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It's a picturesque scene by Pierce's Sugar House in Hebron, with snow on the ground and Ray Pierce's maple trees tapped and – hopefully today – ready to offer up sap to turn into maple syrup for the 24th Annual Maple Fest taking place this Saturday and Sunday, March 8 and 9.

Extreme Cold Taking Maple Toll

by Geeta Schrayter

On a cold morning, a warm breakfast such as pancakes, French toast or oatmeal accented with maple syrup and a cup of Joe (which, depending on your preference, might be sweetened with syrup too) is the perfect way to start the day. But this year, the chilly temps that have been hanging around have made it difficult to make the syrup for that idyllic breakfast; it's been so cold, the sap just isn't running.

At Pierce's Sugar House on West Main Street in Hebron Monday, the evaporator used to boil the water from the sap, leaving behind pure Connecticut maple syrup, was empty. Large buckets sat on the floor, filled with frozen sap; there were no clouds of steam, no aroma of syrup in the air, nothing to hint at the fact within a few days, the sugarhouse – and indeed, the entire town – would be bustling with people looking to enjoy the 24th annual Hebron Maple Festival.

"This year's been a total, complete bust at this point," owner Ray Pierce said Monday. "There's nothing happening. It's too cold – entirely too cold."

Currently he said about 400 gallons of sap had been collected, the majority of which was ice. But that ice can't be used until there's enough liquid sap in the bottom of the evaporator to ensure the temperature rises to, and remains consistently at the boiling point of water, about 212 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Ice blocks won't make it. It's got to be liquid," he said. "So once we get the evaporator filled with liquid then we can start adding the ice blocks."

And the hope is that will happen just in time for the Maple Fest.

"We're supposed to get reasonable weather," Pierce explained Monday. "Some Thursday, Friday and into Saturday."

If that holds true, the sap will start running and Pierce can start collecting and boiling, all in time for this weekend's festivities.

Over at Wenzel's Sugar House, Ron Wenzel, Chairman of the Maple Fest Committee, said he was experiencing a similar situation.

"It's been all of us. It's just been so cold" he stated, explaining weather with cool nights between 20-25 degrees and warmer days around 40-45 degrees (which is more typical for this time of year) was optimal for sap collection. But he added the cold wasn't hurting the sap and wouldn't necessarily hinder the amount gathered – just *when* it's gathered.

"Cold weather doesn't hurt this," he said. "It doesn't hurt the tree or the sap. Nothing is taking place biologically inside the tree, but when it warms up it's either going to run like it's never run before or it'll just be a longer duration."

Wenzel explained the extreme cold this winter could result in the sap-running season last-

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Schuster Presents Colchester Operations Budget

by Melissa Roberto

The Colchester Board of Finance Wednesday received the first presentation of First Selectman Gregg Schuster's proposed budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year – a spending package totaling \$13,767,042, an increase of \$617,192, or 4.7 percent over current year spending.

Combined with the Board of Education's proposed spending package of \$40,401,238, also presented Wednesday, Colchester is looking at an overall budget of \$54,168,280, which is an increase of \$1,942,376, or 3.72 percent, over the current year.

The town and school budgets are due to be voted on separately, at a referendum scheduled for May 6.

Schuster began his presentation Wednesday by stating that, in his view, he and the town department heads "put together a good budget." He stressed the theme for the municipal budget was defining Colchester as "a town with growing needs" due to its increasing population.

Additionally, Schuster said he made about \$673,000 cuts to the requests that came to him, furthering those cuts were not because of disagreement with or "frivolous requests" from

department heads, but rather because of priority decisions. Though Schuster did not communicate specific values of his proposals, he highlighted the departments receiving either increases, flat funding or decreases within his budget.

Public safety expenditures create the largest increase within the budget; the overall category is up \$359,948. Public safety includes police, fire and emergency management, Schuster explained. Within the Colchester Police Department, Schuster has proposed to hire a new police officer to start in January 2015, at a cost of \$28,206. He explained this position would help move the town closer to the goal of providing 24/7 police coverage.

Also, the police budget is rising within the resident trooper line item, due to a state police contract going into effect. Also, \$21,500 is included within the police overtime account to provide third shift coverage two nights per week during the summer months. This, Schuster explained via graphs, was a decision made by comparing Colchester's burglary, accident and assault statistics.

In terms of the Colchester Hayward Fire Department budget, Schuster has proposed to fully fund the ambulance incentive program currently in place at a cost of \$96,000. An additional \$10,000 is also included to go towards the funding of a consultant to help with the Strategic Plan for the department – one of five recommendations made by the Fire Department Task Force earlier this year to the board of selectmen.

The Public Works category is proposed to rise nearly \$190,000. Schuster said this is mostly due to contractual increases and a \$50,000 increase in the snow budget. Additionally, Schuster said he has flat-funded road improvements, meaning the \$400,000 currently within the budget for roads is proposed to remain the same in the next fiscal year.

However, Schuster positively said the state has doubled its Town Aid Road (TAR) funds, which would allow the town to purchase more vehicles and make road improvements without funding the costs through the town budget. This would allow Colchester to "make some progress," he said.

Schuster also highlighted next year's proposal for capital improvement. Capital expenses differ in two ways, he explained. The first is a capital improvement account, which he explained after the meeting is primarily used to fund projects in the next fiscal year. The second, Schuster explained, is funding capital expenses through a capital reserve, which is basically done by putting away funds for planned or unplanned issues that will arrive in the next year or future years, he said.

Capital improvement totals \$329,000, which is an increase of \$99,500 over the current year. Capital expenses include: the replacement of an underground oil tank at Fire Company 1 at \$45,000; mold remediation and roof repair at Company 1 at \$120,000; parking lot repairs at the town garage at \$10,000; replacement of computers at \$26,500; initiating a network virtualization at \$35,000; \$32,500 to be set aside to help pay for the next town-wide revaluation; \$5,000 for open space acquisitions; and \$55,000 for a police cruiser.

Capital reserve, however, is made up of three

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Hebron Maple Fest Section Inside



On Monday, things were quiet at Pierce's Sugar House, and his evaporator sat still. The temperatures have been so unseasonably low, Pierce's sap has frozen into solid blocks, and the maple syrup-making process has been pushed back, as Pierce needs liquid sap to get his evaporator started before he could add the ice blocks. With the temperature forecast to rise today and tomorrow, the hope is the sugar house will soon be filled with clouds of steam and the sticky, sweet aroma that accompanies the process.

Maple Toll cont. from Front Page

ing through April, instead of ending around this time.

Like Pierce, Wenzel said he was going to aim for gathering sap Friday to have for Saturday. He said he had some syrup leftover from last year – which both men said was a great year quality– and quantity-wise – but part of the Maple Fest fun is heading to the area sugar houses (which also includes Woodyacres Sugar House and Winding Brook Sugar House) to watch the process.

Although the weather still looked promising as of press time Thursday (the Weather Channel showed Friday and Saturday as partly sunny with a high of 42 and 50 degrees, respectively), if it were to prove uncooperative, there would still be plenty of events to enjoy at the sugar houses and all around town.

There'll be face painting at Woodyacres, and anyone venturing to Wenzel's Sugar House will find the Farmer's Cow and maple cake with ice cream. At Pierce's Sugar House, the Golden Egg Art Studio belonging to Pierce's wife Deborah will have an open house, and shirts made by the couple's daughter Caitlin will be available in two styles.

One will be silk-screened with the words "I love CT" with a maple leaf in the middle of the

heart used to represent the word "love." The second shirt was thought up last year, and Caitlin called it "cheeky, slightly inappropriate but really hilarious." Next to a "naked" maple tree – that is, one without its leaves – is the slogan "I'd tap that," an ode to the process of tapping the maple trees to acquire the sap.

Elsewhere in town, there will be enough events to interest anyone. On Saturday, these include an opening ceremony at Liberty Square Collectibles, a pancake breakfast sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, a craft fair, an ice cream eating contest, a sled dog demo and the ability to check out the town's World War II Observation Post.

On Sunday, events include a pancake breakfast sponsored by the Hebron Lions Club, the ability to tour the local synagogue and enjoy traditional Jewish baked goods, and a tractor parade.

"The tractor parade last year only had about 30 tractors; this year there's over 60 and they're still coming in," Wenzel explained, adding anyone interested in joining the parade should contact Kevin McDonnell at 860-874-8497.

"There are more events this year than there has been in the past," Wenzel furthered. "There are 50 plus [events], last year there were only

45."

Events taking place across both days include the annual quilt show at the Old Town Hall, a silent auction, tours of Hills Farm (where people can also purchase fried cheese curds and maple dipping sauce), and plenty of open businesses to venture into along with informational booths and demonstrations.

And then, of course, there'll be food – plenty of food. There'll be chili and chili dogs, fried dough and French fries, cheeseburgers, pulled pork, kettle corn, canollis, soup and bread, s'mores and more.

Of the maple-tinged variety there'll be sugar on snow, maple ice cream soda floats, maple milkshakes, maple cotton candy, maple and chocolate covered pretzels, maple fudge and maple-flavored ham, egg and cheese sandwiches; in other words, enough to satiate even the biggest maple craving.

And anyone looking for new ideas as far as what to use that (if all goes well) fresh maple syrup for once they head home, try asking the sugar house owners.

