

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Laurel Beach Casino

Other names/site number: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 102 Sixth Avenue

City or town: Milford State: Connecticut County: New Haven

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood shingle (walls), concrete-block
(foundation), asphalt (roof)

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Laurel Beach Casino (LBC) is a one-and-a-half-story, wood-frame, private community building in Milford, New Haven County, Connecticut, constructed in the Craftsman style by local architect and contractor Clarence V. Sewell in 1929 for the Laurel Beach Association. Located approximately 1,000 feet from Long Island Sound, the casino is part of an early twentieth-century planned seasonal resort. The building illustrates the Craftsman style through its massing. It has a horizontally emphasized, long, low rectangular shape with a steeply pitched hipped roof pierced by shed-roofed dormers on each elevation. A deep, wrap-around porch is set under the roof; it extends the width of the southwest and southeast elevations as well as the partial width on the northeast elevation. Other characteristic features of the style present include wood shingle exterior wall cladding and minimal ornamentation. A porte-cochère, also terminating in a hipped roof, is centered on the northeast elevation. A long, narrow, one-story wing with a hipped roof is attached to the building's northeast corner and contains a four-lane bowling alley. The LBC remains on its original site within the Laurel Beach neighborhood and has been relatively unaltered since its construction.

Narrative Description

Setting

The LBC is located at 102 Sixth Avenue in the southwest section of the City of Milford, Connecticut (Figure 1). Milford encompasses approximately 26 square miles, including 3 square miles of water and more than 14 miles of coastline along Long Island Sound. Multiple seasonal

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recreational communities developed along the city's beachfront during the early twentieth century and remain today as primarily year-round neighborhoods. Bounded by Milford Point Road, Sixth Avenue, and Highwood Avenue, the LBC is sited atop the crest of a gently sloping hill on an oblong-shaped 0.76-acre lot (Figure 2). Manicured shrubs and other small ornamental plants are located around the base of the LBC (Photograph 1). It faces southwest toward Milford Point Road and has views of Long Island Sound from the northeast and southeast elevation porches. Mature trees and low rock outcroppings are present throughout the property. A driveway extending from Sixth Avenue leads to a porte-cochère attached to the northeast elevation of the building. The LBC is part of a small complex of recreational facilities that are jointly owned and shared by the property owners in the Laurel Beach neighborhood. Five tennis courts and a baseball field are located opposite Milford Point Road to the west of the LBC. An undeveloped wooded area is located to the northeast, opposite the intersection of Milford Point Road and Sixth Avenue, and a triangular park that is bounded by Fifth Avenue, Fifth Avenue West, and Seaview Avenue is located approximately a half block to the southeast. A private-access beach for use by residents of Laurel Beach is located approximately one-and-a-half blocks to the east of the LBC. The area immediately surrounding the LBC is developed with wood-frame, single-family residences built as part of the planned resort community. According to a 1901 plat map, boundaries for the Laurel Beach development include Long Island Sound; Milford Point Road from Seaview Avenue to Sixth Avenue; the back property line of parcels lining the eastern side of Sixth Avenue to present-day Highwood Road; and Highwood Road to Eighth Avenue (Figure 3).¹ The triangular park as well as the parcel that presently is occupied by the LBC at the intersection of Milford Point Road and Sixth Avenue represent the two largest lots in the plat map. The Laurel Beach community features gently curving streets and uniform building lots. Residences feature a uniform setback and small front and back yards. Most yards feature landscaping and mature tree cover.

Laurel Beach Casino

The LBC is a one-and-a-half-story, wood-frame building completed in the Craftsman style. It replaced an earlier casino building at the same location that was lost to fire. The LBC measures approximately 87 feet x 200 feet. It has a rectangular footprint oriented northwest/southeast with an attached one-story wing on the northwest elevation and an attached porte-cochère on the northeast (rear) elevation. The steeply pitched hipped roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles and has shallow eaves. Small shed-roof dormers pierce the roof mid-slope on each elevation. The dormers feature square, louvered wooden vents on their faces; cheeks are clad in wood shingles. A deep-set wrap-around porch integrated into the casino's roofline surrounds a large interior hall. The porch runs the width of the southwest and southeast elevations of the building, as well as the partial width on the northeast elevation. On all aforementioned elevations, the roof and an entablature above the porch are supported by evenly spaced rectangular columns that rest on a solid balustrade that encloses the porch space. A wood handrail, which rests on a short row of

¹ "Laurel Beach Summer Health Resort, Milford, Connecticut" (promotional booklet) (Brooklyn: The Albertype Co., circa 1901), 8.

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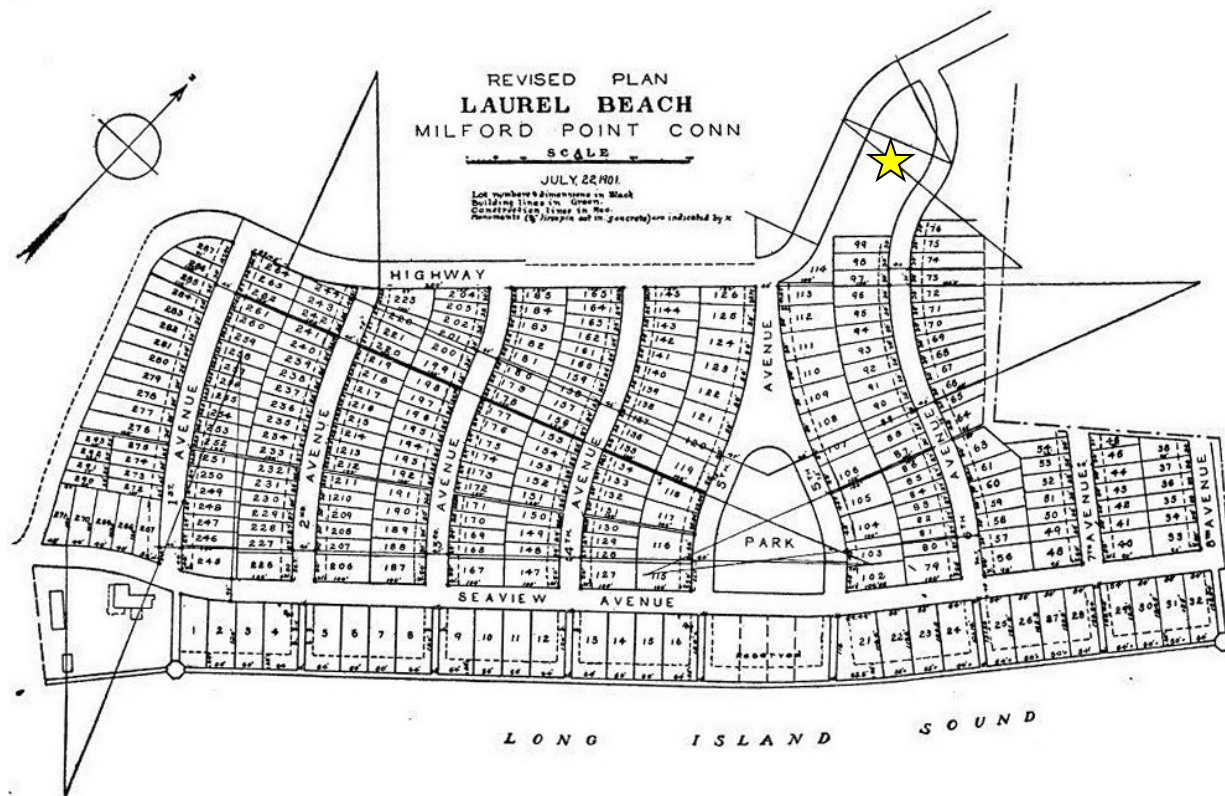


