

THE VILLAGE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF EAST HAMPTON

the Village
Preservation
Society of East Hampton

FALL NEWSLETTER
OCTOBER 2020

HISTORIC ELECTION BRINGS SEA CHANGE IN VILLAGE GOVERNMENT

By Kathleen Cunningham

The year 2020 has been full of unprecedented events, creating change in many unanticipated ways from continuous response to the corona virus pandemic, roving 'shut-downs' and sheltering in place, to a brand new Village Board. The Village of East Hampton has never experienced a competitive election such as was seen this past September. The New Town Party, led by new Mayor, Jerry Larsen, a former Village Police Chief, was swept into power. Two other political parties put forward candidates for election in the three available seats for Mayor and two Trustees. The



Photo by Lisa Mulhern-Larsen

Mayor Jerry Larsen

Elms Party and Fish Hooks Party fielded candidates representing veteran officer holders paired with some new candidates. The public response was definitive, likely due to larger second homeowner voter turnout than seen before. The result brings fresh faces and new ideas, which will hopefully outweigh the relative governing inexperience of the Board as a whole.

Elections are often filled with political rhetoric among the parties competing for office. Now that the new Board has been sworn in and are beginning to serve their constituency, it seemed a good idea to have a post-election interview to better understand their goals for the Village, outside the competition of the political race. Given the Society's commitment to historic preservation, neighborhood character and quality of life in

the Village and its surrounds, understanding how the new Board member's vision of supporting business jives with the vital historic character that sets East Hampton apart from most communities seemed an important conversation to have.

In three interviews conducted over two days, Mayor Jerry Larsen, Deputy Mayor Christopher Minardi



Photo by Kathleen Cunningham

Deputy Mayor Christopher Minardi



Photo by Kathleen Cunningham

Trustee Sandra Melendez

and Trustee Sandra Melendez were eager to share their perspectives. Each was reminded that: the Village Preservation Society was formed in 1982 to save the Gardiner Brown House from becoming a parking lot; that VPS then shepherded the sale of that historic house to the Ladies Village Improvement Society; VPS saved the Hiram Beecher House,

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now Village Hall, from redevelopment; and led the preservation of the Gardiner Windmill by raising \$150,000 for its historic restoration. The Main Street Historic District would look very differently today but for the Society's efforts. Because of the Society's commitment to historic preservation, neighborhood character and quality of life in the Village, publicized pressure of business on these important qualities raised concerns.

Sitting in the Mayor's office, the sounds of the ongoing restoration of Village Hall punctuating the conversation from time to time, Mayor Larsen was eager to discuss the plans his administration is putting forward, primarily, the beautification and upgrading of Village facilities. Parking amenities and power-washing sidewalks, painting lampposts, and generally attending to the functionality and beautification of the Village are the first tangible work products of this new administration. He plans to install granite surrounds to encircle the trees downtown, rather than cedar chips. The Reutershan Lot now offers 3-hour parking per stamped ticket to allow more time to extend consumer's purchase power – another rapid reboot. The Mayor's plan to create diagonal parking to better enable outdoor dining at restaurants, originally a COVID response to support local restaurants, is likely to survive post-pandemic due to popular demand and a commitment to supporting local restaurants in the Commercial Core. He also felt it important to note that he does not want to see nightclubs in the Village and, personally, does not enjoy music at a restaurant venue, as he prefers conversation.

Support for the previous administration's plan to create a waste-water treatment plant is embraced by the new Board members, though siting and funding are still matters to be resolved. Mayor Larsen feels that proper septic treatment will support the Commercial Core. He doesn't feel improved septic will create expansion though, as the rents are so high as to be prohibitive, repressing that kind of expansion. After studying the Hook and Georgica Pond Watershed maps with Village environmental groups, he suggested that the Village might be able to influence more rapid adoption of low nitrogen septic systems in creative ways.

Recent proposals to create a special district to free preexisting nonconforming uses in residential districts to expand amenities on adjacent properties, some within the Main Street Historic District, are a concern to preservation groups like the VPS. Mayor Larsen addressed this issue directly saying that while he was supportive of finding ways the Inns could offer more amenities to their clientele on site, he did not support amenities placed on adjacent residential lots. "It's not working for the Inns and it's not working for the residents around the Inns because of the expansion of services onto residential lots."