Pierce said at his home they like to use it for apple pie and butternut squash, and to sweeten coffee and tea. He added they'll also be supplying some to a new brewery in Bristol, Firefly Hollow, and said with a laugh that may just prove to be his new favorite way to enjoy the springtime sweetener.

Wenzel meanwhile, is a fan of freezing the maple candy his wife makes and enjoying it during the hot summer months.

Speaking on this year's Maple Fest, Wenzel said he was "hoping for a good attendance and great camaraderie."

He added this weekend's festivities made up the only town-wide maple festival in the state, and one of two town-wide maple fests in New England, making it a worthwhile item to add to this weekend's schedule.

The 24th annual Hebron Maple Festival takes place this Saturday and Sunday, March 8 and 9, from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. For more information and to download the festival brochure, visit hebronmaplefest.com.

Operations Budget cont. from Front Page

things: equipment reserve, vehicle replacement reserve and buildings and grounds maintenance reserve. Equipment reserve was reduced for the next year by \$15,000, to \$65,000. Vehicle replacement totals \$141,200, and buildings and grounds maintenance reserve features a decrease of \$25,000 from the current year, to a proposal of \$50,000.

However, Schuster said he did opt to defer some capital improvements, including the repaving the Town Hall parking lot, a document management system project for the town clerk, and GIS map lot line corrections. He also shared the capital improvement requests that he removed, including heavy machinery of an excavator, grader, and a Town Hall sedan.

Additionally, Schuster said within the Senior Services account he decided to include a lease payment of \$19,705 for the Senior Center. This proposal is driven by the ongoing negotiations with the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, who own the center.

Also, Schuster chose to include \$15,000 for Collaborative for Colchester's Children (C3), which he called a "great organization."

"Their results just speak for themselves," he said of the collaborative, which works to provide services and support for town children from birth through age 8, and their families.

The overall \$40.40 million budget proposal calls for the mill rate to increase by 1.32 mills, from the current year's rate of 30.28 to 31.60. Under the proposed mill rate, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay \$7,900 in taxes.

The education budget was also presented to the board Wednesday, done so by Superintendent of Schools Jeffrey Mathieu, Board of Education Chairman Ron Goldstein, Vice Chairman Don Kennedy and Director of Teaching and Learning Barbara Gilbert.

Increases that drive the school budget were communicated as capital expenses, facilities and

grounds, transportation, tuition, instruction, and salaries. Capital outlay, totaling \$300,000 in improvement, features the greatest increase, of \$295,300. Mathieu explained \$188,000 of repairs is proposed to go towards William J. Johnston Middle School. A \$78,000 expense would bring a new phone and intercom system to the school; \$60,000 would go towards the installation of blinds and door shades currently missing within classrooms. Both, Mathieu said, would contribute to school safety procedures if there were ever to be a lockdown.

"We heard loud and clear from Building Committee and town meetings that we need to start taking better care of our buildings," Mathieu explained. "So that's why you see such a large increase in the budget this year in capital."

Transportation is proposed to also rise significantly, as regular transportation went up 3.76 percent, or \$42,739, and special education transportation climbing 14.57 percent, or by \$122,627. Mathieu explained these increases are due to changes the district can't control – such as requirements from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and a new change at the state level regarding state agency placements.

Two positions are also added to be proposed to the education budget. Those are a \$40,000 network engineer and a \$65,000 technology integration specialist. The salaries account is also rising due to three existing positions coming off of grants that the district will need to pay for.

Both budgets will continue to be discussed at several meetings in the weeks ahead in which the public is welcome to attend. A budget forum is scheduled for Monday, March 10, 7 p.m. at Town Hall for the public to weigh in on both budgets, with a Board of Finance meeting following.

East Hampton Town Historian Celebrates 24th Year

by Elizabeth Bowling

The town of East Hampton has a rich history, as evidenced by a visit to the Chatham Historical Society or the Joseph N. Goff House. But one man in particular has devoted many years of his life to researching his hometown's history.

East Hampton's town historian, James (Jay) Hansen, will celebrate his 24th anniversary as town historian Wednesday, March 12.

Hansen, 50, was appointed town historian in 1990, when he was 26 years old. He said in an interview Monday that a state senator at the time suggested each town in the state have a town historian. The assistant to the East Hampton town manager then called Hansen to see if he was interested in the position; he was.

At first, the job description entailed that Hansen give history lessons at the elementary and middle school level. It also called for him to attend meetings of town historians from across the state. However, Hansen said the meetings no longer take place, and he's stopped getting called into schools to act as a guest speaker.

According to Hansen, the biggest challenge now as town historian is initiating community involvement. He said, "Nowadays people are just too busy."

But Hansen said that as town historian, he is "trying to make people aware of what we've had and appreciate what they have."

As a historian, Hansen said he is good at remembering dates and places, but, he laughed, "don't ask me what I had for supper last night."

Hansen, a former president of the Chatham Historical Society (CHS), is no longer a member but said he intends to rejoin, as he said he thinks the society is "a great organization. They do a lot for the town."

Hansen joined the CHS when he was 15 and though he resigned 32 years later, he said he would like to rejoin "in the near future."

The historian owns more than 3,000 local artifacts from East Hampton, Cobalt and Middle Haddam – like bells, postcards, newspapers and other East Hampton memorabilia – that he eventually plans to leave to the CHS in his will.

But before that happens, he said, "My per-

sonal goal is to start my own historical museum [in East Hampton]." He added, "That is my goal; I'm determined to do it."

Regarding his hopes of starting a "personal town museum," Hansen said, "I'd do it now – if I could – in a heartbeat."

But he said it's not feasible at the moment. Instead, he said he'd like to purchase an old building or old home in town and put his 3,000 artifacts on display once he retires as a psychiatric aide from Connecticut Valley Hospital – though, he laughed, "I've got a few more years to go [before retirement]."

More seriously, Hansen said, "I just want to give to the town."

Hansen highlighted a few of his particularly interesting artifacts.

The first relates to the East Hampton Fire Department, which was organized in 1923, he said. In that year, the town voted to purchase its first motorized chemical fire engine – a 1923 American Lafrance Brockway Torpedo – for \$4,000. Hansen has the original brass registration plate for the fire engine. He also has the original "one of a kind" brass plate of the second fire engine – a 1928, 500-gallon pumper – the town voted to purchase in 1928 for \$8,000, he said.

He also acquired a "risqué" calendar from the late 1950s from Elkins Supermarket, which was located in the center of town from the '30s to the '70s. He said the supermarket was "selective to who they gave that type of calendar to," thus making it exclusive.

Finally, he has a copy of the very first issue – volume I, number I – of the *East Hampton News*, published in Middletown and dating back to the late 1880s. He also has a copy of another publication by the same name, printed in town some five decades later, by Al Ellis in 1932, he said.

Hansen has lived in East Hampton his entire life and his mother's family, the Bannings, originally moved to town in the 1800s. Because so many generations before him lived in East Hampton, he quipped, "I know half the town and the other half seems to know me."

Hansen's mother still lives in East Hampton, as do two of his four sisters.



The volunteer position of East Hampton town historian has been held by James (Jay) Hansen for the past 24 years. Hansen is pictured here standing with the bell display in his home; the display is just a dent in his collection of more than 3,000 local artifacts.

"I get overwhelmed because there's just so much history here," he said. "A true historian never knows everything. There's always something to learn."

Hansen said he really loves history, especially his local history. What he finds most interesting is that one artifact or one historical event can be seen differently by different people. "There are so many different perspectives on that one thing," he said.

But just because he can never know everything, doesn't mean he's not going to try.

He said, "History is like a puzzle; once you get one piece you get another piece and another piece and you see a whole picture."

Hansen is personally attempting to put to-

gether the puzzle by acquiring as many pieces as he can.

"I'm a packer. I save everything but money," he laughed.

Because Hansen's position as town historian is voluntary, he doesn't receive money from the town. He said he buys artifacts to add to his collection simply because he likes to. He furthered there is "no pressure" from the town so "I work at my own pace."

In his free time, Hansen enjoys going to flea markets, tag sales and other places to shop for antiques.

Hansen is also a member of the Masons, as well as both the New England and national chapters of the American Bell Association.

House Destroyed in Fire in East Hampton

by Elizabeth Bowling

A structure fire at 1 Young St. on Sunday left an old home destroyed, and while no people were injured, the family's pets perished in the blaze.

According to East Hampton Fire Chief Greg Voelker, a tenant living in the home had left Sunday evening, March 2, and came back to find the house "full of smoke." Voelker said the tenant had attempted to go inside but couldn't because there was too much smoke, so she called the fire department.

By the time the East Hampton Volunteer Fire Department arrived, there was "heavy fire on the first floor," Voelker said, "and coming out of one window in the second [floor]."

The fire chief explained that the house was built in the 1800s, using a "balloon construction" technique that was common in that era. Essentially, a balloon construction calls for boards going all the way from the cellar to the attic.

"The fire can go literally from the fire to the attic without touching anything in between," Voelker said.

That type of construction differs from how houses are built today, he said.

