

THIS SPECIAL PLACE

**An Information Guide to Practical Living on
Shelter Island**



Practical approaches to protecting our community's natural
resources.

HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

March 2014

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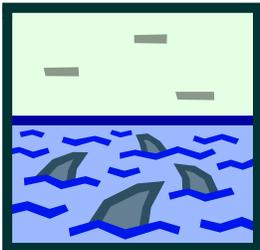
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This is a practical guide to living on Shelter Island, and is full of information that will help you. The Town Board and many people from Shelter Island Town Committees have contributed their ideas and suggestions for the best way to begin, as well as important things to take into consideration. This book explains how to care for your home and property, drinking water, plantings, buildings, wetlands and shorefront in light of our sensitive ecology and its future. Many of these ideas have been written into the Town Code, which can be referenced from this guide. Copies of the Town Code are in the Town Clerk's office and can be reviewed there. You can also find the Town Code on-line at www.shelterislandtown.us.

*The Environment is fragile and highly sensitive to human activities.
Your action or inaction can have an impact.*



I. WATER, WELLS and the AQUIFER

A. Where the Water comes from.

All of Shelter Island's fresh water comes from rainfall. As the rainwater goes into the ground, it percolates down through our sandy soils to layers of clay-like soil and pushes out to the edges of the Island, coming to rest on top of salt water. Because of the clay barrier and the salt water, Shelter Island's aquifer is a relatively thin lens and therefore very sensitive and fragile to rainfall and human impacts. As water moves, underground, it carries along many water-soluble substances, which plants and soils are capable of filtering out of the water. What gets picked up and is not absorbed may end up in your drinking water.

The fresh water in the aquifer floats on top of salt water. And, the weight of the inland mound of water presses outward toward the shore. Typically, in the shore areas, the top of the fresh water table is less than 1 1/2 feet above sea level. In low rainfall periods, the "interface" of bay and fresh water tends to move inland, making shore area wells more sensitive to pumping. Normally, there is adequate good water quality, if used wisely.

However, shore area homeowners are more susceptible to salt water intrusion into their wells and sometimes cause their own water quality problems. It is all too easy to ruin a shore area well with saltwater intrusion. And, once a well is damaged, water quality is slow to be restored.

If you need a new well, the Suffolk County Department of Health Services will tell you where it should be placed.

B. Recharging the Aquifer.

You can help recharge your aquifer! Rainfall is the critical source of aquifer recharge. Minimize impervious surfaces including walkways, driveways, patios, tennis court and pool surrounds. Use pervious surfaces on walks and drives and leave as much natural vegetation on your land as possible. These actions enhance the amount of rainfall that percolates into the soil and aquifer and reduces runoff. Runoff water from driveways and slopes should be redirected and retained on your own property.

Collecting and recharging roof rainwater into the ground is an excellent way to help to protect the water table under your land. Downspouts to drywells or "French Drains" are commonly used. *Ask your local landscaper for advice about solutions.*

Some homeowners have installed cisterns to collect roof rainwater. If cistern water is used for drinking water, it will need anti-bacterial treatments and should be tested regularly.

C. Household Use of Water

Your home's well, or the water system you are hooked to, taps into this fresh water lens. You drink it. You bathe in it, cook your food in it and wash your clothes, etc. Any medicines or chemicals you use go back into the aquifer and may end up in your drinking water.

Be careful in your use of water. Long showers and wasteful washing practices may strain your water supply.

Thoughtful use of household cleansers, detergents, paint products and other potentially toxic substances can protect water quality for you and your neighbors. There are many cleaning products available today that are organic and biodegradable. *Use detergents sparingly!*

DISPOSE OF ALL CHEMICALS AT THE HAZMAT AREA OF THE RECYCLING CENTER



II. YOUR LAWN

A. Pesticides and Fertilizers

Pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and chemical fertilizers can be carried by rainfall into the aquifer. In times past, many homeowners wanted weed free, green lawns. But the more we understand that we may end up drinking these lawn chemicals inadvertently, the more attractive a natural untreated lawn becomes. Most of us live on top of our drinking water.

Pesticides are killers that can drift down to well water and drain to marine or pond waters. The labels on many pesticides caution against applying them to pond or marine waters. Pets and children can pick up pesticides in the yard. The risks reported of damage to animals, fish and people are scary.

Routine maintenance spraying of chemical products and applications of fertilizers are not needed and are risky for you and your neighbors. Wind blown spray that reaches a wetland, creek or pond can kill the living organisms there.

