

## SAYBROOK POINT REVITALIZATION PROJECT OVERVIEW

One could argue that Saybrook Point is the definition of vibrancy. On any given day, whether summery and sunny, blustery and chilly, rainy and dark, or the dead of winter, there is always someone at the Point. ***People are naturally drawn to the water and this place.*** You will see water birds of all types; walkers and runners, with and without dogs or strollers; mini golfers; fishermen; people eating ice cream, meeting for coffee or just sitting and looking at the view or eating in their cars. Even in its current condition, people come here every day to take in the beauty and serenity of this unique place where the Connecticut River meets Long Island Sound.

Revitalizing this coastal area and providing public access for all has been a long-term objective of the town. Beginning with its acquisition of additional parcels in 1989, the town has continued working with its neighboring property owners over the years (Saybrook Point Resort and The Point, LLC), and has taken every opportunity to ensure that while supporting our private businesses we have secured the rights to keep coastal access open to the public. **That commitment continues with a 2024 CT DEEP grant obtained by the town to extend the riverfront walkway for a full mile from the tip of Gardiner's Landing Park to the end of the causeway.**

The proposal at hand to acquire the 2.2-acre parcel of land at Saybrook Point that was the former location of the Dock & Dine restaurant for more than 70 years and to turn it into a public recreation area for all to enjoy is in keeping with the town's long-time stewardship of this area. In exchange the current property owner, who is an experienced restaurateur, would convert the Duffy Pavilion back into a casual restaurant like what existed for 23 years as the Sand Bar from 1966-1989.

## SAYBROOK POINT REVITALIZATION FAQs

### Why is this before the electorate now?

The Town of Old Saybrook has owned most of the property at Saybrook Point since 1989. The town's properties have been divided by the only privately owned parcel that remains – the 2.2-acre vacant and blighted site of the former Dock & Dine (DND) restaurant. Over the years, with renewed efforts taking place over the last five years, solutions have been sought to rectify this situation, including interest by the town in purchasing the vacant parcel. With the site now unsightly and more unsafe than it has ever been, the idea of the town acquiring the 2.2-acre DND property for the Duffy Pavilion (DP) surfaced. After some stop and start negotiations, we have now agreed on lease terms with a purchase and sale agreement.

### What are the legal documents and what do they mean?

The town is proposing to acquire title through a warranty deed to the 2.2 acres of riverfront property, herein referred to as the DND property. In return, the town will relinquish title to the building now known as the DP (formerly known as the Pasbeshauke Pavilion and, before that, the Sand Bar restaurant). The town is proposing a land-lease for the DP property which means that ownership of the DP is being transferred, not the land underneath the DP, which remains town property. The lease for the land is for 25 years, with three renewals at the lessee's option, for \$1 per year. Current estimates by the town value the DP at a little less than \$400k and value the DND property at approximately \$2m. Important terms in these documents (click [here](#) to view complete documents) include:

- A post-referendum due diligence period to investigate the physical and environmental characteristics and condition of the properties.
- Delivery of a warranty deed for 145 College Street (the DND property) to the Town of Old Saybrook. In exchange, the town will sell the DP. The town will lease the land under the Pavilion for a 25-year lease with three renewals. At the end of the lease, the land reverts to the town.
- There is a contingency should the restaurant suffer a natural disaster or other destruction, requiring the owner to rebuild within two years, with a possible one-year extension. If the restaurant is not rebuilt during this timeframe, the lease terminates and the property reverts to the town.
- All parking at the point will be public. The town will explore adding parking spaces at Monument Park.
- The mini-golf property will not be affected.
- The tenant will be responsible for personal and real property taxes for the restaurant; all past due taxes, interest and lien fees on 145 College Street (the DND property) must be paid prior to the transaction becoming final (as of February 2, 2026, the owner is 32 days late on his taxes).
- The restaurant will be a year-round facility.
- The town has a right of first refusal should the restaurant be sold or transferred to another person or entity that will own more than 50% of the facility.
- The town's insurance carrier has reviewed this agreement and set insurance requirements as well as requiring an indemnification agreement by the restaurant owner.

**Which commissions have approved of putting this before the public?**

The Parks & Recreation Commission, Planning Commission and Board of Selectmen have all voted to move this proposal forward to the public for consideration. The residents of the Town of Old Saybrook will make the final decision by a referendum vote to approve or deny this proposal.

