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Portland resident Paul Bell and his beloved pit bull mix Rocky. Rocky has been quarantined in the Portland pound since a 2016 attack on another resident – and is due to be euthanized.

Portland Dog On Death Row

by Elizabeth Regan

Rocky is on death row in the Portland pound. The 90-pound pit bull mix has been in limbo in the municipal facility under the Arrigoni Bridge for more than two years, ever since he was quarantined the day after a Jan. 31, 2016 attack on Stephen Demarest that resulted in injuries to the 68-year-old man's left ankle, inner leg and below his knee.

Demarest said the attack occurred on Old Marlborough Turnpike, where the Portland resident regularly strolled with his wife.

"We were walking along on the opposite side of the road and the dog came charging down the driveway. The dog was unattended and unleashed," he said this week.

Demarest described Rocky as territorial. But he emphasized he and his wife were not on the dog's property.

"I don't like to see dogs put down, but this dog is a danger," Demarest said.

Eleven days after the attack, Animal Control Officer Karen Perruccio authorized Rocky to be euthanized due to the severity of the bite. It's what's known as a disposal order in state statute.

It was the first time Perruccio, who worked in Portland as the part-time animal control officer for ten years and has been full time for five years, had to issue a kill order.

Perruccio told the *RiverEast* earlier this month she felt "a lot of pressure" from town legal counsel and First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield to issue a disposal order instead of a restraint order that could have allowed Rocky to return home with certain protections in place.

"It's not an easy decision to make," Perruccio said. "You're putting someone to death."

She spoke from her office at the pound alongside Rocky and his owner, Paul Bell.

Bell adopted Rocky from the Portland pound in 2015. The dog had shown up in a resident's yard with no tags and no owner to be found. He was approximately 2 years old. According to documents from the state Department of Agriculture, Perruccio determined at the time the dog showed no signs of aggression and was suitable for adoption.

Now Bell visits his dog once a day, and sometimes twice.

See Portland Dog page 2

Belltown School Supporters' Cries Go Unheard

by Elizabeth Regan

The rallying cry of education advocates imploring the East Hampton Town Council to reject the Board of Finance's proposed 2018-19 budget were drowned out on Tuesday when councilors voted to approve the budget with only minor modifications.

The rally stemmed from last week's finance board meeting during which members approved a \$30.50 million education budget. The \$451,697 increase over the current budget was \$670,000 less than the Board of Education had requested in a unanimous vote in February.

In percentages, it's the difference between the school board's 3.73 percent increase over the current education budget and the 1.50 percent increase approved by the finance board and affirmed by the council.

Superintendent of Schools Paul K. Smith said a budget increase of 1.5 percent over current spending will likely result in the reduction of eight teaching positions. While some of those teachers will be moved elsewhere in their schools or the district, Smith said he anticipates three of them will lose their jobs.

On the chopping block are teachers in math, science and English; a health teacher covering the middle and high school; a librarian and Spanish teacher in the middle school; and a fifth and third grade teacher. An assistant cheerleading position added in the school board's proposed budget will not remain. Any cuts would have to be approved by the school board once high school course enrollments are complete and exact class sizes for the coming year are determined, Smith said.

The education budget increase this year is

driven by continuing reductions in education funding from the state and increases in special education costs, according to officials.

Roughly 50 adults and children gathered in front of the high school prior to Tuesday's Town Council meeting, holding placards with slogans like "3.73% - Let voters decide," "Invest now or pay later," "Reject 1.5%" and "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."

Several students held signs that read "I am worth it."

The goal of the rally was to urge the council to send the Board of Finance budget back where it came from with a directive for finance board members to restore full funding for education, according to a press release from the grassroots group of parents, students, educators and education supporters.

As the first speaker during the public comment portion of the council meeting, Board of Education Chairman Chris Goff reminded councilors they are entitled under town charter to pass the Board of Finance proposed budget on to voters, make alterations or reductions, or reject it and send it back to the finance board for further consideration.

He noted the council's Budget Policy Statement, drafted each year to guide the budget planning process, specified the general government and education sides of the budget "should make every effort to only limit budget increases to meet contractual obligations."

A 1.5 percent increase, Goff said, does not include any other contractual obligations, including the teachers' contract, which the council approved three years ago, or the administration contract that the council sent to arbitration



Roughly 50 adults and children held a rally Tuesday at East Hampton High School in a failed effort to convince the Town Council to reject the Board of Finance budget and restore education funding to the level approved by the Board of Education.

two years ago.

Describing the finance board's proposal as a "blatant disregard" of the council's authority, he asked councilors to send it back to the finance board in order to come up with a budget "that, at the very least, sufficiently funds our

existing contractual obligations without eliminating programs or positions."

Councilors instead chose to approve the finance board's education budget by a party line vote of 4-3, while tweaking the general gov

See Belltown School page 2

Belltown School cont. from Front Page

ernment and capital budgets. The council has a Republican majority. The finance board last week, in addition to reducing the school board's proposed budget, cut Town Manager Michael Maniscalco's proposed general government operations budget by \$15,000. The cut came in the form of a \$10,000 reduction to the \$442,551 library budget and a \$5,000 cut to the requested Middle Haddam library allocation of \$10,000.

On the capital side, the finance board halved funding set aside for sidewalk replacement with a cut of \$20,000; it also reduced \$30,000 in requested funds for the new Seamster Park playground to \$10,000. The purchase of a new vehicle for the police chief was put off for a future year.

The only tweak the council made to the finance board's budget involved restoring full funding to the Seamster Park playground project by reducing \$25,000 in funding for the Air Line Trail. Maniscalco said the Public Works department will perform "in-kind" work – instead of paying in cash – to fulfill the local match requirement that came with a grant from the state to connect the rail trail to Portland.

The council approved the proposed general government budget and capital budget unanimously.