If you have a pest problem get expert advice. Some pest problems can be treated without toxic chemicals. For instance, if you have a fungus in your garden, try drying out the leaves by not watering for a few days. Water plants in the early morning so the sun can dry the leaves. Learn about the developing techniques of non-toxic Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

HAVE THE COMFORT OF A “PESTICIDE FREE” LAWN. GET EXPERT ADVICE TO BE SURE YOU TREAT THE RIGHT PROBLEM AT THE RIGHT TIME WITH THE RIGHT STUFF.

B. Other Tips for an Environmentally Friendly Lawn

“Overseed” your lawn to thicken the grass and patch sparse areas. A lazy man’s way is to spread the seed on top of snow or during frost season. Nature does the work of settling the seed into the ground.

Talk to your garden center about grass seeds for your lawn conditions. Many changes to seeds in recent years make them more resistant to drought, disease and pests.

Top-dressing the lawn with 1/4 inch of compost, weed free topsoil or mulch, such as peat moss, will help replenish nutrients in sandy soil.

Make your own compost by saving plant materials from your garden and kitchen in a pile or compost container. Nature will do the rest and you will have nourishing soil for your garden or lawn.

Leave short grass clippings on the lawn. They are an excellent source of nutrients and decay quickly.

If you feel you must water - don't over-do it. It can lead to damaging fungal growth. Grass can only absorb about one inch per week, including rainfall. If you do water the lawn, follow the Town's irrigation regulations, set forth in more detail below. Even after a dry spell, most grasses will turn green again shortly after a substantial rainfall.

Sod requires excessive watering and may over-tax your fresh water supply, and generally will not re-grow if it dies after a drought.

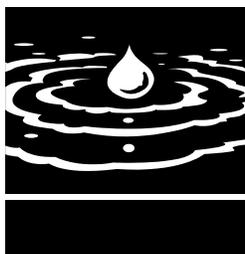
Expert advice is readily available from Cornell Cooperative Extension's Home Horticultural Information line on (631) 727-4126. Mail them a sample and they will test your soil.

If your lawn is serviced by professionals, be sure they understand your concern for protecting the environment while growing a healthy lawn and that application of chemicals to your lawn is approved by you in advance.

C. Lawn Care Near the Wetlands

Owners of property near wetlands and the waterfront have a special responsibility to protect these sensitive areas. The law prohibits any use of sod, turf, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or other pollutants within 100 feet of the wetlands. See Shelter Island Code Section 129-3.

Remember, you may end up drinking what you put on the lawn or garden.



III. IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

A. Irrigation Systems Not allowed.

New underground lawn sprinkler systems are not allowed. There is currently a moratorium on the regulation of existing aboveground and underground irrigation systems. To protect the Town's sole source aquifer, it is best to limit irrigation to the following conditions:

- For the establishment of newly seeded lawns, or portions of lawns, for a period of 90 days after planting, and only during the hours between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 a.m.
- For the establishment of new plantings for a period of 150 days only during the hours between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 a.m.
- For watering vegetable or flower gardens for a period of no more than 20 minutes between the hours of 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 a.m., every third day.

Even if the lawn browns, the grass turns green again after the cooling rains of the early fall. Areas with a shallow water table are vulnerable to salt water intrusion from the use of sprinkler systems.

If you hand water, try to do it before 10 am or after 4 pm. You get much more benefit from watering at these times because less water is lost through evaporation.

B. Drought

It is common during the summer months to have water restrictions in place due to a lack of rainfall. We all must practice water conservation in order to make our supply last. (See Cornell COOP Extension bulletin D1-31)

Even if you live in an area that uses a public water system (The Heights, Dering Harbor and the West Neck Water System) your water comes from community wells and requires the same thoughtful consumption.



IV. SWIMMING POOLS

A. Building or reconstructing a pool.

To install or reconstruct a pool, you need a permit issued by the Building Inspector. You may also need a NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) permit.

Pools may be filled with either fresh or salt water. Fresh water pools must be filled or re-filled with an off-Island water source. This means buying the water. Drain water only after chemicals have been depleted. Drained water must go to a drywell and be confined to your property, or removed and trucked away. Pool effluent can end up in your drinking water, so be careful placing a drywell.

Saltwater pools must be drained to a tank truck or into the open bay waters after all chemicals have dissipated. Don't drain saltwater pools onto the land. You don't want salt water leaching to your well. Pool chemicals will also destroy plant, soil and marine life.

B. Fencing a Pool.

Pools must be fenced, and the fence kept closed, for the safety of all, particularly children. It is the law! See Town Code Chapter 113-6.

