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State Department of Agriculture animal control supervisor Ray Connors is shown with one of 32 horses seized from Fairy Tail Equines in East Hampton. The horses are being kept at a state facility while an animal cruelty investigation continues.

Animals Seized from East Hampton Farm

by Elizabeth Regan

A months-long probe by the state Department of Agriculture came to a head last week when state animal control officers found out a young horse had died at an East Hampton farm being investigated for animal cruelty, according to court documents.

That's when the officers concluded they had probable cause for a search warrant to secure evidence at the 47 Daniel St. farm run by Thomas Olajos and his wife Melanie, court documents said. The warrant was served to Olajos on Tuesday.

The Olajos breed Friesian, Andalusian and Gypsy Vanner horses under the name Fairy Tail Equines.

The state agriculture department seized all of the farm's 134 animals: 32 horses, two dogs, 19 rabbits and 81 chickens. Three of the chickens seized were dead, according to the warrant.

The agriculture department said it will continue to investigate to see if criminal animal cruelty charges are warranted.

The horses were brought to the state's Second Chance large animal rehabilitation facility at York Correctional Institution in Niantic to be cared for during the investigation, according to a press release from the agriculture department. The other animals were taken to municipal animal shelters in nearby towns.

East Hampton Planning and Zoning Official Jeremy DeCarli said the 5.2-acre property is zoned for no more than five horses. The department has been sending letters asking Thomas Olajos to comply with zoning regulations since September.

Last week, state animal control officers visited the property for the fifth time in as many months, when Olajos told them one of his horses had died since the officers' last visit. The warrant indicated that a veterinarian for Olajos said the horse was thin and had a rough coat, but could not determine an exact cause of death.

The veterinarian recommended bringing the horse to the University of Connecticut for a post-mortem examination, according to the warrant, but Olajos wanted a field necropsy performed instead.

The news of the dead horse came after Olajos had ignored most of the state animal control officers' repeated recommendations to give the horses appropriate food, water, shelter and medical care, the warrant said.

The state investigation began in September when East Hampton's animal control officer received a complaint from June Villa, owner of Villa Vanner in Shelbyville, Tenn., who had leased four horses to Melanie Olajos. Villa said the horses were emaciated when she got them back from the East Hampton farm, according to the warrant.

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Changes On Tap for Hebron Maple Fest

by Geeta S. Sandberg

Twenty-six years after the Hebron Maple Fest made its debut in town, giving thousands the chance to learn about the process of making maple syrup (and enjoy the sweet results), the event will this year be hosted by the Windham Chamber of Commerce – and some changes are in store.

But change, according to the founders of the March festival, isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Last week, Ron and Joyce Wenzel of Wenzel Sugar House, and Russ and Denise Schaller of Woody Acres Sugar House, sat reminiscing about the event and where it was headed. Both couples have been involved with the event from the get-go.

"We just started this on a whim," said Ron. The event got underway all those years ago after Hebron resident Selden Wells, a fellow maple syrup producer, had a year that produced so much syrup he didn't know what to do with it. And so, he decided on a fundraiser.

Ron explained, "I remember getting the phone call. 'Ron, want to come to my sugar house? I'm having a sugar-on-snow party. I want you to come look at this.' And I said 'Okay, Wellsy.'"

After the event, Ron said Selden called and asked him if he'd like to do it the following year.

"Then he called Russ and the rest is history!" Ron recalled those first few years, when "cable was first starting out" and public access television was getting underway. Someone came to do a story on the festival, he shared, "but I never saw it because I never had cable!"

Another time, Ron said a different television reporter came out to learn about the process –

gathering over two hours of footage for a segment that lasted two minutes – and asked Ron what he hoped for the event.

"I said, 'I hope it shows that you don't gotta go to that state between New Hampshire and New York to buy maple Syrup. We want you to come out. Get out of the house. Put your boots on because there's gonna be mud – don't come in high heels!'"

"And they do!" Denise laughed. "It's always muddy; it goes hand-in-hand."

"If you don't have mud, you won't have sap," added Joyce.

"And yet [festivalgoers] come out in their Sunday shoes!" Denise stated.

Russ smiled, "One year we had one woman pull up to the sugar house so close she opened up the door and literally stepped from the car into the sugar house – she had high heels on."

"I remember when we just started and traffic was a lot lighter," shared Denise. "I would go in, get some laundry going, start up the Internet, and if I saw one or two cars I'd put my coat back on and go down, then come back up and finish the laundry. And now we don't get lunch until 4 [it's so busy]!"

"There's a lot of good memories," Ron asserted. "We could write a book!"

But despite what Russ called the "good old days," the memories they've made, and the time and effort they've put into growing and fostering the event, both couples admitted it was time for someone new to take the reins.

"We've done it long enough," Ron said.

"We always said [2015] was going to be the 25th and final year" of the festival, Denise added, "and it was."

Although Ron said the group was a little hesitant about the event changing going forward, he said that was also a good thing.

"The good news going forward is it's not the same," Ron said. "That's the good news, because there's new ideas coming in."

"There's new blood," added Russ.

"It makes a big difference," furthered Ron.

"And it could become bigger and better with the right guidance," shared Denise.

"More good news," Ron added, was the involvement of more sugar houses. Dubbed "Maple Madness" this year, the event, scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, March 19 and 20, has extended beyond the borders of town, allowing sugar houses in surrounding communities to participate. Ron explained there were a couple of nearby sugar houses that couldn't officially participate before since they were right outside of town, like Oweneco Farms in Lebanon and Hurst Farms in Andover.

Now, along with Hurst and Oweneco joining Wenzel Sugar House and Woody Acres, a number of others have signed up to participate from as far away as Woodstock.

Windham Chamber of Commerce President Diane Nadeau explained the event was "absolutely" still about educating the public about maple syrup, just as it had been from the start,

and said more sugar houses meant "even if someone can't get out to Hebron, they can at least get out to one of [the sugar houses] to see how it's done."

She furthered, "not only does [the event] promote Hebron as a community and Hebron businesses, it promotes agriculture – which is maple sugaring – and there's milk farmers, jams and honey and organic gardening type of stuff so there's a variety of different agricultural themed vendors."

Other changes this year include the location; Nadeau shared there will be three festival locations – RHAM High School, the parking lot of Ted's IGA Supermarket and Main Street – along with a couple of other places that are holding activities.

"We want to make sure that this is a safe event for everybody and that it is easy for all our guests coming from out of town to find activities," Nadeau explained.

She added having Route 66 go through the center of town was good for bringing people to the event, "but we also want to make sure it's safe."

And so, Nadeau said guests will be encouraged to park at RHAM High School.

"There's plenty of spaces, it's easy to find parking, and there will be buses that will take people from there to the major activity areas – and it's handicapped-accessible – so instead of driving around for two hours looking for parking, they'll be able to park in a nice, clean area and take a

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Animals Seized cont. from Front Page

Taylor Hanes, the trainer for Villa's horses, said the contract on a palomino stallion named Romeo was up when the 10-year-old horse was returned to his home in Tennessee.

"When he arrived on our farm, he was nearly 300 pounds underweight," Hanes said. Upon seeing Romeo's condition, he sent a hauler back up to East Hampton to get the remaining three mares.

But Olajos, when reached for comment, said Romeo was deemed healthy for travel by a veterinarian eight days before being transported back to Tennessee. He added he couldn't comment on the condition of the mares because it is an "ongoing legal battle."

According to Hanes, the mares were brought to Tufts University to be stabilized before they could make the trip home – and Tufts veterinarians found them emaciated and "pretty much loaded with parasites."

Court documents said veterinary records from Tufts gave the horses body condition scores of 1.5 (poor), 2 (very thin), and 3.5 (thin) on a scale of 1-9. A score of 3 merits further examination and a score of 2 or lower needs immediate intervention. A score of 5 means a horse is at the ideal weight and 9 means a horse is "extremely fat."

Olajos declined any further comment, pending a statement from his attorney, John Donovan. A call to Donovan's office was not returned.

Hanes also said that while two of the mares had foals, only one foal came back to Tennessee with the hauler; the other one, he said, remained at Fairy Tail, as per contractual stipulations.

But after seeing the condition of the leased animals and paying thousands of dollars to rehabilitate them, Hanes said the contract doesn't hold up: "We are owed that baby back."

Villa Vanners has offered \$16,000 to buy back two other horses it had sold outright to the Olajos in 2014, according to Hanes. But the couple refused, he said – "And now those two horses are seized."

Hanes said an attorney for Villa Vanners sent letters to the Olajos but did not get a response. The attorney has reached out to the state Department of Agriculture now that the animals have been seized and is waiting to hear back, he said.

Hanes said the four horses returned to Tennessee are in much better health now.

A press release from the state agriculture department said the 32 horses seized Tuesday were evaluated the same day by Bruce Sherman, a veterinarian with the agency and the director of its Bureau of Regulation and Inspection. He authorized the horses' removal to ensure they were properly treated in a healthy environment.

