

## Early childhood center proposed for Groton

By KIMBERLY DRELICH  
Day Staff Writer

As the state works to expand early childhood education, school officials are proposing an early childhood center at the former Mary Morrisson Elementary School in Groton.

Superintendent of Schools Susan Austin said the plan would expand and provide a dedicated space for the programs that lay the foundation for children's education.

The proposal's first phase calls for accommodating programs for 4-year-old children at the center and making all programs full day, said Austin.

Groton was awarded two grants from the state Office of Early Childhood for the proposed center: \$600,000 for renovations to the former elementary school, which closed in 2021, and \$600,000 for the first year's operating expenses. School officials are seeking more grant funding for later phases.

### Full-day programs for 4-year-olds

The school district currently offers prekindergarten/transitional kindergarten classrooms for students getting ready for kindergarten, as well as half-day integrated preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds who receive special education services and their peers. It also has an Applied Behavior Analysis classroom.

Under the proposal, there would be nine full-day classrooms for prekindergarten, a program that transitions 4-year-olds to kindergarten, at Mary Morrisson. Each class would be capped at 18 students.

In addition, an Applied Behavior Analysis classroom, now at Mystic River Magnet School, would be housed at Mary Morrisson and be a full-day for 4-year-olds and a half-

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## STROLLING ON THE SEDIMENT



SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

Lainey, 7, left, and Lila Fisher, 5, play in the exposed sediment at Old Killingly Pond on Wednesday. The sisters live with their parents Kellie and Justen Fisher near the Old Killingly Pond Dam. Since the controlled release at Old Killingly Pond Dam began on Oct. 26, 2025, residents estimate that the 120-acre pond, which straddles the state border, has already lost over 12 feet of water.

## Money issues threaten history

### Financial uncertainty puts future of Killingly Pond in jeopardy

By ALISON CROSS  
Day Staff Writer

For generations of Gene Larrow's family have learned to swim on Old Killingly Pond in Killingly.

"My mother and my grandfa-

ther would drive down here in a Model T, and this is where they learned to swim," Larrow, who moved to the pond in the 1980s, said from a spot on the shore last week. "My three brothers and I learned to swim on that rock or that rock."

Just three short months ago, Larrow would have been pointing to 120 acres of idyllic, clear blue water that swimmers, boaters,

anglers, kayakers and wildlife enjoyed for decades.

Now, he was pointing at two large stones in a muddy, craggy wasteland.

The pond, which straddles the border of Connecticut and Rhode Island, has lost more than 12 feet of water since the private land owners opened Killingly Pond Dam's low-level outlet on Oct. 26 to ease pressure on the dam after

the structure showed signs of erosion and possible damage.

Under orders from the State Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to bring the 200-year-old dam to a safe condition, the owners, Wright Investors' Services Holdings Inc., have recommended the permanent removal of the access gate.

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## Street-corner 'witness for peace' dies after decades of quiet activism



DAY FILE PHOTO

Cal Robertson of New London looks at traffic along State Street as he stands witness at Parade Plaza on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2020, during Electric Boat's rush hour. The Vietnam veteran, who served as a Navy corpsman in the Marines, was a witness for peace almost daily for over 30 years in the region.

By JOHN PENNEY  
Day Staff Writer

Cal Robertson was a man of contradictions, a Vietnam War veteran whose tours of duty helped galvanize his later mission as a self-described "witness" of injustice, and whose halting speech and everyman appearance belied a steely persistence.

Robertson, who died in Norwich on Jan. 3 at age 80, for decades could be found near the New London Soldiers and Sailor Monument, outside the gates of the Naval Submarine Base in Groton or in downtown Mystic with one of several hand-made signs, including ones that asked "Will the children have a future?"

"He wasn't very talkative, but he felt deeply," said Cathy Zall, executive director of the New London Homeless Hospitality Center. "He knew we, especially children,

needed peace in the world. He worked toward (that) in his own quiet way."

Robertson, a Norwich native, later lived in Mystic and Groton, enlisted in the U.S. Navy as a medical corpsman and was assigned to a Marine unit deployed to Vietnam in 1964 and 1968. Robertson rarely spoke of those deployments, but occasionally referenced the "carnage" he witnessed while treating civilians.

"That got to me," he told The Day in 2008. "In war, truth is the first casualty; in all wars, any wars."

Robertson struggled with alcohol after his discharge and in 1975 suffered a disabling brain clot whose effects plagued him for the rest of his life.

"This was a person, a veteran, who was quite damaged by his experience in the military," said New London resident Ronna

Stuller, who attended many of the same protests as Robertson. "But he understood that the best way to honor veterans was to not have any more wars."

As part of an effort to come to terms with his war, Robertson started attending local demonstrations, the first an anti-submarine peace protest at Electric Boat. That led to his attendance at other events decrying the military-industrial complex and his six-day-a-week vigils in New London and Groton.

"I think he hoped people could use their experiences, whether good or bad — maybe especially if they were bad — to help build a new future," Stuller said. "And he was always clear that he wasn't a protester, but a witness for peace."

Robertson was arrested several

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### IN NEED OF PENNIES TO GIVE CHANGE FOR TAX PAYMENTS, BRISTOL BOUGHT A JAR FROM THE MAYOR'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

The penny dropped for Bristol Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu when she realized some residents might be paying slightly more on their tax bills than they expected. The U.S. Mint stopped producing pennies late last year, but some residents still pay taxes with cash — and not always in exact change.

The city passed legislation this week rounding taxes and fees down to .00 when a bill ends in .01 or .02, rounding down to .05 when it ends in .06 or .07, rounding up to .05 when the number ends in .03 or .04 and rounding up to .10 when it ends in .08 or .09. But Zoppo-Sassu worried that not everyone would understand.

"Eight and nine gets rounded up, so you may end up owing the city of Bristol, you may end up giving them 2 more cents than what your tax bill is," she said. "So we fig-

ured we better tell people, because there's some people who get pretty ornery about taxes in general."

But pennies are in short supply since production stopped, so Bristol turned to Zoppo-Sassu's mother-in-law, Shirley Sassu.

"She had a penny collection, and we bought it from her so that the tax office would be able to make change during the January and February billing cycles when people come in and pay cash," the mayor said.

The city spent \$63 to buy Sassu's jar of pennies, which now sits prominently on the tax office counter. Most residents pay their taxes electronically these days, but there is a "segment" of the population that pays in cash, Zoppo-Sassu said.

— Journal Inquirer, Manchester

### Greenlanders oppose takeover



EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP PHOTO

#### WEATHER

Today, cloudy with periods of snow, chilly. High 37. Monday, sunshine and some fair-weather clouds. High 33. **D6**

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