

## Local, State Response to COVID-19 Coronavirus

**by Doug McClure**

**MONTPELIER** — The State of Vermont Department of Health (D&H) and Vermont Emergency Management (VEMA) are preparing for a potential outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Vermont's message in a Friday press conference was COVID-19 "should be taken seriously," but that there is no cause for fear. The state said it is being proactive, with all agencies and healthcare providers coordinating their efforts.

your face, avoid close contact with those who are sick; and if you feel ill, stay home except to go to the doctor.

The U.S. Surgeon General and CDC advise against buying face masks as a precaution, stating it is a misconception that a face mask protects healthy people from getting sick. Face masks are most useful when worn by those who are ill to reduce risk to others, he explained, and a mad rush to buy face masks could result in a shortage in supply. Dr. Levine, **SEE RESPONSE, 4**

### Ghosts of Pandemics Past

**by Doug McClure**

**HARDWICK** — The Harwick Gazette reported on two early 20th-century pandemics: a smallpox outbreak in 1900 and the 1918 influenza pandemic.

In early 1900, Health Officer Dr. S.E. Darling diagnosed a resident with smallpox. The Gazette **SEE GHOSHS, 9**



Counting paper ballots at the Wolcott Town Meeting (clockwise, from top center): select board member Richard Lee, outgoing select board chair Eric Fure, select board member Michael Leavitt, outgoing select board member Jenn Horton-Clapp, Katy Black, Cornelius Reed.

## First Steps for New Craftsbury Elementary

**by Emmett Avery**

**CRAFTSBURY** — The Craftsbury School Board took the first concrete steps toward building a new elementary school building on Feb. 27 at a special meeting to discuss the project. Three board members attended, along with representatives from the architectural firms Bast & Root and Black River Design. Attendance at the meeting was mandatory for any firm wishing to be considered for the contract. The board plans to conduct interviews with the two firms over the next month and announce its decision on April 8.

The work the board hopes to accomplish is three-fold, according to the request for proposal. The first is to design and organize all aspects of the new elementary building. The second is to hire and install Dastan Road to drawing up plans and overseeing the construction contract. The district will put a bond measure to vote no later than the fall 2021, documents said.

The other two components of the contract involve replacing the roof on Minnow Hill and replacing the boiler in the Academy building. The boiler was purchased in 2012 and according to Craftsbury School Board Chair Harry Miller was part of an initiative to improve energy efficiency projects. "We were pioneers in the field back in 2012," Miller said, adding that the school had "one of the first wood pellet boilers in the North America." The company that made the boiler is long gone, Miller said, and the school can no longer obtain necessary replacement parts.

Board members in attendance brainstormed ideas for the new building and answered questions from the architects. "I think what we are looking for," Miller said, "is something that is innovative, and a model."

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## Town Meeting Initiative Stirs Cell Tower Debate

**by Michael Bielawski**

**HARDWICK** — An agenda item at Hardwick's Town Meeting sparked discussion about the safety and public approval process for installing new communications technology and infrastructure.

The initiative was for the voters to approve having a Hardwick representative on the newly-forming Communications Union District (CUD), which is tasked with advocating for increased internet connectivity in the rural North-east Kingdom.

Resident Rose Friedman expressed concerns about the potential with impacts of new wireless infrastructure including cell towers.

"My understanding is that there needs to be some sort of tower for the signal to come out to," she said. "I'm just wondering basically about the process of this in and how people can continue to inform themselves on this stuff is placed."

Student Emily Lanxner weighed in on the issue. "I'm a fifth-generation wireless technology," she said. "It's been shown in thousands of studies to be very dangerous for pollinators, for birds, for people's health," she said.

Other residents said that without updated communications technology the region is at an economic disadvantage, and businesses could leave. "We've achieved a safe and effective solution," she said.

Jake Lester, the presenter of this initiative, said that any major projects should get government oversight. "They have to go through all the same processes as anyone else building infrastructure to go through," he said.

Friedman continued to have reservations that a small community like Hardwick could stop a large project, but after about 20



Hardwick residents Jennifer Filigelman, Alana Considine, Marc Considine, Kim Harting-Welch and Michael Lew-Smith listen to the town budget discussion during Town Meeting held in the Hardwick Elementary School gymnasium.

minutes of discussion, residents voted to approve the measure and move on to the next agenda item.

Town manager Shaun Fielder reported that the town has achieved a new benchmark in its financial health: it now has reserves totaling \$615,646, which amounts for more than 16% of its annual budget.