Voelker said the tenant's call came in to the fire department at around 7:30 p.m. and members of the EHFD responded within three minutes of the dispatch. He said the firemen had the fire under control within 30 minutes of their arrival, but stayed until about 10 p.m. to ensure the fire was out completely.

Voelker expressed thanks for the mutual aid from the Marlborough, Colchester, Portland, East Haddam and Haddam Neck fire departments.

East Hampton Fire Marshal Rich Klotzbier said the cause of the fire is "undetermined."

He also affirmed that two residents were living in the house and the family pets – a dog, cats and rabbits – perished in the fire.

Larceny Reported at Colchester Grocery Store

by Melissa Roberto

A larceny occurred last Saturday night at Stop & Shop, Colchester Police said.

At approximately 6:30 p.m. March 1, the Colchester Police responded to Stop & Shop, located at 99 Linwood Ave. Police did not specify what was stolen from Stop & Shop, but listed the suspect as a white female approximately five feet six inches tall with long,

dark hair, wearing a grey sweatshirt with red lettering, according to a news release.

The female was reported to have left the grocery store in a grey Hyundai SUV bearing Connecticut registration 0ABPT9.

Anyone with information about this incident is asked to contact Officer Jonathan Goss at 860-465-5455 ext. 4083.

LifeStar Responds to Colchester Accident

by Melissa Roberto

A one-car crash occurred early Wednesday morning on Route 2 in Colchester, resulting in a road closure and LifeStar responding to the scene.

According to a State Police news release, Stephen R. Price, 22, of 33 Blais Rd., Uncasville, was traveling in the left lane on Route 2 eastbound, one-tenth of a mile east of Exit 17, shortly before 7:30 a.m. when he traveled into the dirt median with his left side tires, while negotiating a curve.

Price's vehicle then traveled back across the left lane, police said, across the right lane, and

then off the right shoulder of the roadway. His vehicle subsequently rolled over.

Colchester Police Sergeant Joseph Mercer said that, to his knowledge, the road was closed for approximately one and a half hours due to investigation of the accident and LifeStar touching down. Price was transported to St. Francis Hospital for treatment of head and arm injuries, the release states.

Police ask anyone who may have witnessed the accident to contact Trooper Mark Gendron at 860-465-5400 ext. 4056.

The accident is still being investigated.

Marlborough Selectmen Approve Town Ops, Capital Budgets

by Melissa Roberto

The Board of Selectmen Tuesday approved a town operations budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year of \$4.61 million as well as a capital budget totaling \$665,750 to head to the Board of Finance next week for consideration.

The town operations and capital budgets are just two portions of what will make up the overall Marlborough budget. Other portions include the budgets of the local Board of Education, Marlborough's portion of RHAM, contingency and debt – a majority of which are still undetermined.

The town operations proposal approved Tuesday totals \$4,612,919, an increase of \$175,604, or 3.96 percent, over the current fiscal year. The bottom line number has actually risen by \$15,633 since First Selectwoman Cathi Gaudinski's initial proposal on Feb. 4. However, reductions were still made. The selectmen held special meetings specifically on the budget over the last month, in which several cuts ranging from \$200 to \$9,000 in various line items were made.

The largest reductions to the operations budget include removal of a \$6,000 server initially proposed for Town Hall, a reduction in the treasurer department's clerical line item of \$9,360, a \$7,000 reduction in the contracted services line item, as well as \$5,000 in legal fees.

Though even with those cuts, the town operations budget has risen due to what Assistant

Treasurer Hayley Wagner defined Tuesday as "surprises that you don't usually see," and Gaudinski expanded on that.

"We started off what we thought was a good spot," Gaudinski said, "and then when changes came in it just went the other direction than we would like to see."

Changes that contributed to the budget increase include an increase of \$20,000 in the snow removal line item based on this year's events, as well as a nearly \$25,000 increase in the resident trooper salary line item based upon a new state police contract going into effect, and nearly \$18,000 added due to the proposal of the Building Official position going from part-time to full-time.

In terms of capital, the bottom line total of \$665,750 dropped nearly \$200,000 from the initial total of capital requests of \$861,550. Cuts included the selectmen trimming the amount for road improvements by \$49,000, bringing that amount to \$375,860; removing the \$155,000 proposal for a bucket loader for Public Works; cutting out a \$50,000 Ford Inceptor SUV for Marlborough Police; and a \$40,000 reduction in engineering costs.

Though the \$665,750 is the approved bottom line total for capital expenses, the selectmen stressed that total has the potential of reducing even more before next Wednesday's Board of Finance meeting. A reduction is contingent on changes made to the purchase of 20

new air packs for the Marlborough Volunteer Fire Department, currently included in the capital budget at a cost of \$180,000.

MVFD members said the air packs are needed to meet national fire department standards and would replace the outdated 1998 air packs currently used by the department. The selectmen and fire department members agreed to spend the next week looking into lease options for the purchase of the new packs. If a lease purchase is the route taken, the overall cost of the packs could potentially be lowered, and would be included in the town's debt portion of the budget rather than the capital budget, thus potentially lowering the \$665,750 total.

Debt, another portion of the overall town budget, was communicated last month at \$2,457,288 for 2014-15, which reflects a decrease of over \$200,000, or a 7.62 percent drop, over the current year. This is also a potential moving target, due to the possibility of the air packs affecting its total.

Other budgets yet to be approved by respective boards as of press time that will eventually be included in Marlborough's budget are the spending packages for the local and RHAM boards of education. The local school board budget was initially presented by Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz at a total of \$7,298,322, an increase of \$116,717, or 1.63 percent, over the current year.

The Marlborough portion of RHAM's budget, which was presented by Superintendent of Schools Robert Siminski last week, totals \$8,042,879, an increase of \$730,440, or 9.99 percent. Selectmen Tuesday stressed Marlborough's portion of the RHAM budget is unusually high for the town. They said this steep increase is a combination of the overall RHAM budget rising, as well as an increase of Marlborough students at the school. Selectman Dick Shea, the selectmen's liaison to the RHAM board, explained Marlborough's portion of the RHAM budget is dependent on the number of students from Marlborough attending the middle and high schools.

The \$8.04 million is "the worst-case scenario," said First Selectwoman Cathi Gaudinski. "We hope."

Though it was not voted on Tuesday, Gaudinski said after the meeting there would be a proposal in the budget of \$20,000 for contingency, to be used for emergencies, if any arise in the next fiscal year. That same amount is included in the current year budget.

The town operations and capital proposals will be presented to the finance board at its Wednesday, March 12, meeting, at 7 p.m. in the Marlborough Elementary School library. The next Board of Selectmen meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 18, at 7 p.m., at Town Hall.

Tierney Proposes 3.77 Percent Budget Increase in Hebron

by Geeta Schrayter

At the budget workshop with the boards of selectmen and finance Tuesday, Town Manager Andrew Tierney presented a proposed town budget for 2014-15 of \$36,270,171, which is a spending increase of \$1,316,882 or 3.77 percent over the current year's budget.

The number can be broken down into three parts: general government, which accounts for \$8,692,656; the local Board of Education budget, which accounts for \$11,990,454, and the RHAM Board of Education budget, which amounts to \$15,587,061.

In a letter written by Tierney and read at the meeting, he explained a large portion of the increase – \$918,085 – could be "directly attributed to the proposed increase from the RHAM budget."

The RHAM schools budget was proposed last week at \$27,710,405 – an increase of 6.83 percent from the current year. If it were to pass as presented, the amount Hebron would be responsible for is \$15,586,061 or 56.26 percent, which is determined by the number of Hebron residents that make up the RHAM population.

Along with RHAM, some of the other fixed cost budget drivers Tierney mentioned include health insurance, which is locked in at a four percent increase this year and rises \$71,240; contractual agreements, with salaries increasing 2.5 percent or \$68,037; heating oil, which is up \$8,692; liability and automobile insurance which is up \$25,000; legal fees, which are expected to rise \$7,000 with the retirement of the attorney used by the town for more than 20 years; and a payroll commitment to the resident state trooper program which increases funding by \$47,458.

The general government budget includes \$6,814,679 for town government, a \$687,114 contribution to the Capital Improvement Project

(CIP) budget, a \$125,000 contribution to open space, \$42,500 for capital expenditures between \$5-25,000 and \$10,000 for capital non-recurring projects. Another \$50,000 is also included for future revaluations, while the remaining \$963,363 is for debt service.

The contribution to the CIP budget will go toward funding a number of recommendations brought forth by the CIP Committee which include, for the Public Works Department, road resurfacing and road improvements for \$245,967; first-year partial funding to replace a large dump truck with a plow for \$95,000; and the engineering cost to design a new Public Works facility at \$50,000.

Projects from the Board of Education include renovations to the bathrooms at Gilead Hill School for \$46,500 and repairs to the Hebron Elementary School roof over the 1947 and 1988 wings, in the amount of \$95,000.

Two projects are also included for the fire department: money for the lease payment on a fire truck in the amount of \$76,370, which was previously approved; and \$70,000 to repave the parking lot at Company No. 1, stabilize the east wall of its equipment bay and replace disintegrating concrete pads out front.

CIP Committee Chairman Mal Leichter explained at the meeting the above items are grouped as "tier one projects" and are projects the committee felt shouldn't be cut.

