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Hardwick Expects Historic Turnout for Primary

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — At the close of business Monday, with more than 24 hours of voting to go, Assistant Town Clerk Tonia Gray estimated 530 ballots had been processed with many still to be counted. If that count proves accurate, it would be the highest voter turnout in Hardwick for an August primary since at least 1974, according to state data. The state does not break down totals by town for votes prior to that year.

The only year with a similar turnout was 2016, which saw 506 votes cast and featured a close two-way race for Governor on the Democrats' side between Sue Minter and Matt Dunne, and a moderate challenge to Governor Phil Scott from Bruce Lisman. Hardwick and more than half of Vermont thought Governor Scott should keep his job that November.

Tuesday's results should provide clues to what drove high primary voter turnout. While both Democrats and Republicans have a number of candidates vying for top positions, many races went uncontested. Tuesday's bond vote for the Judevine expansion has been a high-profile event years in the making, but the failed, controversial 2011 bond vote for the library drew only 443 voters to the polls at that time.

Gray said that for the most part people were comfortable with the mail-in system and found it easy to understand. According to Town Clerk Alberta Miller, pre-pandemic primary elections have seen few mail-in ballots, with 2018 having just 48 absentee votes. If the count next year would see at least a ten-fold increase in that number, raising the question of whether voters may prefer mail-in ballots to voting in-person.



photo by Vanessa Fournier

Ken Eastman, of East Hardwick, puts his ballots in the boxes while election official Jean Hackett watches during Tuesday's Primary Election held at the Memorial Building in Hardwick.

Education Tax Rate Shocks Board

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — At the August 6 regular select board meeting members received proposed FY 2021 property tax rates from Town Clerk Alberta Miller. The Hardwick Electric Department (HED) general manager updated the board on the current status of HED projects. After some continuing debate that began in a previous meeting, the board decided attempts to reschedule Memorial Day fireworks for later this year were too complicated and pushed the show to 2021. The board also heard from Business Manager Casey Rowell and Public Works Director Tom Fadden.

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DRB Deliberates HCA Latest Appeal

by June Fichel Cook

GREENSBORO — The Development Review Board (DRB) made no decisions following Monday night's two-hour Zoom hearing on an appeal from the Highland Center for the Arts (HCA). HCA attorney Robert Halpert presented an appeal to reconsider the DRB's June 21 decision denying relief from Condition 5 of the HCA's Conditional Use Operating permit, issued in 2014.

Condition 5 of the operating permit prohibits the center from utilizing amplified sound at events outside the facility. The lengthy hearing was mildly contentious at times.

Atty. Halpert said that the HCA was obviously not happy with the earlier decision and felt the need to point out deficiencies. He cited the lack of factual evidence of adverse sound impacts being presented at the earlier hearing to substantiate the DRB's denial. He acknowledged that HCA's evidence of sound impacts had been provided

by himself and Executive Director Keisha Luce, which had concluded there would be no adverse impacts. The HCA evidence given at the previous hearing was not based on actual sound level testing, which was conducted on July 2.

Atty. Halpert, Ted Donlon, and Valaine Hall had conducted sound decibel level testing from several locations by testing environmental background noises with and without music sound amplification from the center. The findings were presented in the appeal.

Halpert explained sound amplification was needed for all events which included visiting author's lectures and other shows, not only music. Without amplified sound, it was impossible to be heard outside clearly beyond the most immediate seating.

At the outset of the hearing, Chair Jane Woodruff noted that she is on the golf course at the Country Club every day and had heard the music sound test while playing golf on July 2. She

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photos by Doug McClure

On Tuesday, August 4, the remnants of Tropical Storm Isaias raced over Hardwick with light winds and moderate, much-needed rain. Clouds briefly dissipated, allowing a glimpse of the Sturgeon Moon (full moon) over West Church Street.