The council's total spending plan comes in at \$45.64 million. It's an increase of \$1.38 million, or 3.12 percent, over the current budget.

The general government budget, including debt and capital, is \$15.14 million, or 6.53 percent, over the the current budget.

The proposal, if approved by voters at referendum, could result in a mill rate of 33.02 mills, which would amount to a 1.70 mill increase over the current year.

That's a 5.43 percent increase in taxes compared to this year.

A mill is \$1 tax per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Under the estimated mill rate, a taxpayer with a home assessed at \$200,000 for the 2018-19 fiscal year would pay \$6,604, or \$340 more than he paid this year.

Officials said the tax burden is heightened by an anticipated \$1.2 million decrease in education funding from the state as well as debt for the high school and road projects.

The Board of Finance, in presenting its budget to the council at the meeting, had some suggestions for councilors when it comes to generating revenue.

Republican Richard Brown asked them to consider reinstating parking passes at Sears Park and charging high school students \$100 to park at the high school. He said the moves could generate \$20,000 for the town.

He also asked them to think about establishing a foundation for donations.

"Especially on Facebook, we've heard many people say 'I'd love to pay more taxes,'" Brown said. "We would like the Town Council to look into setting up a foundation that would make it easier. As it stands now, anybody in town can write a check and earmark it to the school if they feel their taxes aren't high enough. Thank

you very much if you want to do that. We certainly appreciate the help."

During council deliberations, Democrat Kevin Reich referred to a special education fund, established many years ago, that has grown to \$237,000. It was created to cover shortfalls in special education, which can increase by large amounts in a given year if more students than anticipated move into the district.

The district's business manager, Karen Asetta, said the account is funded through Medicaid reimbursements.

Reich said he would like to see the fund used to mitigate the effect of the cuts to the school board's proposed budget.

Smith said Wednesday that special education increases in the current year are likely to deplete the fund.

When asked by the *Rivereast* if the school district would need to drain the fund this year, he said the right word would be somewhere between "tap into" and "drain."

Councilors, including Democrats, expressed grave concerns during their deliberations about the burden on taxpayers inherent in next year's budget.

Democratic council member James "Pete" Brown said the common refrain during public comment revolved around fears of balancing the budget on the backs of children. He responded by asking if it was fair to balance it on the backs of senior citizens who have to decide whether to pay their taxes or fill their medicine prescriptions.

"It's more than education, people," he said. Republican councilor Mark Philhower spoke to the hundred-plus education advocates in the room when he invoked the upcoming budget referendum and asked "What makes you think this is going to pass?"

He said failure at referendum could result in a flat budget with an even more serious impact on the school district and the town.

He applauded the finance board for "doing their job and keeping things in check."

Councilors also declined to heed suggestions from some residents to use a portion of the unrestricted fund balance, otherwise known as the Rainy Day Fund, to ease the burden on taxpayers.

Town Manager Michael Maniscalco advised them that the town's AAA credit rating from Standard & Poor's could be compromised by using the fund to cover operating expenses.

According to Maniscalco, the fund has been used in the past to trade "cash assets for hard assets" like fire trucks and property purchases.

But a look at town documents reveals the town has also used the fund balance over the past two years for items including the town's 250th anniversary celebration, equipment for the new Glastonbury dispatch system, and a mid-year police hire.

The rainy day fund is currently at 11.9 percent of the total operating budget, according to Finance Director Jeff Jylkka.

Maniscalco has said the town's high credit rating is critical to good interest rates on future projects - like the creation of a town water system.

The finance board's fund balance policy, written in 2011, specifies the town should strive for a fund balance of no less than 8 percent of operating expenditures and no more than 10

percent. But Jylkka said this week he likes to keep it closer to 12 percent, which he described as especially important in the face of continuing reductions in state funding.

In Their Own Words

Those who spoke during public comment before the Town Council voted to approve the 2018-19 proposed budget were unanimously in support of sending the education budget back to the Board of Finance for restoration of the Board of Education's initial request. Here's what some of them had to say:

Nancy Oakley, Board of Education member: "So how do we move East Hampton forward? We do it by providing immediate tax relief, not by compromising services; we do it by funding our current needs and planning for the future. I support the proposal that this council rejects the budgets and sends them back to the Board of Finance for restoration of funds.

I further propose that this council explores with the Board of Finance most urgently a one-time use of a small portion of the unassigned fund balance. This will offset the shortfall in state funding and reduce the mill rate increase. This is allowed by the Town Council's own Budget Policy Statement. It will also provide direct relief to all taxpayers while not compromising the services we receive for education. We can still maintain this fund balance at or even above the BOF and Town Council's stated goal of 8-10 percent of operating expenditures while preserving our outstanding credit rating. In October, this council was advised to use 250k from this fund to make up for a lack of state funding. Why are we now being told these funds must be used only for the purchase of hard assets? If it was a good enough idea for this council in October, why should it be resisted now?"

Charise Corsino, resident: "I feel it is irresponsible and unconscionable that this town would even consider the kind of cuts that have been laid on the table. No one wants more taxes, but can we honestly say we are willing to save this money on the backs of our children?"

I want to love this town. I want to raise my family here. I want to invest my hard earned money back in this community, even if that means more taxes. What I do not want is to regret my decision to move here."

Sonja Venetianer, grade five student at Center School: "I'm 10 years old. I may look like a little kid, but I have strong and powerful words, so please listen up.

When I was 7 years old, I wrote a letter to Mr. Maniscalco, our town manager because the library ceiling was falling apart. Last year in February, I chose to testify in front of the [state legislature's] appropriations committee on behalf of our schools and our town. I made it clear that that speech was dedicated to my town, East Hampton, and everybody in it. I explained how in my school, which is Center School, we don't even have a well-working boiler and we are either too hot or too cold.