"These are projects the CIP Committee felt absolutely need to be funded. We felt they shouldn't be cut and for that reason we didn't prioritize them" he said, adding "there are different reasons why we selected some of these projects but in the end they all add value to the quality of life or safety or health of the people of Hebron."

Other items were prioritized however, as either "tier two" or "tier three." These included, in tier two: money to take part in an Inter-town Capital Equipment Purchasing Incentive Grant with Glastonbury for joint ownership and responsibility of two pieces of equipment in the amount of \$45,947; \$50,000 for a salt shed, and \$60,000 for the continued restoration of the Peters House.

Tier three items consisted of a compactor for the Public Works Department for \$36,500 and first-year funding for a replacement dial-a-ride van for \$15,000.

Regarding the recommendations, Tierney said, "We did not do any cuts to CIP. We left everything in as presented and want to let everything take its course as budget meetings happen and see how it pans out."

The CIP recommendations total \$991,284 and, if approved, they'd make up 2.73 percent of the total 2014-15 town budget. Along with the general fund contribution, the projects would be paid for with the \$97,006 balance from previous appropriations, \$72,164 in LOCIP funding, a \$35,000 reimbursement from the state for asbestos abatement at Gilead Hill School and \$100,000 from the CIP Designated Fund Balance.

* * *

Tierney described his budget proposal as a continuation budget – the cost of simply moving things forward to the next fiscal year. As far as requests go, "a lot of new budget initiatives [totaling just under \$100,000] were not funded," he said.

What was included was \$22,500 in partial funding for monetary compensation for the EMS responders. Tierney explained the selectmen made a commitment to look at and poten-

tially fund some of the recommendations recently made by the Fire Department Financial Study Committee, which included the compensation.

Based on the proposed budget numbers and this year's Grand List, which rose by .861 percent to \$778,631,850, the mill rate for the upcoming year is proposed at 36.41, up 1.71 from the current mill rate.

Of that, .48 of the increase is due to the town, .04 is due to the Hebron Board of Education budget and 1.19 is as a result of the increase in the RHAM Board of Education budget.

The mill rate is used to determine residents' taxes by multiplying the mill rate by their total assessments. One mill is equal to \$1 tax per \$1,000 of assessed property.

Under the proposed mill rate, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay \$9,102 compared to \$8,675 under the current mill rate of 34.7.

In a memo that accompanied Tierney's budget proposal, he asked the selectmen and finance board members to "please keep in mind that this is a fluid document and numbers will change as we go through the next couple of months. The proposed budget is based on information available today, with a few placeholders for unknown or estimated amounts."

The Board of Selectmen will review the budget throughout the month of March; the next budget meeting will take place Tuesday, March 11, at the Douglas Library at 7:30 p.m.

A public hearing on the budget will take place Tuesday, March 25, at 7:30 p.m., in the Douglas Library Community Room.

Anyone with questions regarding the budget can email them to hebronbudget@hebronct.com.

Stipends Coming for Fire Officials in Andover?

by Geeta Schrayter

The Board of Selectmen Wednesday discussed the possibility of adding pay stipends for officers at the fire department.

The talk began at the selectmen's February meeting, when Fire Chief Ron Mike said he wanted to increase the budget by \$21,000 for stipends for the officers and himself. Based on the work he and the others do, Mike said in February he was requesting \$7,500 for himself, \$4,500 for the deputy chief, \$3,000 for the assistant chief, \$1,500 for each of the two captains, and \$750 for each of the four officers.

On Wednesday, Mike said "the work these people are doing for the Town of Andover and me is priceless" and explained he was looking for the stipends because of the time the volunteers put in.

"Time is what I'm talking about," Mike said. "These guys don't have to do this stuff. The officers don't have to do stuff I ask them to do. They just do it."

Mike explained he can't make the officers get up and go to calls, but it's still something they do; as an example, he said during a recent call at 2 a.m. six out of the eight officers showed up.

"I'm looking for a bonus for the officers every year to say 'thank you' for doing a good job," Mike stated.

He said the officers would be held to certain criteria and if they didn't reach that they wouldn't get the bonus, but he said adding such a thing would increase incentive and also encourage new members. Mike said he was basing the amounts on those in Hebron and Bolton, but had "reduced the amounts down from their costs a little bit."

But Penny Auer, assistant to the first selectman, explained that, after talking with 19 towns that have populations comparable to Andover, it was discovered no town compensated with a bonus; instead most offered tax abatements. First Selectmen Bob Burbank said Andover already offers that, although he said Mike didn't qualify for the abatement because he doesn't live in town.

Burbank added he's spoken to several people about the stipends, who said, "Please don't do anything because you'll start something and all the town will want to get compensated."

"The problem sometimes is when you start compensating one group and ignoring another," he explained.

Burbank added he'd also had others say they wanted to be known as volunteers, not as individuals who are paid for what they do.

"Sometimes people want to be a volunteer but when [people think] 'these are supposed to

be volunteers but they get a stipend,' do we go across the board and give stipends to every person who puts in the same effort as the fire department?" Burbank wondered. "I agree it's not a lot of money but you do open a situation where you're not volunteers anymore."

Selectwoman Julia Haverl said the active involvement of fire department members was "essential" and she felt "it might be a good idea to put it in the budget and let the town decide."

"The town really appreciates what the fire department does," Haverl said. "Let's consider putting it in and see where it goes. What's the harm in doing that? If there are objections, they'll be voiced."

Haverl's intention was to have the idea of stipends either pass or fail at the public hearing where the town approves the budget and sends it to referendum or votes to lower certain line items. But Burbank expressed concern with that idea because he said only 30-50 people go to the meetings, and while it might pass at the hearing, during the referendum "the naysayers come out and vote against it."

Still, Haverl pushed for it. "There's a lot to think about here. I think the idea has merit."

Vice First Selectman Jay Lindy said the board should take some time to write out where

it wanted to go with the stipends and determine details like who would manage the stipend and what criteria would be used to determine who should receive it.

Burbank also said they'd need to figure out if the stipends would need to be taxed through the town or if a 1099 form could be used that would make it the responsibility of the recipient to claim it on their taxes.

Along with the issue of the stipend, selectwoman Cathy Desrosiers also discussed the abatement Mike wasn't receiving.

"I think the fact Mr. Mike has not received a tax abatement because he doesn't live in town [and] goodwill was not made to cut him a check for the time he has put into the fire department is a tragedy," Desrosiers said. "I think we need to look into it and make good on it because this is mishandled. I feel it's wrong."

Desrosiers continued, "There's two items here. The tax abatement for Ronny Mike and the next steps [for the stipends] so we have information to stand behind this."

The board decided they'd need to talk to the town treasurer, auditor and possibly the town attorney for more information and would discuss the issue at a special meeting not yet scheduled.

Gotta's Farm and Cider Mill Named 'Business of Year' in Portland

by Elizabeth Bowling

The "pick-your-own strawberries" sign on Main Street has become a staple in welcoming spring in Portland. It symbolizes that another frigid winter has concluded, that it's time to start eating locally-grown, fresh foods – and that Gotta's Farm and Cider Mill is open for business.

And though that beloved "pick-your-own strawberries" sign is not out on the side of the street just yet, Gotta's is eager to kick off another warm season, as the Portland Economic Development Commission (EDC) named Gotta's Farm and Cider Mill the town's 2013 "Business of the Year" at a special presentation Wednesday at Portland Library.

About 50 people filled the Mary Flood Room in the library – leaving standing room only – to celebrate Gotta's Farm's big win. A handful of those in attendance were proud Gotta's Farm employees and members of the Gotta family, including the next generation of Gottas who may take over the business someday.

State Rep. Christie Carpino and state Sen. Art Linares presented Gotta's Farm with an official proclamation on behalf of the Connecticut General Assembly.

Carpino thanked the business for all its service and willingness to help the community.

"You're always there for us," she said. "People don't even have to ask."

She then quipped that Gotta's Farm sells "the best pumpkin bread I've ever had – don't tell my grandmother!"

Similarly, Linares laughed, "I've never had a better apple cider."

More seriously, he said, "It's important that we show our respect to you as a small business owner because small businesses are the backbone of our economy."

Gotta's Farm owner Richard Gotta took a moment to thank his employees, each by name. "Everybody kicks in and we make things happen," he said. "I'm proud of all of them."

He especially thanked his wife, Jackie, who he called "the bookkeeper." He added, "She's in charge of the bakery and in charge of the kids."

Gotta, 62, took over ownership of the farm

when his father passed away in 1973, though he worked on the farm his entire life. He said his hope is that his children – Elizabeth, 13, and Richard Jr., 11 – will take over the business in about 10 years.

"We appreciate it; it's special," Gotta concluded. "Let's keep going."

According to Gotta's Farm's website, <http://gottasfarm.com>, the business is a fourth-generation farm, established in 1898.

Economic Development Consultant Mary Dickerson raved, "It really is mind-boggling for a family to be on their fourth generation of farming, of bringing people food to their table, offering services to anyone in Portland, creating jobs." She furthered, "We may have a fifth generation. It's really heartening to know that they are growing up in the family business and they love it enough to take it on."

The farm is open annually from spring through December and has two seasonal retail locations – one on Route 17 and another on Route 66.

