundings – often walk on the wrong side with headphones in – or wear dark clothing.

### **What Plans do you envision for the Wyassup Rd. neighborhood?**

Some felt it was fine the way it was.

Most of Wyassup has been developed, but if the economy improves, some of the larger tracts of land might be further subdivided.

Concern expressed over the fact that the State land was not necessarily protected in perpetuity. There are no constraints on their selling the land.

Ensure that the Zoning regulations make it as easy as possible for farmers to continue to farm.

### **What do you want to create or preserve?**

- Farms and all the other assets and attributes mentioned so far. Preserve agriculture and find like-minded people to move to town. To be a good neighbor you need good people.
- Need to control development if you want to keep the existing character. ½ acre lot subdivisions could work in the right setting as long as it is designed to be a cohesive neighborhood. Some concerns over adequate water and sewer to do this though. Consider open space or cluster developments. Also need to keep treed buffers along streets and neighborhoods to preserve the rural character.
- Keep the land fill (transfer station) open. Stop people from dumping garbage in the woods.
- Promote the value of preserving the historic architecture/heritage – especially the pre-colonial history. Could capitalize on that and draw people in.
- Preserve the aquifer. Get the state to recognize that 8-30g development (i.e. greater density) may not be appropriate everywhere – especially in environmentally sensitive areas. Concern expressed about an alleged state plan to use north Stonington water in an emergency. Maybe North Stonington should develop their own water company or water authority to safeguard the aquifer from state confiscation and/or to limit how much is used.
- Consider developing a park like Wilcox Park in Westerly – possibly on the school property?
- Some of the vacant town-owned land should be put back on the tax rolls by being developed into something that serves the residents.
- Get entrepreneurs and farmers together to produce a unique local product like “north Stonington cheese” that would get us recognized.
- Find seed money for farmers to be able to grow specific food to be used in the school cafeteria.
- Find ways to increase the cohesiveness between local businesses to make each more prosperous. Maybe resurrect the Business Directory and highlight all the available locally sourced goods and local services.
- Improve road safety and walkability.
- Standardize signage for house numbers (i.e. blue signs from fire department).

### **THREE LAKES NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

The third Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, March 20, 2023 at Camp Wightman off Coal Pit Rd. at 6:30pm. There were 23 people in attendance, including 2 members of the PZC who attended other neighborhood meetings. Bill Ricker facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge and the Director and Assistant Director of the Camp attended as well.

#### **What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?**

- Dark night skies
- Being at the end of a dead-end street near the forest
- The quiet
- The lake; tree canopy and all the wildlife
- Stone walls and abundant trails
- Good neighbors and being in a town where there are multiple generations of families – where everyone knows each other.

#### **How can we protect what we love?**

Climate Change and COVID are just some of the things that have pointed to the need for towns to be more sustainable – self-sufficient and better stewards of the environment.

Conservation of the lakes is very important. Need to preserve the vegetated buffer near the shoreline. Suggested a non-infringement area or no-build buffer area – but need to look at the science before determining what that buffer should be.

Preserving the water quality is a priority. There was a lot of discussion about the mill foil issue and the need to continue to secure funding to treat – but also about wanting to skip a year of treatment every once and a while. Is there a better way to handle the issue? Funding could come from grants as well as the budget. The 3 lake Association Presidents should get together to discuss this and other issues.

People need to VOTE!!! Always the same few people that attend town meetings.

#### **What would make your neighborhood a better place to live?**

Reducing the use of outdoor lights at night- requiring dimmer, full cut-off lights.

There was discussion about the proposal to allow certain seasonal residents to become year-round residents. There were some in favor provided the water and septic met health code and the property was accessible for emergency vehicles. Others felt that this would not be a good idea due to the potential impact to the lake from the increase in year-round residents.

There have been issues at the boat launch and other spots along the lakes – especially during COVID- including trespassing, fighting, drinking and theft. These are all particular safety concerns for Camp Wightman given the presence of children. It was noted that some of the trespassers live in the

neighborhood – they are not all outsiders. There was consensus that more policing was necessary and that DEEP had some responsibility too.

There are many groups that also use the lake like Parks and Rec, Boy Scouts and the Lions Club.