C. Maintaining a Pool.

A summer pool cover will greatly reduce evaporation, and winter covers should be permeable to allow collection of rainwater. Lowering the water level about two feet for the winter will enable the rain to refill the pool by the next spring.

A drywell for effluent of a fresh water pool is important to provide a safe way to lower the water level. For an average pool the drywell should be at least 8 X 8 feet and vented.

If you empty the pool for cleaning or repair and an acid wash is used - be sure to neutralize the acid before draining the residual effluent into your drywell.

Fresh water pools should always be filled or refilled with water purchased from an off-Island supplier. "Topping off" your pool with a hose can be done at your own risk. If you "top off" your pool, do it slowly at no more than five gallons per minute. Hopefully, this will not overburden your well.



V. OTHER HOUSE SYSTEMS

A. Septic Systems

Sepptic systems should be properly sited and maintained, to prevent harm to your water supply. It is best to have them as far as possible away from and down-slope from nearby wetlands, your well, or your neighbor's well. The distance allows your septic waste to be filtered from your drinking or bathing water.

The Suffolk County Department of Health Services regulates the design and placement of septic systems. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Town Board regulate the distance from marine or fresh waters. You may need permits from the above agencies.

It is recommended that residential septic systems have a maintenance check every 3-5 years.

Be careful what you put into your septic system or public sewer. Remind the kids that it's not a wastebasket or garbage dump. Facial tissues or toweling can block your septic tank. And some household chemicals, such as toilet bowl cleaners (especially the type which dose every flush) can destroy the bacterial action that breaks down wastes. Furthermore, any chemicals flushed down the drain are absorbed into the ground and might get into your drinking water.

B. Fuel Tanks

Petroleum fuel storage tanks should be above ground and placed in an area capable of containing the full contents of the fuel tank in the event of a leak. The idea is to prevent leaking fuel oil from entering the ground. Metal tanks last about 15 years in our acid soils and plastic tanks have cracked.

Some older properties still have underground tanks. If you have one, have it periodically checked for leakage, and replace it with an above-ground tank if possible. A leak could contaminate not only your ground water, but the water in the whole neighborhood, including nearby creeks or ponds. If an existing home is reconstructed, the Town will require the removal or abandonment of all underground oil tanks.

C. Emergency Alarms

Some houses have alarm systems which send a signal to a central alarm station or the police or fire departments. You don't need a town permit for alarms systems, but be advised that if the alarm system goes off more than twice, and there is no fire, criminal act or emergency, you may be assessed false alarm fees to help defray the costs of response to the false alarms. They go up from \$100 per false alarm, so please be sure your alarm company properly installs and maintains them. Shelter Island Town Code Chapter 24.

D. Fences

There was a time when Islanders built fences to keep in livestock. Now we are concerned about keeping our pools safe and keeping deer out of our gardens. There are strict rules about height and construction so check Shelter Island Town Code Chapter 133-29 for information.

While a baby fawn is cute, deer on your property can pose a problem. Their presence is associated with Lyme disease ticks, and they can eat your plantings. Consult a book or your nurseryman for plants which deer will not eat. If you are bitten by a tick and have it removed, wrap it in transparent tape and take it to your doctor for advice. Reference material on diseases carried by ticks, including Lyme disease, is available at Town Hall or your doctor's office.

E. Waste Disposal

While there are waste disposal services available on Shelter Island, many people prefer to take it to the Town Recycling Center themselves. It is located on Menantic Road and is open every day. Here are a few general guidelines about taking your waste there:

- Wet Garbage must be placed in yellow Town garbage bags found for sale at Town Hall and at many local stores. There is a special area of the Recycling Center for deposit of garbage in yellow bags.
- Glass, paper, cardboard, plastic, newspapers, magazines and metal are recycled. It is your responsibility to sort this waste and place it in the designated bins.
- Construction debris is weighed and deposited for a fee at the Recycling Center for appropriate disposal. All debris must be shipped off the Island to protect our fragile water table and meet State and County environmental requirements.
- Trees, stumps, brush and lawn clippings are weighed before disposal and composted, chipped, burned or trucked off Island.
- Toxic Waste (which includes pesticides, oil, cleaners and paint) is collected in a designated area for appropriate disposal. The town has a STOP (Stop Throwing Out Pollutants) day once a month (check the town's website for the specific dates). Residential toxic waste may be disposed of on these days at no charge.
- There is a designated area where reusable items, such as clothing, furniture, books, etc. can be deposited.

Most of the waste must be trucked away from Shelter Island. Disposal fees and yellow bag fees help pay the costs of removal and transportation. A complete price list is posted at the scale house at the Recycling Center. The more we recycle, the more money we all save on disposal of our waste.

