

Town of East Greenwich

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TO: Suzanne McGee Cienki, Town Council President,
and the Honorable East Greenwich Town Council Members

FROM: Michael P. Donegan, Chair and members of the
East Greenwich Planning Board, and Bethany Warburton, Chair and
members of the East Greenwich Cove Management Commission

RE: Recommendation for the Creation and Implementation of an East
Greenwich Waterfront Access and Enhancement Plan

DATE: June 21, 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last several years, the East Greenwich Cove Management Commission (“CMC”) has worked in conjunction with Harbormaster Jim Cullen to advance ideas for improving the Town’s underutilized waterfront. The CMC requested assistance from the Town Planning Board in the Fall of 2016 and held several joint workshops, including a boat tour of the Cove, to formulate a recommendation to the Town Council for developing an East Greenwich Waterfront Access and Enhancement Plan (“Waterfront Plan”). The following constitutes the Planning Board’s recommendation regarding such Waterfront Plan development.

II. PROCESS

The Planning Board has discussed current and potential land uses adjacent to the Cove and believes it to be in the Town’s best interest to set priorities in preparation for a consultant to perform a feasibility study for the waterfront. Such study would include, but not be limited to architectural, engineering, and economic analyses. The results of these studies would become the underpinnings of the Waterfront Plan.

The Planning Board’s examination of and discussion about the Town’s waterfront have led us to conclude, as the Cove Commission has, that it is an extremely underutilized asset. The waterfront has the potential to greatly enhance the Town as a whole and augment the experience of living here for all residents. In order for its

potential to be fully realized, certain land uses should likely be terminated and new water-based land uses beneficial to the Town's residents should be pursued.

The Planning Board feels strongly that the Town needs to take advantage of one of the Town's most valuable and unique assets, its waterfront. The Planning Board contemplates a Waterfront Plan that will enhance the use and enjoyment of the waterfront for Town residents and visitors, make the waterfront a year-round destination and generate much-needed revenue for the Town.

III. CONSIDERATIONS

Although the Town's waterfront runs from Division Street at the Town's northern boundary to the southern tip of Scalloptown Park, the parcels that the Planning Board believes should be the focus of the Waterfront Plan are the existing municipally-owned properties totaling approximately 950' of Cove frontage, specifically:

- 21 Crompton Avenue, being Map 75 AP 3 Lot 247, and
- 78 Crompton Avenue, being Map 75 AP3 Lot 245.
(see attached Map A, existing conditions, for reference)

21 Crompton Avenue (Lot 247) is currently comprised of the Barbara Tufts Playground, the London Street Coastal Resources Management Council right of way, the Town's Waste Water Treatment Facility ("WWTF"), the Parks & Grounds Department building, and the Transfer Station.

78 Crompton Avenue (Lot 245) consists of a Town owned boat ramp and dock, a state-funded ferry dock, a parking overlook, concrete steps, and dinghy racks.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that the Town Council has allocated \$30,000 to engage a consultant who will develop a plan that will include architectural, engineering and economic analyses of waterfront, the Planning Board hereby makes the following specific recommendations to the Town Council.

Prefacing our recommendations, the Planning Board must unanimously assert that the Town Transfer Station (on Lot 247 as described above) is not optimally located or sited and its current configuration prohibits utilizing the waterfront to its greatest potential for the benefit of the Town and its residents for a multitude of reasons. First, the existing Transfer Station is obsolete and in critical need of repair and is only open a total of five hours per week. Monies required for repairs could be foregone

completely or reallocated to the purchase of a new compactor for installation elsewhere. Second, the use currently swallows up one of the Town's most valuable resources being located on prime waterfront real estate. It does not represent the highest and best use of the property and is, in fact, incompatible with other residential, recreational and commercial uses nearby. Third, the continued existence of the transfer station on the waterfront is incompatible with our vision for the future of the land and its removal or relocation away from the waterfront would allow our concept of redevelopment and optimization of the waterfront to flourish.

The Planning Board thus recommends that the Town Council direct the Department of Public Works ("DPW"), perhaps in conjunction with the consultant preparing the Waterfront Plan, to formulate alternatives that might include relocating, repurposing, or eliminating the transfer station, along with estimates of associated costs. Other possibilities, like regionalizing with an abutting community might also be explored as the Council sees fit.