**What will 145 College Street (Dock N Dine) property look like if the Town acquires it?**

The plan for the property has not been finalized yet. Public input will be an important factor in any design. What we do know is that the property will no longer be blighted and will become a safe and beautiful riverfront facility for the public to enjoy with exceptional public space and appropriate parking. One concept plan includes a large 32' x 86' open-air pavilion that could hold over 100 people. There is potential to make this a three-season entertaining area with pull-down curtains that would be available to rent in whole or in part. Any amenities would require Parks & Recreation input and review/recommendation and public input. Suggestions have included new seating, riverfront swings, public art, new landscaping and support for seasonal activities such as ice skating.

**How would this acquisition integrate with Gardiner's Landing Park, Mini-Golf and Fort Saybrook Monument Park?**

The acquisition of the DND property would allow implementation of a master plan that would seamlessly connect all the Saybrook Point parcels into one contiguous area for public recreation, which is consistent with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development *and* the Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan.

The Town recently obtained a DEEP CT Recreational Trails Grant that requires repair of the existing, deteriorating unsafe seawall to complete the riverfront walkway and will add an ADA-accessible trail connection between the existing parks among other amenities. The owner of the DND property agreed over a year ago to voluntarily grant the town this trail easement along the waterfront, which will remain whether this transaction occurs.

### **What is proposed in the Duffy Pavilion?**

The lease provisions call for a casual dining facility with indoor and outdoor seating. The building footprint will not be expanded. The restaurant owner will make changes to the interior of the building and have outdoor seating to the north of the building, where the awning area and parking spaces are. As for how many indoor and outdoor seats will be allowed, that will be the responsibility of the town's Zoning Commission and public health and safety personnel.

### **What happens if the Duffy Pavilion is damaged by another major storm?**

If the DP building is destroyed or damaged beyond 50% of the structure value, the structure is required to be elevated/replaced to meet the FEMA Special Flood Hazard VE Velocity Zone requirements. This would require the structure to be elevated approximately 13' above the current first-floor elevation of the DP to meet the FEMA design flood elevation (VE 17) and meet all current FEMA coastal construction requirements. A new DP would need to be constructed on pilings with the area below the first floor free of obstruction (not enclosed or habitable) so that water could flow in and out of the area below the building during a storm event. **This is true whether the town or a private business owns the building.** The cost of construction of a new four-season building would, most likely, be cost prohibitive for a variety of reasons, including requiring the installation of a ramp and elevator for accessibility to the elevated first floor. It would also require multiple commission approvals, none of which are guaranteed.

### **Can the town build another Duffy Pavilion if it acquires the Dock N Dine property?**

Realistically, no, for the same reason the DND was never re-built: Because the property is in a VE zone, it would have to meet FEMA requirements and be elevated at a prohibitive cost.

The same is true for the DP should the building be destroyed or damaged now beyond 50% of its value (currently approximately \$400 thousand), the town would likely not rebuild due to the cost of elevating the structure. **The restaurant owner will assume this risk should this transaction be approved.** As stated earlier, the property would revert to the town if the structure were not rebuilt within a certain time frame after a disaster.

### **Are there alternative locations for the activities that currently take place in the Duffy Pavilion?**

Activities taking place at the DP can be relocated to the proposed outdoor pavilion if that structure is approved or to other public and private facilities in town. There are and will be multiple options.

- **The Estuary** The Estuary has two rooms available for use. The room where the Estuary Thrift Shop was formerly located is available and is excellent conference space. The main room that overlooks the marsh, with recently renovated indoor and outdoor space, is also available for rent. Town residents would not pay more for these options than they currently do for rental of the DP.

- **The Acton Public Library (APL)** The APL has met the fundraising goals for a \$5m renovation. One of the focus areas for the renovation has been more and better public use spaces, including a design that would allow public use beyond normal library hours. The town is hopeful that this renovation will be complete at some point in 2027.
- **The Kate** The Kate is considering an expansion. Should this occur, there may be new publicly available rooms for rent. Obviously, this downtown location overlooking the town green would be an excellent addition. If approved, this space could possibly be usable in late 2027.
- A potential open-air pavilion, proposed to be 32' x 86', for public use as weather allows.

**What are the financial implications for revitalization of the DND property and connection with the Town's other Saybrook Point properties?**

This was a question that was asked at the April 2025 public hearing. Recognizing that all estimates are subject to change based on what the public would like to see for this open space, estimates have been obtained for four potential improvements: Paving \$188,000; 32' x 86' open-air pavilion \$166,000; curtains for the pavilion to make it a three-season venue \$64,000; and installing a "great lawn" \$60,000.