Figure 3. Plat map for the resort development at Laurel Beach, dated July 22, 1901. Map excerpted from a ca. 1901 promotional booklet entitled “Laurel Beach Summer Health Resort, Milford, Connecticut” (personal collection of Richard Platt). Yellow star indicates location of the Laurel Beach Casino.

square wood balusters spanning between the columns atop the balustrade, was added around 1990 for insurance purposes.² Wood, multi-pane French doors are located on the main body of the building on the northeast and southwest elevations. Windows are located on all elevations of the building; they are characterized by six-over-one light, double-hung, wood-sash units. All openings on the LBC display simple, unadorned casings. The building is raised on a concrete-block pier foundation in which the crawlspace between piers is covered with lattice. Because the building sits atop a slight hill, the height of the crawlspace varies between elevations. The exterior of the LBC features minimal ornamentation; it is clad in painted wood shingles that wrap uninterrupted around corners. The entablature, columns, and solid balustrade also are covered in painted wood shingles. The porch features a beaded-board wood ceiling and a painted wood floor.

Façade (Southwest Elevation) (Photograph 2): The primary elevation of the LBC faces southwest, overlooking the tennis courts opposite Milford Point Road. It has three dormers centered mid-slope along the width of the roof. The porch along this elevation is seven bays wide

² June Comcowich, personal communication with author, November 3, 2016.

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between columns; it is accessible from its northern end via a set of poured-concrete stairs leading from Milford Point Road. Six sets of French doors are evenly spaced on the body of the building.

Northwest (Side) Elevation (Photograph 3): This elevation features a dormer centered mid-slope along the width of the roof. A window is centered under the dormer on the body of the building. Two more windows are spaced unevenly to the west. The attached bowling alley wing projects from the corner of the LBC on the eastern side of this elevation.

Northeast (Rear) Elevation (Photographs 4 and 5): A porte-cochère (described in more depth below) is centered on the northeast elevation. The elevation otherwise features a partial-width porch that is five bays wide between columns, and that terminates where the bowling alley attaches to the building on its northeastern corner (Photograph 6). Poured-concrete steps are located where the porte-cochère attaches to the building. The steps lead from a poured-concrete landing along the driveway under the porte-cochère to the porch, from which four sets of French doors are accessible (Photograph 7). A set of poured-concrete stairs leading from Highwood Avenue also terminates at the landing under the porte-cochère.

The one-story porte-cochère projects from the main body of the building (Photograph 8). Dormers flank the porte-cochère symmetrically on either side of its moderately pitched, asphalt-shingled hipped roof. The structure covers an asphalt driveway that loops off of Sixth Avenue. The roof and an entablature are supported by three evenly spaced rectangular columns on the porte-cochère's northeastern wall. A solid balustrade runs between the columns. The columns and balustrade rest atop a random-coursed rubble masonry foundation with beaded mortar joints. Like other parts of the LBC, the porte-cochère's entablature, columns, and balustrade are clad in painted wood shingles. Wood beaded board defines the ceiling.

Southeast (Side) Elevation (Photograph 9): The elevation is symmetrical, and a dormer is centered mid-slope along the width of the roof. The porch on this elevation is full width and five bays wide between columns. A French door is centered on the body of the building.

Bowling Alley Wing: The northeast (bowling alley) wing is original to the 1929 LBC building. The wing attaches to the main body of the LBC on the southwestern corner of its southeast elevation. The wing has a moderately pitched, asphalt-shingled, hipped roof and a painted wood shingle exterior. The bowling alley wing rests on a continuous concrete-block and concrete-block pier foundation, with a combination of vertical board, plywood, and wooden lattice between the piers. Windows are six-over-one-light, double-hung, wood-sash units. All openings have flat heads with simple, unadorned casings. A set of paired windows separated by a wooden mullion is located toward the northern corner of the southwest elevation; a window is centered on this elevation and another window is located toward the southern corner of the elevation (Photograph 10). A replacement panel door covered with a screen door is present at the southern corner of the southwest elevation adjacent to where the bowling alley attaches to the LBC. The northwest elevation is blind (Photograph 11). Paired windows separated by a wooden mullion are located on the southern and northern corners of the northeast elevation; five unevenly spaced windows sit between these two windows (Photograph 12). A replacement metal panel door

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accessible from the partial-width porch along the northeast elevation of the LBC is located on the western side of the wing's southeast elevation; the eastern side of the elevation features a window (Photograph 6).

