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Opioid Problems, New Radar Signs, Projects on Target

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK – At the May 2 select board meeting, a full complement of the Hardwick Select Board heard troubling news from Police Chief Aaron Cochran about the growing opioid crisis that is ravaging on Hardwick two separate entities, get opioids in news from Road Foreman Tim Fadden, and distilled the packet ordinance process should go forward.

Cochran said during the recent drug take-back program, 27 pounds of prescription drugs were collected. He wanted to remind people of the disposal site at the Hardwick Police Department (HPD), but also that always there are needles, liquids or creams are not accepted. Select board member Elizabeth Dow found it shocking that many prescriptions, legal drugs people had paid for, were being discarded.

Cochran also said the new radar speed signs the East Hardwick Neighborhood Organization requested have been installed. He noted that officers had stepped up patrols in East Hardwick "for several months" and had not seen the speeding issues directly, but acknowledged that the patrols themselves could have been a deterrent. The hope is the signs act as a deterrent, as well.

HPD also got its audit result from the Vermont Behavioral Safety Unit reviewing the department's use of grant funding, Cochran said, and "all went well." This echoes Town Manager Steve Fulsher's comment on the same audit in his update showing "very favorable reporting."

Road Foreman Tim Fadden said the department has made "good headway on grading" and dirt road conditions were improving. Crews are starting to load up, but Gooch still a few (problem) spots."

Repairs to the paved roads are imminent, but the embankment issue has been delayed by a few at one of the three places in Hardwick. The supply. Continuing issues the old mix, which had not proven very effective, was not in the delay to be extremely short. He said as of now 2 months (Road, Chandler and Dewey Mills) are among the paving projects planned for the summer. A diesel price spike over the week of the 20th.

Fadden said the department has a goal of getting most everything in town in "skip-shape" with the crosswalk repainting village sidewalk repairs and

photo by Doug McClure

Radar speed signs have been installed in East Hardwick, as announced at the May 2 select board meeting by the East Hardwick Neighborhood Organization's Cheryl Michaels and Hardwick Police Chief Aaron Cochran.

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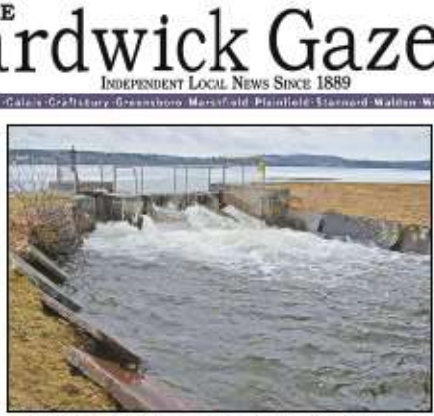

photo by Vanessa Fournier

Water was running high at the Caspian Lake dam April 23. The dam is owned by the Hardwick Electric Department and maintained by The Greensboro Association of volunteers.

Village of the Dammed: Caspian's Water Levels

by Doug McClure

GREENSBORO – Caspian Lake has jumped its spillway again. According to Stew Arnold, a member of the board of trustees for the Greensboro Association, residents are tired of the back-and-forth between the state and the Hardwick Electric Department (HED), which owns the dam, to keep the lake levels within reason.

The lake's water level settles about 20 inches up or down, according to Arnold. He said he spent $2,000 to repair his dock from damage due to fluctuating water levels and added that there have spent ten times that. Arnold said there is no official measurement of the lake's water level – "just a guy with a tape measure."

Addressing a concern about the water level, he said, is cumbersome and ineffective. A permanent contact the state, which in turn contacts HED.

Arnold said that for years HED would adjust the dam by spe to keep a reasonable level and that the practice has continued in the past year and a half. But there still is no official gauge in place to monitor the level of the lake. Arnold would like to see the variation in level minimized to perhaps 10 inches either way.

HED may have made some needed repairs the dam, but Arnold said he HED to tell the association's board of issues with the dam have been resolved was inaccurate. He did note that HEDs crews have always been responsive to responsive and quick to fix issues, but a lasting solution to not possible without an official measurement and water level target.

"We've been trying to work with the state. There's a state-life way to do it," said Arnold.

There is no defined level of "flood" for Caspian Lake, and Arnold worries the lake-as-fate strategy HED has used will cause problems if they don't fix and modernize the dam as they say they have. The control gate, or weir, is adjusted by HED periodically, but it took a day before they came out the last time, by which time the water was nearly overtopping the dam.

HED has owned the lake's dam since 1927. The Greensboro Association, whose mission includes protecting the lake, was founded in 1894. Friction between HED and Greensboro residents is not rare, according to a history authored by the Association.

