



## WEEKAPAUG YACHT CLUB

April 7, 2023

Dear Members of the Weekapaug Yacht Club,

I apologize for the length of this letter, but I have several important updates to share with you. First, I am pleased to report that our new clubhouse will officially open in mid-June! Our Clubhouse Committee, the board and our volunteers are putting the finishing touches on what promises to be a great base of operations for our junior sailing program and Kids Camp, and an amazing place for members to socialize with friends and family and enjoy incredible views of our mooring field, the Pond, and Block Island Sound. **Please mark your calendars and plan to attend the formal Clubhouse Dedication Party on Saturday, July 15.** It will be a time to celebrate a new chapter in our club's history and thank all who contributed their time, talents, and financial support to make the new clubhouse possible.

I am also pleased to report that General Manager Mark Bullinger and the Sailing Committee, have assembled a great team of sailing instructors and camp counselors. The club has also made a significant investment in upgrading the 420 and Opti fleets, including new sails and rigging for the 420s, improved storage, and a rigorous maintenance program. With that in mind, **registration for junior sailing and Kids Camp will begin on our website at [weekapaugyachtclub.com](http://weekapaugyachtclub.com) on April 10.** Please note that we will not be requesting payment at registration. Members will be invoiced for their program fees after their registrations have been reviewed and confirmed. I encourage you to register early for what we expect will be a great 2023 season.

We remain a club with a wonderful volunteer spirit. Members can be seen throughout the season banging nails to repair the docks, moving boats in and out of storage, planning and setting up tables for social events, helping with regattas, and more. If you are not already involved, I

encourage you to raise your hand and volunteer for one or more of the activities on the volunteer form available [here](#). Your help will be greatly appreciated!

While the new clubhouse has captured most of the headlines, the board has been hard at work on two equally important initiatives that I wanted to share with you: 1) a rethinking of our membership structure, and 2) the formal introduction of the Club Rules as required by our recently amended bylaws. I will devote the remainder of this letter to these two topics.

### **New Membership Framework**

The building of our new clubhouse brought to the fore an important question. Who are the members of the Weekapaug Yacht Club? The answer is particularly important now because we have a \$4 million clubhouse on a precious little plot of land on Quonochontaug Pond that belongs to you, our members. For most clubs, who their members are is an easy question to answer, but for the Weekapaug Yacht Club, the answer has been less clear due to our rather unique membership structure.

It is fair to say that we have had a rather fluid membership over the years, with members choosing to join some summers and not others; on and off and on again. In addition, Social members are not allowed to vote on club matters and technically have no stake in the club. And when it comes to funding the cost of capital projects like the new clubhouse, we have not had the ability to assess our members as most clubs do. Finally, our membership has grown significantly, almost doubling in the past five years, and for the first time in our history, we need to ask the question of how many more members we can reasonably accommodate while still maintaining the quality of our programs and services.

The board's Membership Committee, chaired by Vice Commodore Julie Wingerter, was charged by the board to rethink our membership structure and put forward an approach better suited to the Weekapaug Yacht Club of today and tomorrow. The committee started with the following goals:

1. With few exceptions, ensure that all members have an equal stake in the club, have access to all the club's member privileges, and have the right to elect the board and vote on important matters that may be brought before the membership.
2. Ensure that all members are committed to the club and willing to continue as members from year to year so the club has a more stable membership base and a stronger financial foundation going forward.
3. Assess whether there is a practical limit to the number of members the club can support and determine the limiting factors. If a cap is necessary, develop a fair and transparent process for imposing a membership cap and for accepting new members.

With those goals in mind, the Membership Committee recommended, and the board approved, the following changes to our membership structure effective this season.

Eliminate the Distinction Between Full and Social Memberships - The Board has discontinued Social memberships for the 2023 season. It was noted that Social members had virtually the same club privileges as Full members including daily use of the clubhouse, free use of kayaks and paddleboards, and attendance at all social events. Full members had additional privileges such as the ability to rent a mooring or enroll children in club programs but had to pay additional mooring and program fees to access those privileges. With the opening of our new clubhouse, which both Full and Social members can equally enjoy, the board decided the membership dues for Social and Full members should be the same. Furthermore, the Board felt it was important to have as many members as possible have an equal stake and voice in the club and its future, including the right to vote on club matters.