Generally, the industry recommendation is to be at least 15%, so we are just a little bit above what we should have in reserves, and this would be to cover any unanticipated costs in any given budget year," Fielder said.

The total town budget, which was approved by a vote, was \$8,465,120. Rising health insurance premiums were a significant cost factor, as it has been in recent years.

A large portion of the meeting was devoted to Rep. Joseph D'Amico's (D-Stannard) giving

## Yellow Barn Passes Muster, No Ice Jam Concerns

**by Doug McClure**

**HARDWICK** — At a brief, specially scheduled Feb. 27 Hardwick Select Board meeting, the board received an update on the Development Review Board's (DRB) findings from a hearing on the Yellow Barn. Town Manager Shaun Fielder also updated the board on the status of the Lamoille River, as the window for ice jams draws near. A mission-critical deadline forced the delay of the planned discussion before the First Department board for a truck.

"The Yellow Barn went before the DRB on Feb. 24, said Fielder. The DRB approved the Conditional Use and Flood Hazard review along with conditions that are "not as anticipated," Fielder said. According to DRB minutes, the conditions include meeting requirements for the Conditional Use, an exemption for the non-conforming building to exceed town height limits by a foot, two extra parking spaces and nine conditions dictated by the Yellow Barn's proximity to the floodplain. Fielder said the grant process is ongoing and the town is waiting to hear from the Economic Development Association on a \$3 million grant application.

Fielder said the town contacted the Northern Community Investment Corporation about grant opportunities for the Town Garage. Fielder said conversations indicated the town would likely be eligible for up to 80% matching funds for planning grants and be in the process of obtaining cost estimates for the project.

Fielder noted that he had attended a Vermont Emergency Management Flood Financing Workshop. He said the workshop is "a little below normal," as is the river ice. "The river is clearing itself out pretty quickly," he said, adding that it is forming a natural channel with the ice only 3-4' deep. "We're in a good position locally," Fielder said. In the event of an ice jam, Fielder claimed the town can address the problem "pretty quickly."

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## Greensboro Passes All Articles Amid Increased Budgets

**by Emmett Avery**

**GREENSBORO** — Greensboro's Town Meeting on March 3 was an orderly affair. Just over 100 people gathered at the Highland Center for the Arts to transact the business of the town in the long-standing New England tradition.

The fiscal year 2021 budget for Greensboro, including all appropriations, will be \$2,020,651, a 5.1% increase over FY 2020, and the first time the town has broken the \$2 million mark. The main drivers of the cost increase are a \$21,685 increase for the Hardwick Police Department and a \$14,462 increase in the town's payroll and benefits category, which select board member Andy Kehler explained is due to increased health insurance costs.

The total police budget for the town of Greensboro will be \$257,874 in FY 2021. The board said this is a proportional share

Greensboro town meeting at the Highland Center for the Arts.



photo by Emmett Avery

## COVID-19 Coronavirus Hits Close to Home

**by Doug McClure**

**MONTPELIER** — Confirmed cases of COVID-19 coronavirus are getting closer to Vermont. On Monday, New Hampshire officials said a Dartmouth-Hitchcock hospital employee tested positive for COVID-19, and New York officials announced that a New York City woman who had traveled to Iran is the first confirmed case in the state. Rhode Island reported two cases over the weekend, Massachusetts confirmed one case, Georgia has confirmed two cases and Florida has two presumptive positive cases as of Tuesday afternoon.

The COVID-19 virus, which continues to cause worldwide concern, is severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The word "coronavirus" is an umbrella term for a group of viruses and does not refer to a single virus. While four types of coronavirus

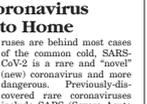


photo by Doug McClure

On Feb. 28, Vermont officials announced a new task force on the coronavirus COVID-19 and updated the public at a conference in the Emergency Operations Center in Waterbury. Pictured (left to right): Erica Borenman, Director of Vermont Emergency Management; Dr. Mark Levine, Commissioner of Health; and Patsy Kello, State Epidemiologist for Infectious Disease.

are behind most cases of the common cold, SARS-CoV-2 is a rare and "new" (new) coronavirus and more dangerous. Previously discovered rare coronaviruses include SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middle-East Respiratory Syndrome).

Medical professionals are working to better understand COVID-19, said Vermont Health Commissioner Dr. Mark Levine in a joint press conference between the Vermont Department of Health and Vermont Emergency Management last Friday. "The complete community picture is not fully understood," Levine said.

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