

The GROTON HERALD

Vol. XLIII No 23

April 8, 2022

One American Dollar

Select Board Authorizes \$100K For Engineering & Design To Rebuild Broadmeadow Road

by Connie Sartini

Town Manager Mark Haddad advised the Select Board that for many years, there has been discussion of the potential of reconstructing Broadmeadow Road to alleviate flooding and periodic road closing due to flooding. He asked the Board to support an engineering and design project, estimated at a cost of \$100,000. He said that he was filing the necessary paperwork with the Conservation Commission for approval to conduct some maintenance dredging of James Brook, and suggested that the funding come from the Federal funds that Groton received under the ARPA (America Rescue Plan Act).

Because this involves Federal funds, the town must put the proposal out to bid to secure engineering services for this purpose.

The proposed project was approved by the Select Board on a 4-1 vote, with Select Board member Alison Manugian voting 'no'.

Early history shows that Broadmeadow Road is mentioned in the roads of 1670, according to several history books. In the first years of Groton's settlement, the meadows were valuable to the settlers for the wild grass that grew there and they used this as fodder for their farm animals. At the time, and for almost 100 years afterward, grass was not cultivated and it was necessary to utilize the native grasses. Land in the Broadmeadow was assigned in small lots so that everyone would get their fair share. Common land, also called a "road", was used by the farmers to reach the pieces of land allotted to them.

Broadmeadow Road had two sections, one from Main Street at the intersection of Route 40 to the beginning of the wetlands, and the other side coming in from Farmers Row on the west. In fact, there are also reported to be stone bounds along Broadmeadow that may be found, with some records that indicate access across land at the Pleasant Street, Elm Street intersection to Broadmeadow.

DPW Director Tom Delaney explained that today Broadmeadow Road is referred to as a "corduroy road". In the earlier days, corduroy roads were made from a series of logs laid parallel across a roadbed to allow passage of wagons, horses, or foot traffic through usually muddy or wet areas to prevent them from getting bogged down. It is an old technology used as an expedient means to improve rudimentary roads during the 19th century and possibly even the 18th century.

Today, Broadmeadow Road continues its use as a "corduroy road."

Delaney explained that \$100,000 from ARPA would be used to explore a viable option to rebuild Broadmeadow Road, and will include looking at the potentials from Broadmeadow to the Groton Electric Light Department Building.

He noted that when the railroad was built through Broadmeadow, the Army Corp of Engineers routinely kept the channels open to avoid the flooding onto the tracks."



American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) "While I was at the edge of the wetland behind my house, I heard the neighbor's dog barking. Then I heard something moving behind me in the woods, and when I looked, saw this bear 75' away. I was able to get a few pictures as it crossed the wetland and walked along the edge of the woods on the opposite side." March 31, 2022 in West Groton by Tom Murray

Select Board Approves \$27,600 For Marketing To Promote Groton As Tourist Destination

by Connie Sartini

The *Destination Groton* Committee asked Town Manager Mark Haddad for some funding from the town in both Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023. He said they are looking for \$15,000 in FY 2022, which he added could be handled by a line-item budget transfer and \$12,600 in FY 2023 which can be part of the Town Manager's budget. He said, "Spending this money leverages grant applications from the state."

Haddad reported that he had discussed this with the "Finance Committee and they have given preliminary approval of these requests subject to approval by the Select Board."

Greg Sheldon, Chairman of the *Destination Groton* Committee, said, as a first step, the group is proposing to hire a professional videographer, "whose initial work would be to film and produce an 'Introduction' video for an estimated 20 Town of Groton Boards, Committees and Groups of interest."

He said, "The Planning Board and the Historic District Commission, for example, would tell their story about how they contribute to maintaining the culture, beauty and charm of Groton. Others would elaborate on particular town assets and discuss how they are managed and enjoyed by the community. Some of these groups include the Trails Group, the Great Pond Advisory Committee, and the Sustainability Commission."

Sheldon added, "These videos would be posted on websites, social media channels and other platforms to illustrate Groton's unique assets. Simultaneously, the Groton Business Association (GBA) will be sponsoring and launching the same video production opportunity for GBA members at their cost. These videos promoting Groton will be posted on the GBA website and public media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. This effort will be a major contributor to bolster Search Engine Optimization for Groton. In addition to these town "introduction" and business "promotion" videos, a series of "vertical" videos will be edited from them and will become "destination" videos highlighting Groton as a destination community for history, hospitality, farming, conservation and weddings."