The Waterfront Plan as recommended by the Planning Board should therefore address:

A. Potential Development of a Town-Owned Marina

The Cove Commission and Harbormaster anticipate that a marina could provide dockage and marina services for approximately 80 boats. Dock slips could be rented supporting seasonal and transient boaters and winter boat storage could be offered. The funding for the building and maintenance of a Town marina could be financed by the dockage slip rentals and the services generated from the marina activities. As contemplated by the Planning Board, a marina would cost the taxpayers little or nothing and would, indeed, generate revenue for the Town.

Examples of successful municipal marina development exist in Rhode Island and we have explored those in Bristol and Newport. Success can be achieved either through management by Town staff or by an engaged outside company. The current 10 to 12 year waiting list at the East Greenwich Yacht Club and shortfall of area dock slips to satisfy the existing demand creates an opportunity for pre-sale of slips to obtain deposits and eliminate investment risk before construction costs are committed or incurred. Potential yearly revenue is speculated to be in the range of \$150,000, but economic analysis specific to a local project should be part of the Study and Plan.

B. Development of a Waterfront Marina Complex

(see Attachments 1 and 2 for potential marina/dock layouts)

A Town marina complex could include facilities for the Harbormaster, facilities for the Parks & Recreation Department's educational programs, restrooms/comfort stations, as well as storage for personal craft and a pump-out station. Additionally, the marina complex could provide access for school waterfront activities, youth sailing, boating, and water sport teams and clubs which will advance the goals of our Comprehensive Community Plan. It is widely known that East Greenwich waterfront real estate is considered prime and desirable. Areas could be made available for pavilion event rentals and commercial (retail/business) development, providing additional tax revenue and fee-based income to the Town for little to no up-front investment. Additional benefits of a waterfront marina complex would include the following:

- Superior dockage for both the Harbormaster and the Fire Department, thereby increasing public safety;
- Additional visitors to the Town from transient boaters who will support local retailers and restaurants and increase the Town's meal tax revenue; and
- A marina will provide the local commercial fishermen with dockage to help them earn a living, while keeping this historic industry alive and providing an outlet for residents to access fresh local seafood.

C. Development and Enhancement of Waterfront Nature Trails and Waterfront Access Points

While there is an existing semi-developed nature trail between the WWTF and the water, it lacks good visibility and access. Therefore the opportunity exists for the development of one or more boardwalks/nature trails connecting the new marina to the Barbara Tufts playground. A longer range objective might be to link the trails all the way to Scalloptown Park. Our vision calls for the trails to be enhanced with signage identifying species unique to Greenwich Cove over a marshland boardwalk. This would not only offer residents and visitors more access to and enjoyment of East Greenwich Cove, but might also create new opportunities on the Cove for waterfront commerce.

V. CONCLUSION

The establishment of an East Greenwich Waterfront Access and Enhancement Plan that includes an assessment of the feasibility of the above-described components is extremely important to the future of our Town. Such Plan would be prepared with input from Town Departments as well as the Cove Commission and Planning Board who will advance a final draft to the Town Council for adoption. We believe this effort is important for the following reasons: (a) the Plan empowers the Town to improve the quality of life for its residents significantly; (b) The Plan will help Town staff perform their jobs more efficiently when it yields superior facilities that are better located; (c) the waterfront would be dramatically enhanced following plan implementation so as to become a year-round destination; (d) the enhanced waterfront would generate additional revenue for the Town; and (e) better integration of the waterfront district with the Main Street commercial corridor will be possible as a result of an integrated and proactive planning process.

The Planning Board believes that the Council-approved \$30,000 waterfront planning study is just a beginning and the budgeted amount is likely not enough to cover all components of the entire waterfront at once. Therefore, the Council should determine specific priorities to outline the consultant's scope of work. The Planning Board looks forward to assisting the Town Council in creating and implementing a vision for an enhanced waterfront that will become the pride of the community, make East Greenwich an even more desirable destination, and generate much-needed revenue for the Town. We are eager to assist the Council however we can and will dedicate our time and resources in support of this important undertaking.