

PERSPECTIVE



Democracy, silly style

First you establish a municipal government within a municipality, a nonsensical creation sure to sow confusion.

Then you hold the election for this odd political subdivision when no one is thinking about an election because they just went through a major election four months earlier. And you hold it on a Monday because, you know, people are conditioned to voting on a Tuesday.

One more thing — members of only one party can vote.

So, is the purpose to discourage voter participation? Create the perfect set up for nonrepresentative government, so to speak? If so, the recent City of Groton primary was a smashing success.

The City of Groton is a political subdivision within the Town of Groton. If you own property there, you get to pay taxes to the city and the town. Lucky you. Other double-taxation political subdivisions in the area are the Borough of Stonington and the Borough of Jewett City (within Griswold), which only have the name “borough” in common.

The City of Groton is by far the biggest of the three, home to Electric Boat and the Pfizer research campus. With a roughly \$20 million budget, it has its own police, fire and public works departments — eight municipal unions in all to deal with. And the city owns Groton Utilities, with a \$70 million budget.

It has a City Council and a strong mayor, currently Keith Hedrick, but it appears not for long. Hedrick, 61, managed to lower taxes during his four years in office — two terms. Overall, things appeared to be running smoothly. It looked like Hedrick would stroll back into office unchallenged in the May 3 election. He is a Democrat, as is every council member, and Republicans did not put up any candidates, using some lame excuse about fearing the ramifications of all the anti-Trump fervor.

But then Democratic Town Councilor André Bumgardner, 26, saw an opening. All he had to do to become mayor, it appeared, was win a March 8 primary — on a Monday of course — a low-turnout popularity contest only involving registered Democrats. And Bumgardner knows how to be popular. Jobless, he had time. He went door to door and let people who otherwise would have no clue that there was an election in on the secret. Personable and empathetic, Bumgardner listened to their concerns and talked up clean energy and youth programs; and who could oppose those?

Hedrick, meanwhile, he of boring tax control and managing a utilities department, was caught flat-footed, which might explain his lack of door-to-door work. Well, that and having to run the city. He seemed reluctant to point out that he had a background in engineering management and an MBA from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, while Bumgardner had a high school diploma. Hedrick hinted at his superior experience and preparedness when he should have been shouting it.

One candidate executed his strategy perfectly. The other had no strategy. And when the votes were counted it showed strategy, and Bumgardner, winning 335-330. That represents about 13% of the registered voters. What a mandate!

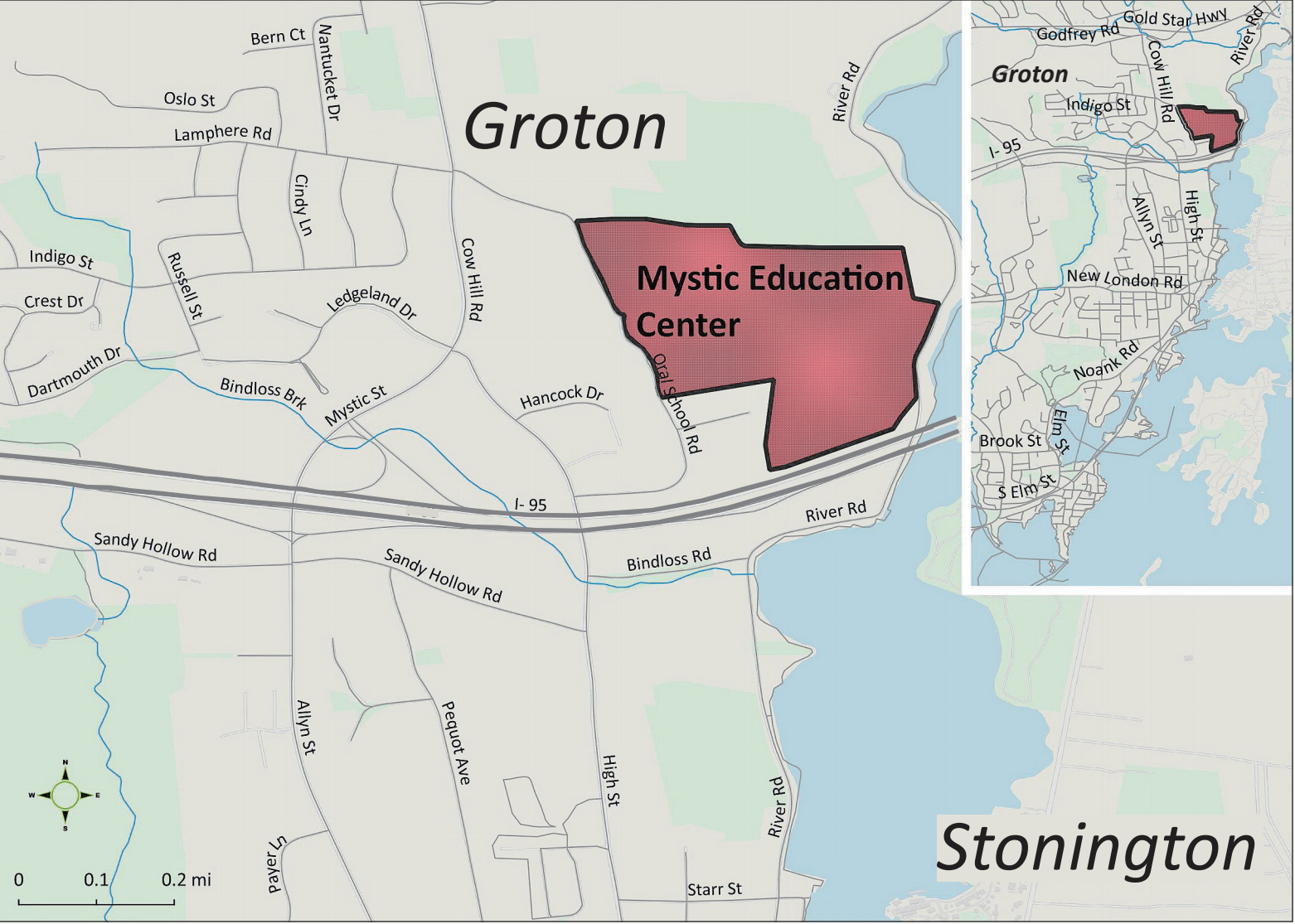
A recount Friday confirmed the result. When I asked, Hedrick did not rule out a long-shot, write-in candidacy May 3. He is taking time to think.