Gotta's Farm grows plants, fruits, vegetables and full ornamentals. It also offers pick-your-own strawberries, peaches, apples and pears, seasonally. Additionally, the farm's bakery sells pies, breads and cookies. During the Christmas season, the farm offers a selection of trees and decorations.

In summing up the presentation of Business of the Year, Dickerson said to Gotta, "We are just so appreciative of everything you do for the town."

The EDC also awarded "Community Partners Awards" to more than 130 local businesses at Wednesday's ceremony. (A list of all of the businesses honored can be found on the EDC's Facebook page; search for "Portland Connecticut Marketplace" in the search engine on the social networking website.)

The Community Partners Program (CPP) was established by the EDC to recognize the contributions of time and money made by local businesses in supporting activities important to the community.

For example, Dickerson said, without the generosity of local businesses, there would be



The Economic Development Commission recently named Gotta's Farm and Cider Mill Portland's 2013 "Business of the Year," and the Gotta family was honored at an awards presentation Wednesday. Back row from left, state Sen. Art Linares, Gotta's Farm owner Richard Gotta, his wife Jackie and state Rep. Christie Carpino.; front row from left, Richard Gotta Jr. and Elizabeth Gotta.

no local Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, high school yearbook or prom or senior class trip, sports teams, or successful food bank.

The businesses named "Community Partners" on Wednesday received window decals and certificates, which recognize the contributions made by the business and serve to remind customers of the businesses' contributions to the community.

Dickerson said to the business owners in the audience, "Beyond the tax revenue that your businesses generate, and the jobs that you generate, is how generous our businesses are in our community."

Regarding all the local support, Dickerson said, "That's the kind of thing that happens in a small town."

Businesses can apply to become members of the CPP via applications available on the EDC webpage, [portlandct.org/Business/Economic](http://portlandct.org/Business/EconomicDevelopment.aspx)

[Development.aspx](http://portlandct.org/Business/EconomicDevelopment.aspx). (Click on the 'CPP' box located on the left-hand side of the screen.)

According to the EDC's mission statement, "Economic development is a process that takes great vision, teamwork and follow-through. The participation of business owners, community members and town government is essential to our success. Portland's business community represents a diverse spectrum, ranging from technology to tourism.

"The mission of the EDC is to work to promote and retain our existing businesses and to attract new businesses appropriate to our community."

The EDC is a volunteer commission composed of five Portland residents appointed by the Board of Selectmen. It represents a partnership between citizens, town officials and the business community to foster and promote the economic growth of the Portland community.

Andover Selectmen OK Oil Burner, Trash Compactor

by Geeta Schrayter

The approval of two purchases was made at Wednesday's Board of Selectmen meeting – one for a new oil burner and one for a new trash compactor.

Burbank explained there needs to be two boilers in the Old Firehouse/Senior Center for the building to be up to code, and the one downstairs recently broke. While he said the boiler had been patched, it was only expected to last about a month longer.

"So it's really an emergency situation, so I brought it in front of the board," Burbank said.

At this point he said he only received one quote for \$5,100 for a replacement boiler but he would go out for additional prices before making a commitment.

The board unanimously approved the allotment of \$6,000 for the replacement furnace and

accompanying ductwork and thermostat after three bids are received.

The second purchase was for a new trash compactor at the transfer station. Linddy explained the compactor, which he joked has been around "since George Washington," had broken down.

Burbank explained it would cost around \$7,500 to repair the existing compactor but added that would mean the town still had a compactor that was "30 years old and rusted out. We're gonna have a patchwork quilt."

Instead he was recommending the purchase of a new compactor for \$10,293 that "includes everything" with the hope the funds would come entirely out of the transfer station budget by "juggling a few things around."

He explained the price was lower than it

could have been because a compactor that was ordered by someone else but hadn't actually been taken by the person who placed the order was available. As such, he said he gave the company a tentative commitment on the purchase because "once it's gone it's gone and we have to then go out and get a new one."

"I think that would probably be one thing we need in this town, the ability to get rid of household trash" he laughed, adding "it's available now so it should be up and running in a couple of weeks."

The purchase was unanimously approved.

A budget meeting with the RHAM school district to discuss the proposed 2014-15 budget has been scheduled for Monday, March 24,

at 7 p.m. in the community room at Town Hall. If it passes as presented at \$27,710,405, Andover would be responsible for \$4,075,465, or 14.71 percent.

Although the population of students from Andover has decreased from last year, resulting in a lower levy percentage (down from 15.26 percent), the selectmen pointed out the actual amount the town would be responsible for had increased from \$3,958,182 in the current year.

The public was urged to attend the meeting to learn about the budget, ask questions and share their thoughts.

The next regular Board of Selectmen meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 2, at 7 p.m., in the community room at Town Hall.

Portland School Board Approves \$19.26 Million Budget

by Elizabeth Bowling

The local Board of Education approved an approximately \$19.26 million budget for the 2014-15 school year at a special board meeting Jan. 28 and carried on with business as usual at its meeting Tuesday night.

Next year's approved budget for \$19,261,703 is up \$325,475 – or 1.72 percent – from the current year's budget, which is \$18,936,228.

Ultimately, the school board made no changes to Superintendent of Schools Sally Doyen's original budget proposal, which she first presented Jan. 7.

"The board felt that Sally's budget that she presented was as lean as it could possibly be," said school board secretary MaryAnne Rode. "This budget allows us to achieve the goals that we set within the district while taking the economic times into consideration."

Rode also mentioned that, compared to other towns in the state, the Portland school district's budget increase of 1.72 percent was "negligible."

Some of the biggest expenses in the budget fall under the "salaries" line item, which totals approximately \$11.86 million. Another approximately \$3.91 million goes to the "benefits" line item. The "books and supplies" line item is set at approximately \$1.18 million and "other services," which includes student transportation

and magnet school tuition, among other things, comes in at approximately \$1.4 million.

A public hearing on the Board of Education and town budgets is scheduled for Tuesday, March 11, at 7 p.m. at the Portland High School auditorium.

Carrying on with business as usual at Tuesday's meeting, the board voted unanimously on three grants. The money will come from the Gildersleeve Fund, a grant program available only to the Portland school district from the Gildersleeve Wheeler Education Fund (GWEF).

According to the Board of Education's web page, GWEF is a non-profit organization that promotes the excellence of public education in Portland through grants for worthy educational projects, enhancement programs, access to enhanced technological equipment, education and training.

The first grant is for \$3,600 to go toward the Rachel's Challenge Club, a national organization that honors the beliefs of Rachel Joy Scott, the first victim of the 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo. Those beliefs include a focus on kindness.

Doyen said the money would help "to keep

the Rachel's Challenge program and culture available to students [in grades five through 12]."

The second grant will range from \$1,500 to \$1,700 and will go toward the Robotics Club to pay for club fees – for example, competition entry fees. The last grant, for \$13,000, will be used to get new choral risers at the high school; the current PHS choral risers will be handed down to Gildersleeve.

The board also voted unanimously Tuesday to move forward with the 2014-15 Healthy Food Certification Statement. Essentially, the statement is a promise that the Portland Board of Education will meet the state's guidelines on serving healthy food to students, Doyen explained.

Also regarding the food the district serves to students, Doyen updated the board that the breakfast program will be implemented at Valley View Elementary School "in a couple weeks." She reminded the board that Gildersleeve already implemented the breakfast program and serves about 20 to 30 breakfasts to students per day.

She furthered that Brownstone Intermediate School will "probably" implement the breakfast program in the fall.

Regarding the breakfast and lunch program, the Board of Education's contract with Sodexo, an outside company that provides the schools with their lunches, will be up after this school year. According to Doyen, three companies showed interest in providing lunches to the district next year; they are: Sodexo, Chartwells and Whitsons. No provider has been selected yet for next year.

Doyen also updated the board that state testing will begin at the high school March 18, and state testing for students in grades three through eight will begin "later on."

Regarding the state testing at the high school level, Doyen explained that the district will implement the Smarter Balanced Assessment in place of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test this month.

She explained, "It's going to be a pilot year this year. The results of the test technically do no count." She added, "It's a way of validating the test, in large part, and getting a handle on what the expectations are."

The next regularly scheduled Portland Board of Education meeting is Tuesday, March 18, at 7 p.m. in the Portland High School media center.

Portland Garage Under New Ownership

by Elizabeth Bowling

It may not have snowed this week, but warm weather is not quite here yet. That's why John Guilmette, owner of Hometown Garage in Portland, put up a sign outside of his business that urges drivers passing by to "honk if you want spring."

Tucked away behind that warmth-wishing sign is Hometown Garage, located at 116 Marlborough St. The car repair shop is not exactly a new feature to Portland, but it is under new ownership. Guilmette, 39, lived in Portland his entire life and bought the 20-something-year-old business from its previous owner last October.

Guilmette said the owner called him up one day and asked if he wanted to take over the business, and he said 'yes.'

"The opportunity arose," Guilmette said. "I hadn't really thought about [owning my own garage]."

A few months into his new business, Guilmette's glad he took the plunge.

"I've enjoyed it quite a bit," Guilmette said of taking on ownership and maintaining the integrity of Hometown Garage. Regarding a smooth transition between owners, he added, "It's been going well."

Prior to his new gig, Guilmette worked as a mechanic for 20 years. He is an Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Master Technician, which means he's earned all eight certifications in the field of mechanics.

