

Final Bid for Act 46 Forced Merger Appeal

by Doug McClure

MIDDLEBURY — On January 15, the Vermont Supreme Court heard final arguments from plaintiffs seeking to reverse Act 46 forced merger. In the appeal, plaintiffs claimed two statutory and three Constitutional violations.

The appeal argues that the forced merger took a stated goal of Act 46, "to encourage and support local decisions and actions," and rendered it "illusory." Plaintiffs claim if there was no choice but to merge, as was demonstrated by the forced mergers, the question of local decisions about whether or not to merge was no choice at all. Plaintiffs claim the state failed to establish that forced mergers were "necessary," and instead relied on its own judgment as to what was "possible" and "practicable" thereby committing a "reversible error." The appeal states the State Board of Education ignored that "no money can meet Act 46 goals without merger."

The Common Benefits Clause of the Vermont Constitution and the Brighton decision.

Kelley said he expects justices will take "a couple of months" to hand down a decision. If the ruling is not in the plaintiffs' favor, so far their recourse ends. Kelley said.

"The only appeal from a state supreme court is to the U.S. Supreme Court, and that generally requires a federal or U.S. Constitutional issue," Kelley explained. "We focused only on the Vermont Constitution, so there is no avenue of appeal from here."

It is unlikely that the justices will ask for further information, Kelley said, despite that new information surfaced right before the trial. The Orleans Superior Supervisory Union was hit by a \$10.000 budget surprise. Schools which voluntarily merged receive an annual cap on budget increases. They must absorb that to a drop in the number of equalized states, while forced-merged schools have no such cap.

If the justices rule in favor of the plaintiffs, Kelley said "it is likely that local boards will have to be restored, and will need to sort it out." The matter could also be sent back to the state boards or could end up in the legislature, Kelley said.

In recent weeks, voters in two towns where schools merged to avoid a forced merger voted to undo the merger.



The Judeville Library is hosting a fundraising event. For 1 per hour, people can try to guess how many pennies are in the jar. Prizes will be awarded by Ross and Sawyer Community. The closest three guesses will win a gift certificate from Galaxy Bookshop.

photos by Doug McClure

Select Board Candidates Outline Their Priorities

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — At the 2020 Town Meeting, voters will elect their representatives to the Hardwick Select Board. This year, three positions are open: a three-year seat currently held by Vice Chair Dennis Hale and two one-year seats held by Lucian Avery and Shari Cornish. Hale has been on the select board since 2010 with the exception of one year, 2015. Cornish is the longest serving select board member, having continuously held her seat since 2008, and Avery is the newest member, first elected in 2017.

One candidate vying for Hale's position is Galloway-Kane of East Hardwick. No formal candidate has filed a petition to run against Cornish or Avery. Voters can opt to write in a candidate during Town Meeting, and present their names in Vermont history where writers win office.

For the profiles printed in this week's Gazette, all of the candidates were asked the same set of 11 questions. The first question was to get some background on the candidate, the last was a summary form where general questions about that candidate's view on how Hardwick was doing and what new ideas the person brought to the table, and the remainder were more open-ended questions addressing concerns residents have raised. The topics that the questions addressed included:

1. Should the town have a part-time person for economic development?
2. What are your thoughts on income inequality in Hardwick? Is there more the town could do?
3. Do you think anything can be done to lower property tax rates? Are there services you feel are too expensive to keep providing as a town?

All expressed hope that this year's Town Meeting will be much better attended than last year, which saw a 3.75% turnout for the vote and 14.69% for the Australian Ballot. Additionally, all encouraged citizens to participate in the town government. Town Meeting 2020 will be held on March 3 at Hardwick Elementary School with ballot voting from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Lucian Avery: 'For the Public Good'

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Lucian Avery was born in California and moved to Hardwick from Marlville in 2000. He attended Peoples Academy and has his own book-selling business in Hardwick, which also offers classes. He feels that his job on the select board is something he should do "to make sure things are happening for the public good." He has been on the select board since 2017.

Avery said he feels Hardwick "is in a really good place to be a great place to live." He is "hesitant about big changes." Avery said the Yellow Barn project is "really large and super cool." He said he "likes a lot of hardwork and has mixed feelings" about it. At the same time, he feels that "the project works as proposed" but that "some good things" to come out of it. He said he isn't convinced the town needs more projects like this.

"I think it's good to the things that have people at the center," he said. "If we have large things we've been held to, it can get us in trouble." He does not agree with the proposed economic development position or its rationale. Avery said for people curious about his or her opportunities: "there are 3,000 people to talk to."

Lucian Avery

See AVERY, 6

Shari Cornish: 'A Self-Appointed Cheerleader for Hardwick'

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Shari Cornish has been on the Hardwick Select Board since 2008, its longest serving member. She said, "In those years, my regular job has changed from being a Sales Rep in the Gift Industry and working with clients in the entire state of Vermont and western Massachusetts to having my own business on Main Street in Hardwick." She runs the Whistle Ensemble on South Main, which opened in 2013.