The *Destination Groton* Committee proposed the same plan of action with videos, meetings, ads, etc. for FY2023.

Sheldon stressed that there would be a series of "Public Forums to engage all town stakeholders. We are planning three Public Forums this spring: one at the Center in West Groton, one at Groton Woods, and one at Prescott. A second se-

RiverCourt Celebrates 20 Years of Offering Security, Dignity & Community For Elders

Two decades on, a public-private partnership between the Town & RiverCourt made possible a place where elders can live with dignity near family and friends

• *Rivercourt Residences Celebrates 20 Years in Groton; Assisted Living Facility Located on the Squannacook River Draws Heavily from Local Towns*

• *Small Population in the Facility Leads to More Personable and Individualized Care; 20th Anniversary Notable as the Elder Care Facility Emerges from Pandemic in Good Shape*

by Robert Stewart

When RiverCourt Residences honored the longest serving employee of the Assisted Living Facility last week, it was also celebrating its 20th anniversary in Groton and tipping its cap to jobs done well the past two decades including the successful navigation of the pandemic the past two years. Scott Taylor, a Resident Assistant at RiverCourt, was honored for his 20 years of service and for being with the facility from the early days of its opening in 2001 to the present. The event was fitting as Taylor represents the type of care that management and employees strive to give to the residents who choose to live there. Taylor said of the occasion, "...The many memories that made me smile the most were the ones where I worked with residents that lived to be over 100 years old...Working with residents that lived over

100 (years) was always the highlight of my career...When good things happen to the residents, it always puts a smile on my face."

And, indeed, it is that close, personal touch added to the professional care that makes RiverCourt appealing to the families of aging parents as they make decisions as to what kind of care they want for the elderly members of their family. The Assisted Living care industry is a tough, competitive industry and while many companies look to economies of scale by housing thousands of residents in multiple building complexes, RiverCourt has a smaller, less crowded atmosphere where, in many cases, staff and residents live and work together in a community type setting.

And, the backdrop for this personal ambience is an old, early 20th century, mill building set beside the Squannacook River with a dam that once supplied hydroelectric power to the mill. For many Groton residents, the transformation of what was called the Leatherboard mill into an attractive assisted living facility remains something of a miracle. The

Continued On Page 4

Continued On Page 2



RiverCourt Celebrates 20 Years of Offering Security, Dignity & Community For Elders

Continued From Page One

journey from a deteriorating mill building to a modern restored mill building took approximately four years from 1996 to 2000 and required an extraordinary effort to clear the multitude of hurdles to make any project economically feasible. It also took the tremendous cooperation between local government and private business to forge what would become RiverCourt Residences.

That effort and cooperation began when the town acquired the property for back taxes in early 1996. After acquiring the property, the town soon realized that ownership of the property could become a boondoggle because the building had been neglected for a decade and was in bad shape; the dam on the Squannacook was part of the property and its condition was very poor; and then the big issue of an environmental assessment and the possibility of incurring major expenses to remediate any potential contamination.

With those issues swirling in the background, the town issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in September 1996. According to Select Board member Peter Cunningham who was a new member on the Board at that time, "There was not an overwhelming response."

However, there were two notable responses: one from John Grady of XRE Corporation that built medical imaging devices and from David Hamilton and Paul Gresinger, principals of Capstone Properties which were commercial real estate developers. Grady was interested in the hydropower potential of the property and withdrew his interest after realizing that the water flow over the dam was not consistent enough to produce reliable power.

Capstone Properties, however, was willing to explore the development possibilities of the property with the town and entered into a tentative agreement to purchase the property from the town.

It took nearly three years of discussions between the town

and Capstone before arriving at an idea that made sense in terms of the needs of the area and the ability to fund that endeavor within reasonable budget constraints. Some of the ideas discussed between the town and Capstone Properties included a canoe factory, a brewery/restaurant and a YMCA facility.