Interior: The LBC contains approximately 10,390 square feet on one story, which is primarily occupied by a large, rectangular hall (Photograph 13). The hall is characterized by its high ceilings, ample daylighting, and uninterrupted floor space. Glass globe lights and ceiling fans hang from tiles in the ceiling. Walls are covered in wood beaded board with wood lattice that was added ca. 1996 that covers the upper half of the walls.³ A small, raised rectangular stage is located in the southwest corner (Photograph 14). The stage is carpeted and features a wood railing. The remainder of the hall retains original wood flooring.

Support rooms are located in the north end of the building (Photograph 15). A women's bathroom and a separate closet are located in the northwest corner of the hall. The closet has French doors. In the hall's northeast corner is an original panel door with a large light in its upper half (Photograph 16). A short hallway through this door extends from the porch on the LBC's northeast elevation to the bowling alley attached to the building's northeastern corner (Photograph 17). The hall has painted wood beaded board walls and a linoleum tile floor. The ceiling exhibits exposed, unpainted wooden rafters, purlins, tie beams, and roof bracing. Fluorescent lights are mounted to the tie beams. A kitchen is located off of the northeast side of the hallway (Photograph 18); it has a large serving hatch on its northwestern wall that opens to the adjacent bowling alley. A men's restroom is opposite the kitchen on the southwest side of the hallway (Photograph 19). The kitchen and both the men's and women's restrooms have been updated with new fixtures and appliances, and a linoleum floor.

Bowling Alley Wing (Photograph 20): The bowling alley is four lanes wide. Original equipment, installed by Larson's Bowling Alley Company, remains largely intact, including metal gutters, a pin deck, and ball return risers at the approach end of the alleys (Photographs 21 and 22). Floors in the bowling alley are wood. Wood beaded board covers the walls. The ceiling features exposed, unpainted rafters, purlins, tie beams, and roof bracing. Fluorescent lights are mounted to the tie beams, illuminating the alleys. Select wooden boards in the lanes of the alleys have been replaced with in-kind materials over time as a result of wear from use; however, the majority of original boards remain.

Integrity

The LBC has been relatively unaltered since its construction in 1929, and changes impacting the building's overall design have not occurred. Materials and workmanship remain largely intact; alterations to exterior features are limited to two non-historic replacement doors on the bowling alley wing. The pattern of openings and fenestration on the building has not changed, and most of the original windows and doors remain in place with their historic hardware intact. This includes the French doors located off of the building's wraparound porch, most of which feature

³ June Comcowich, personal communication with author, November 3, 2016.

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original door knobs and back plates. Modifications to the LBC undertaken to comply with modern life/safety codes and current recreational needs include safety railing along the solid balustrade enclosing the wraparound porch. Interior modifications have included the installation of new fixtures and updating of the kitchen and bathrooms. Historic fabric is largely intact, and the bowling alley in particular retains its original pin deck, metal gutters, and ball return risers. The LBC maintains its original location and setting within the Laurel Beach community, a beachside residential neighborhood built during the early twentieth century. The Laurel Beach neighborhood as a whole retains its historical character and remains largely intact, with few demolitions and infill construction occurring. The LBC retains its historical appearance as well as its function as a shared recreational amenity serving the residents of Laurel Beach.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1929-1968

Significant Dates

1929: Building constructed

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Sewell, Clarence V.

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Laurel Beach Casino (LBC) is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the category of Entertainment/Recreation for its association with the development of seaside resort communities in Connecticut from the late nineteenth through early twentieth centuries. The building is the primary community facility in Laurel Beach, a resort neighborhood chartered in 1899, and represents a property type once prevalent along the Connecticut coastline. The 1929 construction date of the LBC is later than the establishment of the community because this building replaced an earlier casino lost to fire. The period of significance dates from its construction in 1929 to 1968, the 50-year National Register age cutoff date, because it has been continually used for the same purpose by Laurel Beach residents since its construction. The 1968 terminal date coincides with an increase in the permanent population at Laurel Beach coupled

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with a corresponding decrease in the summer population. These demographic changes resulted in a decline in recreational activities at the LBC by the early 1970s.⁴

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation

The LBC represents a casino, a property type that emerged in the United States between 1876 and 1910 as part of the recreational fabric in resort areas.⁵ Typically located in scenic natural settings in the mountains and near sources of water, early resorts were touted for their health-giving effects, particularly in the prevention and cure of diseases.⁶ By the 1850s, however, resort proprietors responded to patrons' increasing demands for recuperation *and* recreation by offering more diversified attractions, such as fishing, dancing, and billiards.⁷ Recreational amenities, such as, piers, promenades, and pavilions, also were constructed to provide entertainment and to attract guests.⁸ Casinos, like the one at Laurel Beach, were part of this trend, providing yet another opportunity for entertainment, recreation, and socialization.

As a result of growing interest and participation in leisure as well as the ease of travel afforded by railroad and, later, trolley lines, resorts spread throughout the nation during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In Milford, Connecticut, nearly a dozen middle-class beachside resort communities were established between the last years of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century.⁹ These colonies each developed in their own way. However, they generally were characterized by their summer cottages, hotels, and boarding houses. Recreational amenities such as boardwalks, piers, pavilions, parks, and in some instances casinos, also were constructed.

Laurel Beach

The resort at Laurel Beach was developed in the last years of the nineteenth century. The Laurel Beach Land Company (LBLC) received a charter from the state of Connecticut in April 1899. That same month the Laurel Beach Association (LBA), a "body politic" constituted of property owners in the community, received its charter.¹⁰ The LBA's charter gave the association authority to build roads, to provide utilities, and to maintain the beach.¹¹ Such powers were not

⁴ Frank Smith, personal communication with author, May 1, 2018.

⁵ Wilson, "From Informality to Pomposity," *Nineteenth Century Magazine: Victorian Resorts and Hotels* (Philadelphia: The Victorian Society in America, Autumn 1982), 111.

⁶ Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacation in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.

⁷ Jon Sterngrass, Jon. *First Resorts; Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport & Coney Island* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 2; Aron, *Working at Play*, 24.

⁸ Wilson, "From Informality to Pomposity," 111.

⁹ Federal Writers' Project, *History of Milford Connecticut* (Bridgeport: Braunworth & Co., Inc.), 113.

¹⁰ An Act Incorporating the Laurel Beach Association, approved April 18, 1899. Substitute for House Resolution No. 88 (*Special Laws of Connecticut*, vol. XIII), 3.