Regarding the COVID crisis and the likely resurgence of the disease in coming weeks, the Mayor has worked with the

Chief of Police to enforce social distancing requirements. The Department has stocked up on supplies of personal protective equipment to make sure there is enough available for all Emergency Medical Service personnel. Coordination has begun with Stop'n'Shop to make sure that rationing of essential supplies and foodstuffs will be enforced if/when the second wave of the virus hits our community.

When asked about the Village's Comprehensive Plan, the Mayor felt an update should begin as soon as possible as it provides a road map for the Village and needs to be reviewed.

In her Park Place office, immigration attorney Sandra Melendez was clearly excited by her new role as Village Trustee. A relative newcomer, she moved here directly from the New York City area via Puerto Rico with her four children in 2007, after her first visit to a friend in the community. She immediately fell in love with the Village as soon as she saw Town Pond. She worked hard to achieve her Juris Doctor from Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, a private Christian university, and LL.M. (Masters of Law) degree from Georgetown University and has practiced immigration law here in East Hampton for six years after stint at the IRS as an Appeals Officer.

Her main goals are to reinforce a sense of community she thinks is lacking from the Village. As a parent of four children, she feels that restoring Herrick Park, the tennis courts and grounds in general, will support more family activity there and draw the community into the Village. She doesn't want to change the Village, just make it more of a community. Our discussion occurred after she attended a 3-hour meeting with the Department of Public Works, where investment in equipment to maintain infrastructure is a top priority.

When asked how to guard the historic nature of the Village, Ms. Melendez indicated that the Code should support these goals. Her life in historic San Juan, Puerto Rico gave her an appreciation of how historic preservation provides the foundation for preserving the unique character of a place, remarking, "We can maintain the historic character of the community by enforcing the Code."

During a conversation on the park bench in front of Village Hall, with renovation work proceeding apace behind us, new Deputy Mayor, Christopher Minardi, spoke about his perspective on Village government and his notions of what the community needs. He has lived in the Village his whole life and feels lucky to be able to raise his own children here. His generation of residents has witnessed the most change over his lifetime reckoning with the reality that nearly every home sale in the Village is to a second homeowner, noting that when his children's school reopened under COVID protocols, there was no plan for students who walk or ride a bike to school. Recognizing the distinct attributes of individual neighborhoods - communities within the community - his view assesses the

great numbers of second homeowners and constant turnover of real property in the Village. Mr. Minardi's position is to try to work with what is there.

He sees no conflict with his party's goal to revive the Commercial Core with the needs of historic preservation. "I'm not the guy who wants to turn the windmill into a 7-11," he said. The proposed sewage treatment plant, yet to be sited and budgeted, will inure to the benefit of local businesses enabling some expansion of existing uses with updated septic capability for restaurants, especially. However, related parking needs remain a challenge.

Regarding the potential of expanded year-round population due to COVID, he was sanguine, opining that New York City will rebound. But, that the increased need for services and support provided a good learning experience as it helped to define our thresholds. As a Village lifeguard, he has noticed an uptick in beach goers as well as an extended beach season.

Each new Board member sent the message that the small neighborhood character and historic identity of the Village are values they appreciate and embrace. How this will balance with the pressures of business and redevelopment remains to be seen, yet there seems good reason to be optimistic that the new administration's goals are more closely aligned to those of the historic preservation community than the political campaign may have signaled. Time will tell.

VILLAGE POND WATER QUALITY STILL IN PERIL

By Polly Bruckmann

The Society has long supported local regulation to reduce nitrogen levels in our surface water bodies, a natural, but polluting by-product of human and animal waste. High levels of nitrogen in our ponds and creeks create a nourishing environment for toxic algal blooms that rob the water of the oxygen that plants, finfish and shellfish need to survive. This has led to the devastation of eelgrass, the nursery of all fisheries, and makes the water toxic to birds and other domesticated animals that drink or play in these waters. Two projects that should improve the health of both Hook and Town Ponds have been approved by the Town Board. St. Luke's Church in the Hook Pond Watershed, and proximate to Town Pond, has received funding to install a nitrogen reducing biofilter at the rectory. These biofilters reduce nitrogen from on-site septic systems and can remove 80% of the nitrogen. The Town has also funded the Village's Town Pond dredging project in the amount of \$191,000, roughly 25% of the cost. Dredging of Town Pond will improve the water quality of Hook Pond as well. The Village has applied to the Department of Environmental Conservation for a Beneficial Use Permit, which is required by that agency in order to enter Phase I of the Town Pond dredging project. The plan is to dredge the southern portion of the pond to see if removing the sediment will

