

Old Schoolhouse Committee Applies for Historic Grant

by Doug McClure

WOLCOTT — The latest chapter in the years-long saga of finding funding and uses for restoring Wolcott's Old School House has begun with a second grant application to the Preservation Trust of Vermont. The first unsuccessful attempt was in 2016. Since then, the Schoolhouse Restoration Committee has worked to raise community awareness and support as well as flesh out more clear use-cases for the building. A 2016 state review said not only would tearing down the building and replacing it be more expensive than restoration, but this is a building worth saving. The building predates the transition and is estimated to have been built around 1855.

meeting attendees showed informal support from citizens for restoration, according to the committee. As with many restoration projects, one question has been what the building could be used for. Until February of 2018, the uses imagined were cited as a community gathering center. Its proximity to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) adds a use case for a related venue. The committee also envisioned a possible home for the Wolcott Historical Society and the Glee Merritt Kelly Community Library. The shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February and the near miss at Fair Haven Union changed things rapidly.

At the April 30 Wolcott Elementary School meeting, the security issues with having the Glee Merritt Kelly Community Library located in the school were raised with more urgency. The library is a public facility, which is a potential risk for the Elementary School. These minutes read, "Patrons to the library have access to the school building, there are restrooms in the library, The school and Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union Superintendent Jonnani LeBlanc discussed security issues related to the library. Superintendent LeBlanc stated that at the current time, public library space in the school building is a security issue. The board discussed public-library hours and considered whether



Hardwick Town Manager Jon Jewett will be retiring on December 31 after eight years of leadership.

Town Manager Jewett to Retire at Year's End

by Michael Bielawski

WOLCOTT — Town manager Jon Jewett will retire on December 31, meaning he is in the last 90 days of his job overseeing Hardwick's day-to-day operations. "I found working for the town to be a really positive experience," Jewett said. "I liked seeing the changes that we implemented in town, making it look better, improving infrastructure and keeping our budget really steady."

Jewett will retire after four decades of work in various management-level positions. In addition to eight years as Hardwick's town manager, he worked with the Agency of Natural Resources for 13 years and with the Vermont Department of Building and General Services for 13 years, including as manager of the Waterbury public library system. "That probably is one aspect that had led to my ability to have this job, my experience in managing that complex," he said.

work involved managing over 1,500 people, including a correctional facility, a mental health hospital and a forensic lab. "Pretty much every state agency, secretary or office was located there. It was equivalent in a lot of ways to Montpelier, except Montpelier has a legislature," he explained. Jewett said that when it came to managing Hardwick, stabilizing the budget was a big challenge because before he came to town, the tax rates were known to fluctuate inconsistently year-to-year, and now it's more predictable. "People could gauge what their taxes were going to do and how much money they would be spending, limiting their surprise," he said. Another big challenge was getting control over the large number of dirt roads. Jewett said that before he got to the job the conditions were inconsistent and there would be a lot of calls in the office complaining about trouble spots. "He was able to help the road crew

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photo by Vanessa Fourrier

Overall restoration costs were estimated at \$400,000 to \$475,000, according to the state architect. The most pressing and immediate concern is the roof, which the state had estimated at \$45,000 to \$55,000, but a late bid came in at \$31,000. Even with the building in disrepair, the state's report valued the structure at \$262,000 to \$316,000. Subsequent investigations alleged concerns as to whether major asbestos abatement would be required. In the over two years since the committee began its work, documents show tension between the select board and the committee. The committee requested an article on the 2017 Town Meeting Agenda, but the select board did not add one. Nonetheless, town

members Sharon O'Connor said 2020 is the 100-year anniversary of the first graduating class of the high school.



The ca.1855 Old School House in Wolcott is slowly arriving at the town office. The building predates the village's arrival in Wolcott by 15 years. A committee has been working on funding restoration since 2016.

photo by Doug McClure

severed. With the debt elimination, the town will not have to borrow money in anticipation of taxes, as it has enough cash to operate for the first two months before taxes are due. Duplessis submitted a management letter which identified two material weaknesses. First is the need for segregation of duties related to cash, check signing and bank reconciliation functions. Second is the need for internal controls related to fund balance.

