

# Housatonic River Estuary Commission (HREC)

Representing the towns of Shelton, Milford, Orange, Stratford, Derby, and Ansonia CT.

**To:** The Honorable Mark A. Lauretti (Shelton), Benjamin G. Blake (Milford), James Zeoli (Orange), John Harkins (Stratford), Anthony Staffieri (Derby), and James Della Volpe (Ansonia)

**From:** Bob Gesullo, Chairman of the Housatonic River Estuary Commission (HREC)

**Date:** November 27, 2012

## **2012 HREC Year-end Summary Report**

This report is intended to summarize the 2012 activities of Housatonic River Estuary Commission (HREC), which is authorized under the State of Connecticut General Statute Sec.25-170 (Chapter 483b) to work collectively with each of these towns as the stewards for the river for which each of these towns share borders.

The Commission is composed of one representative from each town and may study any issues relating to the Housatonic River and may make such recommendations as may be necessary to maintain, protect and restore the resources of the estuary of the Housatonic River. *This is a forum in which the these communities regardless of their own local or similar efforts, come together without borders to collectively work together for one common goal, the stewardship of the Housatonic River.*

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

*"Our mission is the stewardship of the Housatonic River Estuary and its tributaries to both restore and protect the interest of the Housatonic River in the communities of Shelton, Ansonia, Derby, Orange, Stratford and Milford, Connecticut. This is the forum in which the these communities, regardless of their own local or similar efforts, come together without borders to collectively work with one voice in the common goal for the welfare and the valued resources of the Housatonic River. This will include the collaboration and interactions with other similar local or state organizations that also work to protect, the immediate area as well as the entire length of the Housatonic River and its tributaries as it may then affect one or all our communities at-large. Our mission is to support and foster the many components of this stewardship, including but not limited to restoration, conservation, preservation, recreation, and economics as these actions/intentions relate to the River's ecology, environment, economic development/planning and historical/cultural values. We will seek to find collective, balanced solutions to provide equal value to these components as a strategy to promote continued restoration and responsible economic development of the estuary, and to protect against any future threats, changes or adverse impacts."*

**The following is a summary of accomplishments completed during 2012 supporting the mission statement of this commission since its establishment in 2007:**

- The HREC actively participated for the fourth year in the Housatonic River Clean-up. Organizers reported more than 300 volunteers removed 40 tons of debris which is a record amount for this event. HREC strongly supports the river clean-up and its' volunteers.
- The HREC website has been updated with news and information throughout the year. ([www.TheHREC.org](http://www.TheHREC.org))

- Commission members developed a distribution list of other river related groups to better exchange relevant news and information (River's Alliance, Housatonic Valley Association, Norwalk River Commission, and others).
- HREC commissioners continued their outreach efforts by attending and participating in related meetings with the Harbor Commissions, the CT DEEP, CT Sea Grant, and the Long Island Sound Assembly (LISA). Several commission members serve on various other related commissions and provide valuable information and communication between the groups.
- The Commission sent a letter of concern to the CT DEEP with regards to the expansion of a recycling company located along the Housatonic River in Milford and its application to the DEEP for expansion that could include barge transport of various materials on the river.
- The Commission sent a letter to the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) with suggestions for improvements to the speed zones and signage in the river. Changes in the placement of buoys were recommended as well as additional "no wake zone" buoys located near the Knapp's Landing fuel dock.
- The Commission made a request to the DEEP Boating Division for replacement of "No wake" signs at Wooster Island. ***The DEEP Boating Division had the signs up before the active boating season began.***
- The Commission also requested additional patrol at Wooster Island the DEEP Environmental Conservation Office. The island has become a very active boating area with several complaints coming to the Commission during the year. ***DEEP EnCon was able to have one of their patrol vessels docked in that area for the summer.***
- A representative from the Commission attended the Sacred Heart University new Environmental Sciences Laboratory "Open House." Faculty and students held a reception in the new laboratory and provided a complete tour with presentations on the plans for studies utilizing the new equipment. A member of the Commission was asked to be part of the SHU Environmental Studies Graduate Advisory Extension Board and participated in an organizational meeting with the faculty reviewing the Environmental Studies Graduate program curriculum.
- The Commission spoke with the editor of "Milford Living" magazine and was quoted in an article printed that reviewed the rivers in Milford.
- The Commission also wrote an article that was published in "Shelton Life" magazine summarizing the formation and mission of the HREC. (See attached.)
- HREC members attended a meeting in Ansonia with several area town Mayors/First Selectmen, town and local State representatives and US Senator Richard Blumenthal addressing flood impacts from Candlewood Lake to the Housatonic River. Several down-river towns were adversely impacted during Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 not only by the storm rain and wind but from the large amount of additional flood waters released through the dams downstream to the towns along the Housatonic River.
- The Commission made requests to the DEEP permitting division requesting any "Notice of Violations" cited to a Milford property and a company in Shelton requesting permit renewals. Both applicants were compliant with their permitting requirements and the Commission had no objections to their permit renewals.
- The Commission sent a letter of support to the CT DEEP for the dredging project planned for the lower portion of the river planned for 2013.