I love my school because of the teachers and how much they care. I also mentioned the fact that it would be hard on elderly people to pay

more taxes.

"You can tell that I see the whole picture and not just education alone!"

Lois Sprague, music teacher at Center School: "I'm not worried about my job, or the seven extraordinary young teachers who will lose their jobs with the present budget cut. Our loss is another school system's gain. What I am worried about is the children. Children going into fifth grade next year with 26 or more in each class if a fifth grade teacher is cut. The diversity of individual needs is increasing. This in turn compromises the time spent by each teacher on the rest of the class. Is it your child whose hand is up waiting for the teacher while he or she is dealing with the more aggressive needs of the few? By keeping the classes smaller, increasing support, everyone is better served."

Taylor Karabetsos, kindergarten student at Memorial School: "I want to be an orthopedic surgeon. I deserve a good education."

Derek Johnson, resident: "Good schools pay for themselves...The only issue is the magnitude of the increase in residential home values as a result of [good] schools. Just do the math: 95 percent of the town's Grand List is residential. If you alter property values by 2 percent, 1 percent, even 0.1 percent, the budget cuts proposed by the Board of Finance reduces the wealth of this town."

[From a document provided by Johnson to the Town Council]: If there is a 2 percent impact on the Grand List, the BOF cut of \$670,000 could potentially cost East Hampton \$21 million.

Assuming a 1 percent impact on the Grand List, the BOF cut of \$670,000 could potentially cost East Hampton \$10.5 million.

Even assuming a [0.1 percent] impact on the Grand List, the BOF cut of \$670,000 could potentially cost East Hampton \$1.07 million.]

"That cut you may think is beneficial is actually wealth destroying in terms of our town."

Narcissa Matte, resident: "I feel like this is all political. These continual attacks on our education funding has turned rich vs. poor, townies vs. newbies, Democrats vs. Republicans, and it's dividing this town instead of uniting it. I don't understand why other options that could be enlisted to help the less-affluent – tax breaks or using other funds – aren't being considered?"

If you are sure what the community wants, why are you not putting this to a vote and letting the community say what they want? This won't remain a small town; it will become a ghost town."

Steve Archibald, teacher and East Hampton Education Association president: "The budget that Superintendent Smith put together was a bare-bones budget at 3.7 [percent]. We asked him to pad it, but he doesn't play that game. He said 'no.' It's a real budget."

Portland Dog cont. from Front Page

There is no animosity between Bell and the animal control officer ordering Rocky's execution.

"It's a tough story," Perruccio said. "Paul and I are almost like brother and sister now."

Two Years in Limbo

The intervening years have frustrated those on all sides of the case – from the Demarests, to Bell, to Portland officials.

When Bell objected to the Perruccio's disposal order as part of an appeals process outlined in state statute, it took him six months to get a hearing. He represented himself at the August 2016 proceedings.

"I couldn't put [Rocky] down. There's no way," Bell said. "I would do anything I need to do to rectify the situation."

Hearing officer Bruce A. Sherman, designated by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to take up the case, filed his preliminary decision upholding the disposal order 22 months later.

Sherman said Demarest "suffered unprovoked and vicious dog bite attacks" across the street from Bell's 187 Old Marlborough Tpke. home.

"Rocky bit and attacked Demarest not just once, but twice. In both instances Rocky knocked Demarest to the ground and then proceeded to bite him while Demarest attempted to defend himself," Sherman wrote in his November 2017 decision.

Last month, state Department of Agriculture Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky affirmed the disposal order.

He introduced himself in the March 14 order as "the final decision-maker" in Bell's appeal.

He said the town had established a "preponderance of evidence" that Perruccio's disposal order complies with state statute.

Reviczky said current statute "reflects the long-standing recognition that use of the police power of the state to protect the public from biting dogs is a necessity."

Reviczky noted an incident brought up during the hearing during which Rocky got loose the day after the attack, prior to being delivered to the pound for quarantine. According to the hearing report, a man walking on Old Marlborough Turnpike contacted Portland Animal Control to report Rocky ran down the driveway of Bell's home and began to attack the bag the man was carrying.

While Bell was successful in calling the dog back, Reviczky cited the situation as an example of the dog's aggression and evidence of his propensity to attack again.

The state law empowers animal control officers to "make any order concerning the restraint or disposal of any biting dog, cat or other animal as the commissioner or such officer deems necessary."

Both Demarest and Bell say the process needs to move more quickly.

"It's not right to keep an animal caged up that long," Demarest said. "It's a cruel thing to do. They should make their decision more expeditiously."

Twenty-five months after the attack, Stephen Demarest's wife, Maria, spoke in front of the Board of Selectmen in March to demand "something has to change."

She said any dog deemed vicious by an animal control officer should be put down – "no questions asked."

The couple sued Bell and recently received a \$125,000 settlement from Bell in a civil suit, according to state Judicial Branch records.

Bell said the length of time between the attack and the hearing, and then between the hearing and Sherman's proposed decision, reveals unfair weaknesses in the current system.

"There's a lot of legal crap that's messed up," Bell said.

The case is costing the town, too.

Meetings of the Board of Selectmen over the past several months have revealed officials' frustration with a system that requires the town to pay for the care of dogs going through the lengthy appeals process.

When asked by the *Rivereast* about the cost of caring for Rocky since he became the responsibility of the town, First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said it was difficult to calculate the amount. But she said a rough estimate could be reached by using the fees that are

charged to owners when they abandon their dogs and then redeem them.

These fees don't apply in this case since the owner of a dog on death row is only required by statute to pay for the initial 14-day quarantine period, but Bransfield said they represent the approximate cost of caring for an animal.

According to Perruccio, the pound charges \$15 for the first day and \$7 for each day. It would cost roughly \$5,500 to care for a dog for the length of time Rocky has been impounded.