¹¹ Ibid.

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unusual; many other seasonal communities along Connecticut's coast "were organized at the time that certain services were desired that were not then provided by the town."¹² These organizations included the Short Beach Association, chartered in 1895, and residential organizations in Milford like the Walnut Beach Improvement Association and the Morningside Association, which were chartered in 1895 and 1921, respectively.

Laurel Beach represented a holistic approach to seaside resort development. After receiving its charter, the property at Laurel Beach was subdivided according to a plan that featured gently curving streets and uniform lots.¹³ Like other beachside resorts, Laurel Beach was promoted as a "summer health resort" in early turn-of-the-century marketing materials that also called it a "paradise for bicyclists."¹⁴ Advertisements touted the opportunities for saltwater bathing in the Sound, indicating that recreation was an important component to the resort. The association also marketed the colony's shared recreational amenities, including a pier, dock, a large, triangular park, and a half-mile-long boardwalk with pavilions at each end, all "conveyed to the Laurel Beach Association for the use and benefit of the residents and lot owners of Laurel Beach".¹⁵ A large wooden hotel, the Elsemere, also was erected in the development.

As seasonal residential development in Laurel Beach expanded in the first decades of the twentieth century, recreational amenities also expanded. This construction occurred north of the initial phase of development along the beachfront. The first iteration of the LBC, which was built within a few years after the turn of the twentieth century, as well as tennis courts constructed in 1923, were included among the expanded recreational amenities.¹⁶ Like other recreational amenities at the development, the casino and adjacent tennis courts were reserved for the sole use by Laurel Beach residents.

The first LBC building was destroyed by fire sometime between 1925 and ca. 1928.¹⁷ Residents quickly resolved to rebuild their casino, both out of a desire for recreational facilities, and as a means to differentiate Laurel Beach from other resorts and attract homebuyers to the development.¹⁸ Completed in 1929, the second LBC (extant) was designed and built by Clarence V. Sewell, an architect and contractor residing at Laurel Beach.¹⁹ Notably, Sewell constructed a number of houses in Laurel Beach, as well as the pier along Long Island Sound.²⁰ Sewell designed the LBC with sensitivity to its surrounding community. The summer cottages in Laurel Beach were one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half-story, wood-frame buildings with deep, shady porches and exteriors clad in clapboard or wood shingles. Similar characteristics were applied to the LBC: a one-and-a-half-story, wood-frame building with a deep-set wraparound porch and an

¹² Krause, "Residential Associations in the Coastal Area," 9.

¹³ "Laurel Beach Summer Health Resort, Milford, Connecticut," 8.

¹⁴ Ibid. 3.

¹⁵ Ibid. 6.

¹⁶ "Milford Country Club to Foster Athletic Events," *Bridgeport Telegram*, July 5, 1923, 5.

¹⁷ Sanborn Map Company, "Insurance Maps of Milford (New Haven Co.)," 1925.

¹⁸ "Laurel Beach Club Opens with Dance," *Milford Citizen*, July 18, 1929, 6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Announcement, *Naugatuck Daily News*, April 18, 1901, 4.

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exterior clad in wood shingles (Figure 4). Representative of the casino property type, the LBC incorporated an interior hall at one end of the building that featured a large, uninterrupted floor space that made it well suited for dancing and other recreational activities, as well as for gatherings by Laurel Beach residents and their guests. A four-lane bowling alley, installed by Larson's Bowling Alley Company of New Haven, was attached to the hall's northeast corner, with a kitchen, storage, and restrooms accessible from the northern end of the hall. Other recreational amenities, including tennis courts and a large ballfield, were sited along Milford Point Road across from the casino.



Figure 4. Laurel Beach Casino, 1935. Image courtesy the Henry "Buster" Walsh collection, Milford Public Library, Milford, Connecticut.

Shortly after the LBC's opening in 1929, a newspaper reported that "[d]ances will be held every Saturday night for members and their friends. Later in the season the club will sponsor bowling matches and water sports. The ladies committee, which is an innovation at the Casino, was in charge of the dance."²¹ Socializing and card games took place on the LBC's expansive wraparound porch that offered views of Long Island Sound. Tournaments held in the building's attached bowling alley also were recurring events. However, newspaper accounts indicated that dancing in the building's large hall was by far the most common event at the casino during its 1929-68 period of significance. In addition to Saturday night dances, square dancing, dance classes, teenage dances, costume balls, masquerades, and other themed dances such as the "Roaring Twenties," musical performances were frequent.²² Indeed, the LBC served as a center

²¹ "Laurel Beach Club Opens with Dance," *Milford Citizen*, July 18, 1929, 6.

²² "Casino Activities," *Bridgeport Post*, July 30, 1955, 19.

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of community-based activity in Laurel Beach, hosting holiday celebrations, children's parties, committee meetings, benefits supporting the LBA, community games nights, a "minstrel and variety show" by Laurel Beach residents, and church services. Although a smaller summer population entailed that fewer recreational activities were held at the LBC by the 1970s, the types of activities hosted at the building have essentially been the same since its opening in 1929.²³ The LBC continues to serve as a community center for Laurel Beach residents and their guests to this day.

The Development of Casinos in the United States

From a functional standpoint, American casinos were inspired by European prototypes. Derived from the Italian word *casa*, or house, casinos emerged in Italy during the mid-eighteenth century as small cottages, entertainment pavilions, or clubhouses for concerts, dancing, and card games. These facilities were often set in gardens. Notably, gambling also took place in these buildings. Around the turn of the twentieth century the concept of buildings to accommodate a variety of entertainment functions under one roof was adapted to meet American social norms. In the United States, the casino was "a building for recreation belonging to a club, or connected with a spa, watering-place, or like public resorts".²⁴ Dances, concerts, and social gatherings were common in American casinos, but unlike their contemporary European counterparts and predecessors, games of chance and betting generally were absent.²⁵ (American interest in casino gambling is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although Nevada became the first state to legalize commercial casino gambling in 1931, it was not until the last quarter of the twentieth century that other states began legalizing gambling casinos.²⁶) The Laurel Beach Casino is an example of such a recreational and entertainment venue that historically excluded gambling, and represents a property type different from buildings designed and constructed to accommodate gambling.

