

Golf Club to Get \$6.7M for Herring River Project

The agreement includes two years of lost revenue

BY [K.C. MYERS](#) APR 21, 2021

WELLFLEET — The town and the Chequessett Yacht & Country Club have reached an agreement that will allow the Herring River Restoration Project, the largest wetland restoration in New England, to go forward while also saving the club's golf course.

On Feb. 9, the Wellfleet Select Board signed an agreement to give the club \$6.7 million to elevate five low-lying tees, fairways, greens, roughs, and sand traps that would otherwise be flooded as the 570-acre first phase of the restoration project moves forward. The funds will also cover adjustments to upland holes 2 through 5, so that they coordinate with the newly elevated parts of the course.

The \$6.7 million agreed to on Feb. 9 is 34 percent more than the \$5 million "nonbinding placeholder figure" that had been offered to the club for years, said Carole Ridley, the restoration project's coordinator.

Though the agreement is with the town as the legal entity, the restoration of the Herring River estuary is a multi-partner project involving several state and federal agencies, and all costs will be covered by federal, state, and private grants, said Ridley.

"It's a big step," said Anthony Papantonis of Wellfleet and Medfield, who is on the club's board of governors and its Herring River committee.

It's a step that almost didn't happen. After many years of tense discussions, club members received a draft proposal from the Herring River technical team that they "were not happy with," according to minutes from a Jan. 5 Wellfleet Select Board executive (that is, secret) session. The project staff and lawyers for the club had gone back and forth but could not come to an agreement.

On Jan. 5, Ridley told the select board the project would need to move forward to secure funding with or without a deal with the club. The restoration team hopes construction will begin in 2022, after 20 years of planning and negotiations.

According to the minutes of the January meeting, Helen Miranda Wilson told fellow select board members that the Herring River technical team had "bent over backwards for many years to look at all the details in good faith to make this happen with the club." Wilson added that the club "is trying to pull the rug out at the last minute."

The select board voted to give the country club until Jan. 29 to reach an agreement with the Herring River team, or else the town would move forward without one.

For the Chequessett club, which was incorporated in 1978 and has 200 members, no agreement would mean five of the nine holes that currently flood after rains would be permanently flooded when water levels rise in the restored Herring River — and none of the \$60 million in state, federal, and grant funding for the project would go to fix it.

Ridley said the core understanding that has been in place remains the same, but the amount in the final agreement matches construction dollars for 2022.

Of the total, \$5.7 million will go to construction costs, while \$975,000 will be compensation for the loss of business. It's assumed that construction will shut down the golf course for two years beginning in 2022, Papantonis said. Should construction begin later and go on longer, that amount will be adjusted, he added.

About \$1.6 million in construction costs will be considered the club's contribution, in the form of dirt or fill excavated from the golf club property. An estimated 180,000 cubic yards of fill are needed to raise the five holes, and another 70,000 cubic yards will elevate low-lying roads affected by the restoration.

Asked what had changed between January and February, Ridley said, "It's a detailed agreement. What's important is that there is an agreement that's mutually beneficial."

"It was like any negotiation," Papantonis said. "We were able to come to certain resolutions, and we mutually decided to sign the agreement."

Papantonis told the *Independent* that most of the members of the golf club are in favor of the Herring River restoration for environmental reasons. But, he added, "there are members, myself included, that are concerned about long- and short-term impacts to the club."

Mike Snell, a Truro resident and active club member, said many of the members, like him, are elderly. "They are worried that if the club is closed for two years, membership will drop away," Snell said.

For the Herring River Restoration Project, this is another milestone on a long journey. "The light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter," Ridley said.

Applications for state permits have gone out, and a final one to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be sent in a week, Ridley said. The Wellfleet Conservation Commission will be the last permitting agency. After that, federal and state funding must be secured.

"The objective is to get all the funding and have it available," Ridley said, adding that if funding cannot be found at once, the various partners in the project, including the town and the Cape Cod National Seashore, will have to discuss options.



About K.C. Myers

K.C. Myers is the *Independent's* managing editor. As a reporter, she began covering the Outer Cape more than 25 years ago at the *Provincetown Advocate*, and later at the *Cape Cod Times*.