

Environment Corps

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Climate Corps Role Play Exercise (Fall 2021)

Role Playing Exercise

Fall 2021

Background information: East Southport is a mid-sized town on the Connecticut shore. A small neighborhood (The Point) is exposed to Long Island Sound on three sides. There are 16 houses located on The Point as well as a public, town owned beach and The Tidal Retreat (The Retreat), a summer beach bar popular with millennials.

The houses were originally seasonal dwellings on large lots but a few were torn down and converted to million dollar year round residences. Several other houses were purchased some time ago and have been upgraded over the years by remortgaging the property. Others have been in a family for generations and have multiple owners.

The beach is closed in spring due to nesting Piping Plovers, a federally endangered species, and sometimes in the summer, due to high coliform counts after heavy precipitation. It is not a popular beach except at night by teenagers looking for a place to have a few beers and..... Town Public Works Dept. employees regularly have to clean up what they leave behind.

The Retreat gets noisy on some weekends, which annoys the neighbors. At times the police are called. Neighbors have repeatedly called the Liquor Control Board and town officials in an attempt to shut it down. They have not been successful.

The only access to The Point is by Submerge Road that runs through a tidal wetland. All the residents are on septic tanks, which periodically fail due to high water table or flooding from storms. The water in wells serving the houses and The Retreat occasionally taste salty. Submerge Road, as well as other roads on The Point, floods frequently during very high tides, restricting access to and from the homes, town beach and the Tidal Retreat. The flooding is becoming more frequent and the residents on The Point are raising concerns about sea level rise. Some feel that the situation is hopeless and will only get worse. They are worried about the cost of flood insurance and its impact on property values. They want the town to buy them out. Others on The Point aren't happy about the cost of flood insurance but really like living on the coast. They are demanding that the town do something to protect their properties. They pay their taxes and feel their lives and livelihood are in danger. Some people who don't live on The Point argue that it's not their problem and don't want their tax money spent on a few residents who live on The Point. Town officials are concerned about loss of valuable tax base if they buy out the properties and how they will makeup the lost revenue. They are also concerned about getting re-elected.

The East Southport Town Council has received a petition from some of the property owners to buy them out. Not all the property owners on The Point want to sell. The Council has decided to hold a public hearing to get input from the citizens and others before they vote. The Council consists of conservatives, moderates, and liberals.

The council must vote yes or no to:

Acquire the property, by eminent domain if necessary, and issue general obligation bond to buy out all the property owners, tear down houses and use the property for something to be decided later. The bond will raise annual taxes only slightly for 20 years. Like a loan, the town will have to pay interest on the bond. If the properties are acquired, some people in town want to leave the land undeveloped with the intention of it becoming a wetland, thus offering better storm protection and other ecosystem services. A few town officials think the only way they can achieve public support to buy out the property owners is to turn the property into recreational fields. The youth sports groups are very vocal and they vote. They even have a preliminary plan for what to do with the property—ball fields, Dog Park, skate park, pickleball courts and improve the town beach. All of which would increase the amount of the bond. There is a 50% matching grant from the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and a 35% matching state grant to buy the properties. The town will only have to contribute 15% of the cost. The time to apply for the grants is approaching quickly.

The Public Hearing: The Town government consists of a Mayor and Town Council. The Mayor does not have a vote. The Town Council has decided to hold a public hearing and let everyone have their say before they make a decision. **Due to the large number of people expected to testify, speakers have 4 minutes to make their case and 3 minutes to answer questions.** Questions can come from the council as well as the other people testifying.

Day 1 of the hearing—8 people will testify and respond to questions. The remaining time will be used for reporters to interview participants, the public to lobby town councilors, town councilors to get out of the room as soon as they can, etc.

Day 2 of the hearing—the remainder of people will testify and answer questions and time left for councilors to publically discuss their positions, reporters to ask questions, etc.

Day 3—Councilors will vote and defend their vote. Reporters will read their op ed/articles. The remaining time will be used for a class discussion.

Roles: these will assigned randomly by picking names out of a hat. You can switch with someone else but do it as soon as you can. The first paper is due 10/05/21.