Character-defining features associated with early American casinos included large interior halls with uninterrupted floor space, often with a small stage at one end.²⁷ Casinos also commonly incorporated porches and any number of amenities, including kitchens, restaurants, and dining rooms, as well as spaces designed for socializing such as club rooms, smoking rooms, and billiard rooms. Tennis courts and bowling alleys also were co-located at some buildings, reflecting efforts to provide active recreational opportunities. With this array of possible amenities, casinos were generally customizable according to the developer's interests, the size of the intended population, and the types of activities envisioned by potential users of the facility. Consequently, casinos could accommodate varieties in floor plan, layout, and square footage.

²³ Frank Smith, personal communication with author, May 1, 2018.

²⁴ Russell Sturgis, *A Dictionary of Architecture and Building: Biographical, Historical, and Descriptive*, Vol. I (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 466.

²⁵ Wilson, "From Informality to Pomposity," 111.

²⁶ American Gaming Association, "Facts at Your Fingertips: U.S. Commercial Casino Industry," 2008, 5, accessed April 27, 2017, <http://efti.hhp.ufl.edu/wp-content%5Cuploads/Casino-Industry-Facts-2008.pdf>.

²⁷ Marie Frank, "Water Witch Club Casino." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Trenton, New Jersey: State Historic Preservation Office, 1989. Section 8, page 1.

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The massing, form, ornamentation, and style of casinos were not standardized. Therefore, the key distinguishing feature of casinos from this period is a large, open interior hall.

Two subtypes emerged as the casino evolved in the United States: the public casino (i.e. open to the general public), and the private casino (i.e. membership-based). Around the turn of the twentieth century, public casinos developed as leisure became increasingly commercialized. Public casinos were commercial establishments, with entry open to the general public, albeit limited to those who paid admission. To maximize profit, developers and owners hosted a variety of revenue-generating events at public casinos. Such events were advertised in local newspapers alongside competing commercial attractions, including motion pictures and supper clubs. Charging admission was common in public casinos in Connecticut. For example, for 50 cents admission, the Wequetequock Casino at the foot of Stonington Cove in Stonington (not extant) was promoted in 1927 as “the same old place with a Reputation for Good Music, a Good Floor, a Good Crowd, and a Good Time.”²⁸ Located at a stop along the local trolley line, opportunities for dancing and boating and for viewing motion pictures in the casino’s hall drew summer visitors from the surrounding area. Popular contemporary acts also performed at the facility, including Duke Ellington and his Orchestra in August 1939.²⁹

The array of activities at the Wequetequock Casino was not uncommon; many public casinos offered a similar range of programming. This reflected the adaptability of these buildings, with their large, open interior halls, to meet local entertainment needs. The former State Street Casino in Bridgeport held bazaars, exhibitions, poultry shows, and roller skating in addition to dances and concerts. Boxing was also a popular recurring event at the State Street Casino, where a match in 1922 drew such a large audience that “[h]undreds of fans were forced to remain outside... (to) follow the fight by the clamor and cheers of the fans who were lucky enough to obtain the coveted pasteboards” (pasteboards is an antiquated term for tickets).³⁰

In addition to the Wequetequock and State Street casinos, several other public casinos dotted the Connecticut coastline. At least seven now-lost public casinos were located in Milford’s beachside resort colonies. The Oak Grove Casino on the waterfront in the Walnut Beach settlement at Milford, for example, was open during the summer months, with concerts, dances, and socials in the casino’s hall. These events were open to the public for a small admission fee.³¹ A porch on the rear of the building offered views of Long Island Sound and provided a space for socializing away from the dance floor. Advertisements placed in the local newspaper document that the nearby Kozy Korner Kasino [*sic*], contemporaneously referred to as the Kozy Korner Dancehall and the Kozy Korner Dancing Pavilion, hosted similar activities in its hall, including foxtrot competitions and performances by touring musicians.

²⁸ Leigh Fought, *A History of Mystic, Connecticut: From Pequot Village to Tourist Town* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007).

²⁹ Ken Vail, *Duke’s Diary: The Life of Duke Ellington* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002): 172.

³⁰ “Louis Suffered Only Defeat of 1922 One Year Ago Today; To Fight M’Carron Tomorrow,” *Bridgeport Telegram* 12 February 1923:6.

³¹ “20 Years Ago in the Post,” *Bridgeport Post*, October 21, 1961, 24.

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By contrast, private casinos such as the Laurel Beach Casino were typically member-only establishments serving private clubs or residential organizations, and these limited-access casinos occupied smaller footprints than public casinos. Like their public counterparts, however, private casinos also provided entertainment and recreational opportunities. While public casinos had the financial means to advertise and host big-name entertainers, private casinos generally did not attract such acts. Public and private casinos had different missions and served different patrons. While the public facility was income-producing and served a broader audience, the private casino satisfied the needs of its very localized membership. Therefore, as limited-access, member-only establishments, entertainment at private casinos generally was provided by local performers. The activities and functions held at the LBC illustrate the differences between public and private casinos. For example, a barber shop quartet comprised of Laurel Beach residents provided the entertainment during a “Gay Nineties’ era” costume party held at the LBC in 1959 that commemorated the LBA’s 60th anniversary.³² The quartet performed songs popular during the 1890s and was followed by “community singing” by partygoers.³³

Access to and activities conducted at private casinos were for the exclusive use of the members and their guests. Consequently, the mission of the private casino evolved to incorporate community-centric social activities. Because membership at private casinos was restricted to the residents of the immediate neighborhood in which they were located, these facilities gradually evolved beyond recreational activities to offer events, such as Sunday school services and Scout meetings. In this way, private casinos came to function as modern community centers. This function distinguishes private casinos from yacht clubs, golf clubs, and country clubs, where community-centric activities geared towards a select, yet limited audience would not be anticipated. Furthermore, yacht clubs, golf clubs, and country clubs typically serve a membership that drew from a greater community that extended beyond the residents of a well-defined neighborhood.