provide the necessary drainage and water flow anticipated before moving on to Phase II, during which the remainder of the Pond will be dredged. As the dredged material must be handled responsibly, the Village is awaiting DEC approval to move forward. Both grants have been funded through the Community Preservation Fund Water Quality Improvement Project. Dedicating 20% of the Community Preservation Fund (a 2% real estate transfer tax placed on home buyers) toward water quality improvement projects was approved by voters of the Five East End Towns in 2016, when the Community Preservation Fund itself was extended until 2050. Such grants are proposed and submitted to the Town's Water Quality Technical Review Committee and scored for their contribution to water quality improvement, then recommended to the Town Board for funding. Both Village projects scored well and the Town Board approved them along with three other projects within the Town, on 1 October 2020.

The VPS supports further regulatory policy that would require low nitrogen systems for new development or resale of homes particularly within the priority areas of water recharge. Rebates exist for any homeowner wishing to change over their traditional septic system with a new, low nitrogen system approved by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services. More information about how to make this critical contribution to the environment can be found at: <http://www.ohamptonny.gov/640/Clean-Water-East-Hampton-Program> or call the Town's Natural Resources Department at 631-324-0496.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

by Gene E. Cross, Jr.

In 2002, the Village adopted a Comprehensive Plan to promote the public health, safety and general welfare by providing the Village with a sound basis for future immediate and long-range decisions. While not mandatory, such plans must be prepared in accordance with the criteria established in § 7-722 of New York State Village Law. A key aspect of the Plan and its adoption was the widespread public participation that generated not only energy but also consensus. This effort engendered so much public support that the Plan was adopted without objection and the enthusiasm continued to help facilitate the implementation of many of the Plan's recommended actions for the next several years.

Among other requirements, Section 7-722 of New York State Village Law calls for periodic review. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that Historic Preservation is an ongoing process requiring a continual effort with respect to the aforementioned recommended actions. The Society supports this component of any Plan update.

Over time, enthusiasm engendered by public participation in the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan and its goals has dissipated. Achieving any measure of future success will prove difficult without refueling support through public participation.

PLAIN SIGHT PROJECT RECEIVES VPS GRANT

By Mary E. Busch, Grants Committee Chair

The Village Preservation Society is pleased to announce the award of a grant to further the work of the **Plain Sight Project**. For almost four years, David Rattray, the founder of the Project and editor of the East Hampton Star, Donnamarie Barnes, conservationist at Sylvester Manor on Shelter Island and a dedicated group of young volunteers have been searching Town records, Bibles and wills for information about enslaved people who lived on the East End during the Colonial Period. In compiling their data they have “confirmed identities” of almost 500 people who lived from 1657 until 1829.

Being a link in the lucrative trade routes from the West Indies, vessels traveled north bringing products such as molasses and rum and also slaves to work in the homes and farms of the East End. The **Plain Sight** website tells of an enslaved man named Peter who, in 1723, through confessing his belief in God, is made a member of the church in East Hampton by its pastor Nathaniel Huntting. We hear of Boose, the earliest enslaved person to be identified thus far, who is mentioned in connection with the Goody Garlick witchcraft trial in 1657.



