

[Back](#)

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A Sound (View) plan for Old Lyme beach

The Sound View Beach area has long been a blessing and a curse for Old Lyme. This small public beach is a popular hangout in the summer. Memorial Day showed that hasn't changed. Large crowds filled parking spaces by 10 a.m., though the water was still cold and the air not terribly warm.

Sound View's mix of beach bars and restaurants, ice cream shops, arcade, 1925 Allen Herschell carousel, and a few retail stores provides a blend of honky-tonk and nostalgia in this otherwise staid town. The commercial development, modest as it may be, diversifies a tax base largely dependent on residential ownership.

However, parking shortages and resultant traffic congestion can prove a curse on busy summer weekends. Those beach and bar goers who don't understand the concept of moderation can over imbibe, to the detriment of the enjoyment of others. The parties and the problems can stretch into the night.

Under the leadership of First Selectwoman Bonnie Reemsnyder, Old Lyme is taking steps to enhance the blessing and mitigate the curse. The use of redesigned parking spaces and kiosk parking meters, which make it easier for visitors to pay their parking fees, is at least diminishing the chaos.

Meanwhile, several vacant buildings were recently sold at auction, offering the prospect for more development.

Most exciting, however, is the potential for creation of a waterside park, providing rest rooms and some tranquil green space, and connected to a planned bikeway.

Old Lyme is now beginning the design phase of the project, with the town contributing \$29,700 and rest of the \$148,500 cost covered by way of a federal transportation grant under an 80 percent/20 percent match. Federal subsidies would also be available if townspeople authorize construction, with the cost based on the final design plans.

The proposed bikeway would run from the Baldwin Bridge, going east on Route 156 and south on Hartford Avenue to Sound View. A bikeway could provide a healthy alternative to town residents who want to enjoy Sound View but are too discouraged by the traffic congestion to drive into the area in summer. Commuter parking with access to the bike path could provide an alternative for visitors.

Ms. Reemsnyder expects the design phase to be completed by the spring of 2015, along with an estimate of construction costs. Only then can residents decide if the project is worth the investment. In any event, undertaking this study is a "Sound" plan.