Open burning is generally not allowed. Contact the Town Clerk or see Shelter Island Town Code Chapter 47 for specifics.

F. Lighting

Be careful how you use outdoor lighting on your residential property and any business property you own. Most people appreciate the night sky here and enjoy seeing the stars. Light design can have a significant impact on surrounding property. Many designs are available that shield light from neighbors and focus it toward the ground where it is needed.

G. Noise

We all don't have the same interests or share the same lifestyles, but thoughtful consideration of our neighbors and our differences can make things better for everyone.

The chain saw, lawn mower or wood chipper you hear next door may be someone's main source of income. Most of us use these machines on our own property when we need them. Be aware of your neighbor when you do and the time of day. Most people appreciate a simple request and try to do the right thing.

Some businesses, by their nature, are noisier than others. Be aware of the surroundings when you buy, and be sure the community noise level is right for you. Noise regulations are contained in Town Code Chapter 92.

H. Solar Installations

The Town supports the installation of solar energy systems by waiving fees and providing for an expedited permit process.



V. CLEARING AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

A. Land Clearance and Vegetation

Now that you have your new home site you want to clear the land and get the new house or remodeling job started. When considering what to remove and what to leave on your land, you can consult the guidelines the Town has in place. Some are suggestions based on years of experience and some are required by Town Code.

1. Selective Clearing and Pruning

The land may have second or third growth forest that has been overrun with vines and brush. Non-native plant species introduced to the Island in the past have drastically altered native growth. The most notable culprits are bittersweet and multi-flora rose. These plants have become ‘nuisance’ plants and are not desirable. They strangle trees as they climb into the forest canopy and often bring trees down in heavy winds. Cutting them off at the tree bottom and pulling them up by the roots are recommended.

The Town’s Conservation Advisory Committee has recommendations for plants of four types, set forth in section 3 below:

1. Non-native invasive pest plants that are not recommended for your property.
2. Native plants that thrive on Shelter Island.
3. Recommended plants known to survive droughts.
4. Plants that deer don't like. (No guarantees)

Think about house size. Modest homes save energy, and are harmonious with the landscape. Are you impacting your neighbors’ view? Consideration for our neighbors is a cornerstone of Island living. Our Shelter Island heritage is important to all of us. Your new home may be historically significant. Using the best attributes of the land in siting the new house, addition or

accessory buildings is important. Utilizing these ideas will enhance your home's value and the pleasure you receive from ownership. Efficient energy usage is recommended and often less expensive if designed into your plan at the onset.

Remember that if you clear an acre or more of land you will need to prepare a storm water pollution prevention plan that will ensure that storm water from the project will not contaminate nearby roads, properties or waterways.

2. Keep some Trees and Native Vegetation

Trees and native vegetation on your property will:

1. Control erosion.
2. Reduce runoff and evaporation. Runoff is a special problem in a coastal area because it ends up in bays and wetlands and carries pollutants and silt into prime breeding grounds for a variety of aquatic life.
3. Keep your land cool in the summer and provide shelter in harsh weather.

If your land does not have a trees or native vegetation, grow them. Native plants will tolerate drought conditions and can survive the local insects.

Remember some of the advantages of having trees:

- They are critical for aquifer protection
- They act as filters, reducing carbon dioxide
- They reduce and help control runoff and erosion
- They provide shade in summer and shelter in winter, reducing utility costs
- They enhance residential, commercial and community property values
- They encourage wildlife habitat
- They give beauty and character to Shelter Island
- They are an asset to you, your family and the community

3. Plant Recommendations

The following are Non-native plants **DISCOURAGED** by the Conservation Advisory Committee:

Trees

Black Locust - *Ropbinia Pseudoacacia* Norway Maple - *Acer plantanoides*
Bradford Pear - *Pyrus calleryana* Princess Paulownia *Paulownia tomentosa*
Mulberry - *Morus spp.* Tree of Heaven - *Ailanthus altissima*

Vines

Asiatic Bittersweet - *Celastrus orbiculatus* Periwinkle (Myrtle) *Vinca major, minor*
Creeping Euonymus - *Euonymus fortunei* Porcelain Berry - *Ampelopsis*
Chinese Wisterias - *Wisteria sinensis, brevipedunculata*
Japanese Wisterias - *Wisteria floribunda* Black Swallow-worts - *Cynanchum nigrum*
Japanese Honeysuckle - *Lonicera japonica* Pale Swallow-worts *Cynanchum rossicum*
Mile a Minute - *Polygonum perfoliatum*

