

No Decision on Transfer of Derelict House

by Doug McClure
HARDWICK — A half-acre and-a-half parcel, owned by Mark Wright, Village Manager over Pam Tragg, said that despite some speculation no decision has been made whether to take over the derelict house adjacent to the market at 91 Mill Street. She said that at this point there are a lot of questions still to be answered. "The property has been transferred," she said. "We're in discussions."

"Trag said some initial environmental testing has been done and, in the limited tests thus far, asbestos has been found in interior paper and plaster, and a serious mold and mildew issue has been identified. The entire roof carriage shed and portion of the house has collapsed and the interior of the primary house is not safe, with large holes in some of the upper floors. At this point, does not look like the structure, which according to zoning esti-

mates is over a century-and-a-half old, can be saved. "It is a shame," said Trag. "If someone had gotten to it twenty years ago, they may have."

"With demolition and asbestos abatement the only options left. The big question remaining is the cost of the project. Recent projects of similar nature have run from \$20,000 to 65,000. Trag is most concerned about the asbestos abatement.

"If it's \$6,000, that's one thing," she said. "If it's \$60,000, that's quite another. Hopefully it's not going to be cost prohibitive."

"Trag said further testing is underway. If the Village Market were to acquire the property, she said the initial use of the property would be extra parking for the market.

"That's if we were to proceed," Trag said. "It's a long ways from being a done deal. We're continuing discussions."



The front of the house in North Wolcott that was leveled by fire and a blast on October 18. The collapsed center section is where the fire started.

Violent Fire Destroys North Wolcott Home

by Doug McClure
NORTH WOLCOTT — The Vermont State Police issued a release regarding an explosive fire in North Wolcott which began "On October 18, 2018 at approximately 8:20 AM the Wolcott Fire Department was sent to North Wolcott Road in Wolcott for a house fire. Upon arrival the fire department encountered a house fully engulfed in flames. The release goes on to describe that Wolcott Fire was joined by departments from Elmore, Hardwick, Morriville, Hyde Park, and Craftsbury, saying that "it appears the fire started in a chimney pipe on the back side of the house."

For Laurie Behannon, the house's owner, and fiancé Bruce Weston, the reaction was shock, disbelief and sadness. She said she and Weston liked hiking. She was recovering from a Labor Day home attack and finally feeling well enough to return to work part-time, so they decided to set out on a short hike with their two dogs that morning.

Before leaving, she said she

got the wood stove started a bit to ward of the morning chill. "If you've never had a wood stove," she said with a faint smile, "there's nothing better for warming a house."

Behannon had lived in her house for nine years, which she and Weston shared with their son James, two dogs and a cat. The cat is still missing.

She was in Essex, where Weston lives part-time, when she learned of the fire from her son. Behannon said that what she knew of the events matches the police report, with added details. She said as far as she knew, it was her neighbor's son who first saw smoke and flagged down a passer-by. Fearing there might be someone trapped in the house, the passer-by kicked down the door.

Behannon does not know who this person was; it is not mentioned in the police report. At some point, the house looks to have essentially exploded. What little was left of the front door lay two-tenths foot from the house.

Every window in the house

and blown up in the center was even before the roof collapsed, while both ends of the house still stood upright. Behannon noticed that her microwave blew a hole through the wall.

Behannon said she had a few camp-sized propane cutters inside, as camping and hiking were things she and Weston did to gether, and wanting to leave them outside so the place looked nice.

by Doug McClure
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION chair Krista Heintz addressed the option of redrawing supervisory union (SU) boundaries, describing the OSU's boundaries, and said "If you look at this map, this SU is all over the place."

The Craftsbury school board has stated clearly that it wants its school to remain in the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSU).

"Craftsburry came up because in the Secretary's recommendations there was some question about whether Orleans Central SU should be re-organized. Because [Albany Elementary] had the same operating structure as Craftsburry, I think that in front of us and said they want the State Board to require the Hardwick and Woodbury Schools Districts to merge to create a union elementary school district. It is not clear whether there is sufficient administrative budget to do it so while the other is sufficient relationships continue to be."

French noted that Lakeview Union School, Woodbury Elementary and Hardwick Elementary all had the same structure.

Deena Dumas-Savage of the Agency of Education said, "We're aligned after the fact that Woodbury, Hardwick, and Lakeview all have the same operating structure, so there is more of a merger possible than was suggested. It is possible for a merger to move forward."

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An aerial photo of the now-demolished house at 91 Mill Street in Hardwick. The Hardwick Village Market is located on the property and along a parking.

Full Agenda for Select Board

by Doug McClure
HARDWICK — The select board heard an extended update on progress and prospects from the Hardwick Electric Department (HED) and an update on the Yellow Barn plus tackled complaints about slots fixed at Mackville. An escaped horse, asbestos and good budget news were also in the mix.