Arnold is not so much concerned about the dam's integrity as he is tired of needing to make a big deal to get any response. He feels that he and others have spent an inordinate amount of time and effort on the village to control when that really should not be their responsibility.

The Hardwick Gazette's call to HED for comment but, as of press time, we have not heard back.

Pete's Greens Misled on Hemp Plants

by Doug McClure

CRAFTSBURY – Pete Johnson, owner of Craftsbury Farming operation Pete's Greens, was caught by surprise when an exploratory project with hemp plants started in collaboration with Champlain Valley Dispensary (CVD) last summer, turned into a lot more than he bargained for – and not in a good way.

Instead of CBD (cannabidiol) hemp, which has no psychoactive properties, more plant extract was limited as full-strength marijuana.

Johnson said he is "really interested in the [hemp] industry," and when CVD approached him about a trial project to grow 250 hemp plants with a much larger post-harvest collaboration, he took the opportunity.

The plan was that CVD would retain ownership of the plants, and Pete's Greens would cultivate them. Johnson said it was not a financial arrangement, and no money changed hands. He said that less than $1 would go to work, having never tried growing hemp before, but his hope at the time was that CVD would work, and a much larger project could begin. Johnson admitted to a lack of understanding about the laws and said that was part of why he wanted to do the trial run.

Nearly three-and-a-half months were under, reported that it interviewed a former Pete's Greens employee, who had accompanied Johnson in saying it was a "test plot" and Pete's Greens took CVD "at their word" that the plants were "legal CBD hemp."

According to multiple media outlets, what Johnson was not aware of was some of the plants provided were medical marijuana plants, not hemp. Without testing, marijuana and hemp are indistinguishable; they look and smell nearly the same. Testing is the state's responsibility.

To be legally classified as hemp, a plant cannot have more than 0.3% concentration of THC, which is the substance in marijuana that gets people high. Anything in excess of that 0.3% is considered marijuana. The state tested plant remnants at Pete's Greens after an anonymous tip last November, which were left over after CVD had harvested the crop, but it wasn't until autumn from the Agency of Agriculture showed up "in his driveway" this spring that Johnson learned about the THC content results.

Hemp is lightly regulated in Vermont. Farms are required to have special permits to grow it, it can't earn less well as the Agency of Agriculture had not responded as of press time when asked how many permits are being issued, and tracking of hemp is done, or how this interwas tracking would allow something like this to slip through the cracks.

Johnson said he has to be honest in medical marijuana is still very interested in hemp. He said he wants the attention on him around the matter to subside, because to his knowledge he was

See HEMP, 8

photo by Will Walters

Drew McNaughton, Green Up Coordinator for Marshfield, greets volunteers Bert Ai right) Bill Pipp, Brenden McLane, Lucy McLane, Pam Dube, Jean Hebert, Sam McLane and Alex McLane on Saturday as they brought in their Green Up collections to the town garage collection center.

Chief Cochran: Deadly Fentanyl More Prevalent

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK – Hardwick Police Department (HPD) Chief Aaron Cochran spoke to the select board on May 2 about an increase in opioid overdoses, and what consequences that has for HPD. Cochran said the number of incidents in April was not automatically higher, but the gravity of the consequences had worsened. Overdoses were up.

Cochran attributed that to an increased presence of fentanyl, which is an opioid used as a cutting agent, and especially dangerous because of its potency – 100 times that of heroin, he said.

Over the weekend of April 27, Cochran said an overdose case was so severe that it required three shots of the opioid reversal drug Narcan to bring the person back to life. According to the Department of Health (DOH), just 4% of the more than 200 Narcan dose administered statewide required four many units, with over two-thirds requiring just one.

"That person was taken to the hospital," said Cochran, "and to the best of my knowledge is still alive."

HPD's stockpile of Narcan was "depleted" to the point that the department reached out to Northeastern Health Center and the DOH for a resupply, which the department received.

He said HPD has been carrying Narcan for "the last couple years" but the recent trend seemed to be an increase in overdoses involving multiple substances, what Johnson was not aware of was some of the plants provided were medical marijuana plants, not hemp. Without testing, marijuana and hemp are indistinguishable; they look and smell nearly the same. Testing is the state's responsibility.

To be legally classified as hemp, a plant cannot have more than 0.3% concentration of THC, which is the substance in marijuana that gets people high. Anything in excess of that 0.3% is considered marijuana. The state tested plant remnants at Pete's Greens after an anonymous tip last November, which were left over after CVD had harvested the crop, but it wasn't until autumn from the Agency of Agriculture showed up "in his driveway" this spring that Johnson learned about the THC content results.