Shrubs

Autumn Olive - *Elaeagnus umbellata* Japanese Knotweed - *Polygonum*
Burning Bush - *Euonymus alata cuspidatum*
Barberry - Japanese - *Berberis thunbergii* Multiflora Rose - *Rosa multiflora*
Common Buckthorn - *Rhamnus cathartica* Oriental Bittersweet - *Celastrus orbiculatus*
Glossy Buckthorns - *Rhamnus frangula* Russian Olive - *Elaeagnus angustifolia*
Wineberry - *Rubus phoenicolasius*

Perennials and Annuals

Garlic Mustard - *Alliaria petiolata* Mugwort - *Artemisia vulgaris*
Japanese Loosestrife - *Lysimachia clethroides* Larkspur - *Consolida orientalis*
Purple Loosestrife - *Lythrum salicaria* Knapweed (Spotted/ *Centaurea maculosa*
Japanese Knotweed - *Polygonum cuspidatum* Jimson weed - *Datura stramonium*

Grasses

Reed Canary Grass - *Phalaris arundinacea* Japanese Stilt Grass - *Microstegium*
Chinese Silver Grass *Miscanthus sinensis vimineum*
Chinese Lespedeza *Lespedeza cuneata* Bamboo (Most species)

Pond Plants

Curly-leaved Pondweed - *Potamogeton* Water Chestnut - *Trapa natans*
Eurasian Water Milfoil - *Myriophyllum spicatum* Water Primrose *Ludwigia hexapetal*
Water Purslane - *Ludwigia peploides* Carolina fanwort - *Cabomba sp.*

Reeds

Common Reed - *Phragmites australis* (Note: if removed, area may be replanted with native species within three years. This may require a special permit from other agencies.)

The following are RECOMMENDED Native & Non-Invasive Plants for Seaside – Near Shore Buffer Area:

Evergreens

American Holly *Ilex opaca* Atlantic White Cedar *Chamaecyparis thyoids*
Balsam Fir *Abies balsamea* Eastern Red Cedar *Juniperus virginiana*
Eastern White Pine *Pinus strobus* Pitch Pine *Pinus rigida*
Red Spruce *Picea rubens* White Spruce *Picea glauca*

Deciduous Trees

Black Oak *Quercus velutina* Crab Apple *Malus genus*
Littleleafed Linden *Tilia cordata* Mockernut Hickory *Carya tomentosa*
Mountain ash *Sorbus aucuparia* Sycamore Maple *Acer platanoides*
Tulepo *Nyssa sylvatica* White Ash *Fraxinus americana*
White Oak *Quercus alba*

Shrubs

Andromeda *Pieris genus* Beach Plum *Prunus maritima*
Bayberry *Myrica pennsylvanica* Bearberry *Arctostaphylos uvaursi*
Blueberry Hi/Low *Vaccinium corymbosum* Bog Rosemary *Andromeda glauophyllus*

Broom *Cystisus* genus
 Coral Berry *Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*
 Firethorn *Pyracantha coccinea*
 Forsytheia *Forsythia* genus
 Hydrangea *Hydrangea* genus
 Red Chokeberry *Aronia arbutifolia*
 Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*
 Spicebush *Lindera benzoin*
 Sweet Fern *Comptonia peregrina*
 Viburnum *Viburnum* genus
 American Beach Grass *Ammophila
breviligulata*
 Beach Pea *Lathyrus japonicus*
 Bearberry *Arctostaphylos uvaursi*
 Woolly Hudsonia *Hudsonia tomentosa*
 Salt Spray Rose *Rosa rugosa*
 Seaside spurge *Ephorbia polygonifolia*
*Check the pH of your soil and consult a reputable plant book or garden center for
planting
guidelines and advice.*

The following are RECOMMENDED Native & Non-Invasive Plants for Freshwater Wetlands Regulated area:

Evergreens

American Holly *Ilex opaca*

Balsam Fir *Abies balsamea*
 Eastern White Pine *Pinus strobus*
 Red Spruce *Picea rubens*

Deciduous Trees

Beech *Fagus* spp.
 Flowering Dogwood *Cornus florida*
 Mountain Ash *Sorbus aucuparia*
 Red-osier Dogwood *Cornus stolonifera*
 Sycamore Maple *Acer platanoides*
 White Ash *Fraxinus americana*

Wetland Shrubs

Blueberry High *Vaccinium corymbosum*
 Button Bush *Cephalanthus occidentalis*
 Cranberry *Typha augustifolia*
 Inkberry *Ilex glabra*
 Pepperbush *Clethra alnifolia*
 Spicebush *Lindera benzoin*
 Sheep Laurel *Kalmia augustifolia*
 Swamp Azalea *Rhododendron viscosum*

