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TOWN MEETING 2018 ISSUE

East Hardwick Seeks Village Center Designation

by Doug McClure

EAST HARDWICK — Standing at the intersection of Cedar and Main in East Hardwick, one can see a range of historically significant structures whose appearance has not changed significantly since the days when this was a thriving commercial center. The former Hardwick Inn, the old Post Office, the former McFeeters store, Hays, and many other buildings are barely changed from their original appearance. The elementary school from years past is now home to a chiropractic office. Unlike Hardwick, East Hardwick never had multiple fires erase pieces of its past. The main missing piece is the covered bridge, long since replaced.

One part of that past is Caledonia Grange #9. It is the longest operating Grange in New England. Granges are an old New England tradition; the National Grange was founded in 1867 and describes itself as "a non-profit, non-partisan, fraternal organization that advocates for rural America and agriculture." The East Hardwick Grange says their structure is over 100 years old.

Cheryl Michaels is one of the advocates for East Hardwick receiving Village Center designation, which would open doors for grants for preservation and restoration. She describes the Grange as "a gem of a building." It is, according to Michaels, the only historic building in East Hardwick available for public use.

The building committee of the Grange is researching grants for adding an accessible entry to the building and an elevator. Michaels says during the process it became clear a Village Center designation would be helpful.

The Vermont Village Center Designation program affords access to many benefits. According to a fact sheet from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), the following benefits are a part of the designation:

10% historic tax credits, available as an add-on to federal historic tax credits, with eligible costs including both interior and exterior work, code compliance, plumbing and electrical upgrades;

25% historic tax credits for eligible facade work up to $25,000;

50% code improvement tax credits, available for up to $50,000 for elevators and sprinklers and $12,000 for IBC, including ADA modifications such as the ones the Grange seeks, electric and plumbing up to $25,000;

50% technology tax credits available for up to $30,000 for installation or improvements made to data and network installations and heating/ventilation/air conditioning (HVAC) reasonably related to said installations.

Additionally, the designation provides priority access to state grants from agencies such as the ACCD, VTRans, and the Agency of Natural Resources and priority consideration when the state considers building or leasing.

According to a UVM study, there were once several Hardwicks: North, South, and East.

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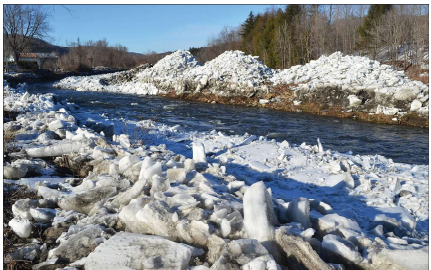

photo by Vanessa Fournier

Huge piles of ice can be seen along the edge of the Lamoille River in Hardwick. As a precautionary measure, the town had Cary Reklevance of Reklevance Construction, inc. clear a channel in the river from the Cottage Street bridge to the end of Charlesvoix Street.

Hardwick Town Meeting Passes Town Budget

by Doug McClure and Elijah Lew-Smith

HARDWICK — About eighty voters turned out for the 2018 Hardwick Town Meeting on March 6, 2018. Together, they exercised democracy not in high ideals or sweeping actions, but line by line, article by article.

Poll workers characterized the turnout as "about normal."

Hardwick Elementary's sixth grade provided lunch, with proceeds to benefit the school's programs.

Most of the twenty-three articles passed unanimously and without debate, including: re-election of town officers and school district directors; funding for the Greensboro Nursing Home, AWARE, the Hardwick Historical Society (HHS), the Northeast Kingdom Human Services, Northeast Kingdom Youth Services, the Hardwick Area Community Justice Center, the Hardwick Area Food Pantry, Caledonia Home Health and Hospice, Hardwick Community Television, Northeast Kingdom Arts Council and the Area Agency on Aging for Northeast Vermont.

Town Historian Lairaine Hussey of the HHS stood up to thank the town for its support.