Photo credit: Mary Busch

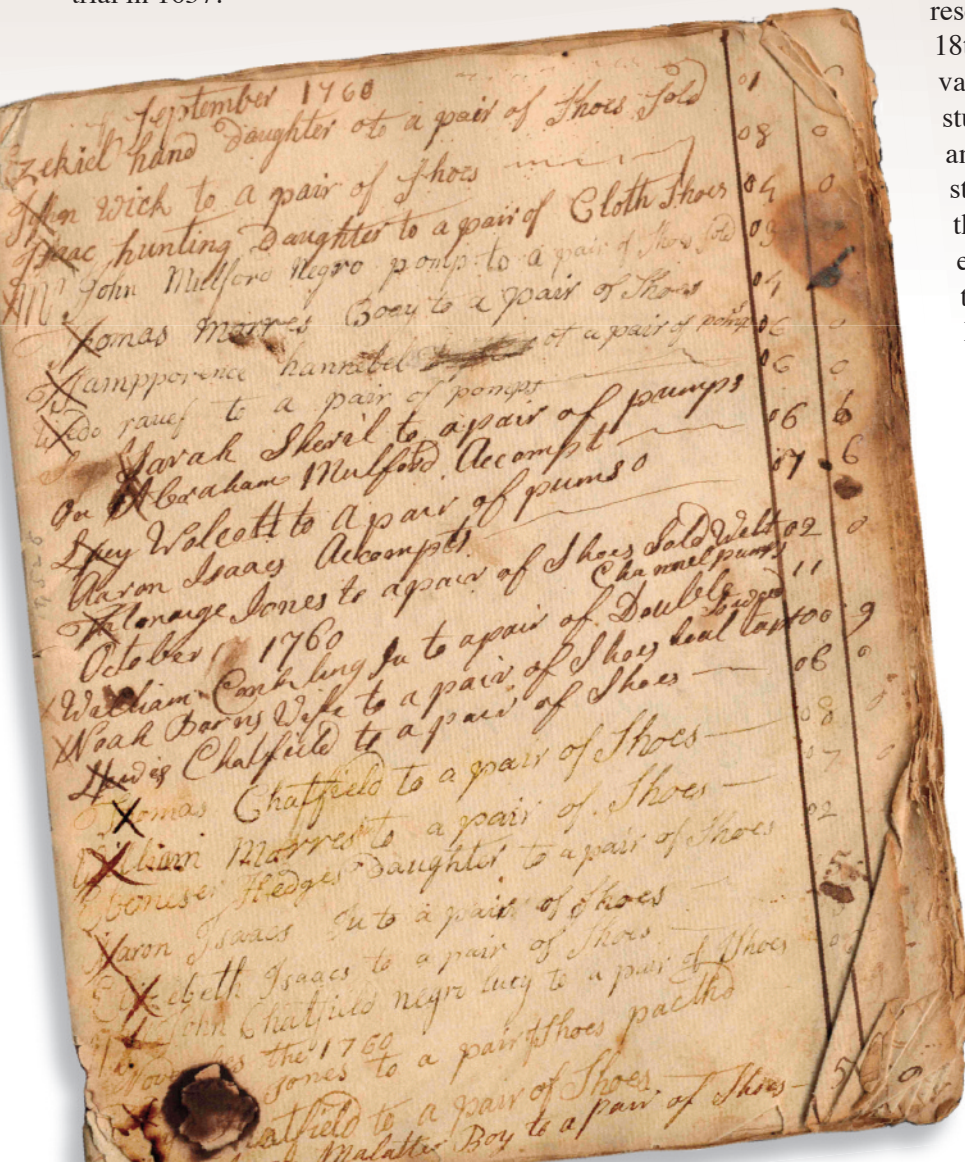
Donnamarie Barnes and David Rattray share findings and stories about early enslaved people at Duck Creek Farm. August 2020.

We also learn of one EHHS student doing research for the Project, who discovered through an 18th century estate inventory that cheese was more valuable per pound than a human being. This student has gone on to make a video about slavery and presented it to a 7th grade class. Many students, he reported, had no real understanding of the extent that slavery existed in the north and especially on Long Island. The researchers want to acknowledge the lives of these individuals and hope to be able to tell a story for each one found and then develop an online database. In this way it will be possible for individuals to research and learn about the people who helped build this town.

The goal of the **Plain Sight Project** as described by David Rattray is to document the names “of all enslaved people that have ever lived in East Hampton Town, to create an online database and integrate Long Island slavery, which existed from the 1600s to at least 1827 when slave ownership became illegal for full-time state residents, into the historical narrative.”

