



# TOWN OF GROTON

## PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Members of the Environment Committee,

We are jointly submitting testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 345, "An act concerning the Water Taxi at the Heritage Park in the Towns of Groton and New London."

Groton has been an active participant in the implementation of the Thames River Heritage Park throughout its history. More than \$4 Million in state funds from both the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) have been invested in the park to date, including approximately \$1 Million for a dock along the Thames Street waterfront near Fort Griswold and the restaurants and businesses in the area.

Throughout the early implementation of the Thames River Heritage Park, what was missing was an anchor- a reason to draw visitors to Groton and New London. While Groton is home to Fort Griswold State Park, the site of a revolutionary war battle, and the USS Nautilus and Submarine Force Museum, which is home to the world's first nuclear powered submarine, these attractions do not draw the number of visitors the way that attractions in Mystic or other part of the state do. With plans for the National Coast Guard Museum moving forward, the Thames River Heritage Park now has its anchor to draw tourists to this area.

The Thames River Heritage Park also has an advantage that other areas do not- a multi-modal transportation center that sees over 1 million ferry, rail and bus passengers annually. Many of these visitors will arrive in New London but will not have access to a car to drive from location to location. The water taxi will enable car-less visitors, as well as those that arrive by car, to visit the heritage sites and major attractions in both Groton and New London using a water taxi on the Thames River.

The water taxi as proposed for the summer of 2015 will follow a central route, with two stops in New London – one in downtown New London and the other at Fort Trumbull and one stop in Groton at the dock near Thames Street and Fort Griswold. This is the same three stop route that had a successful trial run in September 2014, bringing approximately 4,000 passengers from Groton to New London over a two weekend period. Reports from some of the historic sites shows that their visitor numbers for the two weekend period were 4 times those of the previous year, and restaurants and shops showed an increase in sales as well. This pilot run of the water taxi was a great economic boost to the area.

A water taxi from Groton to New London is included as recommended project in several local and regional plans:

- **Town of Groton Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)**  
Groton's POCD states "With Groton's strategic maritime location and varied resources, there is the potential for water taxi service for recreation and other purposes. The potential for this service should be explored..." and goes on to recommend that the Town "Explore the concept of

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water taxi service (in such areas as Noank, Mystic, New London, Groton, Ledge Lighthouse) and carefully manage any land-side activities.

- **Town of Groton Strategic Economic Development Plan**

This plan recommends that the Town “continue to pursue the Heritage Park concept for Thames River attractions” and goes on to explain that “the Town, along with the City, should continue its cooperation with the City of New London, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection to bring this vision to reality, including the pursuit of funding for the capital portions of the project, such as the water taxi landings, pedestrian connections, and signage.”

- **Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**

The 2014 update of CEDS identifies the Park as a new project with regional significance and contains similar goals/action items to develop or enhance new and existing recreational opportunities on the river; increase shoreline access and water-dependent transportation and recreation; and to support investment in Thames River sight-seeing and/or ferry service. The Thames River Heritage Park project is not only consistent with the CEDS goals, but may also help leverage support to implement additional existing downtown revitalization, traffic and circulation plans in New London and future plans for Thames Street in Groton.

Groton and New London need to grow their unique heritage sites and attractions and show not only local residents, but those coming to the area from the rest of the state and the New England region, that we are “Still Revolutionary.” The water taxi showed last fall that it is capable of bringing residents from one side of the river to the other for dining and entertainment. What is needed is a summer long program, with expanded and regularly scheduled service coupled with regional marketing to bring visitors from a broader base to the Thames River.

We ask to you join our support for Raised Bill No. 345 and fund the water taxi for the summer of 2015. Thank you.

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