It is time the major political parties open their primaries to unaffiliated voters. In this primary, their involvement could have led to a different outcome. I expect it would have.

And if Connecticut insists on

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Too much for Mystic?



SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY ♦ SOURCES: CT DEEP, TOWN OF GROTON, ESRI

Critics say plans to develop the 77-acre Mystic Education Center site, which overlooks the Mystic River, would bring heavy density to a quiet, semi-rural area. Groton town councilors back a proposal to build 931 residential units, along with shops and offices, on the site.

Massive residential project flouts sensible development

By JIM FURLONG

THE DAY ON MARCH 1 RAN A guest commentary signed by all nine Groton town councilors arguing that the town “needs” a planned major residential redevelopment on bluffs overlooking the Mystic River. Many townspeople beg to differ.

Mystic River Bluffs, as the mega project is called, is the offering of Long Island developer Jeff Respler, whose website has featured mostly modular housing.

Respler’s 60-plus acre “live-work-play” creation would be anchored by 931 residential units and supplemented by shops and offices.

How big is 931 units? It’s 2.7 times the number of units in The Ledges, an expansive and imposing 339-unit apartment at 79 Drosdyk Drive, Groton. The 931 Respler units, if occupied, would likely bring in 2,000 residents, most with cars.

Planners today recognize that a community benefits far more by bringing mixed-use development into already developed areas in downtown settings than by sprawling out into undeveloped areas. However, the Respler proposal would bring heavy density to a quiet and semi-rural area.

It’s the 1950s-style downtown Groton that needs redevelopment.

Many residents and other lovers of the area see the Respler plan as a push toward shocking urbanization, incompatible with Mystic.

The Respler complex would be built on land occupied by the abandoned Mystic Oral School for the Deaf. It ultimately would be sold to Respler Homes LLC, the now “exclusive developer,” in accordance with stipulations of the State’s Purchase and Sale Agreement with the company.

The Oral School (the name refers to lip reading) was founded in 1869. The state acquired it in 1921 and declared it surplus land in 2011. It’s also known as the Mystic Educational Center.

The Town Council’s commentary shows high expectations. The council believes MRB would become the town’s third-largest taxpayer by attracting newly hired Electric Boat workers and bringing in current EB employees and others who work in Groton but live elsewhere. Other hoped-for opportunities are rehabilitation of Oral School structures to provide offices, a community swimming pool and a theater. Some 37 acres of green space would be retained by the state.

