

PRESS RELEASE

Southampton History Museum Files Lawsuit Against the Town of Southampton Alleging Seizure of Historic Conscience Point Land

Southampton, New York – August 15, 2025

The Southampton History Museum has filed a lawsuit in New York State Supreme Court against the Town of Southampton and Suffolk County, as a result of the Town's unlawful seizure of 2 acres of the Museum's 5 acres of waterfront land at the Conscience Point Historic Site & Nature Walk, which it has owned for more than 115 years. The lawsuit asks the Court to change the tax map back to its original lines and challenges the Town's abuse of power, describing collusion with private counsel to the Conscience Point Shellfish Hatchery, David Gilmartin of Greenberg Traurig, as part of a scheme to take the land. The Conscience Point Shellfish Hatchery was illegally using the Museum's land for commercial shell fishing and subletting to commercial tenants without permission.

The lawsuit clearly lays out the scheme and unilateral decision by the Town and Suffolk County to alter the official tax map lines, to claim Museum-owned land as its own, without any notice, hearing, or due process - a clear violation of any property owner's fundamental property and civil rights. The suit asks the Court to block the release of Town approved Community Preservation Funds (intended to be used to protect our natural habitat), which were slotted to be used by the Conscience Point Shellfish Hatchery to develop the site as a commercial shell fishing hub. The suit also requests that the Court order the Town to stop interfering in the private eviction proceedings against the Conscience Point Shellfish Hatchery. The abuse of power by the Town and the County should send a chilling message to all property owners.

Sarah Kautz, executive director of the Southampton History Museum, expressed disappointment in the Town's actions. "It is devastating to see the Town suddenly turn its power and resources against the Museum, undoing decades of our work together to protect the historic, cultural, and natural resources at Conscience Point from commercial development," she said, "In the spirit of our once positive relationship benefiting all Southampton residents, we hope the Town will reconsider so we can move forward in reconciliation and good faith."

"A tremendous amount of time and resources have been devoted to preserving Conscience Point for more than 115 years," explained Averitt Buttry, President of the Board of Trustees. He noted that the Museum was incorporated as a nonprofit in 1910 to safeguard Conscience Point from commercial development. "We remain committed to upholding the integrity of our mission and duty to preserve Conscience Point. It is our fiduciary duty." He added, "It's hard to fathom just how distressed our founders would be to see the Town not only allow this beloved historic site to

be commercially developed, but to see the Town play such an active role to facilitate it is just beyond comprehension.”

History of Conscience Point

Conscience Point plays a significant and unique role in commemorating one of the most consequential events in our shared past: the landing of the first colonial English settlers in New York State in 1640 and the unimaginable changes that followed their arrival. The property is a Town-designated historic site and eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. While the Article 78 proceeding is a time-consuming and expensive endeavor, the Museum has been forced to take this step to preserve Conscience Point and to defend against government overreach.

The Southampton History Museum

The Southampton History Museum is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization chartered by the New York State Board of Regents and incorporated under the New York State Education Department. Established in 1898 and incorporated in 1910, the Museum preserves and educates about local history and culture through historic sites, archives, collections, and engaging public programs.

For additional information, please contact counsel to the Southampton History Museum:

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