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FEB. 20 - 26, 2014

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2 SECTIONS

The Cape Cod Chronicle

VOL. 49 NO. 8

WWW.CAPECODCHRONICLE.COM

\$ 1 .00

SNOW SELFIE



A couple takes a self portrait against a snowy backdrop at the Chatham Lighthouse overlook Sunday morning. See page 7 for more photos of the weekend blizzard. TIM WOOD PHOTO

New Flood Maps May Have ‘Unintended Consequences’

by Tim Wood

CHATHAM --- The town may have no choice but to adopt new federal flood insurance maps, but some fear that the new flood plain delineations will have unintended consequences and will greatly increase the number of properties falling under conservation and zoning board of appeals jurisdiction.

At the May annual town meeting, voters will be asked to adopt the new maps and incorporate them into the zoning bylaw. The new maps change the boundaries of the flood plain, which is also the coastal conservancy district, adding more than 200 structures and 174 parcels. But because of the way the zoning bylaw, flood maps and wetlands regulations are linked, hundreds more may be impacted because

they will be within 100 feet of the flood plain and thus be subject to regulation by the conservation commission. That could restrict, or prohibit, construction on those parcels and force existing homeowners to go before the commission and the appeals board for additions or alterations.

A private group plans to submit a petition article to town meeting to freeze the current boundaries of the coastal conservancy district so that they do not change when the new flood maps are adopted.

The “flood zone relief committee” sent out about 2,000 letters to property owners whose land is in the flood zone now or will be in the flood zone under the new maps, and those whose property is within 100 feet of the flood zone boundary. A

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Conservation Groups Collaborate With Professional Land Steward

by Alan Pollock

Chatham and Harwich each have strong non-profit organizations to promote land conservation. Now, the Chatham Conservation Foundation and the Harwich Conservation Trust have something new in common: they’re sharing a professional land steward.

Matthew Cannon, a graduate student and AmeriCorps Cape Cod alumnus, will split his time between Harwich and Chatham. He has different duties at each organization, but hopes to help the groups recognize and share one another’s best practices.

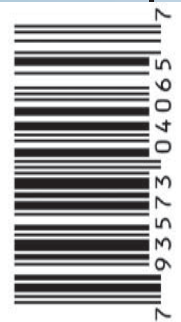
A native of East Greenwich, R.I., Cannon earned his undergraduate degree from



Matthew Cannon, part-time land steward with the Harwich Conservation Trust and the Chatham Conservation Foundation. ALAN POLLOCK PHOTO

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Flood Maps

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meeting at the community center last Thursday drew about 35 people, while about 85 attended a session Saturday, said Sean Riley of Coastal Engineering.

“We’re just trying to freeze zoning to what it is now,” he said. “There seemed to be a lot of interest in the room to get this thing moving.”

Under the zoning bylaw, the coastal conservancy overlay district consists of the areas delineated at the 100-year flood plain on the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps. No new construction is allowed within the conservancy district, except for some marine-related structures. Under the new flood zone maps, the district will expand in some locations and contract in others.

The real concern is that under the town’s wetlands bylaw, a 100-foot buffer zone extends out from the edge of the conservancy district, and includes a 50-foot no disturb zone. The conservation commission has jurisdiction over any work within both the conservancy district and the 100-foot buffer zone, and generally allows no construction or work within the 50-foot “no touch” zone.”

Riley, head of the civil engineering division at Coastal Engineering, said the company was hired by several clients here who realized the zoning impact of adopting the new maps, and decided it was important to educate others on the subject.

Riley said under the new maps, the new flood zone – and thus the conservancy district – will, for instance, come right into the backyard of St. Christopher’s Church, because of its proximity to Oyster Pond. Everything 100 feet from the edge of the district – stretching to the opposite side of Main Street – would be within the foot buffer zone and come under conservation commission jurisdiction. Even the Chatham Orpheum Theater would be within the buffer zone and subject to conservation jurisdiction.

The issue of town adoption of the flood maps is separate from concern over flood insurance rates, now the subject of federal legislation, which would delay a rate increase but does not impact the map adoption process, Paul Lagg, the town’s GIS coordinator, told selectmen Tuesday. The Federal Emergency Management Agency informed the town in a letter of final map determination that after

one successful appeal, the Chatham maps are ready to be adopted with an effective date of July 16.

If the town fails to adopt the maps within six months of that date, it could be removed from the National Flood Insurance Program and the Community Rating System, which provides property owners with a 10 percent flood insurance discount, Lagg said. Existing policies won’t be renewed if the new maps are not adopted, discounts would be terminated and no new flood insurance policies would be issued. The town may also not qualify for federal hazard mitigation grants and disaster relief funding.

Clearly the town has to adopt the new maps, selectmen agreed.

“We don’t have any choice,” said Selectman Jeffrey Dykens.

