

PERSPECTIVE



COURTESY OF NATIONAL COAST GUARD MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

Architectural rendering of the National Coast Guard Museum on the New London waterfront.

Many talented designers, planners and engineers, both in and out of government are working hard to design an environmentally and structurally sound museum on the waterfront.

Coast Guard Museum site has broad support

By TONY SHERIDAN

There have been a number of letters to the editor recently expressing a concern with the chosen location for the site for the Coast Guard Museum. This questioning of location is of great concern. The matter is settled. Numerous sites were considered previously, including out-of-town sites. The downtown New London, waterfront location was selected as the best site for this national museum.

The Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut strongly supports the decision on the downtown location. Indeed, opening up a discussion on location at this late date runs the risk of losing the museum entirely to other communities that worked hard to take it away from New London when the location discussion was underway originally.

Some of the concerns expressed in these letters relate to possible storm damage. Many talented designers, planners and engineers, both in and out of government are working hard to design an environmentally and structurally sound museum on the waterfront of which the entire region will be proud.

A key component of the museum's success will be its location in the center of the region's transportation hub where trains, ferries, private craft, auto traffic and taxis converge, all of which will provide the new museum with the visitation needed for success. In addition, it will provide a new-found vibrancy for downtown. It is already creating an economic ripple effect for the city.

The museum location is in the exact right place to take advantage of this kind of desired traffic. Also, a gleaming national museum in the heart of downtown waterfront, adjacent to the region's transportation hub, will be easily accessible and visible to the hundreds of thousands of travelers that frequent the hub, providing an incentive for them to stop and visit the city.

In addition, access and visibility will lead to more traffic (the good kind). More traffic means more people, which means more customers for shops, restaurants, other historic sites (including Fort Trumbull!), and will be a catalyst that will encourage people and businesses to think of New London in a new and exciting way.

At the recent chamber-sponsored State of New London Address, Mayor Michael Passero presented a list of active and planned projects underway in the city. Many factors are contributing to this new-found interest in New London. The planned Coast Guard Museum is certainly one of them.

The entire region's efforts are needed to bring this exciting project to a successful conclusion. Second guessing the selected location at this late date is counterproductive and serves to encourage the many communities throughout the country who would love to take this wonderful opportunity away from New London. Let's encourage all of our leaders to proceed to bring this national institution to fruition without delay.

Tony Sheridan is president of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut.

‘Very unsettling’ plover deaths threaten an imperiled species

The actions of a few diminish the shoreline experience for all

By PATRICK COMINS

Whether you are a birder, or someone who simply enjoys Connecticut's coastline and the nature of our shores, Judy Benson's recent article in The Day ("Deaths of Three Plovers, Crushed Egg Prompt Federal Investigation," June 8) was very unsettling. For Audubon Connecticut, the state office of the National Audubon Society, the death of these birds at Bluff Point State Park in Groton and Griswold Point in Old Lyme should be a moment for renewing our Connecticut tradition of sharing our shores with birds and other wildlife, and observing a few simple rules that enable us to do so.

There are approximately 4,000 breeding pairs of Piping Plovers left in the world. It was only recently that the Audubon scientists helped identify their winter habitat in the Bahamas. Fortunately, thanks to a cooperative effort between Audubon, the Bahamas National Trust and others, the Bahamian government has done its part to protect some of the most important winter Piping Plover habitat in the country with the creation of the Joulter Cays National Park, 113,920 acres near Andros, along with other protected areas in 2015.

With such great news on the wintering grounds it is unfortunate that Piping Plovers have been killed here in Connecticut, presumably by people rather than predators. Especially since one of the birds lost may have been a bird that was banded with an identifying flag on its leg



COURTESY PATRICK COMINS

Pink flagged plover

placed there by Audubon scientists and partners in the Bahamas who are attempting to track the year to year movements of these birds.

Signs are prominently posted at nesting sites, clearly stating that endangered birds are nesting and need some space. String fencing indicates the sensitive areas to be avoided. Thousands of Connecticut residents realize how important it is to respect these signs and they enjoy seeing these imperiled birds succeed in our state. This incident is a vivid reminder of what can happen when people ignore the signs, thoughtlessly walking through the protected area or letting their dog off leash. These actions diminish the shoreline experience and threaten to reduce access to the shoreline for all.

The good news is that for over 30 years the majority of Connecticut residents have learned to share our shores, and know that we can do so while enjoying the beach as we have always done. By observing a few

simple rules we can do our part to protect the wildlife that is part of our natural heritage, one reason we enjoy coming to the beach in the first place.

Audubon Connecticut and our partner in the Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds, the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History, have invested heavily in shorebird protection. The Alliance works at dozens of sites from Stonington to Greenwich to protect species like Piping Plovers, and other coastal species that depend on our beaches just to survive. We all know that birds are an essential part of being at the beach, and that's why hundreds of volunteers join us each year to protect these incredible animals in one of Connecticut's largest

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Patrick Comins is director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Connecticut. You can reach him at pcomins@audubon.org.

Will tax shift undergird a Nystrom run for mayor?

Norwich City Council Alderman Peter Nystrom is already laying out a strategy to recapture the mayoral seat he lost to Debercy Hinchey in the 2013 election. If Hinchey seeks re-election, it sets up a November 2017 rematch.

Nystrom got back on the council by leading a Republican insurrection last November. He and fellow Republicans focused on high property taxes in the city and a pledge to reduce them. It was a winning approach, with Republicans capturing five of the six council seats up for grabs, giving the GOP a rare majority in a city usually dominated by Democrats.

As mayor, Hinchey is the council's seventh voting member, leaving Republicans with a solid 5-2 majority. The Republicans named Nystrom council president.

Making the tax-trimming task of the new majority more difficult were reductions in state aid and increases in special education and other expenses on the education side of the budget.

Earlier this month, the council finalized the budget. How successful they were on the tax pledge depended on where you lived. Most city residents only saw their tax rates creep up slightly, from 41.39 mills to 41.69, for the fiscal year that starts July 1, a 0.72 percent increase.

In the so-called City Consolidated District, however, consisting of the downtown and the densely populated and often low-income surrounding neighborhoods, the tax rate jumped 1 mill, or 2.08 percent, from 48.06 to 49.06.

The figures include both the general tax rate and the added tax assessment for fire protection.

Why the extreme difference in tax burdens?

Property owners in the CCD are served by the city's only paid fire



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department. Its always-staffed fire stations protect the older, densely clustered buildings in the district. The CCD's much higher tax rate includes the 7.84 mills charged to cover the cost of the paid department, a special assessment the council boosted by a whopping 9.5 percent.

The rest of the town, served by volunteer fire companies, is also charged an added (but much lower) fee for fire service. It was set at 0.47 mills, down more than 4 percent.

So for much of Norwich, this council did a decent job of controlling taxes. But if you own property in the CCD, you were comparatively clobbered.

Wherein appears to lie the Nystrom strategy.

In preparing to again run for mayor, Nystrom calculates that he has to continue focusing on taxes. He sees a path to trimming taxes outside of the CCD, meaning the areas served by the volunteer departments. With a less transient and more owner-occupied population, the districts outside the urban center have better voter turnouts, particularly in local elections.

In approving the new budget, Nystrom targeted the practice of apportioning to the CCD some of the revenues generated by the municipally owned Norwich Public Utilities. The City Charter requires using 10 percent of the revenues produced by

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