

## **Pleasure Beach Water Taxi Service**

### **\$1.9 million earmark for Pleasure Beach Water Taxi Service in Connecticut**

The FY 2009 omnibus spending bill earmarks \$1.9 million to the Pleasure Beach Water Taxi Service in Connecticut.

The earmark is funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in an account intended for economic development initiatives in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. HUD's core mission is to combat homelessness, increase homeownership, and provide access to affordable housing.<sup>[1]</sup> Housing and Urban Development, as its name suggests, also cites urban development as one of its responsibilities.

### **Pleasure Beach has been abandoned for more than a decade**

Pleasure Beach, near the towns of Bridgeport and Stratford, Connecticut, was once a thriving beach community in Connecticut.

In 1996, a motorist passing over the wooden bridge connecting the 65-acre island to Bridgeport tossed a lit cigarette out of a car window. The already decaying bridge ignited and 125-feet of its span was burnt so badly that visitors at the beach had to be brought back to the mainland by ferry.

More than a decade later, the bridge remains charred and closed, and, consequently, it is an abandoned and empty beach.

### **The community has rejected efforts to provide access to the beach**

In 1994, with the bridge to Pleasure Island in a state of disrepair, the state Department of Transportation advised Bridgeport that it had set federal and state funding aside to build a new bridge. But in a show of apathy

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<sup>[1]</sup> <http://www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf12/hudmission.cfm>

Bridgeport didn't respond in time and the money was allotted to another project.

When the existing wooden bridge caught on fire two years later, the island was close down.

Estimated repairs to the Pleasure Island bridge would cost around \$30 million, and local leaders have debated the project, and the future of Pleasure Beach, for the past decade.

Stratford City Council member "Doc" Gunther held a public hearing to consider the construction of a more economical bridge to Pleasure Island. In response, one of the co-chairs of the meeting exclaimed, "Why build a bridge to Pleasure Beach? No one ever goes there."<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Even without a bridge or water taxi, visitors can still walk to Pleasure Beach**

Even without a bridge or a water taxi service, visitors still have a number of ways to get to Pleasure Beach.

Pleasure Island is not actually an island but rather a peninsula. Therefore you can walk down to the beach from the Lordship section of Stratford. This walk along Long Island Sound is just over a mile.

You can also row across the water from Bridgeport, which is only 750 feet.

### **In addition to Pleasure Beach, there are other popular and easily-accessible beaches in the Bridgeport area**

In addition to Pleasure Beach, there are other beaches in the Bridgeport area. These include Seaside Park<sup>[3]</sup> and Saint Mary's By The Sea Park<sup>[4]</sup> as well as Long Beach Park<sup>[5]</sup> and Short Beach Park in Stratford.<sup>[6]</sup>

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<sup>[2]</sup> <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~howardlake/amusement20/pleasurebeach.html>

<sup>[3]</sup> [http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/235914/seaside\\_park\\_in\\_bridgeport\\_ct\\_is\\_fun.html?cat=16](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/235914/seaside_park_in_bridgeport_ct_is_fun.html?cat=16)

<sup>[4]</sup> [http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/235927/for\\_a\\_wonderful\\_day\\_go\\_to\\_saint\\_marys.html?cat=16](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/235927/for_a_wonderful_day_go_to_saint_marys.html?cat=16)

<sup>[5]</sup> <http://www.townofstratford.com/content/1302/402/625/1100/5066/5072.aspx>

<sup>[6]</sup> [http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/251882/have\\_fun\\_at\\_short\\_beach\\_park\\_in\\_stratford.html?cat=16](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/251882/have_fun_at_short_beach_park_in_stratford.html?cat=16)

## **Local mayor says Pleasure Beach is not a priority**

Recently, a local committee was formed to study the possible reconstruction of the bridge, using a \$150,000 state grant.

In September of 2008, Stratford Mayor James R. Miron, disagreed with the study, stating, “they’re wasting their time, it shows an utter lack of understanding of state government and the state budgeting system.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Mayor Miron said the priority should be focused on another bridge, stuck in the up position for a decade, and Bridgeport schools.