The town is being advised by the law firm Murtha Cullina. According to an email provided to Bransfield by the firm, the case has cost the town \$7,086.14 to date.

Civil Rights

Animal advocate and attorney Thompson G. Page, of the Hartford-based Thompson Gould Page legal firm, is currently representing Bell.

"I'm a civil rights attorney," Page said this week. "I just happen to do it with dogs."

He said he will be filing an appeal of the decision with the Superior Court in the coming weeks.

Page said that when he loses the appeal – "and usually we do" – he will move on to the appellate court.

"It's David and Goliath every time," he said. Page has 15 similar cases in Connecticut and 27 in other states, he said. He has brought several cases to the federal court system, includ-

Portland Dog cont. on page 3

Portland Dog cont. from Page 2

ing one challenging this state's kill order statute.

Fighting the superior court and then the appellate court will take 2-3 years, according to Page.

Rocky is 4 years old now. "The dog will live out his life in the pound," Page said.

He has argued in multiple filings with the state agriculture department that "unconstitutionally vague" language in existing state statute violates Bell's property and due process rights.

The attorney said the statute leaves it up to animal control officers to hold dogs in pounds and issue disposal orders "with no adequate rules, regulations, guidelines, policies or standards" for doing so.

According to Page, the statute currently allows an animal control officer to make a kill order based only on the belief that putting a dog to death is "necessary."

He said there are not sufficient educational or training requirements to qualify animal control officers to make that decision. While the officers must complete a certain number of training hours, he said the state lacks provisions for specific training in dog bites, animal behavior, and dog psychology.

Page also alleges the state is depriving Bell of his property rights by not providing a prompt probable cause hearing to determine if the animal control officer's kill order complies with the fourth amendment protections against unreasonable search and seizure.

"The law is so outdated and so void of constitutional protections," he said. "It's just oozing violations."

Bell said he surrendered the dog to the town in response to Perruccio's 14-day quarantine order the day after the attack with no idea what was to come.

"I didn't fight it or anything," Bell said. "I just didn't know through that period they would end up recommending he be euthanized."

Life on Death Row

Bell visits Rocky every day, and sometimes twice. During the interview, the large lap dog sat on Bell's legs, one of which was amputated below the knee a year ago due to complications from a 2013 motorcycle accident.

The predominantly black dog stretched out on his back against Bell, with his white underside exposed for belly rubs.

Rocky is territorial, Bell said – but he is affectionate and demonstrative.

Bell recalled the times before the doctors made the decision to amputate his lower leg that he would lay with his aching foot up in an attempt to relieve the pain. That's when Rocky would wrap himself around the foot to comfort

him.

Many people don't expect that kind of gentle affection from dogs like Rocky, according to Bell.

"You say 'pit bull' and people automatically have an impression," he said.

Bell acknowledged Rocky was not secured at the time of the attack, which occurred six months after the dog came to live with him.

"He didn't seem like he was a problem," Bell said. "It didn't really matter, he was always about five feet away from me."

On that day, however, Bell went inside the house to get a wrench while Rocky remained outside.

The next day, as referenced in the hearing report, Rocky got away from him again.

Bell said he was letting Rocky outside before leaving to put the dog in quarantine. He briefly considered putting Rocky on a leash, but decided it wasn't necessary for the quick trip to the backyard.

"He went to the bathroom, but then he looked over and saw another person down at the bottom of the driveway and started running toward him," Bell recounted.

Bell said he didn't see Rocky attack the plastic bag the man was carrying, but acknowledged that was what was reported to animal control. According to Bell, the man said he was fine when Bell called out from his yard to check on him.

"Nothing happened to him; he was just scared," Bell said.

Bell said he is willing to cage, muzzle and leash the dog – and even install a reinforced entry to his home as recommended by an animal behaviorist he hired after the attack – if the dog can come home.

Bell acknowledged both Rocky's territorial nature, but emphasized it had never created problems prior to the attack on Demarest.

"If I introduce him to somebody, he seems fine," he said. "Maybe if I'm not around, would that be the case? I don't know. But I didn't have any issues with him before."

Demarest said Bell has not apologized or shown remorse for Rocky's attack.

"To me, I would be concerned if it was my dog that basically tried to kill someone," Demarest said. "What's stopping it from doing it again?"

A bill proposed by Portland's state representative, Christie Carpino, is currently awaiting a vote on the House floor. It would establish a working group to address weaknesses in current dog-related statutes that have resulted in complaints from both dog owners and dog attack victims. More information can be found at bit.ly/2GRZWk8.

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Baseball season is here, and it's a welcome sight. Not only are my Mets off to a great start, but I just love having baseball back in general. It's truly my favorite sport.

Which makes some recent news from the Marist Institute of Public Opinion rather distressing.

Marist College is my alma mater – I highly recommend it for anyone looking at colleges, by the way – and the Marist Institute of Public Opinion (or MIPO, as it's commonly called) is the student-staffed agency on campus that conducts polls of various local, state and national issues. I worked for MIPO for a couple of semesters, and I loved calling up folks from across the country to gauge their opinions on various issues.

So, as a proud alum, I'm pleased whenever MIPO polls work their way into national news stories. And when a MIPO poll relating to baseball made headlines recently, I was particularly intrigued – until I sat down and read them. Alas, Marist's findings weren't good for the grand old game.

Last month, Marist surveyed 1,050 respondents across the country and asked them various questions about baseball. Of those, only 44 percent said they watched baseball – not good. The "national pastime" should at least get half of the country.

In fact, when broken down further, just 15 percent of respondents said they watched baseball a great deal or a good deal; 29 percent said they watched it only a little.

The game skews older as well. MIPO found that, of those who identify as baseball fans, 51 percent are over 45, while just 37 percent are under 45. So baseball has a problem reaching people in general, and younger people in particular. That's not exactly encouraging for the future of the sport.