Article 5 was the proposed FY 19 budget for Hardwick. Town manager Jon Jewett gave a speech on different town projects over the past year. After setting the tone with a humorous reference to his age, Jewett discussed the select board's work of the past year. He mentioned the new water line running from Church Street to Vermont Avenue, the waste water project intended to improve that forty-year-old facility, and the South Main Street sidewalk project.

Jewett said the town is working out the best approach to new water rates, stressing the need to get it right the first time, with a target goal for having most of the new meters installed by July 1. He said the preparation and planning steps has already saved the town water.

"I don't want to speak for the select board, but I think I have feeling that what everybody up here tries to do every day is to try and make your life better," he said.

The yellow barn was Jewett's next topic.

"We're at the tail end of a feasibility study… we're already negotiating with some industries that may be willing to go in there and invest significant amounts of money," he said.

Jewett said he expected the project to be a good source of new jobs and that it might have as much as $2-3 million in economic impact.

Select board chair Eric Remick took the floor next to address questions concerning the budget.

"Last year, somebody told us we don't need to go through the entire budget line by line because you all can read, so I'm taking that into account," said Remick, showing the summary chart for the proposed budget.

For FY 2019, the town estimates a tax rate of $0.01177 or $1.1766 per $100, a $4 difference over the 2018 rates on a $100,000 home.

Remick went through the main points of the budget which included an increase in the highway/garage budget to meet new storm water regulations, an increase in the police department budget for an additional officer, and an increase in line items to contribute to capital funds and improve roads and maintain them.

Remick said the increase in highway budgeting is largely due to the Clean Water Act's storm water requirements.

The 13.88% increase in police budgeting is due to the hiring of an additional officer. The cost to the town will offset during the first three years by a U.S. Department of Justice COPS grant, a three-year, $125,000 federal grant to help the town add to the police force. The apparent burden will spike between the town and the grant. It will gradually shift from grant funds to town funds. In FY 2019, 24% of the funds for the extra officer would be paid by the town and 76% from the grant; at the end of the three-year period in FY 2021, 78% would be paid by the town and 22% from the grant. In year 4, 100% of the costs are borne by the town.

Many people were interested in where the select board came up with the figures for the extra officer's cost, with Remick and Chief Aaron Cochran explaining the figure attempts to account for a "worst case scenario," as there's not even been a preliminary screening of candidates.

Cochran said the actual number will vary based on the candidate.

"It [the new hire] could be someone who is brand new and fresh out of school, or it could be somebody with years of experience, so we don't really know what the salary is going to be on the benefit side," he said.

Audience member Brad Ferland asked, "I was on the board a few years ago, and one of the challenges was stepping down a new officer with a COPS Grant, which was very frustrating. So I am just curious, what are the long-term plans for this position. If it is a three-year grant, are we developing this position so we can walk away from it in [three] years?"

Remick clarified: "Cases are increasing in complexity and bringing new cases to court is becoming more of an administrative burden… So the short answer to your question is that the goal is to permanently increase the staff of the police department."

Next up on the budget walkthrough was discussion around clearing sidewalks. Audience member Ross Connelly asked about the sidewalks on Church Street.

Road Foreman Tom Fadden said the issue with that sidewalk is that it is nearly at street level and probably needs to be re-done.

Dave Gross of the Planning Commission asked the select board if they had any plans to follow up on sidewalk improvements on a broader level.

"In the coming years we'll definitely be looking and thinking of possibilities in the downtown village area," replied Remick. "The diner parking lot keeps coming up as an issue. We have proposed solutions, but as you said, we can't do it piecemeal."

The budget went to voice vote

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Cabot School Budget Is Voted Down

by Michael Bielawski

CABOT — The Cabot School Annual Meeting included a lot of history on how the school came to a substantial increase in proposed budget spending, up almost 17 percent over the prior year. Voters were not convinced and by the end of Town Meeting Day, the budget was voted down, 345-236.

