



## East Lyme's Overlook Park Progress Report #52

*Robert S. De Santo, PhD., East Lyme Public Trust Foundation*

On August 10, 2016, the above photograph was taken at 10:40 am as Acela #2029 streaked past the Niantic Bay Boardwalk at its western terminus — Hole in the Wall Beach and underpass.

Over the past eleven years, since the park opened on July 15, 2005, the number of annual visits to the Niantic Bay Boardwalk has grown to an estimated 100,000 by the end of 2016.

When it began planning for, and raising funds to build, the 1.1 mile long "Boardwalk" in the early 1990's, the intent of the East Lyme Public Trust Foundation (ELPTF) was to create a unique coastal community park; a gift in the public trust. Indeed, the Boardwalk is recognized by most as a significant aspect of East Lyme and as an example of how a focused and persistent nonprofit organization, of relatively few members, can spearhead a major public project valued at several millions of dollars drawn virtually entirely from federal and state grants.

The mission of the ELPTF is, and has always been, to preserve and enhance the quality of life and economic health of East Lyme and the neighboring communities through the encouragement, coordination, and execution of projects designed to achieve these goals as has been demonstrated by its creation of the Boardwalk.

From that perspective, the Foundation gave four major donations to the Town of East Lyme in the late 1999 that made it possible for the Town to undertake the final design and construction of the Boardwalk. These four interrelated donations included:

1. All federal and state environmental permits and requirements needed in order to design and build the Overlook, which is commonly known as "The Boardwalk."
2. Amtrak Beach (\$2.1 million market value), and three adjacent land parcels on which to construct the Overlook.
3. Preliminary design drawings, a land survey, geotechnical testing, and preliminary specifications to create the Overlook.
4. \$3.8 million in federal/state grant monies (\$1.5 million State Bonds, \$2.3 million federal ISTEAA grant).

By 1999, the Foundation had donated the project and essentially all its pieces to East Lyme because Federal Law had changed and thus then allow only government entities, such as a town, to receive grants for such projects as the Boardwalk. Therefore, the Foundation was no longer able to receive these monies and, East Lyme accepted the gift and was able to complete the project using the grants transferred in 1999, which were valued at \$3,800,000 and land at \$2,270,000. The transfer worked and the Boardwalk became a reality six years later in 2005!

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