***However, without a fully developed plan, these are just estimates for individual elements.***

Redevelopment costs will be determined based on the scope of the project as ultimately approved by Parks & Recreation, the Board of Finance, other relevant boards and commissions and with input from the public. In addition, the town intends to hire a professional designer to help realize the full potential of this project. There is no reason that this property cannot be a location second to none in New England.

**How would the Town pay for the renovation of the property?**

The town has identified four potential sources of funding: 1) the town's capital non-recurring fund; 2) potential surplus funds that would be calculated at the end of fiscal year 2026; 3) State of Connecticut grant funds and 4) town debt issuance.

**Visitors currently park near the mini-golf and look easterly at the water and the shores of Old Lyme. Will similar parking and views be available if this transaction goes through?**

Visitors will continue to be able to park at mini golf to look easterly at the water. We anticipate that the proposed new park will include additional parking for water views overlooking newly created green space.

**How will this proposal impact the environment?**

The property is in the CT River Gateway Conservation Zone, Coastal Area Management Zone and FEMA designated VE Flood Zone. The proposal will remove a significant amount of asphalt which will be replaced by native, non-invasive grass, vegetation and trees. The location of green space by the river will decrease direct runoff from parking areas to the Connecticut River, improve natural drainage, add to the town's tree canopy and provide a river front open space connection for residents, birds and wildlife to enjoy.

### **How much revenue will the town lose from the transaction?**

The tax bill for the DND property for FY 26 is \$24,156. The revenue the town generates from the Duffy Pavilion is nearly offset by the expenses associated with upkeep, including cleaning and maintenance. Assuming The Point, LLC (the current private property owner) were to invest \$200,000 into the Pavilion to make it into a restaurant, the building, with associated personal property, would likely have a tax bill of \$8,000. The net loss in tax revenue to the town is, at most, \$15-20 thousand.

### **How is the Dock N Dine property currently zoned, and what uses are allowed?**

The DND property is in the Saybrook Point 2 (SP-2) Zoning District. The Zoning Regulations permit the following uses in the SP-2 District:

- A dock, wharf, slip basin or other similar landing facility for pleasure or excursion boats.
- Establishments for the sale, repair or servicing of pleasure boats, including dispensing of fuel or lubricants for boats at retail, accessory offices and stores.
- Hotel or motel including conference facilities, swimming or other recreation.
- A sail loft or ship chandlery includes the retail sale of marine equipment, engines or other provisions for pleasure boats.
- Park, playground or open space land.
- Marine research laboratory for the study of aquatic and marine environment, ecology.
- Indoor or outdoor restaurant or other food and beverage establishments.
- Hotel suites and hotel rooms in separate buildings or buildings, accessory to and administered as part of a hotel located within 1,000 feet of the property.
- Building or use of the Town, State or Federal government.
- Off-street parking lot accessory to a use permitted and located in the Saybrook Point District.

These permitted uses must additionally meet all bulk and special standards outlined in the Zoning Regulations.

In addition to the uses permitted in the Zoning Regulations, Affordable Housing Developments are permitted in the SP-2 District as allowed by Section 8-30g of the Connecticut General Statutes.

### **Has the Duffy family been notified of this possibility?**

Yes, and we will continue to keep them informed.

### **Should this deal be approved by the Town's citizenry, is there a timeline for the revitalization? When would the restaurant open?**

If this proposal is approved at referendum the town expects work to begin immediately on a master plan to unite all the parcels at Saybrook Point in a cohesive and thoughtful manner that takes into consideration public uses. There is a 120-day due diligence period for both parties post-referendum. The town has already begun working on a design and permitting for repair of the seawall in front of 145 College Street, where a walkway will be installed. Once appropriate town approvals are obtained, we expect that the restaurant to be up and running six months from the date of the approvals.

### **What meetings are upcoming?**

**February 2, 2026, 6:00 pm:** Public hearing at Old Saybrook Middle School followed by a town meeting.

**March 31, 2026, 12pm to 8pm:** Referendum at Old Saybrook High School.

The public hearing will be a substantive meeting where information will be presented, and residents can voice their opinions. The town meeting to follow will simply adjourn to referendum, in the same way that our budget referendum works.

### **Who can vote in the referendum?**

All residents who own at least \$1,000 of real or personal property are eligible to vote in the referendum. The timing between the adjournment of the town meeting and the referendum is to ensure that those who need to obtain and cast absentee ballots can do so. Absentee ballot applications can be obtained from the Town Clerks Office: [sarah.becker@oldsaybrookct.gov](mailto:sarah.becker@oldsaybrookct.gov) or by calling 860-395-3135.