The Commission has a small annual stipend funding (operating budget) for recording fees, the website, and ancillary expenses and has requested that each participating town support the Commission with these small expenses. ***"We would like to express our gratefulness to the towns of Shelton and Milford for their ongoing support and we trust the other participating towns will do the***

**same."The Town of Stratford offers in-kind free pump-out services for boaters in Stratford, Milford, and Shelton.**

Plans for 2013 include:

- Continuing to partner with Sacred Heart University graduate students and summarize the debris study findings determining the types, amounts and entry points of floatable debris in the river and possible means of removing/stopping its entry.
- Participating in the 5<sup>th</sup> annual river clean-up to be scheduled in April. The Commission will again reach out to other community volunteers to increase the numbers of participants.
- Continuing to communicate with our local and legislative leaders.
- Monitoring and reporting on the expanded use of Wooster Island for recreation and the boating, Jet Ski and litter issues that have occurred since 2011.
- Continuing to monitor and report on the river dredging project through the end of 2012 and into early 2013.
- *Continuing to support the Stratford Waterfront and Harbor Management Commission to lead the efforts of maintenance dredging of the Housatonic River with encouragement for possible expansion of the current dredge footprint.*

The commission is dedicated to its mission and truly appreciates the support of the local leaders of the towns it represents. Please feel free to contact your town Commissioner as listed below, for any issues relating to the River.

Respectfully submitted,

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William Rock, Stratford, 203-377-653

William Rohland, Derby

Scott Corner (Member-at-Large)

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(Vacant), Orange

# Housatonic River Estuary Commission (HREC)

Representing the towns of Shelton, Milford, Stratford, Derby, Orange, and Ansonia, CT.

**Article published in the "Shelton Life" magazine:**

The Housatonic River Estuary Commission (HREC) was established through CT General Statute Chapter 483b, section 25-170, back in 1990 supported by now retired State Senator George "Doc" Gunther.

## CHAPTER 483b -HOUSATONIC RIVER ESTUARY COMMISSION

*Sec. 25-170. Commission authorized. Membership. Duties.*

*(a) The towns of Shelton, Derby, Ansonia, Orange, Stratford and Milford may by ordinance establish a Housatonic River Estuary Commission. The ordinance shall set forth the number of members of the commission, their method of selection, terms of office and procedure for filling any vacancy. The commission may employ expert and such other assistants as it judges necessary and may accept funds from any source. Notwithstanding any other provision of the general statutes, funds appropriated to the commission, or received by the commission from any other source, shall be held in the custody of the commission and expended by the commission for the purposes set forth in subsection (b) of this section.*

*(b) The commission may study any issues relating to the Housatonic River and may make such recommendations as may be necessary to maintain, protect and restore the resources of the estuary of the Housatonic River. The commission shall consider the adverse impact any action proposed in or for the Housatonic River estuary may have upon the marine resources of said river. The commission may prepare and submit a report to the local legislative bodies of the towns represented on said commission. (P.A. 90-341, S. 5.)*

Senator Gunther felt that the lower estuarine portion of the river needed a multi-town commission that would act as a "watch dog" group and work collectively for the protection of the river and its resources. The lower "estuarine" portion of the river has unique value in its fish and shellfish resources. It is a designated state "natural seed oyster bed" providing a naturally renewable source of CT's famous oysters. Many of the State's seed oyster men utilize this area collecting oyster seed for the local shellfish companies that have leased grounds in Long Island Sound providing continued sustainable economic value for the shellfish industry. The area has a recreational economic value for the numerous boaters, marinas, fishermen, kayakers, birders, and other river enthusiasts.

But, it wasn't until after a controversy arose during 2006, when the CT DEEP approved dredge spoils from the lower portion of the river to be dumped into a "deep water hole" in the Shelton portion of the river, that Shelton Mayor Mark Lauretti decided it was time to formalize the commission. Mayor Lauretti spearheaded the designation of the six town representative members and HREC became a recognized multi-town commission in 2007.

The Commission met for the first time in Shelton at Mayor Lauretti's office and was asked to develop a mission statement and by-laws. Since that time the Commission added a "member-at-large" and currently have seven representative members.

## MISSION STATEMENT

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The Commission meets six times a year and prepares an annual report of its activities. Each town representative member and our member-at-large also volunteer on other local and state committees and commissions increasing the opportunities for outreach and the sharing of information. The Commission members each have their own area(s) of expertise. Representatives report back to town leaders and local State Legislators. The HREC has invited guests to the regular meetings including but not limited to harbor commissions, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, State Legislators, and local universities.

The HREC has recently partnered with Sacred Heart University's Environmental Master's Program to conduct a debris study along the lower portion of the river south of the Stevenson Dam. Students will be identifying the types of debris, assessing volumes and pinpointing natural "collection" areas that will be targeted during annual clean-up events.

The Town of Stratford sponsors an annual Housatonic River Clean-up event that the HREC members support and participate in. More than 20 tons of debris were removed from the river shoreline and islands during the 2011 clean-up. Volunteers include residents, boaters, fishermen, shellfishermen, and other civic groups.

HREC provides suggestions and voices concerns over many of the issues involving the river including commercial facilities, water usage for entities using river water for irrigation, letters of support for research studies and pilot projects, and boating safety.

Excerpt from The Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) guide "Welcome to the Housatonic Estuary."

- *The Housatonic River is CT's third largest river extending 149 miles north through CT and MA.*
- *The river is tidal for the 13 most southern miles from Derby to Long Island Sound and considered "estuarine" for the last eight miles.*
- *The river supplies approximately 11% of the freshwater entering Long Island Sound.*
- *The Housatonic has historically naturally supplied up to 40% of CT's seed oysters to the CT shellfish industry annually.*

[www.hvatoday.org/publications/EstuaryGuide.pdf](http://www.hvatoday.org/publications/EstuaryGuide.pdf)

HREC contacts:

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Scott Corner (Member-at-Large)

Website: [www.TheHREC.org](http://www.TheHREC.org) (copies of annual reports are available.)