"Our goal was to work with the owner to rehabilitate the horses on site," Sherman said. "Unfortunately, our best efforts to bring the owner into compliance did not result in all of the horses being cared for to the degree that we required."

The first visit by state animal control officers

on Sept. 10 found almost a third of the 33 horses on the farm at the time were grossly underweight with signs of malnutrition including muscle wasting, protruding hip bones and visible ribs and spines, the warrant said. There was no hay or grain available for the horses to eat.

According to the warrant, one horse "appeared to be very weak in the hind end and was having trouble walking and standing." She was subsequently found to be anemic and to have kidney problems by a veterinarian hired by Olajos. Other horses were diagnosed with anemia related to malnutrition as well.

State animal control officers made several visits to check how the horses were progressing based on recommendations for Olajos to make sure clean water is available at all times, to double the amount of hay, to separate the horses during grain feedings, and to seek veterinary care for various issues, according to the warrant.

Most of the recommendations were not followed, the warrant said. Regular visits by the state animal control officers indicated some horses had gained weight but not others.

The warrant described one occasion in October during which three horses broke out of the paddock while the state animal control officers were visiting. They saw a horse put his head through a glass window in the barn, breaking it.

"There was still not enough shelter for all of the horses on the property," the warrant said.

The same visit revealed that a horse with a laceration on his nose appeared to need stitches, according to the warrant. The document said there were 14 horses with overgrown hooves, one young horse whose belly was distended with worms, and two with scrapes.

On another occasion in December, the warrant said state animal control officers found horses with no hay available to eat and two horses in the barn with no food or water.

A state animal control officer "gave the two horses water and they drank several gallons immediately, indicating that they had been without water for some time," according to the warrant.

On Jan. 26 – the same visit where Olajos informed state animal control officers one of the horses had died a few weeks prior – the officers again found insufficient amounts of hay and water on the property.

"The horses that were outside had been thrown hay, but it was just thrown over the fence and was not separated, causing the strongest horses to bite and kick at the others to keep them away from the hay," the warrant said.

Five out of seven horses in stalls in the barn had water buckets "so dry there was no evidence that they held water," according to the warrant.

The warrant also included statements from a former Fairy Tail Equines employee and a general manager at a Meriden farm on Allyn Street from which the Olajos leased space starting in



A malnourished Great Dane was among the 134 animals seized from the Fairy Tail facility. The dogs, chickens and rabbits were taken to municipal animal shelters in nearby towns.

August 2014. The statements cited a lack of clean water, feed and hay; failure to trim horses' hooves; inadequate sanitation; and broken doors and fencing.

The owners of Once Again Farm, the Meriden facility, are suing the Olajos for breaching their lease. They are seeking \$42,000 for unpaid rent, repair costs, equipment replacement, the professional resurfacing of the indoor riding arena, and various fees.

The Olajos filed a counterclaim stating that the landlords did not provide "Quiet Enjoyment" during their occupancy and interfered with them by "communicating with them on a regular basis." In turn, they are asking for monetary damages for lost income and relocation costs.

The litigation is ongoing.

The Olajos have been involved in two foreclosures since June 2015: one on the Daniel Street property owned by the couple and one on a Deep River Road home in Colchester owned by Melanie Olajos.

East Hampton Building, Planning and Zoning Department Director Jeremy DeCarli said the department did not receive a response from Olajos

to any of its written correspondence seeking zoning compliance until about two weeks ago.

DeCarli then visited the property last Tuesday with state animal control officers to assess the situation.

Olajos has 30 days from a letter from DeCarli dated Jan. 27 to come into compliance with town regulations. The next step would be a cease-and-desist order, followed by legal action if he doesn't reduce the number of horses on the property.

But it seems the violation has been resolved – at least temporarily – with the seizure of all the animals on the property.

"With no horses on the property, he's now in compliance," DeCarli said.

State Rep. Melissa Ziobron, R-East Haddam, has set up a crowdfunding website to promote a Connecticut Department of Agriculture fund to offset expenses related to the seizure. The website raised more than \$7,000 in its first 24 hours. Donations may be made online at gofundme.com/animalwelfare06424 or by sending a check to: The Animal Abuse Cost Recovery Account, c/o Connecticut Department of Agriculture, 165 Capitol Avenue, Room G-8A, Hartford, CT 06106.

Changes On Tap cont. from Front Page

nice, warm bus."

Nadeau said there will be demonstrations and food vendors, as there have been in the past, but there will also be some more activities geared toward children, and the chamber is looking to have a couple of performances as well.

"We're very proud of the fact there are more vendors this year, and more activities for people to do," she said. "This year there are a lot of activities for people to do, particularly kids. All of us could probably stand to see how maple syrup is made but to watch little kids watch the evaporators with the smoke and then try [the syrup] – it's great. So we're really about young people, educating them and having fun."

She added with a laugh, "The disadvantage for parents is it's a whole day of maple sugar so their kids are on a sugar high for two weeks after, and we're very sorry about that."

Food vendors, as in the past, will include those selling a variety of maple-themed food like maple milk, maple shakes, maple fudge, maple cake – "everything maple you can think of someone is selling."

Nadeau said the chamber was still interested in speaking with anyone who wants to participate; it costs \$50 to participate, unless a host is

selling multiple food items, which moves them into the "concession" category, and costs \$250.

Nadeau added the event wasn't a fundraiser for the chamber, explaining "the sponsorships and vendor fees go to cover the cost of the event which of course is quite a bit because there's a very large police bill, [portable toilets], that kind of thing."

Sponsorships are also available beginning at \$50 up through \$250, with each sponsorship level equating to different promotional opportunities.

"There's a great opportunity for people to come and be vendors and great opportunities for businesses to become sponsors. We know thousands of people will come... it's really great exposure for the town and community," she explained, adding she hoped people attended from all over Connecticut and the northeast, and that "all of the non-profits using this as a fundraiser to further their mission and goals have a successful event so they're able to better do what they do so well."

* * *

Anyone looking for more information on the event can go to the new website available at hebronmaplefest.com or contact Sheri, the event coordinator, at 860-428-4549 or sheri2016hmf@yahoo.com.

Colchester Community Theatre Heads Under the Sea

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

A royal member of the Disney family arrives on stage at Bacon Academy next week as the Colchester Community Theatre presents *The Little Mermaid*.

The production is extra special this year after only a small number of community theaters were granted rights through Music Theatre International to the musical; MTI only began making *The Little Mermaid* available to community theaters last fall.

Based on the Tony-nominated Broadway hit, which was in turn based on the 1989 animated Disney smash (which itself was adopted from the beloved Hans Christian Andersen tale), *The Little Mermaid* tells the story of Ariel, who falls in love with a prince. The only problem is Ariel's a mermaid and her prince is a human.

Director Wallis Johnson said she was very excited when she heard CCT was able to secure the rights.

"Everyone is trying to get it," Johnson said. "We are one of the few community theaters to get it in the entire United States."

The production will open Friday, Feb. 12 and continue Saturday and Sunday, for a total of four performances.

The cast features more than 80 members, ranging in age from as young as 6 years old to over 60. And while several of the names are CCT veterans, a majority are new to the community theatre group.

Among the CCT newbies is Andover resident Liv Kurtz, 17, who is playing Ariel. Kurtz isn't unfamiliar with the stage, however. A senior at RHAM High School, she has been involved with several RHAM drama productions over the years.

"Who says no to being a Disney princess?" Kurtz said during rehearsals this week. But, she admitted, being the iconic Disney princess is also something of a challenge.

"Ariel is perfect," Kurtz quipped, "and I am not."

Rehearsals started in early January and while Kurtz is still a little uncomfortable in the part, she said she knows she will feel better once the sets and costumes come together – as she'll feel more like Ariel.

Kurtz has also spent the past few weeks developing on-stage chemistry with her co-star, Ian Yue, 27, of Hartford. Yue is also a newcomer to CCT.

"It's my first lead and it's kind of terrifying," Yue said of playing Prince Eric. "I over-

rehearsed and strained my voice so now I'm trying to work hard, but not too hard."

Returning to the CCT stage this year is Chelsea Kelle, 27, of Manchester. Kelle, who played the dragon in the theater group's production of *Shrek* last year, is performing Sebastian in *The Little Mermaid*.

Being cast in the musical is something of a dream come true for Kelle, as she has long been an aficionado of Alan Menken, who wrote the music for the movie and Broadway versions of *The Little Mermaid*, and is also the composer behind several other musical classics, including *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* and *Little Shop of Horrors*.

"I'm a huge fan of anything Alan Menken composes," Kelle said. "I wrote to Menken as a child telling him my dream was to be in *The Little Mermaid*."

While those dreams may have never included being a Jamaican crab, Kelle said she's enjoying playing Sebastian.

"The keys were raised on Broadway so it could be sung by a girl," Kelle said. "The accent has been difficult, and I'm carrying the weight of well-known songs like 'Under the Sea.'"