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photo by Vanessa Fourrier

A Greenspace community work day was held on Saturday, Sept. 29. Volunteers have cleaned the property of South Craftsbury Road for nearly two years. Pictured clockwise from left to right: Robert Picard, Claire Falcione, Wadsworth Parkers, Sarah Livingston, Carolyn Galloway, Kari and Geoff Fries.

School Board Keeps Door Open On Act 46

by Will Walters

CABOT — School board chair Chris Torney contacted the Calais Cooperative Unified Union School District's board for a meeting to discuss any interest in working with Cabot to help keep options open under Act 46, should the state board of education not accept the Cabot School board's alternate governance structure proposal. Torney is interested in exploring Cabot as a high school choice. The Calais board meets on the first Monday of the month and chair Heather Goway was asked to put Cabot on the agenda for the November meeting. Torney also contacted the Pea-

scham School Board to discuss middle-school opportunities for Peacham. Peacham is a member of the Calais Cooperative, but the school only goes up to grade six. At the Vermont Superintendents Association meeting, Dan French, the new state secretary of education, said the state board will not be making any decisions on alternate governance structures (AGS) proposals in early October, but may have some decisions to announce after the board's October 17 meeting. He said that, so far, the secretary's office has accepted about two-thirds of the proposals submitted. Cabot's proposal has not been acted on as of yet. An addendum to the proposal based on sugges-

tion by the Vermont Agency of Education has yet to be completed, and it will be posted on the school's website as soon as the Cabot School Board is finished with the addendum. Superintendent Mark Tucker said it is expected to be finalized soon.

Advantage Cabot, an independent enrichment and boarding program, has expressed an interest in restarting its initiative to help attract tuition-paying out-of-state students to attend the high school while boarding with families in town. Tucker said the board will look to learn from them when they have specifics to discuss.

Member Sharon O'Connor said 2020 is the 100-year anniversary of the first graduating class of the high school.

Identification Cards Under Consideration

by Will Walters

CALAIS — Whether or not to issue identification cards to town employees is under discussion by the Calais Select Board, but a decision is yet to be made. This topic arose after an incident involving alleged anonymous who falsely claimed to be a road crew member. Select board member Cliff Emmons said if identification cards are issued, then a policy would need to be enacted to clarify procedures for employees when approaching homes and providing identification. According to chair Denise Wheeler, the issue came up after an incident on County Road reported a person coming

up to the house, saying he was a road crew worker. The individual told a story about a ditch project and asked if he could leave a car in the driveway.

State Police responded to the residence and found, based on the license plate and a description, that the person in question had a criminal record. State Police are expected to conduct an investigation. Eric Duplessis of Sullivan Powers & Co., the town's public auditors, said the town is ahead of most towns by completing the 2017 and 2018 audits. He reviewed the town's fund balance and debt elimination with the select board, saying all financial

Early Retirement Not Offered This Year

by Will Walters

MARSHFIELD — The Windfall Union School Board voted not to offer educators early retirement this year, considering the uncertainties in budgeting and what impacts the district may face from Act 46. Superintendent Andrew Cleary made the announcement to accept Superintendent Mark Tucker's recommendation to offer Early Retirement/Carer's Change Incentives for fiscal year 2019, due to the uncertainty of the budget process and reassignments in new Supervisors' Union. The motion passed unanimously. Cleary said that uncertainties of budgeting and where Townfield will be next year led her to

oppose offering the benefit. Jon Grossman said he would like to offer early retirement to the professional staff in the future and hopes that negotiations will result in it being "more palatable."

Cleary's recommendation to offer early retirement was chair and clerk of the board, and Grossman was elected to be the representative from Windfall on the Washington Northeast Supervisors' Union Board. Tucker attended the Vermont Superintendents Association meeting recently and said Dan French, the new secretary of education, made the following comments on Act 46: the state board will meet on October 2 to decide

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