Daniel Hedges Account Book also known as 'Shoe Book' listing a human being along with the dispersion of shoes.

Courtesy of the East Hampton Star Archives.



AIRCRAFT NOISE – A GROWING PROBLEM

By Peter M. Wolf

According to the East Hampton Town aircraft noise engineering consultant, Harris, Miller, Miller, and Hanson, reported on July 14, 2020, overall aircraft activity increased by 8% during the period of June 27, 2019 thru September 30, 2019. Helicopter operations were up 8%, but the biggest increase in operations was from seaplanes at 23%.

Even more telling is a comparison from the brief period when East Hampton Town imposed temporary regulations on aircraft operations in 2015. From then until now operations were up 23% with the largest increases in helicopter activity at 56% and seaplane activity up 40%. While the impacts of the corona virus may yield a decrease in 2020 activity, the growth trend is undeniable.

The formerly farfetched option of closing the airport is now an ever more likely solution to the problem of increased carbon emissions and noise impacts resulting from aircraft operations, that pollute our environment and ruin the peaceful enjoyment of home and property of thousands of residents Island-wide. The Town Board will have the opportunity to close the airport beginning in the fall of 2021. Continuing to register aircraft noise complaints is still the best way for everyone to keep the issue before the Town. Please continue to log your complaints at: <https://www.planenoise.com/khto/> or <https://airnoisereport.com/>. You may also call to report noise complaints: 1-800-276-4817



Please fill out, cut along the line and mail to **THE VILLAGE PRESERVATION SOCIETY**
P.O. Box 2015, East Hampton, NY 11937 • 631-324-3524 • www.villagepreservationsociety.org

Please enroll me as a member of The Village Preservation Society of East Hampton
for the Membership Year from January 1, 2021 - December 31, 2021.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email address _____

Number of Members in this Membership _____

For year round Newsletters and information, please print winter address

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Contributors of:

\$ 25,000.00 will be listed as **Chairman's Circle**

\$ 15,000.00 will be listed as **President's Circle**

\$ 10,000.00 will be listed as **Visionary**

\$ 5,000.00 will be listed as **Champion**

\$ 2,500.00 will be listed as **Advocate**

\$ 1,000.00 will be listed as **Benefactor**

\$ 500.00 will be listed as **Patron**

\$ 250.00 will be listed as **Supporting Member**

\$ 100.00 will be listed as **Friend**

Regular Membership (\$50) _____

The Membership Year runs from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021.

I would like to be active. My special interests are: _____

I (We) support VPS principles but do not wish to be listed as a member.

Enclosed is a contribution of \$ _____

THE VILLAGE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

P.O. Box 2015

East Hampton, NY 11937

www.villagepreservationsociety.org

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD ON HOLD DURING PANDEMIC

By Georgia deHavenon, Historic Preservation Committee Chair

In 2018, under the aegis of the VPS, an Historic Preservation Award was initiated. The mission of this award includes a mandate to recognize the preservation of historic structures, neighborhood character and quality of life in and around the Village of East Hampton. With the establishment of the Historic Preservation Award, the anticipation of increased appreciation for historic buildings and the past history of our village was an additional expectation. These goals were quickly realized, and two successful seasons of awards recognized some of the iconic structures in our midst. We were also delighted to discover that with each property recognized for the award, there came a rich historical background, from discoveries of a wealthy sea captain to a windmill operator and a famous publisher with a speakeasy in the basement.



Photo by Kathleen Cunningham



Photo by Kathleen Cunningham

Village Trustees, Rose Brown and Tiger Graham, Town Councilman, David Lys, VPS President, Joan Osborne, Pulitzer Prize winning architectural critic, Paul Goldberger, Town Councilwoman, Sylvia Overby and Town Supervisor, Peter VanScoyoc display the VPS Historic Preservation Awards presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of Members at the Tennis House.

Because it did not seem a time to be celebrating an award and finding a suitable awardee does involve some in person contact, it was decided not to have a presentation this year in the midst of the pandemic. But, as we go forward, the award will again be activated and we look forward to learning more about the evolving history of East Hampton.

VPS Inaugural Historic Preservation Award winning home of Elizabeth and Patrick Gerschel on Hither Lane (2018).