Even though she is nervous to be the main voice of the iconic song, Kelle said she's very excited for opening night.

"'Under the Sea' makes me cry, it's so beautifully composed," she said. "It's definitely the type of challenge I like."

One of the biggest challenges the entire production faces, Johnson said, is trying to differentiate between when the musical is under the sea and when it is on land.

"On Broadway, they could fly people in [like fish swimming]," Johnson said. "We can't do that – so we're thinking of other ways."

Some of those ways include putting Kurtz and actors playing fish on roller skates, and using special effects to highlight when the musical is under water. Johnson said the production is also using set pieces and costumes to go between water and land.

Those costumes have been a challenge in themselves, Johnson said. Since MTI only made *The Little Mermaid* available so recently, costume companies that CCT usually rents or buys costumes from don't have them available for the musical yet. So CCT members made a lot of the costumes themselves – and, Johnson pointed out, "We've already been contacted by people to ask if they could borrow our cos-



Liv Kurtz of Andover, left, and Ian Yue of Hartford are Ariel and Prince Eric in the new Colchester Community Theatre production of *The Little Mermaid*, which will be performed Feb. 12-14 at Bacon Academy.

umes."

In the end, though, the plan is for *The Little Mermaid* to go off without a hitch – and Johnson said it is going to really appeal to young children.

This isn't CCT's first trip to the Disney well. The group's February musical in 2010 was *Beauty and the Beast* – and the CCT children's group has performed *101 Dalmatian Kids* and *The Little Mermaid Jr.* in recent years.

"I like seeing the children's faces [at the musicals] because, to them, it's real," Johnson said. "All of their favorite characters are going to be there."

Kelle agreed that the production is sure to stun the audience.

"We've gone above and beyond," she said, "and the kids are really going to feel that Disney magic."

The production opens Friday, Feb. 12, at 7

p.m., at the Bacon Academy auditorium, 611 Norwich Ave., with shows following Feb. 13 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. and Feb. 14 at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors and children 12 years old and younger. Preferred seating tickets are available for \$25 each which will allow the ticket holders to enter the auditorium and choose seats 15 minutes before general admission ticket holders. Seating for the general audience will take place 20-30 minutes before the performance time.

Tickets are available for cash or check only at Copies Plus...More, 31 Halls Hill Rd., Monday-Friday, from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tickets can be purchased via credit card at colchestercommunitytheatre.com or by calling 860-707-4488 (leave a name and phone number; calls will be returned within 24 hours). Tickets will also be sold at the door, subject to availability.

Colchester Grand List Grows by 1.15 Percent

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

The Oct. 1, 2015 Grand List of taxable properties grew 1.15 percent from the 2014 list, totaling \$1,230,498,800.

This is a \$13.9 million increase from the 2014 list. This translates to an additional \$428,500 in tax dollars, based on the current mill rate.

The Grand List, Assessor John Chaponis explained, is the aggregate valuation of taxable property within a given town. The assessor updates the list annually by adding any new taxable property and removing any property that is no longer taxable.

Chaponis said while the increase is twice what last year's was – the 2014 Grand List grew just 0.6 percent from the 2013 tally – Colchester still has a way to go.

"It's still only 1.2 percent where 10 years ago, we experienced 5 to 6 percent Grand List growth," Chaponis said. "Of course, everything is relative and the Grand List was only \$700 million then and it's \$1.3 billion today."

Colchester's grand list is divided into three categories of taxable property: real estate, motor vehicles and personal property. All three categories saw an increase in the 2015 Grand

List.

The Grand List is used by the Board of Finance to help set the mill rate for the upcoming fiscal year. The mill rate is then used to determine residents' taxes; a resident can determine their taxes by multiplying the mill rate by their total assessments. One mill is equal to \$1 in tax per \$1,000 of assessed property and under the current mill rate of 30.76, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay \$7,690 in taxes.

Real estate went up \$9.93 million to \$1,054,287,900 over the 2014 Grand List. Motor vehicle went up \$2.37 million to \$119,785,600 over last year's list while personal property went up \$1.63 million to \$41,925,300.

Chaponis said real estate was the primary driver of this year's Grand List increase. He said there was no specific project that generated the increase; however, North Woods of Colchester, a 55 and older adult community on Lebanon Avenue, was responsible for about 10 percent of the new real estate, thanks to an expansion of the development.

First Selectman Art Shilosky said the in-

crease in the Grand List helps; however, it doesn't mean much yet.

"I'm happy, but it doesn't mean anything until we start putting the budget together," he said.

To obtain the net Grand List total, all three categories are totaled, and then the assessor adds in an estimate for prorates – new construction completed and occupied after Oct. 1 – and a motor vehicle supplement. The 2015 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 \$1,230,498,800 net total.

The top 10 real estate taxpayers on the Oct. 1, 2015 Grand List were: Country Place of Colchester LTD Partners at \$9,211,100; SS1 Colchester LLC at \$7,232,900; the City of Norwich at \$4,835,900; Gaia Colchester LLC

at \$3,695,100; Sharr Realty LLC at \$3,518,000; S&S Worldwide Inc. at \$3,401,500; Genesis Health Ventures of Bloomfield at \$3,220,000; GND Too of Colchester LLC at \$3,117,000; Keystone Shoppes LLC at \$2,768,700; and Colchester Realty LLC at \$2,726,990.

The top 10 personal property taxpayers on the Oct. 1, 2015 Grand List were: Connecticut Light and Power (now known as Eversource Energy) at \$13,774,650; Stop and Shop Supermarket at \$2,445,910; Hillandale Farms LLC at \$1,874,230; S&S Worldwide Inc. at \$1,554,830; Alpha Q Inc. at \$1,398,590; Michael Beebe at \$951,640; Cellco Partnership at \$612,900; AT&T Mobility LLC at \$568,500; Maxi Drug Inc. at \$502,250; and Connecticut Water Company at \$417,170.

The deadline to file a written appeal if a taxpayer is unhappy with their assessment is Saturday, Feb. 20. Chaponis said failure to meet this deadline constitutes a waiver of one's right to file an appeal. Appeal applications must be in the assessor's office at Town Hall, 127 Norwich Ave., prior to 4:30 p.m. on Feb. 20.

Hebron Grand List Rises .5 Percent

by Geeta S. Sandberg

The 2015 Grand List has increased just over half a percent, according to the report submitted by town assessor Debra Gernhardt.

The net Grand List moved to \$786,095,920, for an increase of \$4,092,370 or .523 percent, compared to last year's increase of \$3,351,700 or .43 percent.

The change incorporates a large decrease in personal property assessments – down \$1,471,260, or 2.018 percent – that Gernhardt said was due to some smaller businesses closing and “very little new purchases of equipment which results in the existing equipment depreciating even more for this year.”

The personal property decrease was offset, however, by an increase in both real estate and motor vehicles.

Real estate increased .42 percent, or \$2,930,430 to \$696,865,670. Gernhardt explained in her Jan. 29 memo the majority of the increase is due to new residential dwelling construction and improvements to existing buildings.

Meanwhile, motor vehicles increased 2.031

percent, or \$1,471,260 to \$73,903,240, which Gernhardt said was mostly due to new vehicles.

She added compiling the motor vehicle list “was the most challenging this year,” due to glitches with the new software at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

“Preparing this list usually takes the least amount of time, but this year took much longer,” she shared.

The top 10 taxpayers for 2015 were: Connecticut Light & Power Co. at \$7,722,800; Village Shoppes LLC at \$1,995,070; Hebron Country Manor LLC at \$1,802,920; Blackledge Country Club Inc. at \$1,794,920; The Connecticut Water Company at \$1,576,600; Hebron Properties LLC at \$1,470,000; Hebron Lincoln LLC at \$1,224,230; 41-61 Main Street LLC at \$1,071,350; Grayville Estates of Hebron LLC at \$1,024,660; and Honda Lease Trust at \$885,820.

Gernhardt pointed out Hebron Country Manor LLC, an apartment complex, moved up from sixth on the 2014 Grand List to third for

2015 due to its purchase of a multifamily home at 108-110 Wall St. Meanwhile, Hayden Hous-ton dropped off the list due to the sale of the former Hebron Pharmacy at 117 Main St. and a .36-acre lot on Wall Street.

Speaking on the increase, Town Manager Andrew Tierney said this week, “It’s not a huge increase but at least it continues to go in the right direction.

The list has seen an increase each year since 2011 – a revaluation year – when there was a decrease of \$99,588,090 or 12.96 percent.

Revaluation is the process of evaluating real estate in town and ensuring all properties are assessed at market value. This then allows for the redistribution of the town’s tax burden. Connecticut State Statute cites a revaluation has to be performed every five years. Before 2011, the last revaluation took place in 2006, but the results then were quite different; the Grand List increased more than \$200 million.