The total proposed budget was $3,669,885, which would have been an increase of $337,105 (10.11 percent) over the prior year. The tax impact would increase the homestead tax rate by 16.8 percent. That's compared to a 2.5 percent average increase from 2013 to 2018.

Chris Tormey, chair of the school board, broke down some of the numbers. Some large increases arose because the budget for special education was projected to increase $134,499, proposed instruction spending (salary and benefits) was up $87,670, and a new elementary counselor would have added $64,317.

If there were no penalty by the state for spending over the threshold set by lawmakers, the increase would have only been 11 percent. The threshold is $17,816 per equalized pupil (a weighted student count), and Cabot's proposal is spending $18,225. Every dollar spent over the threshold is taxed 100 percent and then contributed to the state's education fund.

To get below the penalty, the Cabot school board would have had to cut $174,000.

"The only way you can get to those numbers is by slashing staff, that's basically about 3 or 4 teachers," Tormey said. "It would make the school less strong for the whole community."

He noted that Montpelier has at least one bill under consideration in Montpelier — H.911 — which changes the education funding formula to eliminate the threshold penalty, among other changes.

Tormey talked more about the high special education spending. He noted there are a lot more students with "significant emotional trauma" that not only impacts the budget, but also the learning atmosphere. The extra money would help mitigate that.

"We can be proud as a community of the good job that we do for the kids that have special education needs," he said. "But the tail end of that is if we have a number of kids that are here who need special ed services, it does add up in our budget."

Superintendent Mark Tucker spoke on who and how a special education designation is set.

"It's a pretty elaborate process for kids who have never been identified. Usually it takes a couple of months to go through that," he said. "If it meets certain criteria, then we (including special education professionals) identify them as being eli-

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photo by Will Walters

Tom Mackey (left), the retired chief of the Marshfield Fire Department and Tim Mackey, the current chief, hold the awards presented them at Town Meeting for their 55 and 50 years of service to the department. At right is Assistant Chief Tim Morris, who presented the awards. The two were given National Flags, which flew over the Capitol in Washington, DC, provided by Sen. Patrick Leahy and letters of appreciation from Senator Bernie Sanders. See story, Page Two.

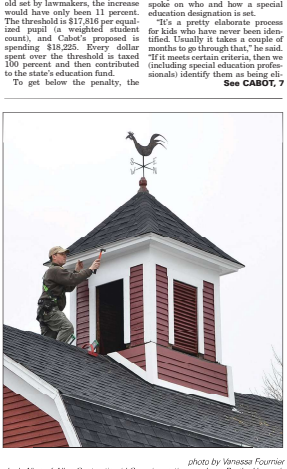

photo by Vanessa Fournier

Josh Allen of Allen Contracting LLC works on the cupola on Bertha Hooper's garage in Hardwick. Allen restored the circa 1900s cupola. Bertha has lived at her residence on Elm Street since 1973.

One Article Postponed: Everything Else Passes Overwhelmingly

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY—The day's sunshine outside may have spurred voters' generosity inside the Craftsbury Academy gym, as voters willingly appropriated $1,030,395 for the coming year. After two and a half hours of deliberation, with little debate, voters were almost unanimous in approving budget proposals.

All incumbent town officers were re-elected without opposition. Auditor Carolyn Ryan, who was not running for another term, was thanked for her years of service. Amanda Cookson was voted to assume the position. Barry Chase was voted to assume the post of Trustee of Public Funds and fill the remainder term of Morris Rowell, who passed away in December. The 2018 Town Report is dedicated to Rowell.

Deliberation on the proposed town budget, reducing it $3,000 from $746,183 to $743,183 came through an amendment by Ryan. The auditors and select board, knowing Town Treasurer Yvette Brown's salary was reduced by the Craftsbury School Board in its budget, had voted to increase the Clerk/Treasurer's salary in the town budget.

Ryan explained the salary had been raised at the morning school district meeting; she proposed the reduction at the town meeting. The amendment passed unanimously. No questions were raised on the $743,183 budget which passed 115 Yes to 5 No votes. Of the $743,183, $501,281 must be raised in property taxes.