### **What Plans do you envision for the neighborhood?**

There is limited lakefront property, but there seem to be new houses being built and new people moving in. Discussion continued about the possible conversion of seasonal properties to year-round use. Some properties are well suited for this – others are not. Finding an area sufficient for a new septic system without having to clearcut the lot is difficult. Technology needs to advance in this respect (or catch up with RI). Some felt that the lakes were a fragile ecosystem, and the reason the seasonal use restrictions were put into place was to protect this ecosystem from over development. Increased development means greater impervious surface, less tree cover, more pesticides and fertilizer use, more septic system effluent seeping into the ground etc.

There is no enforcement in the area for speeding boats, lights, noise, pesticide application etc. It is up to the residents to get others to comply. If there is no enforcement available to stop the ongoing issues, then maybe we must limit the density. Need to think about the lakes as something to protect, not just a play thing or something to exploit. All we do has an impact- need to abide by the “leave no trace” motto.

Need longer-lasting weed control.

Want all roads to be treated equally. Currently some of the private roads are maintained by the town and others are not.

The lake neighborhood used to be more vibrant. There are a lot of properties in disrepair and people do not want to invest in the old cottages – especially if they can only be used seasonally. Need to approach the year-round use issue more creatively and come up with smart limitations.

### **What things do you want to create for the town in general?**

- Preserve farms and open space by providing incentives to preserve both and by promoting the sale of development rights to the State. Ensure employees have housing and that farms remain affordable for new farmers to farm. Consider using town-owned land to create new smaller or “boutique” farms with or without associated housing....but do need to create more affordable houses or promote building smaller houses.
- Create more places like Hewitt farm for the public to enjoy and gather.
- Create more elderly and/or ADA accessible trails.
- Continue to fund the schools.
- Lobby the state and local government to enact ordinances to better protect natural resources.
- Consider a Short-term Rental ordinance.



## **COSSADUCK HILL/NW CORNER ROAD NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

The fourth Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, March 27, 2023 at the Barn at Maple Lane Farms on Northwest Corner Rd. at 6:30pm. There were 30 people in attendance, including the three Selectmen and 2 members of the PZC who have attended several other neighborhood meetings and members of the Board of Ed and Finance Commission. Dave McCord facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge and Allyn Brown (owner of Maple Lane Farms) attended as well.

### **What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?**

- Rural Character – lots of open space. Lots of protected open space as well.
- Caring neighbors. Despite low residential density, it is a close-knit community.
- Natural beauty/abundant natural resources
- Accessible local government
- Great schools
- Location along I-95 Corridor which provides opportunity for development/revenue generation.
- Despite the development over the past 50 years, it still “feels good” – town feels like the right size.
- Wild and Scenic River status
- Scenic areas and farms
- Have beauty and rural character but access to all necessities within a 20 minutes’ drive.
- Like the new businesses like the brewery and the wineries. They bring visitors and revenue without impacting the rural character.

### **How can we protect what we love?**

Need to continue to encourage farmers and farming even if it means dealing with the occasional nuisance that sometimes accompanies living near a farm.

Need to find an appropriate location for affordable housing so that we can house the local workforce.

In order to maintain or protect the existing character of town, could create an architectural review process and pass regulations to increase setback requirements and control other elements such as height and scale. Consider design guidelines. (J. Hodge explained the statutory limitations on what could be regulated and how).

There was a lot of discussion about recent logging operations and the activity on the MPTN property on Swantown Rd. and the potential impact it will have on the neighborhood – i.e traffic. The proposed use of their property is not known. Residents want the dirt roads to remain unpaved. Do not want Swantown Rd. to become a paved through road to NW Corner Rd.

Discussed the potential impact to the grand list of the MPTN were successful in their attempt to be given tax-exempt status on non-reservation property they own in town.

**What would make your road or neighborhood a better place to live and work? Is there something that could be eliminated or reworked?**

Keep it the way it is!

Address the issue of trees growing in front of the stone walls that line many roads - visibility and safety issue.

Stripe the roads that are unstriped. B. Carlson stated that this is being done in the fall hopefully with LOTCIP funding.

Reduce the speed limit on Button Rd. to 25 to control the speeding. Residents generally agreed that it is typically the local residents who speed in their own neighborhoods!