In turn, the Grand List is used by the Board of Finance to help set the mill rate for the up-

coming fiscal year. The mill rate is then used to determine residents’ taxes; a resident can determine their taxes by multiplying the mill rate by their total assessments. One mill is equal to \$1 in tax per \$1,000 of assessed property and under the current rate of 36 mills, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay \$9,000 in taxes.

The mill rate for the upcoming year, however, is yet to be determined, although Tierney said the town was hoping to keep any increase to a minimum.

“We’re actively compiling the budget as we speak and we’re going to continue to work on it to try to come in with a very minimal increase—if any at all,” he stated. “It depends on the RHAM budget, but the town’s budget along with the Hebron Board of Education budget [which the school board adopted in January with a zero percent increase] is looking pretty good, and if winter continues on as it is, we’ll have a surplus in that [snow removal] account which also helps.”

Andover Democratic Registrar Resigns

by Geeta S. Sandberg

As of yesterday, Feb. 4, Andover resident Catherine Magaldi-Lewis is no longer the Democratic Registrar of Voters.

Magaldi-Lewis submitted her letter of resignation Jan. 19, sharing her reasons were “personal” and “not related to being unsatisfied with my position.”

She added, “I regret that I must make this difficult decision before the end of my term as registrar.”

The registrar of voters is an elected position governed by Connecticut General Statutes. According to the Andover town website, registrars “work closely with the Office of the Secretary of the State to develop methods and procedures to ensure the voting rights of citizens and administer all elections based on current election laws.

Magaldi-Lewis was elected to the position for a four-year term in 2012.

Although she called her decision to resign “personal,” she added, “Perhaps if working conditions at Andover Town Hall were civil and respectful it may have been easier for me to stay. But I cannot balance a health situation at home with a continuous stressful situation at work.”

Magaldi-Lewis has been vocal at public meetings about her feelings regarding her interactions with First Selectman Bob Burbank, who she said ignored and criticized her and her attempts to improve working conditions at

Town Hall.

“From the time of my election it has been a constant battle for equal access to funds, fair treatment, honesty and respectability,” she wrote. “I have dealt with First Selectman Bob Burbank’s attempts to disparage me at Town Hall meetings and ignore every attempt I have made to assist the registrars in the performance of their job.”

At a recent meeting, Magaldi-Lewis spoke during public comment pointing out the same job selectwoman Julia Haverl had been tasked with – examining town office space and looking into reconfiguration options – she had already done; she said she brought forth a viable solution, but that solution was ignored.

“It must be noted,” she added in her letter, “that appeals for more office space have been discounted and the new hardware is not installed because current conditions in our office make it impossible to access the wiring. It must also be noted that not only has office space been requested for a year but *space for EDR [Election Day Registration] is required by state statute.*” [The italics for emphasis were in Magaldi-Lewis’ letter.]

Due to the space constraints, Magaldi-Lewis and Republican Registrar Cathy Palazzi have shared with the current set-up, it’s difficult for residents who come to register to have any privacy, as their office is crowded and shared with four people. Palazzi had also mentioned before

there were times voters have had to wait in the hallway.

In response to Magaldi-Lewis’s comments as to his treatment of her, Burbank said Thursday, “The fact of the matter is I try to work with everybody no matter who they are, but she wasn’t happy with the office conditions that the registrars have had for years and wanted to be moved into a larger facility and it just wasn’t available.”

He added, “Not only myself tried to work on this but other selectmen and other people as well tried to make as many arrangements as we could to utilize the limited space we have in town to the best of our ability but she wasn’t happy.”

Burbank added he didn’t ignore Magaldi-Lewis’s efforts, saying “All the suggestions or requests that came through this office were carefully considered and in many cases actually went in front of the Board of Selectmen... We treat all people equally in this town and basically, no one else including the other registrars have complained about my activities or the way the working conditions have been in this town; we’re always trying to improve as much as possible but we have a small town hall and we have a limited budget. It’s hard to give people everything they want.”

In addition, Burbank said, “the demands in many cases were impractical in my opinion.”

As an example, he said Magaldi-Lewis had

requested laptops and a new computer for the office, “and they’ve been in-house for over a year and it was something she had to have immediately and we ordered them and in some cases they’re yet to be out of the boxes... So these are the types of things that sometimes do get me a little irritated, because we have a lot of needs in this town. We have to allocate for the best use and we strive not to waste money in this town so that we can control our taxes.”

But despite Burbank’s comments saying otherwise, Magaldi-Lewis asserted in her letter she experienced an “antagonistic working environment.” Regardless, she said she achieved a number of accomplishments during her tenure, including:

Writing an emergency plan requested by the state, writing the first two chapters of the Registrars of Voters of Connecticut procedures manual for the state, creating a new detailed budget for the registrars, creating a daily budget sheet to keep track of all Registrar of Voter accounts, creating an easier voter identification requirement form to use at the polls and developing a new excel timesheet for poll workers and to maintain poll worker information.

Now that Magaldi-Lewis’s resignation is effective, Democratic deputy registrar Julie Victoria will fill the position until the Democratic Town Committee chooses a replacement for the remainder of her term.

Marlborough Residents Air Grievances with Elementary School

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

The Board of Education held its annual community outreach forum on Tuesday – and was slammed with concerns about enrollment, not returning its surplus, and complaints about curriculum.

Education board member Theresa Brysgel opened up the forum, stating the reason the board does outreach is that the board “values the input of the community and want to hear what the public has to say.” She stressed that, while the annual forum always occurs during budget season, residents can talk about any issue they want.

Indeed, concerns touched on a variety of topics. Kristine Hudock, a resident in town for 30 years, told the board she was very disappointed it voted last July to keep the approximately \$105,000 surplus from the 2014-15 budget, instead of returning the funds to the town.

“If you have a surplus this year, consider giving it to the town,” Hudock said.

Brysgel explained the surplus was used to restore items cut after the Board of Finance chopped \$87,000 from the 2015-16 school budget that April.

“We go through budget votes and as a long-time taxpayer, when I see these things get placed back, I ask why do I bother?” Hudock said. “It’s just going to go up every year.”

A retired teacher, Hudock suggested cutting the \$300 stipend to teachers for classroom supplies.

“I worked in a system that didn’t have a lot

of money,” Hudock said. “For many years, we didn’t have any money for supplies. I have no sympathy when it appears there is an unlimited supply of stuff.”

Hudock wasn’t the only one upset with the school system. Parent Deb Fitzsimmons, who has a first-grader and a fifth-grader at the elementary school, said she would support the school budget if she “saw a good return on my investment.”

Fitzsimmons said she has not been impressed with the curriculum at the school, and has been touring magnet schools.

“My first-grader was sent home in the first 58 days of school with 218 worksheets,” Fitzsimmons said. “That averages 3.7 worksheets a day, and they were repetitive.”

Fitzsimmons explained the worksheets asked her son the same thing over and over – what the child wanted to do over the weekend.

“No one taught him how to write,” she said. Fitzsimmons explained other schools provide programming with less funding.

“Why not creative, engaging assignments?” she asked, after explaining her fifth-grade student receives multiple worksheets a week as well. “I was told that’s the program we’ve implemented – that there are other concerns from other parents, but that’s the way it is. I was told that’s Common Core. I was told that for the fifth grade that we have to teach to the SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) test.”

Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz told

the *Rivereast* Wednesday that the worksheets are part of the Common Core curriculum.

“It’s a different way of teaching and how kids work at home,” Sklarz said. “Some people adjust to it quickly and others take a bit more time.”

Sklarz said he knows Principal Dan White and Assistant Principal Kim Kelley have sat down with Fitzsimmons and her husband regarding their concerns.

“I don’t know where they’re coming from about repetitive [assignments],” Sklarz said. “Sometimes [the work] may look similar, but it’s different.”

Sklarz stressed that what goes on in the classrooms is creative and individualized.

“Every Tuesday, there is a page of the spelling book, a math worksheet and a reading assignment that’s ‘read this paragraph, fill out the diagram below’; day in and day out,” Fitzsimmons said. “For the money we’re paying, we shouldn’t be seeing this. We should have engaging, creative assignments.”

Fitzsimmons said she believes that not every student in the classroom should have to do the same thing all of the time and that teachers should have the freedom to individualize their teaching to each student.

During meetings with the administration about her concerns, Fitzsimmons said she has suggested activities such as students making their own crossword puzzle, instead of simply filling one in every week.

And administrators, she said, were not receptive. “No response [from them]. Crickets,” she said.

Fitzsimmons said she made other suggestions about using baking for math – and again, there was no response.

Fitzsimmons said she and her husband had lived in town previously and left, but “we moved back to this town for the school system, and now that we’re in it, we wish we were in another town,” Fitzsimmons said. “We’ve toured multiple magnet schools. Avon has a certified HOT (Higher Order Thinking) school. These are the schools we should be achieving to be.”

She added, “This is the kind of school this school can be with the money we’re putting into it.”

Brysgel told Fitzsimmons at the outreach meeting that the Board of Education cannot speak to what’s happening in a classroom, but that it’s important these concerns come forward.