The poll also surveyed people's race, and found that 48 percent of white Americans and 43 percent of Latinos identified as baseball fans, while 35 percent of African Americans said they were fans.

While the overall report card for baseball didn't look great, the MIPO poll did produce some positive news. The Major League Baseball powers that be have kicked around a frankly insipid idea to start each extra inning with a man on second base. This would undoubtedly lead to the speedy resolution of a game once it reaches extra innings, which MLB likes because apparently it's the threat of extra innings that are keeping that 56 percent of Americans away from the sport. Umm....I'm not sure I agree with that logic, but then again I'm not a member of the vaulted baseball brain trust.

While MLB opted not to introduce it this season, it is being tested in the minors – and MIPO asked people how they felt about it.

Not good, it turns out. Marist found that 67 percent of baseball fans thought this proposed rule change is a bad idea, compared to just 17 percent that thought it was a good one. Sixteen percent said they were unsure.

The takeaway? Yeah, there aren't nearly as many baseball fans as there should be, and that really stinks. But at least those that are fans understand there are certain elements of the game you just don't mess with.

* * *

Lastly, here are some goodies from the late Milton Berle:

"If evolution really works, how come mothers only have two hands?"

"If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door."

"My wife and I have a perfect understanding. I don't try to run her life, and I don't try to run mine."

"My doctor told me that jogging could add years to my life. I think he was right. I feel ten years older already."

"The problem with life is, by the time you can read women like a book, your library card has expired."

"I bought my mother-in-law a beautiful chair for Christmas, but she won't let me plug it in."

"Folks who don't know why America is the Land of Promise should be here during an election campaign."

"We owe a lot to Thomas Edison; if it wasn't for him, we'd be watching television by candlelight."

"Sex at eighty-four is terrific, especially the one in the winter."

"It's rough to go through life with your contents looking as if they settled during shipping."

"A young man fills out an application for a job and does well until he gets to the last question, 'Who should we notify in case of an accident?' He mulls it over and then writes, 'Anybody in sight!'"

"The company accountant is shy and retiring. He's shy a quarter of a million dollars. That's why he's retiring."

"The Post Office is very careful nowadays. When they get a package marked 'Fragile,' they throw it underhand."

"They've finally come up with the perfect office computer. If it makes a mistake, it blames another computer."

"Committee - a group of men who keep minutes and waste hours."

"Money can't buy you happiness. It just helps you look for it in more places."

"You can lead a man to Congress, but you can't make him think."

* * *

See you next week.

New Police Chief Hired in East Hampton

After a nationwide search and more than 35 applicants, Town Manager Michael Maniscalco has tabbed a Glastonbury Police veteran to serve as East Hampton's new police chief.



Dennis Woessner

Maniscalco announced in a press release Tuesday he has hired Dennis Woessner, a 30-year member of the Glastonbury Police Department. Woessner currently holds the rank of captain, meaning he's second-in-command of the 58-member (both men and women, Maniscalco noted) police department.

Woessner's annual salary will be \$110,000, Maniscalco said. He starts April 23.

Woessner, who lives in Colchester with his wife Sherrill, has received various awards during his career, the press release noted, including the Meritorious Service Award, Chief's Achievement Award and Unit Commendation Award, and was named the 2001 Glastonbury Police Officer of the Year.

Woessner is also team commander of the Capitol Region Emergency Services Team, a regional tactical team comprised of 35 tactical members and 14 negotiators that covers 10

towns in the state. The team is responsible for executing high-risk search warrants and dealing with barricaded and suicidal individuals, as well as dignitary protections, Maniscalco said in the press release.

According to Maniscalco's press release, Woessner received his Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice from the University of New Haven in 1986, graduated from the FBI National Academy in 2006, and received his master's in criminal justice management from the University of New Haven in 2014.

Woessner has attended various law enforcement courses over the course of his career, Maniscalco said in the press release, including executive and mid-management courses for police detectives at Roger Williams University, First Line Supervisory School at Babson College, and courses dealing with the investigation of sexual assaults, interview and interrogation, and crime scenes.

On a personal note, the press release said Woessner and his wife enjoy spending time with their horse and attending NASCAR races.

Woessner "is looking forward to joining" East Hampton Police, Maniscalco said in the press release. "He plans to work with members of the department to continue providing quality service in a professional and sensitive matter to all members of the East Hampton community."

East Hampton Police News

3/23: After an investigation into an evading car-vs.-utility pole crash on Route 151, Kurtis Goodspeed, 26, of 120 Brush Hill Rd., Lyme, was arrested and charged with DUI, evading responsibility, possession of drug paraphernalia and possession of less than half an ounce of marijuana, East Hampton Police said.

4/1: Sean Porter, 24, of 83 Rivermead Blvd., East Hartford, was arrested and charged with DUI and being in a state park after hours, po-

lice said.

4/3: Jack Ayer, 47, of 38 Highland Dr., was issued a summons for failure to renew registration and operating under suspension, police said.

Also, from March 26-April 1, officers responded to 11 medical calls, four motor vehicle crashes and three alarms, and made 21 traffic stops, police said.

Portland Police News

4/3: Barry Lockwood, 55, of 46 Wellwyn Dr., was charged with risk of injury to a minor and tampering with evidence, Portland Police said.

Andover Police News

4/6: State Police said Nicholas Stanchfield, 25, of 577 Adams St., Manchester, driving a Chevrolet Trailblazer on Route 6, near the intersection with Route 316, was stopped at a red light, that had just turned green, when he was struck from behind by a Buick Century Special, driven by Daniella K. Banks, 21, of 58 Mapleside Dr., Wethersfield. Police said Stanchfield was transported by Andover EMS to Windham Hospital, with possible injuries.