People to testify at the public hearing:

- Osborne Ferdinand Pflingst III—Obbie, to his friends at the Yacht Club, is a successful hedge fund manager who, 5 years ago, bought a waterfront piece of property on The Point. He tore down the old house and built a 9750 sq. ft. McMansion. His house has been built in compliance with FEMA regulations and the town's building code. He has been pushing others on The Point to build a berm/seawall that will protect them from future storms and sea level rise. He wants the town to partially fund the cost.
- Ima Onnafence—Ima's great grandfather bought a modest cottage for seasonal use on The Point many years ago. It has since been passed down to his decedents and is now owned by 3 different families. They have upgraded it over the years and have a mortgage.

They love spending summers there but are concerned about sea level rise and the increasing cost of flood insurance.

- Donna Wannago—Donna is 82 years old and lives on The Point with her 89 year old sister. The house has been in the Donna's family for 100 years. She and her sister were born in the house and like things the way they are. Donna's sister has health problems and Donna is concerned that having to move may cause them to get worse.
- Murf "The Surf" Murphy owns The Retreat. He lives above the bar during the summer and makes enough money to spend winters at his house in Aruba. He is planning to retire soon and has not invested anything in The Retreat for some time. He needs to sell The Retreat to fund his retirement.
- Homer Ball is president of the East Southport Youth Sports Parents Association (ESYSPA). Participation in the town youth sports has been growing every year and there is real competition for playing time on the fields. ESYSPA has also decided to expand their offerings by promoting construction of a skate park, dog park, horseshoe pits, pickleball courts and badminton. They need more land to build additional sports facilities.
- Gotta B. Green is a resident of East Southport but does not live on The Point. She is president of the local chapter of Wake-Up America, Save our Planet (WUASOP). She has been instrumental in starting a town appointed committee that is studying the effects of climate change and sea level rise in town. They have just started and some members are trying to be politically sensitive. Gotta, however, is a rabid environmentalist and is very vocal.
- U. B. Gone- U. B. is a nationally recognized climate scientist and a strong advocate for managed retreat. He sees the East Southport decision as an example of how managed retreat can work in the rest of the country. He is viewed as an outsider trying to stir up trouble by some members of the town council and as a progressive looking to the future by others.
- Grover Nordquist is the head of Lower Our Taxes (LOT), a group of citizens that annually opposes the budget and will not support anything that increases taxes. In the past, they have collected enough signatures on a petition to force a budget referendum.
- Lotta Carbon—Lotta is the regional representative of the Organization of Climate Change Deniers (OCCD). She travels throughout New England and testifies against anything that appears to support climate change. She is well funded the Pepsi sisters and comes prepared with a significant amount of documentation to support her position.
- B. Coming Hot is a climate scientist who has been asked by the town to give a range of possible scenarios for sea level rise and what that will mean for residents of The Point. B. Coming also has a lot of documentation and the town has asked him to make a recommendation for the best option considering sea level rise and increased storm surge from more frequent storms.
- Deep Thinker works in the planning and permitting division for the CT Dept. Of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). He has looked at the options and has concerns about each one as they relate to state permitting requirements. It is the policy of DEEP to not allow filling in of wetlands, which raising the road would do, unless there is no feasible alternative. He is also concerned about the impacts of doing nothing and the

costs of buying out the property. He has received input from other divisions at DEEP— Open Space and Recreation, Water Resources, Fish and Wildlife. The DEEP Commissioner is a political appointee and doesn't want to make a decision. He has left it up to Deep to make a recommendation on behalf of DEEP. He is worried about his job if he makes the wrong decision.

- Mayor Beachy is in his first term as Mayor and has no vote on the Town Council. He has decided to testify at the public hearing to raise his profile in town. He is up for reelection and realizes that this is a big issue. His popularity has slipped recently due to a recent public disclosure of an incident with his neighbor over landscaping.
- Lookatta Future is the town planner and has been asked to provide information on how the town will be impacted by each of the options from a land use perspective. Although he doesn't want to, Lookatta has been asked by the Town Council to make a recommendation on which option is best for the community.
- Sella Lot is a realtor with Sea View Realty. Sea View sells a lot of coastal property in the area and has concerns about the impact of each of the options on the coastal real estate market. The CT Board of Realtors has asked her to represent them at the public hearing and take a position which is in the best interest of realtors across the state.
- Adoren Cash is an international real estate investor who owns several properties on The Point. He has owned them for a long time and doesn't have a mortgage. During the summer he rents them as vacation cottages and during the winter rents some to students at East Southport Community College.