“Absolutely we all want for this to be a school of excellence and that’s always the goal,” Brysgel said.

Sklarz said he believes the issue with Fitzsimmons can be resolved.

“An awful lot of attention has been given to the parents and hopefully they can work things out,” Sklarz said.

The Board of Education continues its discussion on the budget Thursday, Feb. 11, at 7 p.m., in the Marlborough Elementary School media center.

School Maintenance Hot Topic for Marlborough Boards

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

A meeting two years in the making, the boards of selectmen, education and finance met last Thursday to discuss the maintenance needs of Marlborough Elementary School.

The meeting was heated, as board members opened up about their frustrations concerning maintenance and how to pay for those needs. Members of all three boards said they had been seeking such a meeting for several years, but it had never materialized under administration of previous first selectmen.

Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz opened the meeting, saying MES does not have a maintenance plan and that has worried him since he came into the district seven years ago.

The building was renovated in 2004. The \$16 million renovation demolished some of the older units of the school, created some new parts of the school – such as the community room and cafeteria – and “brought everything up to code,” said school board member Louise Concodello.

“A lot of people told me that the renovation was fairly new and [before the renovation] the building was in really bad shape and [town officials] had let it go,” Sklarz said. “They gave taxpayers a promise to never let this building get in that shape again.”

Sklarz said there have been some good things happening concerning care of the inside of the 12-year-old facility.

“I proposed a building improvement plan for the inside of the building funded by the MECCA [Marlborough Elementary Child Care Association] rental fees,” Sklarz said. The building improvement plan contains items such as painting, furniture and playground equipment.

MECCA rents space from the elementary school for approximately \$24,000 a year.

Sklarz went on to explain while the school has the building improvement plan; there is no plan for larger ticket items such as when the roof may need to be done or a boiler or for other routine needs.

Concodello said the board in 2006 adopted a capital improvement plan for the school maintenance; however, after the recession hit in 2008 – and with the 2004 renovation still fresh – the consensus was the plan wasn’t needed, and it fell to the wayside.

The school board has spent time at past meetings discussing whether, since MES is a town-owned building, general school maintenance items should be in the education budget or in the town operations budget.

At last week’s meeting, Sklarz stressed he wanted clarity on the issue.

“Who is going to pay for it?” Sklarz asked. “There’s not two Marlboroughs; there’s one Marlborough. We need to have a plan and agree upon it.”

Sklarz said he would like to know where the money is going to come from when an item such as unexpected boiler work occurs – but indicated he would like to see such maintenance costs paid for by the town, not the school board.

“We don’t own this building; the town owns the building,” Sklarz said.

School board member Betty O’Brien agreed. She added the board formerly had a contingency fund for unexpected maintenance built into the budget; however, when budgets got tight that money stopped.

But selectmen and finance board members disagreed with the school board.

“If the Board of Education budget includes routine maintenance, it’s going to take a

backseat when the budget gets tight,” finance board member Ken Hjulstrom said. Hjulstrom said the school board tends to cut maintenance first before anything else. For example, he said, the \$19,000 that was cut last year for duct cleaning at the school.

When asked if there were any need for the ducts to be cleaned, Public Works Director Chris Corsa said he had no information stating the ducts had to be done, referencing a former issue with air quality that occurred before the renovation, but had been fixed.

First Selectwoman Amy Traversa said her problem is a disconnect between the school and the town.

She said MECCA funds formerly went to the town and now go to the school. The playground equipment, Traversa said, was in the school’s building improvement plan and is now with the Capital Non-Recurring Committee to obtain the funds from the town. The CNR committee looks over capital requests and sends them to the Board of Selectmen to be included in the town budget.

“You’ve got 544 kids you’re educating for almost \$8 million, RHAM educates 1,600 kids for \$28 million, and there are 6,431 people being funded on what looks to be \$8 million, but it’s not once you take out the school building debt that the town carries for this school,” Traversa said.

She also said she is upset that the school surpluses are not returned to the town as it used to be. This past spring, the Board of Education voted to spend approximately \$105,000 in surplus on a “want list” instead of returning the funds to the general fund.

Selectman Dick Shea agreed with Traversa.

“You can always find another program,” Shea said. “You can go on forever with new programs, gadgets and equipment and you can justify every bit of it, but somewhere along the line you need to strike a balance.”

Traversa said she didn’t think the school board understands the situation at Town Hall.

“Third-graders are using Chromebooks, while professional adults are working on four-year-old refurbished used computers,” Traversa said.

She added that, for the taxpayer, “it is the same pair of pants, but different pockets.”

School board member Mimi LaPoint fired back, claiming, “If it’s the same pair of pants, why do you have a problem with paying for more?”

Traversa stated her problem with that is that the budget is then not reflective of the true cost of education.

“If you really want a transparent education budget, it would include all of the expenses of education including the cost of maintaining the building and the debt,” finance board member Susan Lesser said, agreeing with Traversa. “Many taxpayers don’t know the debt [for the school building] is in the town budget.”

That sentiment seemed to be shared by other board members as Shea said he would like to see maintenance be part of the education budget.

“The idea that if it doesn’t have to do with education, someone else should pay for it just doesn’t make sense to me,” Shea said.

The group agreed by the end that the boards need to reconvene at another date after Traversa, Sklarz and Corsa have met to discuss what needs the school building has.

Transparency Complaints Continue for Chatham Health

by Elizabeth Regan

Complaints about a lack of transparency in the Chatham Health District persisted last week as the district’s Board of Health was forced to continue a hearing on the 2016-17 proposed budget because a copy of the document wasn’t available online as promised in the public notice.

At the hearing, held Jan. 26, Portland resident Shirley Olson said she went online to see the proposed budget – but it wasn’t there.

After some initial confusion, the board voted to continue the public hearing to Feb. 23 so the public would have ample time to view the document online and make comments.

Interim Director of Health Don Mitchell said he would make sure the budget proposal was posted by the next day at the latest. It is now available on the health district’s website at chathamhealth.org.

“There could be things that fall through the cracks right now in terms of things getting posted on time, me being aware they need to be posted,” Mitchell said. “There’s certain things I’m learning that I don’t know yet.”

The lapse is the latest in a series of black marks on the district culminating with the resignation of embattled Director of Health Thad King, the imminent departure of Haddam from the district, and widespread concern by residents about service quality.

King stepped down in December after the state Department of Public Health completed its investigation into allegations he was working as a private certified water operator at the same time he was serving as the district director of health. State statute specifies district health directors must devote their “entire time” to their job.

King entered into an agreement with the DPH’s then-commissioner Jewel Mullen to resign his position with the health district and to pay back \$100,380 to the state related to what DPH has called “the improper and/or fraudulent” use of the state health department laboratory for private business purposes. The agreement acknowledged that King “expressly denies all such charges and does not hereby agree to any liability, wrongdoing or amounts owed as alleged.”

King’s resignation letter characterizes his departure as an “early retirement.” The distinction allows King to remain eligible for a pension through the town of East Hampton. That’s where the health district’s finances are administered and where King had been employed since the early 1990s as a sanitarian and then as the local health department director. He joined the Chatham Health District when it was created in 2002.

King also received a \$44,385 payout for vacation and sick time, according to the Chatham Health District’s outgoing interim chairman, Peter Hughes.

East Hampton Town Manager Michael Maniscalco said the town is in the process of extricating itself from its responsibility for the health district’s financial management, which it has held “for whatever reason” since the health district formed in 2002.

The district’s payroll is now being managed on a contract basis by an outside service, according to Mitchell, with the remaining accounting functions to be handed over by July 1.

“As we look forward to the new health district that’s coming about, it’s going to be an organization that stands on its own two feet,”

Maniscalco said.

Both the current and proposed budgets allot approximately \$15,000 for accounting services, up from the \$5,000 expended yearly since 2011 to help compensate East Hampton.

Maniscalco said \$5,000 didn’t “even come close” to making up for the time spent by town employees in the management of the health district’s finances.

The proposed 2016-17 budget increases each town’s contribution from \$9.40 per resident to \$10.30 per resident.

It also adds \$25,000 for contracted food inspection services to help address documented shortcomings in that area.

A report released in September by the state health department showed the state didn’t conduct even half as many food inspections as it should have. The report also showed the district did not conduct follow-up inspections when the establishments that did receive inspections came up short.

The report said 272 food establishments in the district required a total of 832 inspections according to state guidelines – yet only 352 inspections were conducted.

Of those 352 inspections, 210 should have been inspected again due to one or more serious violations or a low overall score, the report said. Records indicated follow-up inspections were done in only 26 cases.

Hebron Town Manager Andrew Tierney, who was elected as the health board’s new chairman at the monthly meeting held after the aborted public hearing, said transparency and customer service will be his priorities going forward.

“It’s a new day for Chatham Health,” Tierney said. “I’m known throughout the district as a straight-shooter. I’m not going to make any promises, but we’re going to work on customer service.”