The master technician worked at Valley Oil, located under the Arrigoni Bridge, the past 13 years, and before that he worked for Ride-Away Handicap Equipment Corporation in East Hartford, where he installed lifts and hand controllers for handicapped-accessible vehicles. He also previously worked at Gallagher Buick in New Britain.

He said being the owner of a business differs from his previous work because "I'm more involved in the final outcome." He added, "It's just a different way of working."

Guilmette said his garage differs from other repair places because he provides a personal touch.

"I know almost everybody that comes here," he said. "I don't want to be a typical repair shop."

One way Hometown Garage adds a personal touch is by offering in-town pick-up for both clients and cars – if a client doesn't want to wait around at the shop for their car to get worked on, Guilmette offers them a ride home; or if a client doesn't want to, or can't, drive their car to the shop, he offers to pick it up.

"It's safe to leave your car here," Guilmette assured.

The personal touches continue, as Guilmette said he has a policy to "not go looking for issues."

"Getting your car fixed is expensive. We get that. So we try to make it as convenient and least expensive as possible," he said.

He furthered that any problems he or his crew report to a client would be "legitimate." He added, "We're not going to create problems. We're not going to retire on each customer."

Instead, Guilmette said he provides quality work and repairs so that "when [a car] leaves here, it doesn't come back."

Guilmette also said he doesn't intend to do many sales or promotions because "I feel if I give things away I'm going to be forced to look for problems [in a car]." Plus, he added, "I'm not a marketing guy."

Guilmette gets some assistance in running his new business from his wife Meghan, who "comes in and does paperwork," he said.



Portland resident John Guilmette bought Hometown Garage, located at 116 Marlborough St., last fall. He said he's experienced a smooth transition into business ownership.

Hometown Garage has two mechanics: one has been with the business for 20 years and Guilmette said, "he's one of the best mechanics I've ever worked with." The other has been there for almost two years, and Guilmette describes him as "very thorough."

Meghan Guilmette added that the two mechanics are "a good team."

Asked if he plans to keep his business in Portland for the long haul, Guilmette said, "absolutely."

For more information on Hometown Garage and the services it offers, visit its website, which is currently being updated, at hometowngarageportland.com or email Guilmette at hometowngarageportland@gmail.com.

Portland Selectmen Establish Air Line Trail Committee

by Elizabeth Bowling

With an increase of public interest in extending the Air Line Trail into Portland, the Board of Selectmen Wednesday created an Air Line Trail Steering Committee to do just that.

The board voted unanimously in favor of the creation of the seven-member committee, whose duties are, according to the board's resolution, "to organize, guide and support a larger group of citizen volunteers in activities to build public support for the trail, develop specific plans for trail access, identify funding sources and cooperate with regional entities."

Essentially, the committee's purpose is to "improve the effectiveness of Portland's effort to restore the Air Line Trail in Portland," the resolution states.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said, "There's a lot of interest and, more importantly, there's a lot of people interested in working."

Bransfield said extending the trail, which currently ends in East Hampton before picking up again in Middletown, would bring "not just physical health and recreational opportunities,

it's also an economic driver in that it makes the town an attractive place."

Selectman Fred Knous called the Air Line Trail "a real treasure." He said extending it into Portland "could be a great asset to the town."

Board member Mark Finkelstein added, "I think this is a wonderful endeavor."

The selectmen unanimously appointed the following seven people to the committee: Stephen Byrne, Chantal Foster, John Hall, Kathy Herron, Louis Pear, Rosario Rizzo and John Shafer.

Bransfield affirmed that the appointed persons already expressed their willingness to serve on the committee.

According to Bransfield, the proposed town budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year devoted \$10,000 to "get the committee started and to get some of the work done."

At first, she said, the committee will focus on the three-mile portion of the trail that is owned by CL&P. (Other private owners own the additional approximately two miles of the

trail in Portland.)

During the public comment portion of the selectmen meeting, Shafer, a newly-appointed committee member, called the Air Line Trail a "crucial link" to connect Portland to its neighboring towns "and to much of the state."

Hall, another newly-appointed member, also spoke during public comment. He said there is "incredible vitality" in Portland and "the Air Line Trail would really tie into that energy."

He said extending the trail through Portland would probably be a 10-year project.

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Also at Wednesday's meeting, the board heard from Ruth Maio, who spoke on behalf of the senior center. She proposed changing the name of the Portland Senior Center to "The Waverly Center," with the slogan "a place for seniors and their friends."

Maio said, "As boomers age, we are finding they do not want to be associated with the word 'senior' and there is a strong feeling that they stay away from senior centers for that reason."

She called the possible renaming "an experience in re-branding" the center and a more accurate reflection of the center and its mission.

The board said it would discuss Maio's recommendation at a future meeting.

The selectmen also heard a presentation from Mike VanDeventer, from Mahoney Sabol & Company, LLP, on the audit of the 2012-13 fiscal year. VanDeventer summed up to the board, "Overall, from a budgetary perspective, you had a very good year."

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A public hearing on the proposed approximately \$31.61 million town budget will take place Tuesday, March 11, at 7 p.m. at the Portland High School auditorium. More information on the town budget can be found on the town website, portlandct.org.

The next regularly scheduled Board of Selectmen meeting is Wednesday, March 19, at 7:30 p.m., at Portland Library.

Colchester Grand List Grows a Scant .6 Percent

by Melissa Roberto

The Oct. 1, 2013, Grand List of assessable properties in Colchester has been completed, and the list sports a scant .6 percent growth over the 2012 list.

The net Grand List totals \$1,209,174,800, an increase of \$687,380 over the previous year's list. The .6 percent increase over last year's list is considerably lower than the 1.4 percent increase the 2012 Grand List had over the 2011 list.

The Grand List represents Colchester's net value of assessed property. The list is broken into three categories – real estate, motor vehicle and personal property – and only two of those categories featured an increase.

Real estate assessments clocked in at the biggest increase over the 2012 list, with a total assessment of \$1,038,115,600, representing an increase of \$7,792,480. Motor vehicles also saw an increase, of \$498,990, over the 2012 list, which brought the category up to \$115,959,200. However, the nearly \$500,000 increase in motor vehicles was an increase so slight that Town

Assessor John Chaponis considered the category "essentially flat" altogether.

The final category, personal property, saw a decrease. It was assessed at \$40,600,000, which represents a drop of \$2,220,090 over the 2012 list.

Overall, Chaponis concluded the real estate growth as "decent," furthering that \$2 million of the \$7.8 million increase was contributed by the construction of Tractor Supply.

In terms of the motor vehicle assessment, Chaponis said it's a category "you can never predict." He proved this by showing the history of motor vehicle assessments, which varied from a \$70,000 increase in 2012, to an increase of \$7,200,000 the year prior, and in 2008, the category dropped \$6.8 million.

"It definitely seems to cycle from larger increases to smaller [increases], or even decreases, and then back again," Chaponis said. "It could very well have to do with the cycle of people owning a car for four to five years and

then purchasing a new one. It also is affected by new residential construction because every new house brings in at least two cars that were not assessed in the past."

To obtain the net Grand List total, all three categories are totaled, and then the assessor adds in an estimate for prorates and a motor vehicle supplement. The 2013 Grand List shows prorates at \$1,900,000 and a motor vehicle supplement of \$15,100,000. Once all of those values are determined, an estimate of what is expected to be taken off the list – by means of corrections or adjustments made by the Board of Assessment Appeals (BAA) – is subtracted from the total. Like last year's list, Chaponis estimated BAA corrections at \$2,500,000, thus resulting in the \$1,209,174,800 net total.

First Selectman Gregg Schuster had a positive take on the 2013 Grand List, despite its slight growth.

"Obviously I wish the Grand List growth was more than what we saw," he said. "But consid-

ering some towns are seeing no Grand List growth or actually saw a reduction in the Grand List, I'm happy that we're at least moving in the right direction."

The top 10 real estate taxpayers on the Oct. 1, 2013 list were: Country Place of Colchester LTD Partners at \$9,211,100; SS1 Colchester LLC at \$7,232,900; City of Norwich at \$4,835,900; Gaia Colchester LLC at \$3,695,100; Sharr Realty LLC at \$3,518,000; Church Street Oreo One LLC at \$3,508,800; S + S Worldwide Inc. at \$3,401,500; Genesis Health Ventures of Bloomfield Inc. at \$3,220,000; GND Too of Colchester LLC at \$3,117,000; and Keystone Shoppes LLC at \$2,768,700.

Chaponis explained any taxpayer unhappy with their assessment must file a written appeal and submit it on or before March 20. The Board of Assessment Appeals will begin hearings for appeals and must make its decisions by the end of April.

East Hampton Police News

2/18: Elizabeth R. Warzecha, 22, of 45 Copper Beach Ln., Portland, was issued a ticket for possession of less than half an ounce of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia, East Hampton Police said.

2/20: Joel Michaud Jr., 34, of 11R Olde Flatbrook Rd., was arrested for DUI and failure to drive right, police said.

2/21: Douglas Elwin Wagner, 47, of 562 Main St., Apt. 6, Middletown, was arrested pursuant to an active arrest warrant for sixth-degree larceny and third-degree burglary, police said.

