

PUBLIC COMMENTS – Sept. 18 (Ft. Hancock 21st Century Committee)

We are thankful for the opportunity to come before you today. My name is Susan Sandlass Gardiner. Our family has been part of this community since 1887. We care about both the past and its future. We have a love for this community just as many others do. The Sandlass family has largely represented the recreation and entertainment industry in our region. We are also public servants and involved in the life and commerce of our town.

Everyone has been concentrated on the military history on Sandy Hook. The “Lost Resort” at Highland Beach is also a powerful history and just as much a part of Sandy Hook as the Sandy Hook Lighthouse or the Twin Lights Lighthouse is part of Highlands’ history. They are all part of the story we value so much. These are locations that stand-alone as vital to our local history. There are now over 12,000 views of a recent Chris Brenner documentary telling the story of “Highland Beach: Destinations Past.” This film shows us the fascination with an amazing story in our local region and the hunger to connect to the birth of tourism on the northernmost part of the Jersey Shore at Sandy Hook. The Sandlass House is the last remaining element linked to a phenomenon of social change belonging to our region. This experience survives as a symbol in the house that still exists today after 122 yrs. on the peninsula. This was also the birth of a social movement vital to our country’s history. It evolved here on our shores at the turn of the 20th century and its impact and this history of our forefathers is closely tied to the activities of tourism on Sandy Hook today.

The house evokes a compelling element that rests in the last visible piece of this local history as a reflection of this social change. The significance itself is embodied by this resort’s last remaining structure located at the entrance to the park at Sandy Hook. We as the public care about what happens to our local history. When our history and our lives are actually changed by events that occurred and impact the way we view life, it deserves to be acknowledged, saved and celebrated. The “Lost Resort’s” history still gives us one last opportunity here and now to preserve this symbol, the Sandlass Building, as an individual monument with a vital role to play in the community. Just as the Sandy Hook Lighthouse stands for our country’s ability to survive challenges and care for our citizens, so does the history of the “Lost Resort.” We find a connection to a re-birth so needed in our community today. This resort succeeded in building community and a new way of life for its time. The commerce it engendered alone brought prosperity to Sea Bright, Highlands and Sandy Hook. The ratables at Highland Beach in one given summer were a quarter of a million dollars at the turn of the 20th century. Translate that into today’s dollars and it would make a difference even now.

We feel this building has the potential to be a revitalization hub for our local area once again, just as the Sandy Hook Lighthouse and Twin Lights. Our rich legacy on Sandy Hook in recreation and leisure offers a golden opportunity to come together to engage the community in an endeavor that fascinates them. We want to build upon this fervor to assist in bringing back our community through re-building

efforts that will encourage growth and sustainability. Living at the Jersey Shore requires the same kind of fortitude that any region struck by natural disasters must undertake. These can occur in every segment of our nation whether it is wind, water or fire. We do not have all the answers today. We ask your assistance and help as an advisory committee interested in the survival of Sandy Hook and its ability to thrive. Give us a chance, as part of the re-building initiatives to create a Center in this building that brings much-needed resources to our area and more than the resources, the hope and the will to make it happen.

The Sandlass Building #600 is now under imminent threat due to neglect following Storm Sandy. In just the past year, windows have been broken allowing the elements to come in, stairs are coming loose and, at times, doors are found open. This is too precious a cultural resource to allow this deterioration to continue. Recognize the historical value and help us to preserve and guard its worth at a time when we need so deeply to embody the historical spirit this story conveys in our local history. The building is different from others on Sandy Hook because it speaks to a different issue and a “visionary” era that was here on this land at one time. It’s a symbol of what generated and developed community. There are linkages to many residents still here that embrace and see that community.

Recreation and leisure is still the largest commercial venture on Sandy Hook. This “Lost Resort” and the last remaining structure is “**our**” history. Let this monument live as a testament to our ability to thrive. The energy, time and talents are great in this community. Please assist us in bringing this vision alive and make a difference in the re-building of Sea Bright, Highlands and Sandy Hook. We are here to turn the tide in recognizing the importance of this history. People, who are not here anymore, contributed to developing this community. Their legacy would be interested in contributing to its future. The image of the house and its history, as a vital factor in the growth of the Jersey Shore, would engender the contributions and infrastructure that would be able to move us forward. Blood, sweat and tears built this area through the decades and this is an opportunity to move the community towards the future.

By working together, we have the power to make the Sandlass Building a destination once again. At the very least, local industry is searching for hospitality sites. The waterfront dock options, walking by bridge and boardwalks can be a solution to parking challenges. We’ve reached a sink or swim point. Allow the Sandlass Building to become a beacon for transformation as the Twin Lights and Sandy Hook Lighthouse connect over Sandy Hook in a pyramid of strength for building towards the future. In conclusion, give us a hand to see the spirit of this house triumph over adversity as it has through its 12 decades on this peninsula. This structure is indelibly linked to its roots on Sandy Hook. If you haven’t already seen the documentary, I would like to invite each of you to discover the magical history of Highland Beach. Preview the story and see the visual images of what used to be in days gone by.

The history of Sandlass Pavilion is also woven into the historical fabric of this military reservation at Ft. Hancock. The Sandlass House is the home of someone who made an important contribution to our community and our nation during WWII. Lt. Commander Henry Sandlass, served as the Commander of a Coast Guard Freighter in the South Pacific during the war years. Upon his return, Lt. Commander Henry Sandlass remained active in the Coast Guard Reserves for many years. The Sandlass Pavilion was the staging site for military maneuvers starting the day WWII was declared with archival photos of these links to Ft. Hancock history. There is significant photographic documentation reflecting these bonds. This missing history exists and deserves inclusion as part of the historic preservation of Sandy Hook. NPS has a role as conservator of the Sandlass House and its connection to the Ft. Hancock military history. We ask that it be honored.

We ask you to join our efforts and assist us in making these goals a reality. Thank you for sharing your time with us today.

~SUSAN SANDLASS GARDINER



Henry Sandlass, Commander of Coast Guard Freighter in the South Pacific, WWII