The Lordship Casino, in the Lordship summer resort colony in coastal Stratford, Connecticut, provides an example of a private casino that evolved to function as a modern community center. The Lordship Casino (not extant) was constructed during the early 1910s by the Wilkenda Land Company, which developed the resort at Lordship.³⁴ The building featured a fire station on its first floor (later converted to commercial use during the 1920s) and a large, character-defining hall on its second.³⁵ During its early years, the casino operated as a public casino that charged admission for dances and concerts. However, as more Lordship residents converted summer cottages to year-round residences, the local residential organization, the Lordship Park Association, assumed management and operational control of the building in the early 1920s.³⁶ By that time, the Lordship Casino functioned as a private casino for exclusive use by Lordship residents. In addition to recreational activities such as dances, the casino evolved to host

³² “Casino to Stage 60th Year Ball,” *The Bridgeport Post*, August 3, 1959, 14.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Tom Halverson, “Lordship Center,” *The History of Lordship*, accessed February 17, 2017, <http://www.lordshiphistory.com/LordshipCenterwebpage.html>.

³⁵ Tom Halverson, e-mail message to author, January 29, 2017.

³⁶ Ibid.

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community-focused events. In 1916, enough year-round residents with children resided in Lordship that the second-story hall of the casino was partitioned and used as the Lordship School until a new schoolhouse was built in 1922.³⁷ A 1925 article described other uses of the Lordship Casino, noting that it was “equipped for social entertainment and [was] therefore a natural meeting place for smaller groups as the boy scouts, camp fire girls and private socials and dances, and very adaptable to Sunday school entertainments or special services” [*sic*].³⁸

The Lordship Casino was referred to contemporaneously as the Lordship Country Club. The same 1925 article described the facility’s role in the Lordship community, noting that the casino’s members were considering changing the building’s name to the Lordship Community Center: “[m]any of its members have felt for a long time that its name did not signify its purpose inasmuch as the club’s place in the [Lordship] colony is really that of a community center rather than a country club”.³⁹ Many other such facilities changed their names to “clubhouse,” “community center,” “yacht club,” or “country club” in the twentieth century. It is possible that some private casino organizations sought to distance themselves from associations with gambling, particularly after casinos in Nevada received bad publicity during the 1940s and 1950s owing to their connections with organized crime syndicates. Another possible explanation for the change in name could be attributed to attempts by casino owners to attract a certain clientele by rebranding their facilities as country clubs or yacht clubs, property types associated with exclusivity and high-income members.

Of the seven private casinos located historically in Milford’s beachside resort colonies only one, the LBC, was referred to as a casino. Although six buildings went by other names, including community clubhouse, country club, and yacht club, all were included in the private casino property type, having met the definition of private casino: limited-access establishments with large, character-defining interior halls capable of hosting a variety of community-centric entertainment and recreational uses. The Milford Yacht Club clubhouse, built around the turn of the twentieth century at Fort Trumbull Beach, hosted card games, tea parties, formal dinners, and musical performances for yacht club members and their guests. (The original yacht club building is no longer extant.) The nearby Woodmont Country Club held dances, minstrel shows, song recitals, and holiday parties for club members in its large, interior hall, which featured high ceilings and hardwood floors, much like that at the LBC (Figure 5). A comparison of historic photographs of the exterior of the Woodmont Country Club with the LBC reveal many other commonalities (Figures 6 and 4). Both buildings had steeply pitched hipped roofs; wood-shingle exteriors; deep-set wraparound porches; low, horizontal profiles; and striking resemblance to each other. The buildings, although named differently, functioned and looked the same. The basic form of the twentieth century casino made it easily adaptable to a variety of functions. Yacht clubs, country clubs, and community centers supporting residential organizations served the same functions; in some cases, they exhibited the same architectural features as casinos. Because the layout, form, massing, ornamentation, and architectural style of twentieth century

³⁷ Ibid. January 25, 2017.

³⁸ “Lordship Country Club Makes Plans for Changing Name,” *Bridgeport Telegram*, May 6, 1925, 14.

³⁹ Ibid.

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casinos were not standardized, the size and design of the casino could be executed to meet the requirement of its members.



Figure 5. Woodmont Country Club interior, unknown date. Image courtesy of Katherine Krauss Murphy and Nancy Holt at Photography by Joseph.

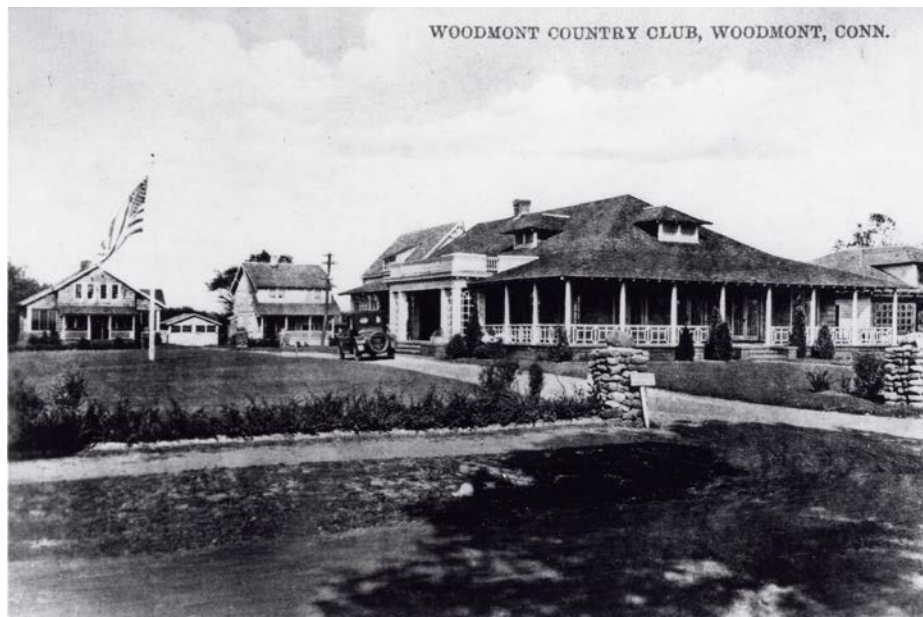


Figure 6. Woodmont Country Club, unknown date. Image courtesy of Katherine Krauss Murphy and Nancy Holt at Photography by Joseph.