Wet Meadow and semi aquatic plants:

Arrow Arum *Peltandra virginica*

Cinquefoil *Potentilla* genus
 Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster* genus
 Flowering Quince *Chaenomeles lagenaria*
 Groundsel Bush *Baccharis halimifolia*
 Inkberry *Ilex glabra*
 Red Osier Dogwood *Cornus stolonifera*
 Shadbush *Amelanchier arborea*
 Sweet Pepperbush *Clethra alnifolia*
 Tamarix *Tamarix* genus

Bayberry *Myrica pensylvanica*

Beach Plum *Prunus maritima*
 Dusty Miller *Artemisia stelleriana*
 Prickly Pear Cactus *Opuntia* spp.
 Sea Rocket *Cakiole endtula*
 Seaside goldenrod *Solidago sempervirens*

Atlantic White Cedar *Chamaecyparis
thyoides*
 Eastern Red Cedar *Juniperus virginiana*
 Pitch Pine *Pinus rigida*
 White Spruce *Picea glauca*

Black Birch *Betula lenta*
 Grey Birch *Betula populifolia*
 Paper Birch *Betula papyrifera*
 Sweet Gum *Liquidambar tyraciflua*
 Tupelo *Nyssa sylvatica*

Blueberry Low *Vaccinium angustifolium*
 Coral Berry *Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*
 Elderberry *Sambucus canadensis*
 Hydrangea *Hydrangea* spp.
 Shadbush *Amelanchier arborea*
 Viburnum *Viburnum* spp.
 Silky Dogwood *Cornus amonum*

Blue Flag Iris versicolor

Broad-leafed Arrowhead *Sagittaria latifolia*

Rushes *Juncus spp*

Ferns Various species

Check the pH of your soil and consult a reputable plant book or garden center for planting guidelines and advice.

Cardinal Flower *Lobelia cardinalis*

Sedges *Carex species*

Pickerelweed *Pontederia cordata*

4. Landmark Trees

One of the attributes that make Shelter Island so special is the presence of many large and wonderful trees of many species. The Friends of Trees have identified some 75 such trees, located on public land, which have been designated as “Landmark Trees”. Some of what you think is your property may actually be public land. Generally, the Town, County or State owns 10 - 15 feet of land on either side of our public roads. Thus, many of our large trees, located along the roadside, are in fact on public land. The Town has agreed to create and enforce policies to foster our public tree assets. These Landmark Trees must not be removed or severely pruned without prior permission. If removal is warranted, then a replacement planting is necessary.

If you wonder whether your tree is on public land and you want to remove or prune it, contact the Highway Superintendent.

B. Permits

You will need at least a building permit to construct a new home. You may also need other permits from the Town, Suffolk County, the DEC, various Town departments, and other agencies. The Town building department may not issue you a building permit until you have finished the other reviews. However, they may have useful advice about what kind of approvals you will need, so it’s a good idea to contact them early in the process. Bring the tax map number and survey of your lot with you—it will speed things up.

A new structure may require two other types of approval from the Town. The Town zoning code requires houses to be built a certain distance from the property lines, depending on the zone the property is in. If for special reasons you cannot build your house in this location, you will have to go to the Shelter Island Zoning Board of Appeals. You will have to show the Zoning Board of Appeals the reasons why you cannot comply with the zoning code, and that the benefit to you will outweigh the detriment to the neighborhood. The Building Department will let you know whether you need to go to the Zoning Board of Appeals, and will give you a letter of disapproval to take to the Zoning Board of Appeals. If you have to file an application, contact the Zoning Board clerk.

A new structure built near wetlands may also require a town wetlands permit. See the discussion under Waterfront Properties, below, for a further discussion.



VI. WATERFRONT PROPERTIES – A SPECIAL SENSITIVITY

A. Wetlands

1. What is a Wetland?

Wetlands are generally thought of as marsh areas with grasses that can live in water. A wetland is generally larger than we think and it may expand dramatically in major storms. You may not think that a sandy beach, shoal or mudbank is a wetland, but there are many shellfish, plants and marine organisms living there. The technical criteria to determine the existence of a wetland are in Shelter Island Town Code Section 129-8. You may have to hire an expert to help you identify the wetland boundaries on your land.

