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Grant will fund effort to address flooding in Watch Hill

By Dale P. Faulkner Sun staff writer

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King tides routinely cause flooding of parking lot near WHYC and portions of Bay Street in Watch Hill and stretches of Atlantic Avenue from high water in Winnapaug Pond. The town has received a grant that aims to address the issue. Sun file photo

WESTERLY — A \$250,000 grant from the state Department of Environmental Management will be used to address tidal flooding that impedes access to Napatree Point in Watch Hill.

The project is estimated to cost \$330,000, with the additional costs, in excess of the grant amount, coming from the Watch Hill Fire District and donations of the time of individuals who will work on the project. The grant award follows an initiative of the Watch Hill Conservancy to assess sea level rise mitigation options. Efforts to resolve flooding on the access route to Napatree Point was one of the action items that emerged from the conservancy's work, which included forums with business owners and conservation experts and volunteers.

"The Watch Hill Conservancy has been working hard with our partners in the community, especially the fire district, in developing solutions to the impending threats from sea level rise in Watch Hill. We are so grateful for the support from the state DEM Resiliency Grant fund. This grant provides the necessary funding to allow the project team to roll up our sleeves and get to work," Deborah Lamm, president and chairwoman of the Watch Hill Conservancy, said in a news release.

The goal is to mitigate the nuisance tide flooding that occurs in the Larkin Square parking lot and at the entrance to the Napatree Point Conservation Area.

The project will occur in two parts. Part one will elevate the 260-foot-long path to enter the Napatree Point Conservation Area. With an additional 3 feet of elevation, the entrance is expected to remain dry during very high tides. Part two will involve closing a gap in the seawall, improving the drainage systems at the paving and the seawall, and elevating and replacing part of the roadbed in the area between the Larkin Square shops and the Napatree entrance.

The work will be done in the offseason so residents, merchants and visitors won't be inconvenienced. The entire project will take approximately 21 months to complete, according to the news release.

The fire district's parks commission has been working on solutions to the flooding for years. The commission is coordinating the project on behalf of the fire district.

"The Watch Hill Fire District is thrilled to have received this grant from the state DEM Resiliency Grant Fund to help mitigate flooding downtown. We are extremely grateful to The Watch Hill Conservancy and the fire district's park commission for their continued dedication to this project and bringing it closer to becoming a reality," said Joan Beth Brown, Watch Hill Fire District moderator.

The grant was one of \$4.36 million in matching grants, announced on July 29, to 13 municipalities and community organizations for climate resilience projects across the state. Funding includes \$4 million from the 2018 Green Economy and Clean Water Bond, along with \$360,600 from the 2014 and 2016 Green Economy Bonds for flood mitigation and stormwater.

"We know that climate change poses an existential threat to our state and our 400 miles of coastline," said Gov. Gina M. Raimondo in a news release. "These grants will support our Resilient Rhody strategy and help us ensure that we are able to protect both our people and our natural spaces."

Grant applications were evaluated and scored by a review committee consisting of members of DEM, the state Infrastructure Bank and the state Coastal Resources Management Council. A request for proposals for an additional \$1 million from the 2018 Green Economy and Clean Water Bond for similar climate resilience projects will be released in late 2020 or early 2021, according to DEM.

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Reporter

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