2/26: Kelley Angeloni, 38, of 44 Flanders Rd., was arrested for disorderly conduct and second-degree threatening, police said.

Colchester Police News

2/28: State Police said Daniel Reyes, 32, of 143 Hughes Ave., Bridgeport, was charged with third-degree forgery and criminal impersonation.

3/2: State Police said Sandra D. Straker, 50, of 6 Cobble Way, Apt. 2, was charged with failure to drive right and DUI.

3/3: State Police said Robert Neilson, 65, of 191 Dr. Foote Rd., was charged with second-degree failure to appear.

Marlborough Police News

3/2: State Police said Gerard Reidy, 41, of 1 Brighton St., Danbury, was arrested for DUI and two counts of failure to drive in the proper lane on a multiple lane highway.

Hebron Police News

2/27: State Police said Frank R. Grabner IV, 32, of 16 Carolina Dr., Oakdale, was charged with possession of narcotics, criminal trespassing, keeping narcotics in an original container and possession of marijuana.

Obituaries

Portland

Mary Petrucelli

Mary (Reeves) Petrucelli, 79, of Portland, beloved wife of the late Anthony Petrucelli, passed away Sunday, March 2, at Portland Care and Rehab.

Born Dec. 15, 1934, in Philadelphia, Pa., she lived in Middletown for most of her life until moving to Portland four years ago. She worked at Olin Ski in Middletown for many years until her retirement.

She leaves her son, Daniel Petrucelli of Massachusetts; a daughter, Charlotte Justice and her husband, Bruce of Maryland; sisters-in-law, Philomena McKinstry of Portland, Mary Fede of Enfield, and Terri Melo of Rocky Hill; and several nieces and nephews.

She was predeceased by a brother, a brother-in-law, Frank Petrucelli and his wife, Theresa.

Funeral services were held Thursday, March 6, at Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland. Burial will be in the Swedish Cemetery, Portland, at a later date. Relatives and friends called Thursday before the service.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to a charity of the donor's choice.

To send an online expression of sympathy, visit portlandmemorialfh.net.

Marlborough

Catherine Roberts

Catherine Roberts, 95, died peacefully Monday, March 3, at her home in Marlborough. Born in New Brunswick, Canada, on Oct. 31, 1918, she emigrated to the United States in 1950 and lived most of her life in Marlborough. She retired from Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in 1984 after many years of service.

Catherine was a member of the Marlborough Congregational Church and the Marlborough Senior Citizens. In her free time she loved knitting, listening to country music, the Red Sox, and being with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

She was predeceased by her husband John Roberts, and her faithful and loving friend, Douglas Secord.

She is survived by her three sons, William Roberts of Marlborough, Bruce Roberts of Norwich, and Daniel Roberts and his wife Donna of Colchester; her daughter, Willa Winter of Glastonbury; three beloved grandchildren, Andrew Winter of Chicago, Ill., Philip Roberts of Colchester, and Krystan Keller and her husband Michael of Colchester; and two adored great-grandchildren, Gavin and Thomas Keller of Colchester.

She is also survived by her sister, Clara Savoy of New Brunswick, Canada, and several nieces and nephews.

The family would like to thank the nurses of Middlesex Hospice for all of their care and support over the last month.

Funeral services will be held Saturday, March 8, at 11 a.m., in Marlborough Congregational Church, with the Rev. Robert Faulhaber officiating. Burial will be in the family plot in Marlboro Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Marlborough Congregational Church, 35 South Main St., P.O. Box 57 Marlborough, CT 06447.

The Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, has care of arrangements. To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Hebron

Marian K. Regan

Marian K. (Follette) Regan, R.N., 75, of Hebron, beloved wife of John F. Regan Sr., died Saturday, March 1, at Windham Hospital in Willimantic.

Mrs. Regan was born Oct. 25, 1938, in Newark, N.Y., to the late Wallace and Harriet (Hickey) Follette. She began her career in pediatric nursing and had been employed as a school nurse at Hebron High School and concluded her career at Glastonbury Health Care Center.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by four sons, John F. Regan Jr. and his wife, Kelly, of Manchester; Matthew D. Regan and his wife, Karen, of Utah; Andrew J. Regan of Texas; and Paul Regan and his wife, Stacey, of Stratford; one daughter, Theresa A. Brann and her husband, Ty, of California; a sister, Barbara Masclay of New York; a brother, Roger Follette of New York; six grandchildren, Jessica, Stephanie, Scott and Nicole Regan and Riana and Sierra Brann; and several nieces and nephews.

A private gathering of family and friends to celebrate Marian's life took place Tuesday, March 4,

Glastonbury

Wendell Farrar Coffin

Wendell Farrar Coffin died peacefully in his home in Glastonbury Saturday, March 1, at the age of 96. He was born Nov. 9, 1917, in Ashland, Maine, to the late Ansil Bradford Coffin and Alberta Green Coffin.

Wendell grew up during the Great Depression on the family farm in northern Maine, married Phyllis Marguerite Berry and honorably served his country in the U.S. Army during World War II in the 234th Engineer Combat Battalion.

On D-Day, Wendell landed on Utah Beach, fought through the Hedgerows and earned a Purple Heart outside St. Lo, France where he was wounded in a strafing by a Messerschmitt fighter plane. After recovering, Wendell returned to the front and helped liberate Paris. He continued on across France and Belgium, fought in the Battle of the Bulge, crossed into the Rhineland and shook hands with Russian soldiers outside Berlin. During the war, Wendell served under Generals Eisenhower, Patton and Bradley.

Wendell will be remembered for his kind, generous nature, work ethic and incredible mechanical aptitude – he could fix anything. In 1952, on his own, he built his home in Glastonbury, while working full time and raising a family with Phyllis. Wendell and Phyllis were married for 71 years. He worked for P&W Aircraft for over 35 years, and retired as a test cell supervisor.

Wendell is survived by his wife Phyllis, daughter Carole Shea and husband Dick of Marlborough, and sons Wendell A. Coffin of Colchester, Bradford Coffin and his wife Lori of Colchester and Richard Coffin of Amston. He will be fondly remembered by his grandchildren, Mallory, Jared and Jason Coffin, Kristina Coffin, Richard and Kristin Shea, and many nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his first child, Roy Lewis (Benny) Coffin, whom he loved very much, and by his three brothers, Carl, Vaughn and Clyde.

Funeral services will be held Saturday, March 8, at 3:30 p.m., at Glastonbury Funeral Home, 450 New London Tpk., Glastonbury. Visitation will be prior to the service, from 2-3:30 p.m. Burial will be private and at the convenience of the family.

The family would like to recognize the kindness shown Wendell by his caregiver, Mzia Shveldze, and the VNA hospice team.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to: Windsor Independent Living Association, 45 Maple Ave., Windsor, CT 06095 or the Parkinson's Disease Foundation.

To leave an online condolence, or visit Wendell's tribute, visit glastonburyfuneral.com.

East Hampton

Michael Brian Skinner

Michael Brian Skinner, 40, of East Hampton, beloved son of Judith Skinner and the late Wayne Skinner, died Sunday, March 2, at Hartford Hospital.

Born Oct. 7, 1973, in Middletown, Michael grew up in East Hampton and was a 1991 graduate of Xavier High School. He attended Central Connecticut State University, where he received his teaching degree. Michael was employed as a dog groomer at Pampered Pets in Windham.

Besides his mother Judi, he is survived by his two brothers, Mark Skinner and his wife Nina of Glastonbury, Todd Skinner of California; aunts and uncles Mary Lou and Robert Drewry of East Hampton, Donna Mitchell of East Haddam, Doreen and Gerry Benoit of Florida; niece and nephew Sarah and Ryan Skinner of Glastonbury; his special nieces Callie and Sydney; and many cousins.

A memorial liturgy will be celebrated today, March 7, at 11 a.m., in St. Patrick Church in East Hampton. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the East Hampton Police Department, 20 East High St. No. 2, East Hampton, CT 06424.

The Spencer Funeral Home has care of arrangements. To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Andover

John Howat

John "Scotty" Howat, 94, formerly of Andover, passed away Sunday, March 2, joining the love of his life, Edna, in a better place. He was born in Glasgow, Scotland, on Oct. 24, 1919, while his parents were on an extended visit home there.

Scotty lived in Hartford with his parents and later with his wife, Edna, until the 1950s, when they moved to South Windsor. John and Edna raised their family in South Windsor until their retirement. They subsequently lived in Andover and Hilton Head, S.C.

John served in the United States Army during World War II. Following the war, he became a successful businessman founding Howat and Mosher Grinding Service in East Hartford. He served as president of the company until it was sold at his retirement in 1988.

John was active in the community and a generous contributor to many local causes. Nearest to his heart was the East Hartford Rotary Club, which he served as president. He was the proud recipient of the Rotary Paul Harris award and had many friends as a result of his involvement there.

John leaves his children, Allan D. and Andrew J., both of Jupiter, Fla., Jean Howat Baranello of South Windsor, John T. of Ellington and Bruce M. of East Hartford.

In addition to his parents, John T. and Agnes (MacLachlan) Howat, John was predeceased by his wife of 47 years, Annabelle "Edna" Laliberte, and his loving daughter, Lynne Howat Fitzgerald of Storrs.