Our wetlands are a nursery for marine life. They should never be filled in, used as a dump, or sprayed with pesticides. The wetlands also act like a kidney, to filter out impurities. They need our help to stay healthy and must not be loaded with fertilizer in rain runoff due to indiscriminant use by homeowners. You may think that your actions are insignificant, but the cumulative impact of wetland abuse can damage the waters, shellfish and environment that make the waterfront property so very special and valuable.

A healthy marine wetland can protect your property from coastal erosion.

Our freshwater wetlands are also of vital importance and in fact are a part of our aquifer, visible because the water level is above ground level. Note that the water level in ponds will vary with the amount of rainfall, a visual reminder of what is happening underground to the aquifer. Both fresh water and salt water wetlands are very important to our environment.

2. Wetlands Permits

There are many special concerns that waterfront property ownership entails. There are regulations set up by the federal government such as FEMA and Federal Flood Insurance requirements. The DEC has regulations concerning activities within 300 feet of a wetland or 100 feet of a fresh water wetland.

The town also has wetlands regulations. The regulated area extends from the landward boundary of the wetlands back 100 feet. The first seventy-five feet are especially sensitive, so most activities are prohibited there. The Town Code contains a chart identifying various activities and indicating whether a wetland permit is required.

The Building Department can help decide whether a wetland permit is required, and they will give you a letter of disapproval to start the application process. The wetland permit is issued by

the Town Board, and applications can be obtained from the Town Clerk. The process takes several months, and you should be prepared to propose some environmental measures that would offset the negative impacts of development so close to the wetlands. Be advised that you should have your project reviewed by the DEC before you apply for the town wetland permit.

In order to get a wetland permit, you should consider adopting mitigation measures which will offset the negative impact of your proposed building near the wetland. These mitigation measures might include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Moving an old, existing septic system further from the wetlands
- Planting drought resistant vegetation on your property
- Creating a vegetative buffer between your lawn and the shoreline to collect any runoff
- Installing French drains or other methods to control rainwater runoff from your roof
- Replacing an impervious driveway, such as asphalt, with a pervious driveway, such as gravel
- Removing an old bulkhead or dock that is in disrepair

B. Shoreline Vegetative Buffers

A building lot near the shore (or fresh water ponds) being newly developed needs a natural vegetative buffer to prevent runoff of lawn and garden chemicals to nearby waters, permit absorption of excessive nutrients and in some cases prevent erosion.

Owners of developed lots can help by creating new vegetative buffers of a reasonable width. However, owners of existing or new lots which have undisturbed areas within 100 feet of the wetlands must keep those buffer areas in a natural, undisturbed state except for limited cutting to remove dead, diseased or invasive plants, building a five foot wide path to a dock, or trimming tree limbs up to a height of 15 feet to permit water views.

Under no circumstance may any owner use fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides within 100 feet of the wetlands, even on already developed lawns.

C. Docks and Bulkheads

There is an ongoing debate about the building of bulkheads and docks along our shoreline. While the issue has not been resolved, it is a fact that our shoreline has been “hardened” over the years with more and more waterfront being bulkheaded, thereby altering the movement of sand and silts. Shorelines naturally move and change supplying inland creeks and estuaries with nutrient rich sediments that feed marine life. In keeping with this philosophy, the Town Board will not allow any new bulkheads unless there is a demonstrated imminent peril of destruction of significant structures.

You will need a permit from the Town Board in order to construct a dock. Many docks around the Island have catwalks built over the wetland grasses, to minimize disturbance to these areas.

Generally, the Town Board will not permit new docks that are more than 100 feet long or reach a 4 foot water depth, whichever is shorter, and the dock may not be wider than 5 feet. The placement and orientation of the dock are also important factors to mitigate negative environmental impacts. Permit applications may be obtained from the office of the Town Clerk.

The Town Code regulations on docks are in Chapters 53 – 9 through 53-15.

D. Public Beach Access

An important thing to remember is that your property ownership extends only to the mean high water mark. This means that other people have access to the shoreline below the mean high water mark to walk, fish, swim and harvest shellfish.



VII. EXPANSION OR REBUILDING

A. Permits

A repair may need a building permit, but an expansion or a reconstruction will certainly require a building permit. You may find you need other permits too. The Building Department can advise you.

B. Nonconforming Structures

Many houses on Shelter Island are nonconforming, which means that they were built before the existing laws came into effect and do not conform to them in some way. A nonconforming house can be used and repaired indefinitely, but if you want to reconstruct or expand that house the Town would like you to make it conform to the current law. If that is not possible, you must go to the Zoning Board of Appeals and show why the change is needed, why it cannot be made to conform, and that it won't have a negative impact on the neighborhood. You will need a disapproval letter from the Building Department in order to file with the Zoning Board of Appeals. The Zoning Board clerk has the application for filing.