REPORTERS—

- Lefty Liberal- Has been a reporter/anchor for CNN for 20+ years. Has liberal leanings and is known for his tough questioning of those who appear on his show.
- I.M. Wright-Has been a conservative voice on radio and television for many years. Recently she landed a job on Fox News as host of the Conservative View.
- Waddis Supp is a reporter for the International News Service which has been covering climate issues for years. Waddis grew up in Amsterdam and is interested in how local government in the United States is reacting to rising sea levels. She is now based in Washington, DC.
- Kan Speerecy is a reporter for The Real Truth. He believes climate change is a hoax created by China to destroy the US economy. He has written articles about climate scientists to getting grants to line their pockets with government cash. Surveys of the Real Truth's audience show that 71% believe Elvis has been reincarnated as Bigfoot and is living in a cave in Canada and 68% believe that 5G high-speed telecommunications technology spreads the coronavirus.

TOWN COUNCIL-

- Bernie Sandinista is the leader of the East Southport Progressive Party and has liberal views on most everything. Bernie has been on the council for 25 years.

- Jordy Jimbo is a member of the East Southport Tea Party. He is very conservative and a big supporter of small government. Has been on the council for 3 terms. Has a very vocal base.
- Susan Merkowski is a moderate Republican in her first term on the council. She defeated a 5 term Democratic councilor who was caught a month before the election making a hush money payment to his former girlfriend.
- King Angus is an Independent. On the council for five terms, he is often the swing vote on many issues. He thoughtfully considers issues, asks a lot of questions and his opinion is respected by both liberals and conservatives.
- Janet Duckworth, an Independent who tends to lean to the left, is newly elected councilor who upset an older long-term incumbent. Although she is an independent, she has strong support from young progressive voters.

The Assignment: 2 papers

1. Everyone will write a 2 page character development paper. This will **not** be on the issue itself. It should include your age, occupation, educational background, family make-up, events in the past have shaped your decision making, etc. What is your character's view on climate change? How did your views develop and what influenced this view? Have some fun with this. Be creative. Think about people in the news or who you know or research what characteristics/views your character might have. Due 10/05/21
2. The second paper will depend on your character:
 - The good citizens of East Southport and others testifying at the hearing:
 You will be presenting written testimony in the form of a 3 page paper. You must make an argument that supports your character's position. You should also provide reasons why the opposition to your position falls short. The paper should will be used as the basis for your oral testimony at the Town Council public hearing. Due 11/16/21
 - For the Press:
 You will be writing a 3 page paper (article) for your news program after all testimony is in and before the council renders a decision. You should interview those who testified and members of the council. You can do this at any point during the public hearing process. You can slant the article in any way that you think the organization you are representing might do. Due 11/30/21
 - For the Town Councilors
 A 3 page paper on your vote and why you voted the way that you did. You need to include your reasons for rejecting the other position. Due 11/30/21

Things to consider:

- Try to put yourself in the position of the person you are playing, even if you don't agree with it. Think about what someone in real life would do when faced with the issue.
- During the semester you can lobby the councilors, form alliances with others, use trickery and deceit, etc.
- Think of the arguments that people who oppose your position will make and come up with counter arguments.
- Consider your audience. Who are you trying to get to accept your arguments? Some people already are on your side, some are open-minded and others will oppose you no matter what you say. Anticipate questions and answer them before they are asked when presenting your testimony.
- For your oral testimony, hit the high points. The time goes by faster than you may think. Practice out loud!

If you have any questions or need to talk something out, DO NOT hesitate to call or email Bruce or Juliana at any time except after a party at 3 AM. If you are at a party, be sure to wear a mask and social distance.