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courtesy photo

A sweet array of the opioid reversal drug Narcan, which is used by the Hardwick Police Department and other law enforcement agencies to save people who are overdosing.

overdoses involving multiple more use.

"Overdoses[ ] seem to be becoming a more common occurrence, and we've been using Narcan more than we have in the past," he said. We're seeing a lot of fentanyl, as [particularly] around the state," he said.

With the increased appearance of fentanyl, Cochran said

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Act 46 Appellants Request Summary Judgment Motion

by Doug McClure

MONTPELIER – Appellants for the Act 46 forced-merger appeal have filed a motion for summary judgment in the three-month suit, which was heard in Judge Robert A. Mello's April 12 debate. With a ruling on the summary judgment of their way, the appellants will be able to present the entire in last appeal to the Supreme Court, rather than in two parts.

In his April 12 ruling on the appeal against Act 46 mergers filed by over 20 schools, school districts, towns and individuals, Judge Mello dismissed three counts in the original appeal based on "pure questions of law": Counts II, V, and VI questioned whether the delegation of authority to the State of Education was constitutional, and whether violation of due process or equal protection of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the Chapter I, Article 4 of the Vermont Constitution had occurred.

Justice Mello wrote all three counts would not succeed on legal grounds above, but that the remaining three counts, I, III and IV, "may require the presentation of facts that have yet to be established, and therefore do not present questions which are subject to dismissal at this time ... The certified questions in this case are not questions of 'law' as the resolution of each of them may be dictated by the facts that are developed at trial."

Justice Mello noted at the time he completed a partial ruling could duplicate the Supreme Court and explained his reasoning.

"This Court is mindful of the Supreme Court's well-established policy of avoiding piecemeal appeals. This Court also understands that directing the entry of final judgment now on just three of Plaintiffs' six counts runs a risk that the Supreme Court could be faced with a second appeal in this case."

In so doing, Justice Mello created an avenue for the appellants which the summary judgment would take advantage of: reducing or fine filing an appeal against the three dismissed accounts, and waiting for a decision on the resolution of the remaining three which could take until next fall, a motion for summary judgment would remove that separation and reinstate the unified appeal for presentation to the Supreme Court.

Attorney for the appellants Thad Bell-Pasqua wrote: "Right now, we can only get three [the Supreme Court] with the three issues Mello has resolved in S. and judgment on, but we want to get all issues in front of the Supreme Court at the same time."

The three remaining counts focus on whether the forced merger order is "arbitrary and capricious," whether the state has the authority to impose a municipality's bonded debt onto another municipality without the consent of whether the Small Schools Grants which are affected by forced mergers, would be redistributed in a way that violated the common benefits.

Under Vermont law, school districts are municipalities, and the appellants' argument is as such, state law allows for voter consideration before can merge. Municipality's debt is transferred, or a municipality's property is conveyed, to another. The power to consolidate was not something the legislature gave the Board of Education. The common benefits clause would create situations where districts with wealthy families receive Small Schools Grants to help their districts with less well-off students. It also makes a case that administration of school districts presented to mergers were ignored, as were cases of geographic isolation and financial disparity, which were statutorily required to be considered.

"My hope is that this an appeal to the Supreme Court tomorrow [Tuesday, May 7] on the issues already filed by Mello and then get the Attorney General's office to agree to an appeals schedule that will allow all issues to be briefed simultaneously for the Supreme Court as soon as Mello resolves a motion on those remaining issues," said Kelley.

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Graduates Hailed as Seeds of the Future

by Jane Pickel Cook

CRAFTSBURY – The Sterling College Class of 2019 received the very same words of the message delivered by Dr. Vandana Shiva at commencement exercises on Saturday afternoon. The 23 graduates heard an inspirational plea from Dr. Shiva to undo the ravages wrought by the 20th-year old mistake that has driven industrial agriculture, namely, fossil fuels.

The seeds of a revolution following her emotional address including industrial agriculture by the destruction of natural resources – soil, water, air and forests. The emphasis has been on chemical agriculture, which has become ever more dependent on fossil fuels, she noted, but, more traditionally "it has fossilized our minds."

The term "monoculture of community," Dr. Shiva said. "Making living begins big. Every plant was a little seed. Your little college is the seed of the fu-

photo by Jane Pickel Cook

Dr. Vandana Shiva gave an impassioned commencement address to the 23 graduates of Sterling College Class of 2019 during commencement exercises on Saturday.

ture. You don't all have to be the same. Each of you is an expression of diversity."

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Vermont Vaultsville's Cream of the Crop