One of the first orders of business for the new Board of Health is the selection of a permanent Director of Health. The board will finalize a new contract, as required by the state health department, to ensure compliance with state regulations going forward. The position will be advertised in early March, according to Hughes, with the position to be filled by early May.

The state has been withholding half of its funding to the district for the current fiscal year until a replacement for King is hired. A DPH spokesman said it has received a request by the Chatham Health District for the funds to be released right away instead of waiting until May.

The state is reviewing the request, according to the spokesman.

Mitchell has been clear that he’s interested in making his temporary position permanent.

The proposed 2016-17 health district budget eliminates the assistant director position Mitchell held before he stepped up in King’s absence.

Chatham Health District Board of Health member and Portland First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield went on the record at last week’s meeting to applaud Mitchell, who served as a sanitarian in Portland before joining the health district.

“I think Don has been very responsive to the needs of Portland,” she said. “I want to say thank you. You’re doing a very good job and I appreciate it.”

East Hampton Police News

1/21: A 17-year-old juvenile of East Hampton was issued a summons for third-degree assault and second-degree breach of peace, East Hampton Police said.

1/23: Philip P. Selavka, II, 22, of 22 Harlan Pl., was arrested and charged with driving under the influence, failure to have tail lamps and failure to have stop lamps, police said. Selvaka was released after signing a \$500.00 non-surety bond wherein he agreed to appear before the Middletown Superior Court on Wednesday, February 3, 2016 at 9:00 a.m. to answer to the aforementioned charges.

Colchester Police News

1/26: State Police said Clifford Pixley, 43, of Amston, was arrested and charged with violation of probation.

1/27: State Police said Emily Mueller, 43, of 6 Augusta Circle, Moodus, was arrested and charged with DUI.

1/27: State Police said Nicholas Majek, 20, of Lebanon Avenue, was arrested and charged with interfering with an officer, disorderly conduct, interfering with an emergency call and third-degree assault.

1/27: Colchester Police said they are investigating a report of stolen items from multiple mailboxes on Middletown Road. Police said

checks and a debit card were stolen and used to make purchases at multiple locations. Anyone with information can call Officer Jonathan Goss at 860-537-7270.

1/27: State Police said James Murphy, 30, of 61 Boys Ave., Killingly, was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

1/27: State Police said Amanda Malinowski, 21, of 35 Inland Dr., Vernon, was arrested and charged with DUI and reckless driving.

1/29: Colchester Police said Hollie Robichaud, 32, of 68 Hilltop Rd., East Haddam, was arrested and charged with violation of probation.

Hebron Police News

1/26: State Police said Walter Sevetz, 58, of 12 Lakeside Dr., Lebanon, was arrested and charged with DUI, making an improper turn, and failure to carry a license.

East Hampton Dispatch Services Moving to Glastonbury

by Elizabeth Regan

East Hampton is expediting the transition of dispatch services from Colchester Emergency Communications (KX) to the town of Glastonbury, due to fears that the struggling regional dispatch center will not be able to provide services through its announced closure in June.

The KX Board of Directors voted in December to dissolve as of June 30, after most of its member towns indicated they wouldn't be renewing their contracts.

Uncertainty regarding KX's finances led Town Manager Michael Maniscalco to begin working with the heads of the local police department, fire department and ambulance corps to explore other dispatch options in 2013. After looking at six providers, from Madison to Killingly, Maniscalco said a partnership with Glastonbury would provide "some real synergy with all three departments."

The move to Glastonbury-based dispatch could cost East Hampton as much as \$770,000 in the first year, based on tentative numbers provided by Maniscalco – even after grant money is applied.

That figure includes approximately \$215,000 in operational costs and \$555,000 in start-up capital expenses.

The numbers take into account state grants for start-up costs and annual state subsidies for operational expenses.

Maniscalco said the capital expenses – which include such items as computer software, radio repeaters, and an additional dispatch console – are a tentative estimate likely to change. He pointed to the dispatch and data management system he's looking at currently, which would come in at about \$250,000 less than original projections.

"This is not a cheap adventure and it never was going to be," Maniscalco said. "There's a number of things that are happening because the town didn't invest in the dispatch services

and police services that they've got."

East Hampton Police Department Chief Sean Cox said time is of the essence.

"July is not as far away as one might think with respect to the enormity of this process," Cox said. "It is a significant undertaking; not one we're taking lightly. But we're doing everything we can to make sure we're doing it right."

Initially, Marlborough was going to come on board as well – until the town's new first selectwoman, Amy Traversa, balked at the cost. The Marlborough Board of Selectmen put dispatch service out to bid and recently signed on with Tolland County Communications for five years at a cost of \$12,860 annually.

East Hampton and Glastonbury have not yet signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish the multi-town dispatch center, but Maniscalco said he hopes to formalize an agreement by the end of the month.

Glastonbury's Town Council last month authorized Town Manager Richard Johnson to execute an agreement with the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection in order to receive grant money for the endeavor.

At last week's regular meeting of the East Hampton Town Council, members agreed to spend \$17,000 in capital reserve funds to install basic equipment so Glastonbury will be ready to take over services in July – if not sooner.

Maniscalco cited concern about a potentially imminent "mass exodus" of dispatchers from KX because the organization does not have enough money to fund vacation and sick time payouts, as well as pension obligations, for all of its employees. Maniscalco said such a tenuous situation could present an incentive for dispatchers to get out early in order to avail themselves of the payouts while there is still money

in reserve.

"As a result, we're looking at putting some stop gap measures in place in an effort to ensure that we could quickly transition some dispatch services, while very rudimentary and basic, to Glastonbury," Maniscalco said.

Maniscalco said the information about KX's financial situation came from the town's representatives on the organization's board of directors.

A representative from KX could not be reached for comment.

At last week's Town Council meeting, former East Hampton fire chief and a past member of the KX Board of Directors Marty Swan asked why dispatch service wasn't put out to bid.

According to Swan, the reason KX is closing is because towns, like East Hampton, said it was too costly for them to remain with the dispatch provider – but now the town will be paying more than it ever did with KX.

But Maniscalco said the worsening financials at KX meant the town was looking at a 30 percent increase in the cost of services if it stayed on – with no improvement in services.

Back in January 2014, Maniscalco threatened to go to bid for dispatch services when he said KX wasn't coming through with a "digital bridge" to enhance dispatch service by allowing officers to access and update records remotely.

"My hope is that KX gets the digital bridge taken care of," Maniscalco told councilors at that time. "My hope is that we can stay. That being said, if we have to go down the road of going out to bid that's what we'll do because it's too important a service to our police department and it's too important a service for our residents in the community and too much money has been put into this project to just let it go by the wayside."

But Maniscalco said the former Town Council did not want to put dispatch service to bid. It was a different set of circumstances, he added: "At that time, nobody was looking to leave KX. Since then, all the towns have said they're leaving. You don't have a choice."

Now, according to Maniscalco, the town has fewer options than towns like Marlborough – who don't have a municipal police force – because not as many communications providers offer dispatch for law enforcement. And those that do provide police dispatch have not indicated they would be able to meet East Hampton's desired level of service.

He said he talked with the Portland Police Department, which is dispatched through Middletown, and found the capabilities did not match East Hampton's needs.

Town Council Chairwoman Patience Anderson said public safety is the most important consideration and that Maniscalco is doing everything he can to ensure services continue uninterrupted.

"It's frightening what can happen if everything shuts down. We have to protect the town. That's the first and foremost duty and obligation," Anderson said.

Per the Town Council's request, Maniscalco also looked at the cost for the town to operate its own dispatch center. He gave a general estimate of \$1.2 million for capital start-up costs and \$1.3 million annually for staff.

Residents like Swan said there should have been a more formal, transparent process outlining the options before the town decided to work with Glastonbury.

"I don't think it's a good deal," Swan said. "But the powers that be have already made that decision. It would've been nice if they had come up with the real numbers for everybody so that everybody sees what the real numbers are."

Marlborough Grand List Sees Small Increase after Revaluation

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

The Oct. 1, 2015 Grand List of taxable properties in town is in, and the growth was minimal, with a 0.27 percent increase over the 2014 Grand List.

Up by \$1,560,685, the net 2015 Grand List totaled \$576,606,550, a much smaller increase than last year that saw a 0.486 percent increase.

The list represents the net value of assessed real estate, personal property and motor vehicles in town. All three categories saw increases this year, compared to the 2014 Grand List when personal property decreased from the year before.

On the list, real estate assessments increased by \$880,490 to \$513,288,300; motor vehicle climbed by \$322,300 to \$52,071,100; and personal property went up by \$357,895 to \$11,247,150.

The Grand List is used by the Board of Finance to help set the mill rate for the upcoming fiscal year. The mill rate is then used to determine residents' taxes; a resident can determine their taxes by multiplying the mill rate by their total assessments. One mill is equal to \$1 in tax per \$1,000 of assessed property and, under the current mill rate of 32.89, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay \$8,222 in taxes.