But that’s separate from the issue of increasing regulatory jurisdiction under the new maps, and selectmen wanted to know the extent of the area that would be impacted. Selectman Sean Summers wanted to know how many buildings would fall within the 100-foot buffer zone under the new maps; Lagg said while some preliminary research has been done, he did not have any figures Tuesday.

“Those are situations where we do have some choice as

FROSTY FRIEND



Ella Adamsons and her snow girlfriend. PETER MCCORMACK PHOTO

a community,” unlike adoption of the maps, Summers said. He was concerned the change could impact the town’s real estate industry and economy, concerns also voiced earlier by Finance Committee Chairman Ken Sommer.

Community Development Director Deanna Ruffer noted that the incorporation of the flood maps into the conservancy district scored the town points toward that 10 percent discount under the Community Rating System. “Whether or not to have those additional points has to be part of the dialog,” she said.

Riley said the backers of the petition want to see the town adopt the new flood maps. “We don’t want to vote down these maps,” he said, but instead want to address the “unintended consequence of these maps being adopted.”

Because adoption of the maps requires an amendment to the zoning bylaw, the planning board is required to hold a public hearing, which is scheduled for March 11. Selectmen held off on taking a position on the warrant article until after the hearing. Ruffer said addition information on the impact of expansion of the 100-foot buffer zone will be available by the time of the public hearing.

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Flood Zone Numbers

Structures within current flood zone: 458

Structures in the current flood zone that will be removed from proposed flood zone: 117

Structures outside of current flood zone that will be added into the new flood zone: 242

Structures within Proposed Flood Zone: 583

Parcels impacted by current flood zone: 1,599

Parcels impacted by flood zone expansion: 1,393

Parcels impacted by flood zone reduction: 1,202

Parcels completely outside current flood zone that are being added into new flood zone: 174

Source: Paul Lagg, Chatham GIS Coordinator

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Connecticut College, where he was particularly motivated by a class on U.S. environmental policy. He held an internship at the office of Rhode Island’s attorney general, working on issues of environmental law. Cannon started to see that he could make a real difference in that realm of public policy.

“That, along with a love of the beach,” drove him to take part in the Cape’s AmeriCorps program, he said. Cannon said he enjoyed his year of service, living with 13 other “like-minded people” in the group’s Wellfleet house. He and his colleagues spent their days mapping conservation land and removing invasive species, teaching citizens about environmental stewardship, and taking part in various other projects.

“That was the best experience of my life so far,” Cannon said. It was also his introduction to the Harwich Conservation Trust, where he got his hands dirty main-

taining trails, monitoring and mapping properties, and even cleaning away trash. “Each day was a full day,” he said.

When his AmeriCorps stint was complete, Cannon headed to Washington, D.C., to attend American University’s Graduate School of International Service, pursuing a master’s degree in global environmental politics. While there, he served as an intern for Senator Jack Reed, D-R.I., where he got a feel for politics. He also worked with A.U.’s Professor Simon Nicholson, an expert on global food politics, and brought him to Chatham to visit the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen’s Alliance.

Part-way through his graduate studies, Cannon learned of an opportunity he couldn’t ignore, back on the Cape.

“This is an amazing collaboration,” he said. Though the Harwich Conservation Trust and the Chatham Conservation Foundation each have different programs, they’ve got a history of collaboration, sharing the common goal of preserving

open space in their towns.

Cannon will work in Harwich three days a week, managing volunteers and helping with the group’s many public outreach programs, like the annual owl show and the popular Wildlands Musical Stroll. He’ll also be coordinating the annual eel and herring counts, and will supervise the bird nest box monitoring program. Cannon will also organize walks and events. “It’s all the fun stuff,” he said.

In Chatham, Cannon’s two days each week will be spent chiefly on monitoring the foundation’s open space parcels, starting with producing maps and documentation for town-owned parcels where the foundation holds conservation restrictions.

“That’s priority number one,” he said. Cannon has already been collaborating with Kristin Andres, Chatham’s conservation agent. His other priority will be producing monitoring reports for the foundation’s properties, identifying any

problems with neighborhood dumping, invasive species or unauthorized alterations of the land. Cannon sees his role as building a relationship with people whose property abuts conservation land.

During his tenure with the Chatham Conservation Foundation, Cannon hopes to explore ways to build a base of active supporters.

“Volunteer engagement is huge,” he said. He also hopes to work to build proper documentation for the land the Foundation has already protected. “We have a lot of property right now,” he said. Eventually, Cannon would like to help coordinate some public events for the group, as well.

In Harwich, Cannon would like to explore the use of new technology to manage the trust’s land records. OneHub, a cloud computing system used in Chatham, might eventually allow the Harwich Conservation Trust’s leaders to easily access information without having to come to the office, he said.