Marlborough Police News

4/3: State Police said Robert E. Murphy, 57, of 4 Hickory Road was arrested and charged with DUI and improper parking.

4/6: State Police said Scott A. Panganiban, 18, of 78 Ginger Dr., Groton, was arrested and charged with third-degree assault, violating a protective order and disorderly conduct.

4/6: State Police said Eric A. Fay, 37, of 45 Cowan St., Suffield was driving a Honda Accord, traveling Eastbound on Route 2, approximately 300 feet west of exit 13, when he traveled off the right side of the roadway, colliding into a rock wall. The vehicle rolled over and came to an uncontrolled stop on its roof. According to police, Fay sustained minor injuries and was transported by Marlborough Fire Department to Marlborough Clinic.

Concerns Linger Over OpenGov Software in Colchester

by Allison Lazur

At the Board of Selectmen meeting last Thursday, the contract with OpenGov financial transparency software was revisited by First Selectman Art Shilosky and selectman James Ford and Denise Mizla. All three seemed on board with finalizing the contract – until selectman Stan Soby quickly nixed things due to concerns regarding the program.

The meeting included a conference call – with OpenGov’s Account Executive Dave Spolidoro, Chief Solution Engineer Adam Stone and General Counsel Sean Wani – in hopes of signing a two-year contract with the software company the following morning.

Last year, Shilosky pulled the \$15,100 set aside for the software, to help make up for a \$1.78 million deficit in municipal aid from the state.

Board of Finance members subsequently slammed Shilosky’s decision to pull the funding, and the selectmen pledged to hold a meeting about the software with OpenGov representatives, in order to better understand it.

According to its website, OpenGov – which had been an item of discussion and in-depth research among finance board members since mid-2016 – not only provides citizens with easy access the town’s financial data and records (which are then presented in interactive visualizations and graphs), but also helps town officials “save hundreds of hours” processing information requests, while still complying with transparency mandates.

However, at the April 5 meeting, after receiv-

ing what he deemed less-than-satisfactory answers from OpenGov representatives, Soby hesitated to offer his full support.

“My concern is any loss in the faith of our citizens in the credibility of the information that we are putting out there,” said Soby.

Because all the information that will be available through the OpenGov portal is currently public knowledge, Wani emphasized that a relay of misinformation to the portal or a security breach was not likely.

“Even if someone were to gain access to the full portal, there is no capability to gain access to any of your systems,” Wani said.

Wani went on to say that, in the event of a data breach, OpenGov would have 30 days to resolve it. If that attempt were unsuccessful the town could terminate the contract and recoup any damage costs. However, Wani noted that in his two years with OpenGov, he had never encountered such a scenario and was confident in the security of their systems.

Soby pushed for a better answer by reiterating that he wanted “remediation on the part of OpenGov,” if there was any scenario at all involving data loss, corruption or any issues in the transfer of information to the software’s portal.

“I am a skeptic about computer security based on all the representations that all kinds of folks out there have made – in terms of security – only to find out some period of time later, that it wasn’t as secure as everybody thought it might be,” said Soby.

OpenGov currently has contracts with 1,800 towns, including several Connecticut towns, such as Simsbury, Danbury, New Haven and Coventry. If Colchester were to sign a contract, Spolidoro explained that the town would join an extensive community and enroll in “OpenGov University” – a training tool that consists of webinars, PowerPoint presentations and various online materials to help ensure success when learning the software.

Having access to these training materials prior to signing a contract was a worry for Soby, as well as the training being easily comprehended by users of “varying degrees of technical capabilities.”

Spolidoro said “training” will actually be able to be done on a remote basis with the users. You will have a dedicated person who will be working closely with [Board of Finance] Chairman Robert Tarlov or whoever else you’ve chosen as the point person. You will get the training as needed on an individual basis, or with communities online as needed.”

With a two-year contract on the table, Ford noted the language did not include an appropriation clause in the event the funds are not available for the software in the second year. Soby pointed out that the two-year contract overlaps with the next municipal election – which could potentially result in a completely new Board of Selectmen.

“I can’t guarantee, and no member of this board can guarantee, what’s going to happen in the budget process and whether the funds

will be made available [for OpenGov],” said Ford. “So we really have just had a simple non-appropriation clause in the contracts and no one has ever objected to it; this is the first time I’ve seen this response and it raises some questions in my mind.”

Wani assured the board that he thought OpenGov could work out some language to satisfy the request of the added clause.

While the answers provided by OpenGov’s representatives were suitable for the rest of the selectmen to move forward with a motion to approve the software – which had been made by Ford and seconded by Mizla – Soby stood by his concerns.

“I am not comfortable with making approval without getting some documentation in response to the questions we asked tonight,” he said. “I haven’t seen an onboarding schedule. I haven’t seen a training schedule. I haven’t seen any training information available to have any confidence that we will be able to get it up and running as we need to. We can assume all that we want, but let’s see that we’ve got the pieces in place in order to ensure the best possible outcome.”

The rest of the board agreed that, at the very least, the town’s attorneys should review the contract before signing – and ultimately Ford withdrew his motion.

Soby insisted that the board should be “voting on the package, not a conditional ‘we’ll do it and hope it comes back the way we want it.’”

Colchester Resident Publishes Book of Poetry

by Allison Lazur

David Wasserman, a Colchester resident and Marlborough Elementary School teacher, has written his first book of poetry, *Tiny Footcrunch*, set to be released on April 30.

Wasserman, who grew up in East Hampton, attended Stonehill College in Easton, Mass., where he obtained degrees in both elementary education and English literature. Shortly after graduating, he moved to Colchester and began teaching second grade at Marlborough Elementary, where he has been for the past 10 years.