HED Commissioner Nat South presented a number of updates for the board. Ervino also reports to the Captain Lake Dam were completed this October. He also mentioned that the theft of a large amount of copper has been solved and the materials returned.

South said upgrades to the Mackville and Hardwick Village transformers, insulators and other equipment were well along, which could provide a reduction of 90 percent of system noise once done. Green Mountain CEB stopped using these generators immediately. Has become HED's largest customer. In addition, the H1 solar project is still looking to begin construction in the fall of 2019.

HED is actively planning on putting an Electric Vehicle (EV) charging station somewhere in Hardwick, with a number of sites under consideration. South explained that the utility is re-bidding the costs and options of ways that type of charging station is put in place.

"I think that's a great idea," said Town Manager Dan Jewett. Jewett updated the board on ongoing work on the new Yellow Barn. A USDA grant has allowed

the town to hire an architectural historian to assess the existing structure for historical value. The building is on the Vermont Historic Register and may be eligible for the national register.

"A good share of that barn was built in 1920," said Jewett. "But there is, hidden within that barn, an older 1850s barn, which you can see if you go inside. If it belongs on the national register, you have to do a more formal program to ensure you don't damage its historical character in any way."

Jewett also said an inspection of the property had not discovered any fire containers close enough to the structures to pose additional challenges.

Regarding update, Jewett said a horse had been escaping its pasture on Hopkins Hill Road and allegedly injured a dog in one case. The board discussed how to handle the structures to pose additional challenges.

Regarding the demolition of the old senior center, All Metals Recycling gave a price of \$16,000 to demolish the structure and an estimate of \$6,000 for asbestos abatement.

"On the question of whether the town should assist the library with the purchase of those seats, select board member Elizabeth Dowd said she has a clear memory that we said yes, we'll give you the building, and you'll give us the seats in your problem."

"On a \$11 million project," Jewett said.

Police Nab D&L Armed Robbers

by Doug McClure
BARRÉ TOWN — For a second time this year, armed robbers have hit D&L Beverage in East Hardwick. It happened just one day before Barre Town Police contacted the Hardwick Police Department (HPD) regarding a robbery in Barre with similarities to the D&L robbery.

At the October 16 Hardwick

Select Board meeting, HPD Chief Austin Cochran briefly mentioned the arrest. "We had evidence from the first [armed robbery], so when Barre Town Police called in Barre Town and [HPD] were all dispatched by the Lamoille County Sheriff as they were aware of what we had from the previous night. The car like suspects were not actually got stopped on River Street."

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by Doug McClure
WOLCOTT — On October 17, the Vermont Department of Transportation awarded the Vermont chapter of the Nature Conservancy (DNC), The Nature Conservancy, Town of Wolcott, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department and Vermont Department of Transportation together plan to restore the habitat of the river corridor. Wolcott Select Board Chair Eric Furr was excited about the project and said Wolcott town did not have to match any funds. "It's a zero-dollar cost to the Town of Wolcott taxpayers," he said.

In a release, the Nature Conservancy said, "The funds will be used for wetland restoration, tree plantings, removal of a defunct bridge, and other enhancements to allow for wildlife movement in changing climate landscapes owned by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department."

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Wolcott Habitat Gets \$25K In Conservation Grants

by Doug McClure
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years of study of deer, bobcats and other wildlife, which found that the movement of the animals is being hampered in some cases by artificial obstructions, such as a defunct bridge abutment, but also by the use of improved tree cover. Route 15 also contributes to the

problem with "large riprap under the Route 15 bridge."

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State asks Calais to Merge Boards with U32 System

by Michael Bielawski
CALAIS — The State Board of Education met last week to make professional judgments on school districts that have yet to merge in accordance with Act 46, the state's new merger law. The state board voted to merge five elementary districts which feed into the Montpelier U-32 High School. These are the Montpelier, East Montpelier, Middlesex and Worcester.

Calais was one of many dis-

tricts in the state that requested Alternative Governance status, which means the school could remain independent without at least 900 students under a single supervisory union structure and board. In almost all cases, this means maintaining the school's current governance structure.

Another concern is that Calais and Worcester have no debt, while the other three elementary schools do. Montpelier and Middlesex supervisory union do. So, the State Board of Education

Elementary School Board, said in prior interviews that the town's tax rate would be "very negatively impacted."

Agency of Education General Counsel Mely Bachman told the Gazette she had attended state board meetings with representation from Calais. She said the state is doing all it can to mitigate the debt impact.

"The school debt issue is a complex one," Bachman said. "We tried to pull out of the

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