C. Work near Wetlands

There are many older homes which were built within 100 feet of the wetlands. Consult the Building Department or Town Code Section 129-2 for guidelines on how you can reconstruct or expand. The town strongly discourages any expansion in the area within 75 feet of the wetlands, especially if it expands the structure closer to the wetlands.



VIII. USING ISLAND WATERS

A. Fishing, Clamming and Scalloping

If you own shorefront, it is not necessarily your private beach. The public has access to the beach from water's edge to three feet above mean high tide. Local residents and baymen can use the creek or bay bordering your land.

If you want take shellfish from town waters, you will need a shellfish permit. You can get one from the Town Clerk. Other rules are covered in Shelter Island Town Code Chapter 108.

B. Moorings

A mooring is like a permanent anchor on town underwater lands that you can tie your boat up to. You may rent a commercial mooring from several Town businesses and marinas. The Town has also established mooring grids, where you can get permission to install and maintain your own mooring in various locations around the island. If the grids are full, there is a waiting list. See the Town Clerk for information. Shelter Island Code Chapter 90.

C. Boat and Jet Skis Operations

The Town has a number of rules regarding the operation of your boat or jet-ski. They are designed to ensure that you, your riders, other boaters and swimmers are safe in our increasingly busy waters. There are specific rules limiting operation near bathers (Section 40-6), conduct of water-skiers (Section 40-7), jet-ski operation (Section 40-9.1), and anchoring (Section 128-4). A responsible boat operator knows and obeys the rules.

D. Beach Parking stickers for residents and guests

The Town has three lovely beaches, but if you want to park at the beach, even for a short time, you will need a beach parking sticker. You can get your beach parking permit, with instructions on how to display it, from the Town Clerk. For more information consult Town Code Chapter 36-6



IX. YOUR COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT

Welcome neighbor. Life on Shelter Island is different. We drive slower here and like it that way. The Town speed limit is 35 M.P.H. but the roads lend themselves to slower travel and many people walk and bike. Some folks just like to drive around and look at things, checking for wildlife along the shore and woodlands. As the popular bumper sticker says, “Slow down, you’re not off Island anymore.” We have all learned that there is such a thing as “Island time” on Shelter Island and that is one reason why we live here.

A. Be Proactive – Get Involved!

Community volunteers make this place work. Take a positive role in your community and keep it the special place that it is. The School, Youth Center, Senior Center, Fire Department, Red Cross Ambulance Crews, Town Committees, Historical Society, Nature Conservancy, Island Churches, American Legion, League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce, etc., all depend on the efforts of volunteers.

B. Town Government

We are a community of participatory town government with a supervisor and four town council members. Public town meetings and committees also play a key role in our town democracy. The town is also reliant to a considerable degree on volunteers in many government functions. We all have an interest in maintaining that special quality of Shelter Island

The Shelter Island Reporter prints the meeting schedule for all town government committees and Public Notices.

In addition to the resources noted in this guide there are several volunteer advisory committees that can help you with shore area ecology questions and practical advice. These committees serve in an advisory capacity to the Town Board and meet regularly. They include the:

Conservation Advisory Committee	Recreation Commission
Drug Abuse & Prevention Council	Water Advisory Committee
Waterways Management Advisory Committee	Zoning Board of Appeals
Planning Board	

The Town of Shelter Island maintains a website. You can find the Town Code in its entirety at this site as well as lists of everyone serving in public office. It is www.shelterislandtown.us

C. Phone Numbers

Here are a few phone numbers that users of this book may find useful:

Town Government	Phone	Fax
Assessor	749-1080	749-0162
Building Department	749-0772	749-9305
Police	749-0600	749-0637
Recreation Department	749-0302	
Supervisor	749-0015	749-0728

Town Board	749-0291	749-0728
Town Clerk	749-1166	749-3436
Zoning/Planning Boards	749-0758	749-0227

	Phone
North Ferry	749-0139
South Ferry	749-1200
Shelter Island Reporter	749-1000
Shelter Island Fire Department	749-0184
Shelter Island Library	749-0042
Shelter Island School	749-0302



To Summarize:

Help us make a difference! All homeowners can help by taking care of their properties in a way that also takes care of the environment.

Consider the impact of your actions on the water that you drink. Conserve it, and keep it free from pollutants. Protect our wetlands, woodlands and fields, so that they can do their job as natural water purifiers, benefiting our aquifer and coastal waters and the wildlife they support. **Together, we can all make a difference.**

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