It’s hard to blame the council

for being attracted by this vision, but serious questions of reality are being raised. One big one is whether Respler can afford to repair existing key structures, for example the recreational Pratt Building. Planning & Zoning Commission members have assigned low value to what they term mere “old buildings” that are questionable candidates for repair. Can the Respler-promised community swimming pool survive?

Below are specific areas of serious concern.

Size

The currently quiet neighborhoods surrounding MRB are semi-rural and rich in open space. Many residents and other lovers of the area see the Respler plan as a push toward shocking urbanization, incompatible with Mystic. Words like “behemoth” and “seismic” are used to describe the size of the project and the influx of people it would attract.

As one resident said, “Right now, I have wildlife. If this goes through, I’ll have night life.”

Would final approval of this giant — by local standards— inspire copy-cat mega developments elsewhere in Mystic?

Floating Zone

Respler’s plan would require a “floating zone.” This would replace existing rules with permissive zoning that allows the developer considerable freedom. At present, the developer would be allowed to incorporate 48 acres of land into the floating zone. This is the land Respler is slated ultimately to buy from the state for a dollar. In addition, he has purchased privately an abutting 16-plus acres, which he hopes to incorporate into the floating zone. In fact, the language of the Development Agreement between Groton and Respler encourages such acquisitions. It states: “The developer shall have the right to, at its sole discretion, acquire additional properties, including but not limited to properties abutting the (original) Property, to include in the project.”

If taken literally, this language would allow Respler to buy all of Mystic, with only the Planning & Zoning Commission to stop it. The P&Z commission, rather than the Town Council, has the veto. At present, it appears that Respler intends

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‘I want the option of medical aid in dying’

By KIM HOFFMAN

I’M A STAGE FOUR OVARIAN cancer survivor of nearly eight years. I’ve known for years that I will never go into remission again. My disease has spread to one of my breasts, my liver, lungs, and skin. I’ve nearly run out of options and time.

I was last able to work in December 2019 due to my steadily declining health. Two years ago, I could still play tennis matches and run road races. Today, walking a mere half a mile takes every ounce of energy and determination that I have. I have endured long bouts of chemotherapy, and I still have not had a break now from debilitating treatment in five years.

My disease has metastasized to the point where I am always in pain or some level of discomfort. I’m always fatigued. Every day is a long, long day; the night often just seems endless.

When the pain is so intense it can’t be managed with over-the-counter medication, I resort to

Being doped out on narcotics is not comfortable for me in any way, shape, or form. I want to be able to choose what’s comfortable for me. The option to end it.

Dilaudid; I don’t tolerate other narcotics. Within a half-hour of taking a half of a Dilaudid, I become so weak that all I am able to do is lay in bed or sleep; my day is over.

So if it gets to the point where I have to manage my symptoms on some narcotic like Dilaudid all the time, I will be miserable, and unable to do the things I love. I would be just so far beyond miserable than I already am, not being able to do all the things that bring me joy and enrich my life. And to what end? Again, there’s no cure. I’ll just continue to get worse and worse.

I’ve not given up. I began a trial a few weeks ago with the hope that there may still be a chance to stabilize my disease. But it is, I am near certain, my absolute last hope. If the trial drugs do not work, my disease will continue to progress, likely

rapidly. The pain will get to a point where it is only manageable with a steady dosing of narcotics, and the fatigue will likely increase to the point that I’ll no longer be able to perform even the simplest of daily living skills on my own.

It’s sad to me that my outlook is so grim, but it is what is true and it is what is real. I do not want sympathy, so don’t feel sorry for me; rather, feel compassion. Imagine how you’d feel in my situation, how long you could tolerate the suffering, the daily loss of capacity before you just want to relax and die peacefully?

That’s why I have testified twice in the last two legislative sessions in support of Connecticut’s legislation (HB 6425) that would allow mentally capable, terminally ill people to have the option to obtain prescription medication that they

could decide to take to peacefully end unbearable suffering.

One person at the hearing promised she could “guarantee” that hospice could make me comfortable and give me “dignity” at the end of my life.

My response? “Being doped out on narcotics is not comfortable for me in any way, shape, or form. For other people, their choice. They have their own definition of comfort. And that’s why this bill is so unique because it is up to the individual to choose. And so I want to be able to choose what’s comfortable for me.”

I want the option of medical aid in dying, and polling shows Connecticut residents support this option by a 2-1 margin.

I’m grateful that the Public Health Committee approved this bill last Friday. Out of care and respect, I implore the House and Senate to pass it before it’s too late for me.

Kim Hoffman is a clinical social worker in Glastonbury.