**Accordingly, all Social memberships have been converted to Full memberships for the 2023 season** and will be invoiced at the Full member rate. Social members who prefer a different membership category should contact the club at [info@weekapaugyachtclub.com](mailto:info@weekapaugyachtclub.com). The board encourages all former Social members to become Full Family or Full Individual members.

Patron Membership - The Board recognizes that a small number of members chose to be Social members mainly to support the club, possibly attend a couple of social events, but otherwise not use the club. In recognition of that small but valued group of members, the Board will continue to offer Patron memberships.

Patron memberships are offered to individuals who support the club's mission through a donation of \$250 or more to the club's Nat Earle Fund, its capital reserves, or for general purposes. Patron members and members of their immediate family may attend the following four social events in 2023: the Clubhouse Dedication Party on July 15, the July and August awards dinners, and the Chowderfest on Thanksgiving weekend. They may also visit the clubhouse and attend other social events as guests of Full Family and Individual members subject to the club's guest policies. Otherwise, Patron members do not have club privileges, may not vote on club matters, and will be considered a new member should they wish to become a Full member in the future.

Junior Memberships - The club will continue to offer Junior memberships at a discounted dues level to individuals between 21 and 30 years of age.

Visiting Memberships - The club will continue to offer Visiting memberships of two weeks or less in duration. However, Visiting memberships may be limited depending on whether there is available capacity in our junior sailing program and/or Kids Camp.

Guaranteed Membership/Possible Membership Cap - The attractiveness of the new clubhouse and the popularity of the club's sailing and Kids Camp programs increase the potential of a surge in memberships that may exceed the club's capacity to effectively serve its members. Accordingly, **all members who were Full Family, Full Individual, Social Family, and Social Individual, members in 2022 are guaranteed membership in 2023 as Full members.** Former Junior members will also be guaranteed membership in 2023. **Members should let the club know by May 15 if they do not plan to renew their membership** at [info@weekapaugyachtclub.com](mailto:info@weekapaugyachtclub.com).

Membership applications by **new** members (those who were not members in 2022) will be **conditional** until May 15, 2023 at which time the Board will determine if the number of new

membership applications, together with 2023 renewals, exceed the club's membership capacity. This will be driven largely by how many new members plan to enroll children in the junior sailing program and Kids Camp. Although unlikely, should the board determine the club will exceed its membership limit, it will establish a fair process for accepting new members up to the cap, which could include using a first-come first-served approach. Accordingly, **new members are encouraged to submit their membership applications and program registrations promptly.**

Initiation Fees/Grandfathering of 2023 Memberships/Capital Charge - In order to encourage members to make a longer-term commitment to the club, the Board intends to introduce an initiation fee for **new** members beginning with the 2024 season. The initiation fee is currently expected to be set at \$2,000 for a Full Family membership and at \$1,000 for a Full Individual membership. **All 2023 Full members will be exempt from the initiation fee as long as they continue as members in 2024, so there is an extra incentive to be a Full member this season.** The board plans to develop procedures that allow members to place their memberships on hold if they must take a leave of absence for personal reasons. Initiation fees will not apply to Patron, Junior, and Visiting memberships.

Beginning with the 2024 season, the board also intends to introduce an annual capital charge of approximately \$100 per Full Family membership and \$50 per Full Individual membership. The Board intends to use capital charges and future initiation fees to build its capital reserves and ensure the club can maintain its sailboat and motorboat fleet, and new clubhouse, in top condition.

Guest Policy - Members are welcome to bring guests to the club, whether to attend social events, crew in fleet races, or to enjoy our beautiful pond in a kayak or paddle board. In the spirit of fairness to fellow members, members should limit hosting the same guest at the club to no more than four times during the season. Visits by a guest serving as crew for a member in regattas or club races will not count towards this limit. Frequent guests are encouraged to become members in any of the membership categories available.