As the discussions continued, one idea started to make a lot of sense to the town and to Capstone – the suggestion to build an Assisted Living Facility. With the growing elderly population in the area and the lack of a nearby facility, that idea quickly gained acceptance and the attention then turned to the amount of investment that would be necessary to turn the old *Leatherboard* building into a modern assisted living facility.

While it took a lot of time to arrive at a feasible use for the building, it would take an intense effort but not as much time to work out arrangements to allow Capstone to proceed with developing the property.

To accomplish that, the town would undertake some incredible negotiations with numerous governmental entities and for good measure and complexity negotiate with the Boston and Maine Railroad to ensure access and use of the property over the railroad tracks that run alongside the property and divide it from West Groton Square.

According to Cunningham, one of the tools used by the town to assist Capstone was to offer them a 20-year Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Agreement. Under this agreement, property taxes on the development would increase incrementally and not reach full assessed value for 20 years.

However, in order to offer such an agreement, Groton had to be included in an Economic Target Area (ETA) that was created by the closure of Fort Devens. On the surface, Groton did not fall within the target area because the town was not contiguous to Fort Devens. To be placed in the target area and be eligible to offer this agreement, Groton needed

the cooperation of the Town of Ayer which they did receive.

By being placed in the ETA, Groton was also allowed other state funding opportunities through Mass Development, MassDEP Brownfield funding and Mass Historical Commission funding.

With that major step complete, Capstone Properties entered into a Purchase and Sale Agreement with the town in August 2000 and shortly thereafter construction began on what would become RiverCourt Residences.

RiverCourt opened its doors to residents in 2001 and in the ensuing two decades built a reputation as a welcoming environment, with personal care, a caring staff, a professional level of support for older residents and where acclimation into a new living situation is achieved more easily because of the small, intimate environment of a renovated old mill.

The personal touches at RiverCourt begin with the staff who are respectful, energetic and creative in the care they provide to their residents. In the Memory Care Unit where residents have different levels of dementia and Alzheimer's Disease, activities take on an important dimension.

Laurie Morency, Life Enrichment Director for the Memory Care Unit, has to reach deep into her creative repository to plan activities that keep the mind stimulated and to put residents in that unit in an environment that exposes them to the familiar and unfamiliar.

Morency plans van rides for the residents where a ride around the local area prompts some residents to remember the places they used to visit and the homes where they once lived. She also plans visits to the Fitchburg Art Museum where docents ask simple questions about colors, moods and the likes and dislikes of various art works at the Museum. Before the pandemic, Morency would take residents to the Harvard Bowling Lanes where they would actually become a little competitive with

their scores and laugh a lot about the "Gutter balls."

In another unique situation, Morency participated in a Music and Memory program that was funded by the Groton School. In that program, students from Groton School would come to RiverCourt's Memory Care Unit to perform and talk about different forms of music with the goal of eliciting a range of responses.

One of the residents who participated in the program was a renowned doctor from Belgium who spoke French. As it turned out, one of the students in the group spoke French and for the duration of the program, the student would converse with the doctor in French.

Of course, activities at RiverCourt are not just focused in the Memory Care Unit but are also an everyday occurrence where residents in Assisted Living and Independent Living can participate and enjoy.

On almost any day, one could walk into the lobby at RiverCourt and find a band playing, a sing-along, a birthday being celebrated or a speaker making a presentation about an international trip, about birds of prey or even the history of RiverCourt.

RiverCourt also opens its doors to the public for special events where residents and the public

come together to listen and ask questions. One of the more popular events involved a presentation on owls where more than half-dozen live owls would accent the discussion.

In a US News and World Report on Assisted Living Facilities, reviews from family members on their experiences with Assisted Living Facilities were published in a special section. There were a few reviews for RiverCourt but one in particular captures the essence of the community environment there. It was written nine months ago in June 2021 and referred to a father that the family moved into RiverCourt.

The review read in part, "I like that they had longevity in their staff...There were people that had been there for 18 years, which is pretty significant for this type of care...I like the fact that it is small, unlike some of the other places where there's been 10 or 12 people at the dining table...In this place, they only have two to three people max at a table, so I think it is less confusing for him (the father)...The best part of the facility is it's an old converted mill. My grandfather was a miller right there for 35 years, so my father knows it very well. He may not know where he is in time, but at least he knows where he is in space."



On Old Ayer Road. Photo by Steve Lieman

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