John leaves 10 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren, whom he loved dearly.

A memorial service will be held Saturday, March 8, at 10 a.m., at the First Congregational Church of South Windsor, 993 Main St., South Windsor, CT 06074. Burial is private and at the convenience of the family.

To leave an online condolence, visit newkirkandwhitney.com.

Colchester

Alice Ashton

Alice Ashton, 91, passed away peacefully Friday, Feb. 28, at home in Colchester. She was predeceased by her husband of 65 years, James Frederick Ashton. Alice was born in Morecambe, England, on April 22, 1922.

Alice and Fred were married on Feb. 8, 1946, in England, and came to America shortly thereafter. Initially living in New Jersey for a few years, they settled into their longtime residence of Giants Neck Heights in Niantic in 1956. Over the years, Alice had worked at Electric Boat in Groton, John Meyers in Norwich, and Scott's Garden Center in East Lyme.

Alice and her husband were ardent gardeners. Their home and yard were admired by family, friends, visitors, neighbors, and passers-by alike. Alice was a talented seamstress, making anything from her daughter's clothes and Halloween costumes to curtains and furniture covers. The list was endless. She also crocheted, knitted, did needlepoint, and spent many hours doing crafts, a passion she passed along to her daughter.

Alice's greatest accomplishment was being a loving mother to her children, Pamela and Clifford, and a dedicated and loving wife to her husband, Fred. Alice's love for her family was boundless. She was warm-hearted and befriended by all who met her.

In her last year of life, she ventured out to join the Red Hat Society with her close friends and caretakers, Roxanne Daimler and Judy Scalora. We shall ever be indebted to them, as well as Linda Larson and Daryl Dinger (who fondly called her "Mom") for spending many hours taking our mother on short expeditions, playing Scrabble, cards, and other activities.

Alice is survived by her sister, Vera Hamilton of Niantic (formerly of Queens, N.Y.); son, Clifford James Ashton, his wife, Teri, their children, Jeffrey and Haley Ashton of East Lyme; daughter, Pamela Ashton and her partner, Michael Plecan, of Colchester; and niece, Jeannette Brodeur and her family of Terryville.

Our heartfelt thanks go to both Dr. Setu Vora and Dr. Catherine E. Hylwa for their support and compassion in their care of our mother over the last few years.

A memorial service will be held at 6:15 p.m. on Friday, March 7, at Fulton-Theroux Funeral Home, 13 Lake Ave., Niantic. Family visitation will take place between 5 and 6:15 p.m. there, prior to the service. Visit fultontherouxniantic.com for photos, tributes, directions and more service information.

Alice's burial will take place at a later date. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that contributions be made to the Center for Hospice Care Southeast Connecticut, 227 Dunham St., Norwich, CT 06360.

Colchester

Harry P. Berryman

Harry P. Berryman, 96, of Colchester, formerly of Enfield, passed away Friday, Feb. 28, at Hartford Hospital. He retired from Hamilton Standard, Windsor Locks, as an engineer after 45 years of service.

Harry was born in Scranton, Pa., to Gertrude and Harry Berryman (deceased). He was predeceased by his brothers and sister, Mark, Norma and Jack. He leaves 12 nieces and nephews from various locations.

Harry leaves to mourn him his beloved wife, Kathleen (Ryan) Berryman of Colchester; his stepson Richard Carone and his wife Elaine of Columbia; stepson George (deceased) and his wife, Susan of Wethersfield. He also leaves his granddaughter, Cheryl (Carone) Powers and her husband, Jim of Lebanon, along with their children, Allison and Ryan; grandson, James Carone and his wife, Deborah of Myrtle Beach, S.C., and their daughter, Ava; granddaughter, Kimberly Carone of Newington and grandsons Kevin and Mark Carone of Wethersfield.

Calling hours are today, March 7, from 4-7 p.m., at the Rose Hill Memorial Funeral Home, 580 Elm St., Rocky Hill.

Andover

David A. Skorka

David A. Skorka, 73, of Andover, the husband of Kathleen (Dziadyk) Skorka, died Wednesday, Feb. 26, at St. Francis Hospital.

Born in Hartford, he was the son of the late Edward and Mary (Cuper) Skorka and had lived in Andover for 29 years. He was a U.S. Navy veteran and had retired from Southern New England Telephone after many years of service.

Besides his wife, he is survived by his daughters and their spouses, Cheryl and Craig Mamelson, Dawn and Mark DeVoe, Tami and Terry Brophy, Meegan Horan, and Melinda and Jason Ferraro; his grandchildren, Brooke and Amanda Brophy, Gabrielle Fenn, Preston, Addison and Gavin Ferraro; his sister, Janet Thayer and her husband Tom; and his niece and nephews.

Funeral service will be private and at the convenience of the family.

The John F. Tierney Funeral Home, Manchester, has care of the arrangements.

Dave's family would like to offer a special thanks to the doctors, nurses and staff of St. Francis Hospital, fifth floor, for their kindness and care.

In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to the Salvation Army 661 Main Street Manchester, CT 06040.

For online condolences, visit tierneyfuneralhome.com.



From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Bifurcation sounds like the name of a mild stomach ailment that perhaps a few Tums would knock right out. But in the world of town budgets, it commonly means splitting a spending proposal into two documents – most often, a town government spending package and a school spending package. Colchester already bifurcates its budget, and for a few years now there's been debate in Hebron as to whether that town should do the same.

The Charter Revision Commission, which is due to present recommended revisions to the town charter to the Board of Selectmen next month, seems to be leaning against bifurcation. In a letter to the editor in this week's *Rivereast*, Hebron resident Harvey Desruisseaux begs them to reconsider. And you know what? I agree with him.

In three of the past four years, there have been multiple budget votes in Hebron; voters just could not get behind the proposal the first time. Or in some cases, the second time. It hasn't always been clear what voters were balking at – the general government spending or the school spending – so town officials have usually taken a little bit from both, to try to get a budget to an acceptable number.

It's a guessing game that people shouldn't have to play.

Like I said, in Colchester the budget vote has been bifurcated for several years. During that time, have budgets failed? Sure. But with a clear yes-no vote for general government, and a clear yes-no vote for education, the town's finance board members know where to look at first if they need to make cuts.

Sometimes, even without bifurcation, it's pretty clear who the culprit is. In May 2010, for example, the Hebron budget was soundly rejected by voters the first go-around – and I do mean soundly; it was 1,127 'no' votes to a mere 639 'yes' ones – and taxpayers made it pretty clear they were rejecting the Board of Education spending, and specifically the proposed expansion of all-day kindergarten that was planned for that fall. But still, because there was no bifurcation, the general government budget was forced to go along for the ride.

School spending can be a hot issue, in any town. It easily represents the largest portion of a municipal budget, and there's always a delicate balance to strike between increasing services for kids and minimizing the tax impact for residents, many of whom don't have kids in the school system. And if there's a particularly controversial item in the budget, well, folks aren't afraid to say 'no' again and again, if need be.

For an admittedly-extreme example, allow me to step in my Wayback Machine about 10 years, to when I was but a young pup, covering Hebron for the *Rivereast*. It took 12 votes

before the RHAM 2003-04 schools budget was finally passed. It was February 2004 before the thing was approved – meaning that, since the fiscal year started the previous July, the schools had been operating on a month-to-month budget derived from the 2002-03 spending package (which, by the way, had seen seven trips to the polls before finally passing).

Now, because the RHAM schools are their own separate entity, the constant stream of 'no' votes didn't really affect the town budgets in Hebron, Andover or Marlborough; those spending plans had been passed by the voters long ago. But imagine if one year, say, the Hebron Board of Education's spending plan rubs voters the wrong way as much as RHAM's did in 2003. Would it be fair for the Hebron town government budget to be held hostage while the Board of Finance chips away at the Hebron schools budget, trying to find just the right number?

Like I said, it's an extreme comparison, and somewhat of an apples-to-oranges one as well. After all, the Hebron Board of Finance can cut the Hebron Board of Education's bottom-line budget number to whatever it likes, whereas no Board of Finance has any direct control over RHAM spending, so I highly doubt the Hebron schools budget would even get to six referendums, let alone 12. But still, it *could* happen.

Basically, I see reasons *to* bifurcate the budgets in Hebron, but I don't really see any reasons *not* to. As I said at the beginning of this column, the Charter Revision Commission won't present its final recommendations to the Board of Selectmen until April. Hopefully between now and then, the commission will reconsider its stance on the issue.

* * *

Just a quick reminder to get outside and head over to Hebron this weekend – as it's time for the Maple Fest! It's a ton of fun, and you don't even have to have a sweet tooth to enjoy it (although it certainly helps). Activities range from pancake breakfasts to sled dog exhibitions and much, much more – including, of course, the always-entertaining tours of the sugar houses. I've been to those houses many times over the years, but I always enjoy revisiting them. Learning about the sap-to-syrup process (and smelling that sweet boiling-sap aroma) never gets old.

As you saw on the cover, Geeta Schrayter's got a lot of info about the festival in this week's *Rivereast*, and there's also the maple map in the center of the paper listing various sugar houses and activities, so I won't say too much more about the festival here. But really, get out there. You'll have a great time!

* * *

See you next week.