2023 Dues - The board and General Manager Mark Bullinger developed a detailed operating budget for the 2023 season taking into account the requirements of our new clubhouse. Staffing

costs remain the most important driver of the club's expense structure and continue to increase as the employment market remains very tight. Still, the board approved a budget that includes only a modest increase in member dues. Sailing program and Kids Camp fees will remain at last year's levels except for Beginner Opti which will see a \$25 per week increase. The board believes its dues and fees remain very reasonable and competitive with other yacht clubs in New England.

#### 2023 Membership Dues

Family:	\$700
Individual	\$425
Junior	\$275
Patron	\$250 (minimum)
Visiting Family	\$450
Visiting Individual	\$300

**Members will be automatically invoiced for their membership dues based on the membership category they were in last year.** Former Social members will be invoiced as Full members as explained above.

#### **Member Handbook and Club Rules**

The club's bylaws, which were amended last year, required the board to develop our first formal set of Club Rules to help members, guests, and staff, understand expected norms of conduct while on club property and while representing the club at offsite events. The Club Rules also needed to include provisions to ensure the club could meet its commitments to the Weekapaug Fire District (WFD) and to the club's immediate neighbors. These commitments are memorialized in various agreements regarding the club's use of Sunfish/Opti Beach, use of the WFD parking area, and the potential for noise, light, and other disturbances from club-sponsored and private member events held at the clubhouse or on club property.

The Club Rules committee, led by Katie Davenport, took on this task and worked throughout the winter to look through the rules at other private clubs, identify best practices, and craft rules that

prioritized the safety and enjoyment of our members and were consistent with the “respectful and welcoming culture” reflected in our mission statement. The committee took the effort a step further by making the Club Rules a part of a new Member Handbook that assembles in one place important information regarding membership, member privileges, mooring procedures and regulations, parking rules, storage locker assignments, and other important information. The Member Handbook and Club Rules are available on our website at [weekapaugyachtclub.com](http://weekapaugyachtclub.com). I want to highlight a few aspects of the Club Rules that merit special mention.

Socializing in the New Clubhouse - The new clubhouse will make it possible for members to use the seating areas and decks to socialize with their friends and families during the day and early evenings. There will also be access to a kitchen and an ice machine so the clubhouse will be a perfect place to entertain. The rules encourage members to share prime seating areas (especially the decks), behave responsibly, clean up after themselves, and be mindful of noise when seated on decks later into the evening. Our General Manager Mark Bullinger will monitor usage of the various areas of the club this first season and determine whether we need to institute any more formal rules regarding member use of the clubhouse.

Reserving the Clubhouse for Private Member Events - A key benefit of being a member is also the ability to reserve a section or the entire clubhouse for private member events such as wedding receptions, rehearsal dinners, or private cocktail or dinner parties. Not surprisingly, given the breathtaking views and the wonderful ambiance of our new clubhouse, there is already considerable interest. These events may only be scheduled during the Spring and Fall as we did not want the clubhouse to be unavailable to members during the precious 10-week Summer season. A lot of thought went into establishing policies and procedures regarding private use of the clubhouse, including the required fees and insurance coverage and compliance with our neighbor and WFD agreements. The board’s goal was to set fees for private member events at a reasonable and competitive level, but high enough to more than cover the club’s costs and generate net income for the benefit of all members.

Please take time to familiarize yourself with the Member Handbook and the Club Rules and please forward any questions or suggestions to Mark Bullinger so we can document member feedback

and continue to improve and evolve this initial edition. I want to thank Katie and her committee for putting together an excellent resource for our members and thoughtful set of rules for our club.

In closing, I want to harken to the beginning and encourage you register for programs as soon as registration opens and make a point of being in Weekapaug on July 15 to celebrate the dedication of our new clubhouse. I also hope you take advantage of the many volunteer opportunities by filling out the volunteer form.

I cannot wait to see you on the decks of the new clubhouse enjoying a late afternoon refreshment after kayaking on the Pond, while watching Beetles, Optis, and 420s tack down the channel while little ones play in our fun new playground. Start making plans. It promises to be summer full of new possibilities at the Weekapaug Yacht Club!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Ad" followed by a long, horizontal flourish.

Commodore