The Fire Department's $46,000 request passed without questions on a 104 Yes to 4 No vote. The increase of $6,000 over 2017 was due to insurance premiums, dues and equipment maintenance.

On Article 6, seeking a $125,000 appropriation for a new town truck, select board chair Bruce Urie explained the town's 2009 International Dump truck was being replaced. The truck, used in sanding and salting the roads, was rusted. Article 6 passed, 98-8.

Article 7, seeking $7,200 for town organizations, drew no debate and was passed by unanimous voice vote. The individual grants were: $500, Memorial Day; $1,000, Recreation Committee; $1,500 Village Improvement Society; $3,200, Cemeteries; and $1,000 Block Party.

Article 8, seeking $12,000 for the Craftsbury Community Care Center, passed on voice vote unanimously.

The Craftsbury Public Library was appropriated $39,000 on an 88 Yes to 6 No votes. Ned Houston, chair of the Library Trustees said the library had expanded its hours, programs, and technology.

Article 10, which proposed a $27,012 appropriation in support of requests from 24 organizations, drew some deliberation. The article passed on a 71 Yes to 15 No vote. The suggestion that entities seeking more money than awarded the previous year should be in a separate article was defeated in a voice non-binding vote.

Scoutmaster Aaron Cornelius explained the $1,000 for the BSA Troop 827 was used to defray scouting expenses. The troop has 24 scouts and 8 leaders, double last year's numbers. The money will be used to help defray costs of uniforms and to send scouts to summer camp. All the scouts are Craftsbury Academy students, but not all are town residents.

The only Article postponed was a $500 request from the NorthWoods Stewardship Center. No one was present to speak to the request.

Article 12, an appropriation of $5,000 for the select board to use from the Good Neighbor Fund, passed unanimously by voice vote. Resident Carol Marony suggested an accounting of the fund be made, as possibly some expenditures should be under a different account. Urie explained the $5,000 would be used to purchase another radar speed sign, as suggested by the Road Safety Committee. It was also used for small requests from other committees. Last year, the appropriation was used to help fund playground equipment. Each year, the town receives between $29,000 to $33,000 for the fund

See CRAFTSBURY, 7

Legislature Addresses 'Extreme Risk' Bills with Unanimous Vote

by Doug McClure

MONTPELIER — In an historic moment for the Vermont Senate, the legislative body passed S.221, a bill designed to tackle the problem of guns in the hands of people who intend on doing themselves or others harm. It was a unanimous vote.

As passed by the Senate, the bill allows law enforcement to appeal to a judge if an individual is thought to be dangerous. If a judge agrees, law enforcement can seize firearms for fourteen days; that period could be extended to sixty days with a hearing.

Some senators echoed Senator Joe Benning (R-Caledonia) in saying S.221 is not a gun control bill; it's a public safety bill that is designed to keep firearms out of the hands of those who may be a danger to themselves or others.

Senator Randy Brock (R-Franklin), who has an A+ rating from the National Rifle Association (NRA) went a step further, saying: "This is not a gun control law. This is a lunatic control law."

Just two days later, the senate passed legislation that would require background checks for private gun sales and raise the age limit for purchase to 21. The vote was 17-13 in favor, with an almost even number of Democrats and Republicans opposing it.

With its unanimous passage and support from both pro- and anti-gun groups, S.221 moved to the House, where it became an amendment to H.675, "An act relating to conditions of release prior to trial."

In its version, the House broadened the scope of S.221, with an added provision making it a felony to have a firearm on school grounds and lowering the burden of proof to "a preponderance of the evidence" required for seizing firearms. The House passed H.675 and sent it back to the Senate.

Rep. David Yacovone (D-Lamoille-Washington) said "When

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In Sports

Winning Streak Propels Lady Cats to Final Four

Trojans Blaze into Upcoming Postseason

Wildcats Finish Regular Season in Fourth Seed

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