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Groton Town Council
Groton, Connecticut
06340

November 9, 2021

Subject: Coastal Access on Riverview Avenue, Noank; Public Hearing and Informational Meeting, Town of Groton on Tuesday, November 9, 2021, to collect public feedback.

Dear Members of the Groton Town Council:

I am speaking on my own behalf tonight. I would like to go on record opposing the requested proposed land swap between the Town of Groton and Urbanski and Jordan, trustees for the Noank Waterfront Revocable Trust, for lands held for public use by the town on Riverview Avenue.

Today public access to the waterfront is extremely limited, as our shoreline communities have become dominated by wealthy private property owners. These owners demand exclusive control of their property with access to coastal water. In earlier times, property owners along the waterfront were often local individuals whose livelihoods were often associated with the use of the waterfront and coastal waters, such as fishing and boatbuilding. Many of these property owners were willing to share access and in many cases provided opportunities for their neighbors to swim and boat in the adjacent waters. In fact, many people here tonight have had just that experience along the Mystic River and particularly on the lands of concern here on Riverview Avenue.

Today access to the Mystic River by town residents is far more limited, and access is now mostly through a few existing marinas at a very high cost. While the town has several public beaches in Groton, people flock from near and far to use tiny coastal access areas such as the pocket beach and public dock at the end of Main Street. It is clear that there is more need for coastal access points in Groton for people to enjoy, particularly for such activities as fishing, small boat use, swimming and quiet waterfront enjoyment.

The cost of coastal property has skyrocketed, attracting wealthy people who do not want to share their water access with others. Witness the boulders placed along Riverview Ave. to prevent the public from parking there. Today more than ever, it is extremely important for government, in this case the Town of Groton, to hold on to existing coastal access lands for the benefits of all residents so that access may continue to be available now and in the future.

In many ways, small public coastal access areas along our waterfront function the way “public pocket parks” do for our more urban/suburban areas in town. These coastal access lands are often places you can walk to; destinations providing unique views; small informal meeting places; fishing spots; or just open spaces for the public to enjoy. It is clear that if this property is transferred out of the public domain, it will be lost and unavailable for public access in the future.

The purpose of this Public Hearing is to collect public feedback on the proposal for a property trade regarding properties at 66 and 53 Riverview Avenue. Urbanski and Jordan have proposed to the Town of Groton a property swap whereby the Town would deed certain waterfront lands along the Mystic River to Urbanski and Jordan in exchange for lands between the existing town property and Riverview Avenue over which a public right of way exists. The Town has, at a minimum, an existing public right of way from Riverview Avenue to existing town property along the Mystic River. In the requested exchange Urbanski and Jordan would get additional waterfront lands along the Mystic River to build additional structures in navigable waters.

In summary, this requested exchange would limit the public’s access to coastal waters by reducing publicly owned waterfront lands. Residents have walked for many years to coastal access locations to fish, swim and enjoy the waterfront. Coastal access is very limited in Groton and important to our community.

I strongly encourage the Town of Groton to do the following: 1.) not enter into the requested proposed property swap agreement; 2.) clearly mark the town-owned property(s); 3.) place signs to indicate the town-owned property is a coastal access point; and 4.) clearly mark the land parcel area(s) where the public right of way exists. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Zell Steever