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An Act Incorporating the Laurel Beach Land Company, approved April 28, 1899. House
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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☒ Other

Name of repository: Milford Public Library

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property 0.76

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 41.184728 | Longitude: -73.095164 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):



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NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Located at 102 Sixth Avenue in Milford, Connecticut, the Laurel Beach Casino occupies a 0.76 acre lot of land bounded by Milford Point Road, Highwood Avenue, and Sixth Avenue (reference Figure 2).

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary encompasses the lot of land occupied by the Laurel Beach Casino, built in the location in 1929.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kelly N. Morgan, M.P.S./Architectural Historian II
organization: R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc.
street & number: 309 Jefferson Highway, Suite A
city or town: New Orleans state: LA zip code: 70121
e-mail: kmorgan@rcgoodwin.com
telephone: (504) 947-1714
date: June 6, 2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Laurel Beach Casino

City or Vicinity: Milford

County: New Haven

State: CT

Photographers: Lindsay Hannah; Kelly N. Morgan

Date Photographed: July 13, 2016; November 3, 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photograph #1 of 22: Laurel Beach Casino, camera facing northeast.

Photograph #2 of 22: Southwest elevation, camera facing east.

Photograph #3 of 22: Northwest elevation, camera facing southeast.

Photograph #4 of 22: Northeast elevation, camera facing southwest.

Photograph #5 of 22: Alternate view of northeast elevation, camera facing west.

Photograph #6 of 22: Detail of northeast elevation and bowling alley's southeast elevation, camera facing northwest.

Photograph #7 of 22: Detail of doors on northeast elevation, camera facing southwest.

Photograph #8 of 22: Detail of porte-cochère, camera facing south.

Photograph #9 of 22: Southeast elevation, camera facing northwest.

Photograph #10 of 22: Bowling alley, southwest elevation, camera facing southeast.

Photograph #11 of 22: Bowling alley, northwest elevation, camera facing southeast.

Photograph #12 of 22: Bowling alley, northeast elevation, camera facing south.

Photograph #13 of 22: Main hall, camera facing southeast.

Photograph #14 of 22: Detail of stage, camera facing southwest.

Photograph #15 of 22: Alternate view of main hall, camera facing northwest.

Photograph #16 of 22: Detail of doorway, camera facing northeast.

Photograph #17 of 22: Hall connecting the main hall with the bowling alley, camera facing southeast.

Photograph #18 of 22: Kitchen, camera facing northeast.

Photograph #19 of 22: Men's restroom, camera facing northwest.

Photograph #20 of 22: Bowling alley interior, camera facing northwest.

Photograph #21 of 22: Detail of pin deck, camera facing northwest.

Photograph #22 of 22: Detail of newel on ball return riser, camera facing southwest.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

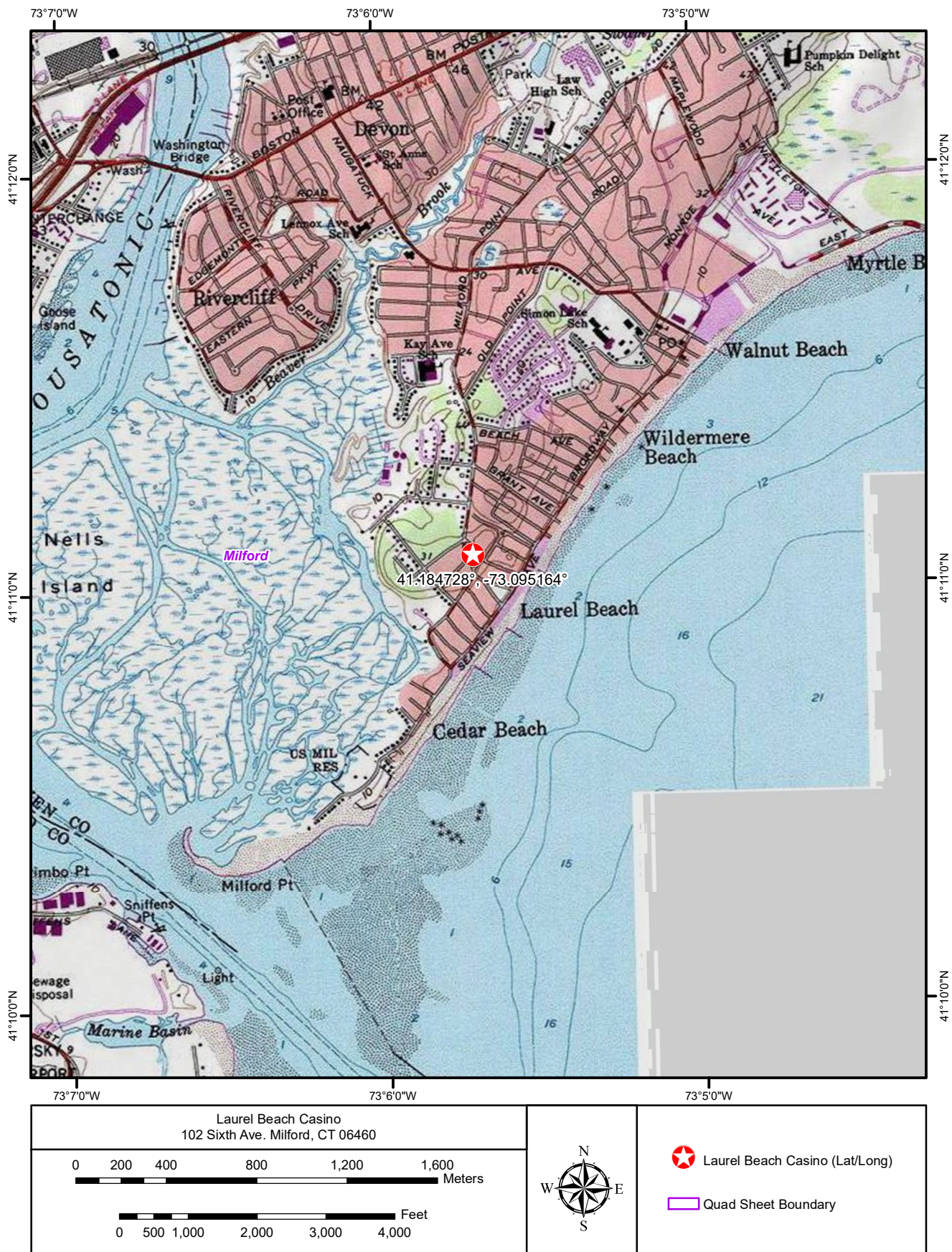


Figure 1.

