

RESOLUTION OF THE WESTERLY TOWN COUNCIL  
DECLARING ITS INTENT ON BEHALF OF THE TOWN OF WESTERLY  
TO REQUEST OWNERSHIP OF THE WATCH HILL LIGHTHOUSE FEDERAL LAND  
TO THEREBY PROTECT PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE SHORE IN PERPETUITY

WHEREAS, the Watch Hill Lighthouse property (hereinafter the "Property") at 14 Lighthouse Road, Westerly, Rhode Island, (Westerly Tax Assessor Plat 185, Lot 24), is appraised at \$11,344,600 (according to Town records dated June 2023), is owned by the United States of America (which now seeks permanent disposal of the Property), and consists of a lighthouse tower, other structures, and 4.5 (+/-) acres of federal shoreline land; and

WHEREAS, the Westerly Harbor Management Plan (WHMP) of 2016 (revised in 2019) identifies the Property as one of the Town's established Shoreline Public Access Points (Site #29) and stresses that the Town (1) "shall not allow any future privatization of existing public access points," (2) "should not abandon or ignore any public access points," and (3) "should continually explore the potential for additional shoreline access points"; and

WHEREAS, the Westerly Comprehensive Community Plan 2020-2040 (approved in 2021) underscores the above-quoted WHMP policies by stating that "the Town will continue to identify and prioritize opportunities to both add and maintain public access points to the shore and the Pawcatuck River"; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 86 of the Town of Westerly Code of Ordinances amplifies the above-quoted Town policies by stating that the Town shall "manage the waters of the Town and balance the diverse uses of the water and waterfront" (Article I, para. 86-1.A.(2)); that the Town shall "maintain and improve shoreline public access and water quality" (Article I, para. 86-1.A.(3)); and that "One of the key components of the WHMP is securing and maintaining public access to the shore, coastal waters and mooring areas..." (Article IV, para. 86-40); and

WHEREAS, the United States of America temporarily leased the Property to a private entity, the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association (hereinafter the "Association"), which has placed various restrictions on public access to the Property; and

WHEREAS, a previous Town Council didn't actively seek Town ownership of the Property's 4.5 (+/-) acres of federal shoreline land, an established Shoreline Public Access Point (WHMP Site #29) in contravention of the above-quoted Town policies and ordinances; and

WHEREAS, in contrast, the current Westerly Town Council seated in November 2022 has repeatedly and unanimously demonstrated its strong desire and commitment to protect and enhance the public's constitutional right to access the shore consistent with the above-quoted Town policies and ordinances; and

WHEREAS, the Westerly Town Council believes that keeping the 4.5 (+/-) acres of federal shoreline land under public ownership is the best way to ensure that public access is forever protected and that the federal shoreline land is never sold, transferred, or swapped by private entities; and

WHEREAS, the Westerly Town Council has this one fleeting moment to seek to halt the abandonment/privatization of the entirety of the Property (Shoreline Public Access Point, WHMP

Site #29) by requesting ownership of the 4.5 (+/-) acres of federal shoreline land and any associated roads and/or easements; and

WHEREAS, in appreciation of the mission of the Association and their caretaking of the lighthouse, the Westerly Town Council supports conveying the lighthouse tower and other structures to the Association in perpetuity, and will exempt the tower and other structures from local property taxes as long as public access to such buildings is appropriately maintained; and

WHEREAS, if the Town of Westerly becomes the land owner, the Town will also lease an appropriate portion of the land to the Association for one dollar (\$1) annually, under a long term agreement, as was similarly done with the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce at 1 Chamber Way, Westerly, RI; and

NOW THEREFORE, be it hereby

RESOLVED: that the Westerly Town Council declares its intent to protect public access to the shore at WHMP Site #29, the Property, in perpetuity by (1) requesting ownership of the 4.5 (+/-) acres of federal shoreline land and all associated roads and/or easements, (2) supporting conveyance of the lighthouse tower and other structures to the Association, (3) exempting the tower and other structures from local property taxes, and (4) leasing an appropriate portion of the land to the Association; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: that the Town Clerk shall email and ship/mail certified copies of this adopted resolution tomorrow, using expedited delivery methods, to the Honorable US Senator Jack Reed, US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, US Representative Seth Magaziner, RI Senator Victoria Gu, RI Representative Sam Azzinaro, RI Representative Brian Patrick Kennedy, RI Representative Tina Spears, and the appropriate office in the US General Services Administration, US National Park Service, RI Attorney General, RI Department of Environmental Management, RI Coastal Resources Management Council, and RI Historic Preservation Officer.

ADOPTED: July 31, 2023

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WHEREAS, the Westerly Harbor Management Plan (WHMP) of 2016 (revised in 2019) identifies the Property as one of the Town's established Shoreline Public Access Points (Site #29) and stresses that the Town (1) "shall not allow any future privatization of existing public access points," (2) "should not abandon or ignore any public access points," and (3) "should continually explore the potential for additional shoreline access points"; and

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WHEREAS, the United States of America temporarily leased the Property to a private entity, the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association (hereinafter the "Association"), which has placed various restrictions on public access to the Property; and

WHEREAS, a previous Town Council didn't actively seek Town ownership of the Property's 3.92 acres of federal shoreline land, an established Shoreline Public Access Point (WHMP Site #29) in contravention of the above-quoted Town policies and ordinances; and

WHEREAS, in contrast, the current Westerly Town Council seated in November 2022 has repeatedly and unanimously demonstrated its strong desire and commitment to protect and enhance the public's constitutional right to access the shore consistent with the above-quoted Town policies and ordinances; and

WHEREAS, the Westerly Town Council believes that keeping the 3.92 acres of federal shoreline land under public ownership is the best way to ensure that public access is forever protected and that the federal shoreline land is never sold, transferred, or swapped by private entities; and

WHEREAS, the Westerly Town Council has this one fleeting moment to seek to halt the abandonment/privatization of the entirety of the Property (Shoreline Public Access Point, WHMP Site #29) by requesting ownership of the 3.92 acres of federal shoreline land and any associated roads and/or easements; and

WHEREAS, in appreciation of the mission of the Association and their caretaking of the lighthouse, the Westerly Town Council supports conveying the lighthouse tower and other structures to the Association in perpetuity, and will exempt the tower and other structures from local property taxes as long as public access to such buildings is appropriately maintained; and

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