Cornish described herself as a "member of this community, a volunteer and a self-appointed cheerleader for Hardwick." She is a president of that board of directors. "I've been working with many other local volunteers for nearly 15 years to preserve and restore our historic opera house and cultural facility. I like to serve in these roles to help contribute to our town."

She is a supporter of the Yellow Barn project and happy that the town needs more projects like this. She said that her director will continue to have the iconic, restored, historic yellow barn. It will welcome visitors and locals to town. The activities and jobs the entire project will create will benefit the local economy for years to come with the tenants that will set up businesses there. It will also offer more than 100 jobs to the town who would have to commute out of town for work.

See CORNISH, 4

Judevine Kicks off 2020 Fundraising

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — The 2020 fundraising effort for the Judevine Library's Expansion is off and running. The first official event of the year involves a "demi-john" or "carboy," more commonly known as a gigantic jug. This particular jug is full of pennies and "weights a lot," according to fundraising a daily to save the heavy object. Due to its weight, the jug has remained on the floor of the library.

See FUNDRAISING, 6

Hardwick in July 1986 and, according to Sammel, decided to organize a game and throw party in 2013. Thirty-three years on, Connolly and his son Sawyer, who had continued the tradition after Jerry's passing in 2011, donated the new full jug to the Judevine.

Sammel said Connolly contacted her last summer to make the arrangements, which included borrowing a daily to save the heavy object. Due to its weight, the jug has remained on the floor of the library.



photo by Vanessa Fournier

Public Discusses Route 2 Plans

by Will Walters

PLAINFIELD — Issues and ideas regarding the redesign of the Rte 2 and Main Street intersection in the village were brought before the select board recently.

A major concern was that responsibility the town will assume, and that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTAs) will do, if town infrastructure requires funding but the state will not absorb the cost for the work.

No VTAs representatives attended the meeting, but board chair Alexandria Thayer said the agency will be informed 2/23/20.

While the proposed plan from VTAs is not final, the reconstruction is planned in two parts.

Several funds and therefore federal guidelines must be followed. Thayer said the state has indicated it has a declining amount of money to spend on transportation. See PLANS, 5



photo by Vanessa Fournier

Cabot Wins Scholars' Bowl for Second Year

MONTPELIER — The team from Cabot School captured its second straight small-school state title at the Vermont-NEA Scholars' Bowl held its preliminary round playoffs at Montpelier on Saturday.

The Scholars' Bowl is the state-wide high school question-and-answer competition, similar to "Jeopardy!" but featuring teams of high school students and with a heavier focus on the academic curriculum. Schools with enrollments of 500 or fewer students in grades 9-12 are eligible for the small school title. Cabot is by far the smallest school in the league with just over 30 high schoolers.

The small-school playoffs start-off with semifinal matches that saw Cabot defeat Lamolle, 380-130, and Woodstock knock out Montpelier, 365-125.

Earlier on Saturday all the league's teams played five preliminary playoff matches, with those winning at least three earning the right to compete for the overall state championship at the state level on March 28. Cabot posted a 3-2 mark to earn a place in the final rounds alongside Burlington, Champlain Valley Essex, Hanover, Lamolle, Middlebury, South Burlington, St. Johnsbury and Woodstock.

the small-school final, pulling away in the second half for a 320-235 victory. The Hankies join Montpelier as teams that have won the small-school competition in its six-tyear history.

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Ceillidh Galloway-Kane: 'A Community of Possibility'

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Ceillidh Galloway-Kane said she was "one of the most fortunate people in Hardwick." She was born in 1989. She attended Hardwick Elementary School and Hardwick Union, then went to Saint Colman's in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she majored in Art History and Museum Studies. She found a passion for education and took a position at the Portland, Maine Children's Museum. But she missed home and returned to the area.

She worked at American Sign in St. Johnsbury first, and since then has worked as the head of Creative Arts at the Orleans Southwest Shapers' Union, and served on the Hazen board for three years. She also was the Executive Director of GreenVT WoodArts for five years. Currently, she is the REACH Program Director.

She said several factors to explain her move to Hardwick. She said that in her view Hardwick is a "community of possibility" and collaboration, and we're heading in a good direction." At the same time, she said that "many things going on in town," success is whenever every one has the ability to access those advantages.

Ceillidh Galloway-Kane

See GALLOWAY-KANE, 4

Danny Hale: 'Think of Hardwick as an Entity'

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK Danny Hale was born in Hardwick and has served our citizens for almost 20 years. He has been on the select board since his tenure, the select board has seen Hardwick through the later stages of its sometimes painful rebirth, which Hale described as "brave."

"It has been through the hard and what I consider the good," he said. "We're bringing years of institutional knowledge" to the table and strong infrastructure background. Hale said not only understands the infrastructure, but he's been on the front lines doing some of the work himself. He said along with the select board, the town's involvement comes a knowledge of how much it costs.

"The town is almost like a living thing," said Hale. "Something you need to feed. You need to think of Hardwick as an entity."

Hale said the select board has been practicing about "paying attention to state mandates" which he put the town in a favorable position to handle.

Danny Hale

See HALE, 7

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