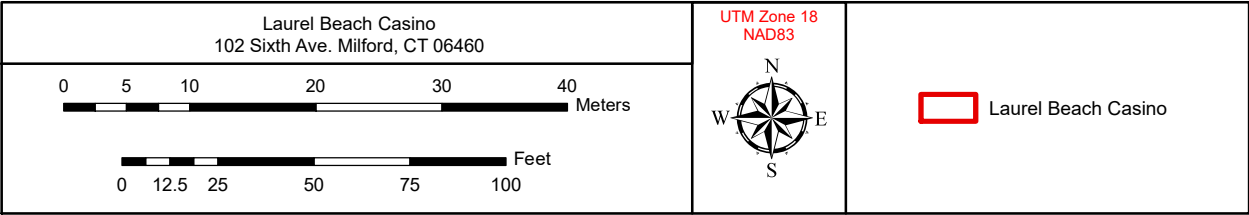
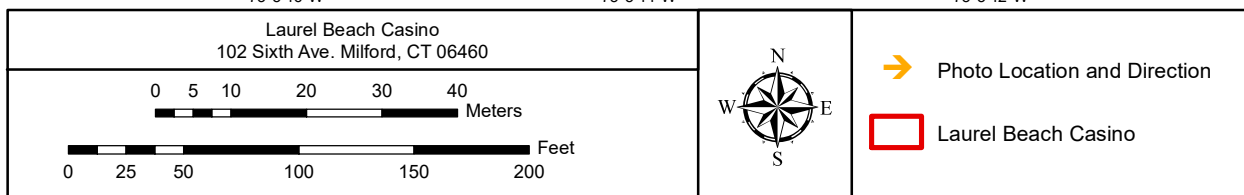
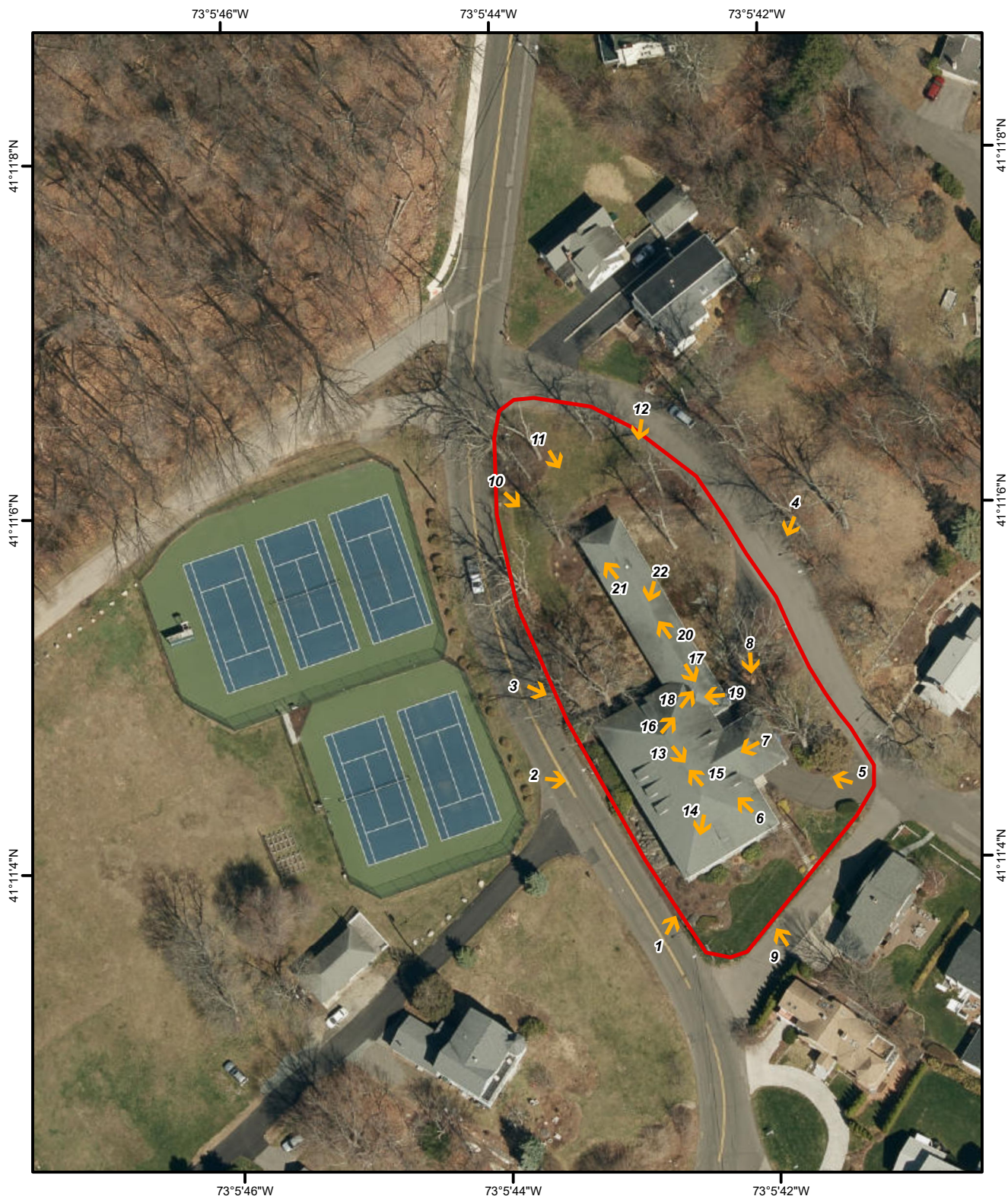


Figure 2.



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_1



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_2



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino 3



CT New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_4



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_5



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_6



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_7



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_8



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_9



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_10



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_11



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_12



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_13



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_14



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_15



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_16



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_17



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_18



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_19



CT_New Haven County_Laurel Beach Casino_20



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_21



CT New Haven County Laurel Beach Casino_22