While the Grand List grew, the rate of increase is much smaller than what Marlborough saw last year at this time. The 2014 grand list climbed 0.486 percent from the 2013 tally.

"It is what it is," First Selectwoman Amy Traversa said Wednesday of the scant increase. She said the town economy hasn't "bounced back yet" from the recession, but added the town is "facing a real opportunity with the town center properties in a real transition."

Those town center properties are five properties, three of which are plazas in the center, formerly owned by attorney Robert Elliott. Elliott was foreclosed upon this past Decem-

ber by Chelsea Groton Bank and has until Feb. 9 to repay over \$7 million or forfeit his chance to reclaim the properties, or else they will be sold by the bank. Developer Allan Schwartz is currently managing the properties.

2015 was a revaluation year for Marlborough, which meant property in town was reassessed as to its value. Assessor Marie Hall explained when a revaluation year occurs, sometimes the grand list goes down depending on the market.

"Even though the market went up approximately two percent since the last revaluation, the market shifted in different areas of the town," Hall said. "The market went up in some areas, where other areas went down so on the whole, it ended up that there was not much of a change."

The fact that there was even a small increase in the Grand List instead of a decrease during the revaluation year, Hall said, is good news.

"It went up like any normal [non-revaluation] year did," Hall said. "It's better than going down."

The top 10 assessments in the 2015 Grand List included Connecticut Light & Power (now known as Eversource Energy) at \$4,827,330; Elliott Enterprises/Robert at \$3,993,290; BOTH LLC at \$3,216,220; Marlborough Health Care Realty Co. at \$2,791,810; Robert H. and Mary C. Soleau at \$2,077,050; C&B Marlborough Associates LLC at \$1,296,890; Country Barn Properties LLC at \$1,099,420; Leandra Knes at \$886,250; Douglas A. and Nathalie D. Thibodeau at \$883,190; and Edward F. and Nancy S. Bader at \$882,360.

Taxpayers unhappy with their appraisal can appeal them in front of the Board of Assessment Appeals. The deadline to apply for an appeal is Feb. 20. Appeals will take place in March and all decisions are expected to be made by the end of that month.

Two Arrested After Fleeing Colchester Crash

State police said two people were arrested after they fled on foot following a single-car crash on Route 2 Sunday.

Police reported Samantha Montgomery, 27, of 183 Wethersfield Ave., Hartford, was driving a Pontiac Grand Am westbound on Route 2 near exit 18 when, at around 3:30 p.m., she lost control of her car and collided with a wire guard rail. A witness who called in the crash reported Montgomery and her passenger, later identified as Anthony Tarantino, 41, of 60 Old Town Rd., Vernon, fled the crash on foot, and headed toward Dr. Foote Road, police said.

Montgomery and Tarantino were found by police on South Main Street in front of Wendy's. Tarantino was taken into custody,

police said. Montgomery, however, ran behind the Polish Club, and was eventually taken into custody at the Gan-Aden Apartments on South Main Street.

Tarantino was charged with interfering with police, while Montgomery was charged with evading responsibility, operating an unregistered car, failure to insure a motor vehicle, interfering with police, possession of narcotics, and possession of drug paraphernalia, police said.

Police said the vehicle has been involved in other pursuits with Hartford Police and Troop H in Hartford recently – and that additional arrests are anticipated.

One Injured After South Main Street Crash in Colchester

State police reported a Willimantic man sustained minor injuries after being rear-ended by another car on South Main Street Jan. 25.

Police said Gerry Soucy, 53, of 469 Pleasant St., Willimantic, was transported to the Marlborough Clinic after the crash at 7:45 a.m.

Soucy, who was driving a GMC Sierra, was

stopped for a red traffic signal on South Main Street near Halls Hill Road, police said, when he was hit from behind by Michael Carroll Jr., 36, of 25 Pennsylvania Ave., Oakdale, in a Honda Accord. Carroll was cited on scene for traveling an unreasonable distance apart, police reported.

Obituaries

Portland

Roger Wayne Lyman

Roger Wayne Lyman, 69, of Portland, long-time companion of Paula Moon, died Monday, Feb. 1, at the West Haven V.A. Hospital. Born June 16, 1946, in Middletown he was the son of the late Walter and Claire (Pelletti) Lyman.

Roger was retired from Travelers Insurance where he had worked as a printer. He proudly served his country in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. Roger loved hunting and fishing.

Besides his partner Paula, Roger is survived by his sisters, Tina Blood of Arizona, Pamela Mateos of North Carolina, Kathy Lyman of East Hampton, Florence Lyman of East Hampton; sister-in-law Linda Carter; many nieces, nephews and a great nephew.

He was predeceased by his brothers, Michael Carter and Walter "Bo" Lyman.

Funeral services will be held at the convenience of the family.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Marlborough

David P. O'Keefe

David P. O'Keefe, 26, beloved son of Victoria (Kemp) O'Keefe of Marlborough and the late Timothy J. O'Keefe, passed away Wednesday, Jan. 27.

Born in Hartford and raised in Marlborough, David was a graduate of RHAM High School Class of 2007, where he was the captain of the boys' basketball team in his senior year. David went on to continue his education at CCSU. He was currently a valued employee of King Air Conditioning, LLC as a sheet metal worker apprentice. In his leisure time he enjoyed fishing and playing disc golf.

A beloved son, brother, grandson, nephew, cousin and friend, besides his mother, Victoria, he leaves his sister, Shelley O'Keefe of Marlborough; his paternal grandparents, Martha B. and John G. O'Keefe Jr. of Bethlehem; his aunts and uncles, Sandra Morrissette and husband Donald, Deborah DellaBernarda and husband Peter, Richard C. Kemp and wife Susan, Robert C. Kemp and wife Penny, Susan L. Anderson and husband Steven, Scott J. Kemp and wife Susan, Patricia O. Dwyer and husband Robert, Katherine O. Thomsen and husband Jeffrey, Kevin J. O'Keefe, Thomas W. O'Keefe IV and wife Gerri, John G. O'Keefe III and wife MaryBeth, Mary O. Perrotti and husband Robert, Genevieve O. DeFelice and husband James and Paul R. O'Keefe; as well as many loving cousins. David also leaves his longtime very close friends, Kyle Endrelunas, Jeff Sauve, Dan Drum, and Kate DiFrancesco.

Besides his father, David was predeceased by his brother, Sean Kilbourne O'Keefe, and his maternal grandparents, Richard G. and Barbara C. Kemp.

His funeral services were held at The Church of St. Andrew The Apostle, 331 Orchard St., Rocky Hill, Saturday, Jan. 30. Burial was private in Center Cemetery, Newington.

To honor David's brave struggle with addiction, donations can be made to Partnership for Drug-Free Kids at drugfree.org.

To leave an online expression of sympathy for the family, visit newingtonmemorial.com.

His funeral services were held at The Church of St. Andrew The Apostle, 331 Orchard St., Rocky Hill, Saturday, Jan. 30. Burial was private in Center Cemetery, Newington.

To honor David's brave struggle with addiction, donations can be made to Partnership for Drug-Free Kids at drugfree.org.

To leave an online expression of sympathy for the family, visit newingtonmemorial.com.

Portland

Anna Dahlberg

Anna (Mays) Dahlberg, 86, of Portland, wife of the late William E. Dahlberg, passed away Monday, Feb. 1.

She is survived by her two daughters, Christine M. Dahlberg of Portland and Barbara A. Perigny of Middletown; two granddaughters, one great-granddaughter and one great-grandson. She is also survived by her sisters and brothers, Charles Mays and his partner, Carolyn Costain of Brewer, Maine, Elizabeth (Betty) Schieman and her husband, Robert of Glenmoore, PA. Lewis Mays and his wife, Beverly of Middletown, Eleanor Magnano and her husband, Joseph of Stratford and Phyllis Baboval of Cromwell.

She was predeceased by one brother-in-law, Richard Baboval.

Funeral services were held Thursday, Feb. 4, departing Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, for a Mass of Christian Burial at the Church of St. Mary, 51 Freestone Ave., Portland. Burial was in St. Mary Cemetery, Portland. Relatives and friends called Wednesday, Feb. 3, at the funeral home.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Church of St. Mary, 45 Freestone Ave., Portland, CT 06480.

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

Hebron

William M. Gerardi

William M. "Willie" Gerardi, 22, of Hebron, beloved son of William D. Gerardi and the late Jamie K. Gerardi, unexpectedly passed in his sleep Monday, Feb. 1, at home. Born June 8, 1993, in Bristol, he had lived in Hebron since 1994.

A 2011 graduate of RHAM High School and a two-year captain of the wrestling team, Willie also attended Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and Manchester and Capital Community Colleges.

Always ready to help a friend in need and with a gleam in his eye, Willie had a great sense of humor and a magnetic personality that drew people to him as he made friends wherever he was.