The roads are all very dark – hard to see at night. Very dangerous for walkers and joggers in particular. Would be good to develop more bike and pedestrian paths to connect various areas of town and get people off the roads. Discussion about developing a pathway along the Old Trolley route and more trails like the Tri-town trail.

Trash on the side of the road is an issue. Would like to find ways to reduce this.

- Clean-up days
- Provide residents with trash cans that have lids that stay closed so that trash does not fly out of the truck on the way to the transfer station.

**What plans can you see this neighborhood making for its future? What do you envision?**

- Would like to see more little shops like the old mom and pop shops and farm stands.
- Pharmacy and Supermarket would be great along Rte. 2 closer to the Cossaduck hill and NW Corner Rd. neighborhood.
- Infrastructure needed to have any significant development along rte. 2. Plan where you want pockets of development or greater density and focus infrastructure development in those areas only. Infrastructure in targeted areas would be ok. Discussed limitations of development or locating infrastructure in the commercial and industrial zones due to the underlying aquifer.
- **What things do you want to create or preserve for the town as a whole?**
- Develop infrastructure to facilitate revenue generating development.
- Develop a trail to connect both ends of town. Discussed keeping sight lines clear along roads and opening up some of the narrow roads a bit.
- Develop more rural-style businesses to attract more tourists (but not too many) like trillium's farm brewery. Attract businesses that feel like they belong in town.
- Keep the farms as farms help protect them from being subdivided.
- Hewitt Farm is a great asset to town and getting a lot of use. Farmers Market was also a great addition. The library is also a great asset – great staff and great programming for all ages.

- Discussion about the possibilities for developing other public spaces for community gatherings and recreation. The schools need more gym space and playing fields. Suggested a town-wide meeting to decide what to do with the space created by the demolition of the old school. Some suggestions included gardens and walking paths.
- Preserve and protect the schools. They are unique and add great value to the town.
- Discussed the need for a plan to handle bulky waste- need to come up with a better way to manage the waste stream in general – get away from the land fill approach.

## **THE VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

The final Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, April 24, 2023 at the Media Center at 6:30pm. There were 21 people in attendance, not including the three Selectmen and 2 members of the PZC who have attended several other neighborhood meetings. Bob Carlson and Nicole Porter facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge attended as well.

### **What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?**

- Friendly neighbors – familiarity between residents and elected officials. Close-knit community.
- The beautiful historic homes Natural beauty/abundant natural resources
- Accessible local government
- Great schools
- Location along I-95 Corridor which provides opportunity for development/revenue generation.
- Despite the development over the past 50 years, it still “feels good” – town feels like the right size.
- Wild and Scenic River status
- Scenic areas and farms
- Have beauty and rural character but access to all necessities within a 20 minutes’ drive.
- Like the new businesses like the brewery and the wineries. They bring visitors and revenue without impacting the rural character.

### **How can we protect what we love?**

Need to continue to encourage farmers and farming even if it means dealing with the occasional nuisance that sometimes accompanies living near a farm.

Need to find an appropriate location for affordable housing so that we can house the local workforce.

In order to maintain or protect the existing character of town, could create an architectural review process and pass regulations to increase setback requirements and control other elements such as height and scale. Consider design guidelines. (J. Hodge explained the statutory limitations on what could be regulated and how).

There was a lot of discussion about recent logging operations and the activity on the MPTN property on Swantown Rd. and the potential impact it will have on the neighborhood – i.e traffic. The proposed use of their property is not known. Residents want the dirt roads to remain unpaved. Do not want Swantown Rd. to become a paved through road to NW Corner Rd.

Discussed the potential impact to the grand list of the MPTN were successful in their attempt to be given tax-exempt status on non-reservation property they own in town.

### **What would make your road or neighborhood a better place to live and work? Is there something that could be eliminated or reworked?**

Keep it the way it is!

Address the issue of trees growing in front of the stone walls that line many roads - visibility and safety issue.

Stripe the roads that are unstriped. B. Carlson stated that this is being done in the fall hopefully with LOTCIP funding.

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- Preserve and protect the schools. They are unique and add great value to the town.
- Discussed the need for a plan to handle bulky waste- need to come up with a better way to manage the waste stream in general – get away from the land fill approach.