Wasserman describes how he returned to writing in 2016 – by simply sitting on his porch with a notebook in hand – after a year full of emotions. He experienced life-changing events like the passing of a close relative and the birth of his daughter, Violet, as well as “little things” – as he put it, like when his beloved cat went missing. He mined all as inspirations for this book. Elements of East Hampton, Colchester and Marlborough are also evident in his poetry.

“I started out writing these poems just as catharsis – getting it out there,” he said. “If you read the poems, you can see some different things through my life in there, but they’re always open to interpretation as well.”

Publishing a book was not necessarily the goal for Wasserman when he began writing. It

was only after his wife Katie encouraged him to do so, that he took the next step in sending his poems to 30 different presses.

“I heard kind ‘no’s back, harsh ‘no’s from some, and [then others] I didn’t hear back at all,” Wasserman said.

Unsolicited Press – a small Oregon-based publishing company that boasts they “seek to publish brilliant authors, unknown or otherwise, and to reject all of the bureaucracy of the mainstream conglomerates” – was the first to show interest in his poetry, which brought Wasserman closer to being a published writer.

“I was nervous [working with the editors] because I didn’t know if they would just leave me on my own or take my work and do whatever they wanted with it,” Wasserman said, “but it’s been very collaborative.”

Tiny Footcrunch consists of 100 short poems divided into 10 chapters, each chapter with the focus on a different emotion. According to Wasserman, he intentionally kept the poems “very short,” ranging from haiku-length to some poems consisting of only a few words.

“I wanted to bring people back to poetry – back to literature and the best way to do that is with brief, short, succinct poems,” he said. “A very modern type of poetry.”

Wasserman also revealed that his own life

lacked literature and had been replaced by technology, when he realized he neglected the pile of books on his nightstand by reaching for his phone instead. This fact alone served as further inspiration to create his first book.

According to its description, “*Tiny Footcrunch* was born out of emotions and sharpened by society’s waning attention span. It delivers vast thoughts through tiny poems. Ten universal emotions: Sadness, joy, anger, kindness, fear, love, confusion, humor, curiosity, hope.”

Due to the birth of his daughter, Wasserman has taken the past month and a half off from work. He’ll resume teaching after April vacation – and, by combining his love of teaching and writing, he’ll be able to return to Marlborough Elementary with another lesson for his students: you never know how you’ll be using the things you learn in school.

Wasserman currently has two future pursuits underway – another set of poems inspired by tarot cards and the future, as well as a project that combines poetry and prose in a different format with foot notes.

Venues like the Book Barn in Niantic have expressed an interest in having Wasserman host a reading of his new book which he joked may be a bit difficult with poems that are only three words in length.



Wasserman

Tiny Footcrunch can currently be preordered through Amazon or Unsolicited Press at unsolicitedpress.com.

Colchester Police News

4/2: State Police said that at approximate 4 p.m. they responded to a reported burglary on Cato Corner Road. According to police, forced entry was made through a bedroom window, resulting in stolen money and jewelry from the residence. Anyone with information regarding this incident is asked to contact Colchester’s Resident Trooper’s office at 860-537-7270.

4/2: Colchester Police said at approximately 3:30 p.m., a tan 2014 KIA Forte with the license plate 7ALHV1 was stolen from the parking lot of Noel’s Supermarket on Broadway. Anyone with information regarding the location of this vehicle or information leading to the identification of a suspect is asked to contact the Colchester Police.

4/3: State Police said Amie Trzaskos, 44, of

55 Wales Rd., Andover, was arrested and charged with second-degree failure to appear and possession of a controlled substance.

4/4: According to State Police Rachell Kennedy, of 327 Linwood Cemetery Rd., was driving a Toyota Corolla westbound in the left lane of Route 2, prior to the Route 11 onramp, when she traveled across both lanes and into the median, where her Toyota Corolla overturned. Police said minor injuries of a passenger were reported, who was transported to Marlborough Clinic by Colchester Ambulance.

4/7: Colchester Police said at approximately 8:17 p.m., a resident came into the station to report fraudulent use of his debit card. The case is currently under investigation.

Four-Car Crash in Colchester Leaves One with Possible Injury

State Police responded to a four-vehicle collision on Middletown Road, near Silver Meadow Drive at approximately 5:25 p.m on Tuesday, April 3.

According to police, Katherine A. Murray, 60, of 8 Silver Meadow Dr., was stopped on Middletown Road, waiting to turn left onto Silver Meadow Dr., when her Jeep Patriot Latitude was struck from behind by a Dodge Ram 2500, traveling west on Middletown Road, driven by Lauren S. Baribault, 28, of 114 Hope Valley Rd., Amston.

Murray’s Jeep Patriot Latitude was pushed into the eastbound lane, resulting in a collision with a Nissan Titan, traveling east on

Middletown Road, driven by Daniel D. Dennis, 45, of 275 Middletown Road.

Sarah E. Pickup, 23, of 24 Charles Mary Dr., East Hampton, driving a Volkswagen Passat 2, collided with Baribault’s Dodge Ram 2500, after Baribault struck Murray.

Baribault and Pickup were both found at fault for failure to drive a reasonable distance away, said police. Dennis, Baribault and Pickup’s vehicles were all towed by Desmond’s Auto. Murray’s vehicle was towed by Marvin’s Auto and she was transported by the Colchester Fire Department to Middlesex Hospital, with possible injuries, according to police.

RHAM School Board Passes \$29.31M Budget

by Sloan Brewster

The RHAM Board of Education Monday approved a \$29.31 million budget request for the 2018-19 – a spending proposal that calls for the elimination of 11.6 teaching positions, a figure that includes six teacher layoffs, as well as retirements and resignations.

According to schools superintendent Patricia Law, the staff reductions are due to continuing declines in enrollment. Law projects enrollment to dip by 83 students, bringing it to 1,424 combined at the middle and high schools.