Besides his father he is survived by his brother, Christian J. Gerardi of West Hartford; his grandparents, Eda Gerardi of Torrington, Dianne (Fitzpatrick) and William Wyant of Coventry; several cousins and countless friends.

A funeral service for family and friends will be celebrated Friday, Feb. 5, at Mulryan Funeral Home at 10 a.m., followed by burial in New Hebron Cemetery. Friends called at the Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury, Thursday, Feb. 4.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to RHAM Youth Football, P.O. Box 209, Hebron, CT 06248.

For online condolences, visit mulryanfh.com.

Colchester

Francis James Furphy

Francis James Furphy, "Jim," 86, of Colchester, passed peacefully Thursday, Jan. 28, at Hartford Hospital, surrounded by his loving family. Born July 28, 1929 in Manchester, he was the son of the late Francis and Mary (Biske) Furphy.

Jim's career included many roles for Pioneer Parachute in Manchester. He was a supervisor when he retired after 40 years. Loving father, he was always there for his children. He enjoyed woodworking, fishing, boating and gardening. Most of all, "Big Pops" was a man who was loved by all his (great) grandchildren. A man who made beautiful creations and could build anything, he kept his memories in picture frames and lived his life until the end.

He will be sadly missed but always remembered by three sons, James and wife, Sherry of Willington, Kenneth and wife, Dellonna and Eric and wife, Marcy, all of Colchester; his former spouse, Beatrice (Hardy) Furphy of Lake Elmore, Vt.; two stepdaughters, Linda Jutras of Barre, Vt. and Susan Parsons; 10 grandchildren, Allen, Jed, Trish, Susan, Tony, Melissa, Theresa, Launa, Jay and Lee; 11 great-grandchildren; a sister, Mary Salvatore of Manchester; and numerous extended family and friends.

In addition to his parents, he was predeceased by an infant son, Francis III, in 1963 and three sisters, Joan Crossan, Elizabeth Preston and Jacqueline Shaia.

Calling hours were held Sunday, Jan. 31, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, before a chapel service that evening. Burial was private in the New St. Andrew Cemetery, Colchester.

Donations in his memory may be made to the American Cancer Society, 825 Brook St., Rocky Hill, CT 06067 (cancer.org).

For more information, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Portland

Isabelle Louise Bascom

Isabelle Louise (Bibisi) Bascom left this world suddenly Wednesday, Jan. 27.

She spent most of her life in Portland, where she devoted her time to raising her four children. She and her husband loved to visit Florida in the colder months and shared their love for travel with their children. Later, she moved to Heritage Commons in Middletown where she resided for 13 years and enjoyed playing bingo and watching movies.

She was predeceased by her husband, E. Francis Bascom; her sister, Helen Lastrina; and three brothers, William, Joseph and Edmund.

She will be dearly missed by her children, son Donald and daughter-in-law Diane of Portland; daughters Linda Johnson and son-in-law Howard of East Haddam, Cindy Tynan and son-in-law Patrick of Rocky Hill, Susan Walsh and son-in-law Mark of Cromwell. She was adored by her seven grandchildren, Erick and Jeffrey Johnson, Kristen Johnson-Swindell; Katie and Brian Bascom; April and Kelly Walsh. Her great-granddaughter, Ciana Isabelle Johnson, loved to visit her on Sunday afternoons. All brought great joy to her life.

Calling hours were held at D'Angelo Funeral Home, 22 South Main St., Middletown, on Monday, Feb. 1. Burial followed at Middlefield Cemetery.



From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

I was intrigued last week to read Kaitlyn Schroyer's story about developer Allan Schwartz now managing several high-profile Marlborough properties – with an eye toward finally realizing the oft-discussed grocery store in the middle of town.

I'm quite familiar with Schwartz's penchant for developing commercial properties. I was covering Glastonbury for the *Rivereast's* sister paper, *The Glastonbury Citizen*, back in 2005 when Schwartz first presented his plans to transform the property at 124 Hebron Ave. in the center of Glastonbury. And transform it he did – taking a drab-looking, set-too-far-back-from-the-road office building and turning into a very bustling commercial plaza, home to, among other tenants, a Plan B Burger Bar.

The plaza – named Eric Town Square, in honor of his father – went up fast, and, nearly a decade later, still looks great. Schwartz has filled it with popular draws – like Plan B, as well as the bar-restaurant Rooftop 120 and the Japanese steakhouse Sakura Garden. And as I said, the joint is hopping. Depending on the time of day you go, it can be nearly impossible to find a parking space at the plaza.

Since opening Eric Town Square, Schwartz has developed other properties in that part of Glastonbury – such as another plaza on Hebron Avenue that houses, among others, one of the area's only Ben & Jerry's ice cream shops – and he's also building a new plaza next to the First Niagara bank on Welles Street. Construction on that plaza began last summer, and from the looks of it, its opening could be mere weeks away.

Simply put, it's been my observation that Allan Schwartz is a developer who puts his money where his mouth is. If he says he's going to put up a commercial property, it'll get done – and fast. And it'll likely look pretty great to boot.

Schwartz's interest in Marlborough is, in my opinion, only a good thing for the commercial development of the town.

* * *

On Monday, Iowa had the moment in the sun it gets every year. And when all was said and done, Ted Cruz won for the Republicans, while Hillary Clinton – well, she *technically* won, but collecting 49.9 percent of statewide delegates to Bernie Sanders 49.5 percent is hardly reason to go dancing in the street.

Of course, no one should go dancing in the street just yet. Because, when you look at the history of the Iowa caucuses, the winners go on to win their party's presidential nomination only about 50 percent of the time. (Among the more notable times Iowa's gotten it completely wrong was 1992, when Bill Clinton won just 3 percent of Democrat delegates, and 2008, when John McCain collected only 13 percent of Republican delegates.)

But now it's on to New Hampshire, which at least has a real primary system as opposed to that simply-bizarre caucus system. A win in New Hampshire means the party nomination for sure, right? Well, no. New Hampshire's had a better track record than Iowa of picking the winners, but it's not spotless either. (For example, McCain beat George W. Bush there in 2000, while Gary Hart bested Walter Mondale pretty handily in New Hampshire in 1984.)

Also: Bill Clinton lost in New Hampshire in 1992 as well, meaning he fell in both Iowa and New Hampshire that year. And as we all know, he went on to spend eight years in the Oval Office.

Moral of the story? We've still got a long way to go, folks.

* * *

I caught the three-hour live telecast of *Grease* that was broadcast on Fox this past Sunday night. I've always loved *Grease*. I know the transformation of Sandy from a wholesome if somewhat bland girl-next-door type into a black leather-wearing “tell me about it, stud” bombshell, all to win over her greaser boyfriend, may not be the greatest message in the world, but the songs are catchy, the story very enjoyable – and overall the show is just a lot of fun.

So I was hopeful Fox would do a good job with the musical on Sunday. As it turns out, they did that and more – a lot more. Simply put, they knocked it out of the park. It was raining in Los Angeles Sunday night – a rarity – and while that may have forced producers to tweak their plans a bit when it came to staging the part-indoor/part-outdoor musical, it certainly didn't dampen the fun.

There were a couple technical glitches involving the sound – and I suspect the bad weather may have played a part in those – but overall the production values were top-notch, and extremely impressive. A few of the shots were quite clearly inspired by their counterparts in the 1978 movie adaptation starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John, but that was perfectly fine. It was because of these moving cameras and quick cuts in between stages that at times I forgot I was watching a live show. That doesn't happen a lot when I'm watching live TV.

The cast was pretty great – particularly when it came to what everybody watches *Grease* for: the singing and dancing. Julianne Hough acted as if Sandy were the part she was born to play. Not only did she have the vocal chops for her songs, when it came time to get down to dancing, Hough showed why she was on *Dancing with the Stars* for all those years – she really knows how to hoof it.

Vanessa Hudgens was fantastic as Rizzo, handling her songs extremely well – particularly the fantastic “There Are Worse Things I Could Do.” The performance was especially impressive considering Hudgens' father had died just a day before the show.

It's no secret *Grease Live* was Fox's attempt to cash in on the success NBC has had mounting live productions of Broadway musicals the past three years. For that reason, I think a lot of people assumed the show would be pretty bad, as most rip-offs are. But it was quite the contrary. If anything, Fox has set a new standard for these shows – one that NBC will be hard-pressed to top with its next production. I've read it reported elsewhere, but it's true: this show wasn't just live – it was *alive*.

And it was done in front of a live audience – which was a welcome presence. A criticism of the recent NBC live productions is that they're done in a studio with no audience present. The silence can be deafening, particularly after a show-stopping number that you just know would normally be met with boisterous applause. But Fox had multiple sets – including outdoor sets – and still was able to bring in an audience. The audience really enriched the experience.

The show, I was happy to see, performed extremely well in the ratings – and I'm sure Fox will repeat it at least once over the next couple of weeks. So if you missed it this past Sunday, try to catch it when it reruns. You'll have a blast.

* * *

See you next week.