Miron believes “leaders should focus on local issues, and that there’s been no attempt to rebuild the bridge to Pleasure Beach in the 12 years since it burned because there’s no support for it.”<sup>[8]</sup>

With the construction of the bridge at an impasse, attention has turned towards a water taxi service that could ferry visitors to the island.

A water taxi was proposed by several Bridgeport council members. It would depart from the Port Jefferson ferry terminal, giving Bridgeport residents direct access to their beach in lieu of a bridge.

## **Bridgeport area has spent half-a-million dollars on lobbying in recent years, enough to pay for one-fourth of the water tax earmark**

Since 2002, the City of Bridgeport<sup>[9]</sup> and the Bridgeport Port Authority<sup>[10]</sup> spent \$500,000 on lobbying, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

This amounts to one-fourth of the total cost of the water taxi service that Bridgeport would receive from the omnibus.

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<sup>[7]</sup> [http://www.acorn-online.com/joomla15/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9677:new-span-to-pleasure-beach-could-block-long-beach-west-sale&catid=186:local-news&Itemid=517](http://www.acorn-online.com/joomla15/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9677:new-span-to-pleasure-beach-could-block-long-beach-west-sale&catid=186:local-news&Itemid=517)

<sup>[8]</sup> [http://www.acorn-online.com/joomla15/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9677:new-span-to-pleasure-beach-could-block-long-beach-west-sale&catid=186:local-news&Itemid=517](http://www.acorn-online.com/joomla15/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9677:new-span-to-pleasure-beach-could-block-long-beach-west-sale&catid=186:local-news&Itemid=517)

<sup>[9]</sup> <http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/clientsum.php?lname=City+of+Bridgeport%2C+CT&year=2008>

<sup>[10]</sup> <http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/clientsum.php?year=2008&lname=Bridgeport+Port+Authority&id=>

## **Bridgeport is likely to seek additional funds for Pleasure Beach recreational improvements**

Bridgeport City Council President John Fabrizi in 2003 stated, "In addition to the funding for the water taxis you have to talk about police protection and fire protection, running water, electricity and issues of that nature. It's not as simple as just finding funding for water taxis. The city has other obligations if it's going to allow people to use the beach there."<sup>[11]</sup>

Other ideas have been kicking around for use of the island itself, including a par three golf course, a driving range, a batting cage or maybe a summer camp, but so far these are only ideas.

Bridgeport Mayor Bill Finch notes that on Pleasure Island, "we have a closed park, we want an open park, but we have no money to do it."<sup>[12]</sup>

So taxpayers can probably expect that Bridgeport will once again rely on its Washington lobbyists and their friends in Congress to earmark more funds to spend on recreational projects in their community.

In fact, in addition to the water tax to Pleasure Beach, Bridgeport will receive millions of dollars from other earmarks contained in the 2009 omnibus.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **The Congressman who requested the Pleasure Beach earmark is no longer is a member of Congress**

*The Connecticut Post* reports "Republican Christopher Shays may not be in Congress anymore, but his ghost lives on, at least for another week," noting that the omnibus spending bill before Congress "is stuffed with earmark requests from last year, including \$24.8 million that Shays sought primarily for the 4th District."

Among these is the \$1,900,000 earmark for the Pleasure Beach Water Taxi Service.

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<sup>[11]</sup> <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~howardlake/amusement20/pleasurebeach.html>

<sup>[12]</sup> [http://www.acorn-online.com/joomla15/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9677:new-span-to-pleasure-beach-could-block-long-beach-west-sale&catid=186:local-news&Itemid=517](http://www.acorn-online.com/joomla15/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9677:new-span-to-pleasure-beach-could-block-long-beach-west-sale&catid=186:local-news&Itemid=517)

<sup>[13]</sup> [http://www.connpost.com/ci\\_11801799](http://www.connpost.com/ci_11801799)