The spending package is largely composed of a \$29.07 million operating budget request, an increase of 1.92 percent, or \$547,204, over the current year's \$28.81 million budget. The package also includes \$243,286 for capital expenditures, a .16 percent decrease from capital spending for the current year.

Overall, the regional school budget comes in at a 1.76 percent increase over current year spending.

At a special meeting Monday, the board approved the budget proposal after hearing Law's latest revisions. Last week, after a public hearing on the budget, the board sent Law back to the drawing board with a request to make some reductions and bring the proposed operating budget down to a 1.93 percent increase, rather than the 2.03 percent increase she had presented that night.

Law did just that, finding \$28,400 in reductions to the operating budget. The bulk were

\$20,000 saved by knocking the virtual security audit services line item to \$5,000 and going with a variety of resources, instead of spending \$25,000 for the individual service previously used, "which, in my opinion was exceptionally expensive," she said.

Law also saved \$8,400 on science tables for the high school by finding some tables that aren't being used in the middle school.

The board passed the motion to approve the operating budget 9-1, with board chair Judy Benson-Clarke opposed. Board member Amy D'Amaddio, who had called in earlier in the meeting, was absent from the vote.

Benson-Clarke raised concerns about cuts to the guidance department in the operating budget, and questioned whether this year was the best time to add an additional special education administrator, a recommendation Law included in the budget.

"I worry about some of the cuts," she said. "I just question if this is the year where we add in this one place while taking away from other places in the budget."

And while it didn't come from the operating side, Law was able to reduce the overall budget even further by making trims to the capital expenditures budget. One of the ways she found reductions was by following through with a suggestion by board member Carole Shea at the RHAM board's meeting last week.

Shea – while admitting that she is not usu-

ally a fan of putting payments off for later – suggested leasing rather than buying a plow/dump truck would reduce the capital budget.

Board members discussed the possibility and asked Law to look into it. She came back Monday with a proposal to lease the truck for \$15,287 a year for four years.

The truck was originally slated to cost \$57,000 in this year's capital budget. At a 6 percent interest rate, leasing the truck would cost the district \$4,178 more over the four years of the lease than if the district had bought it outright, Law said.

David Gostanian, board treasurer, said the lease was not a typical one and that the district would not be required to make any additional payments at the end.

"This lease is very different than a normal consumer lease," he said. "This is a municipal lease, which means at the end of the lease you're completely paid off."

Most board members said that, under the circumstances, they would consider the lease.

"That was a good way of thinking out of the box," Joseph O'Connor said. "It isn't a good practice, but it is a good idea."

"I'm not a big fan of leasing but understand what we're doing," said Kathleen Goodwin. "And if it saves us a teacher or something I think I would consider it."

The only dissenter was Robert Schadtler, who called into the meeting. He said he would rather

the truck were purchased outright.

Law also found \$15,000 in savings on a project to add ADA requirements to the softball field. The project was initially slated at \$30,000. The savings will be realized by combining the softball project with another ADA project, Law said.

The reductions brought the capital budget request to \$243,286, a decrease of \$46,674, or 0.16 percent, from the current year's capital budget.

Other items in the capital budget include four sidewalk/step projects totaling \$152,299; \$12,500 in repairs to the loading dock; \$19,800 for installing vents in the main school entrance archway; \$20,000 for a new fire panel; and \$8,400 for chimney restoration.

The board approved the capital budget 9-1 with Schadtler opposed. D'Amaddio was also absent from this vote.

When split between the three member towns, the \$243,286 capital budget translates to a \$37,369 levy for Andover, with 15.36 percent or 232 students from there; a \$127,774 levy for Hebron, with 52.52 percent or 793 students from the town; and a \$78,143 levy for Marlborough, with 485 or 32.12 percent of students from that town.

If approved by voters, Andover will be responsible for \$4.47 million of the operating budget, Hebron will cover \$15.27 million and Marlborough will pay \$9.34 million.

Arrest Made in Fatal Portland Arrigoni Bridge Hit-and-Run

by Elizabeth Regan

Portland Police this week made an arrest in a fatal hit-and-run crash on the Arrigoni Bridge that claimed the life of a 22-year-old Middletown man in November.

Kavar McDonald, 36, also of Middletown, turned himself in to Portland Police on Wednesday in response to an April 6 arrest warrant.

He was charged with reckless driving, second-degree manslaughter, evading responsibility, failure to maintain minimum insurance, operating an unregistered motor vehicle, and tampering with or fabricating evidence.

McDonald posted a \$100,000 bond pending a court date the same day, police said. According to the state Judicial Branch, his next court date is May 14.

The arrest warrant affidavit by Portland Police Officer Paul Liseo said the crash occurred on Nov. 4, when a moped operated by Daquan Moore was struck from behind by a white 2001 Audi A4 speeding in the right lane from Middletown to Portland. A witness reported the Audi was racing another vehicle when the crash occurred.

According to the affidavit, the witness reported the driver of the white Audi failed to stop at the scene. Instead, the driver of the Audi continued over the bridge into Portland and quickly turned around to head back to Middletown.

Police said an autopsy revealed Moore, who was transported by ambulance to Middlesex Memorial Hospital and pronounced dead, was the victim of blunt head, neck, torso and extremity trauma due to the crash.

The Audi was turned into police on Nov. 7 by McDonald's lawyer, according to police.

Portland Police Department Captain Ron Milardo said at the time that the owner of the Audi was "not cooperating."

The Audi was processed by detectives from the Connecticut State Police Eastern District Major Crimes Unit, police said.

Police said they subsequently interviewed

McDonald's girlfriend, who said she was the passenger in the Audi driven by McDonald.

According to the affidavit, McDonald's girlfriend told police they were on the bridge when another car came up fast in the left lane, at which time both drivers started accelerating. She said McDonald looked in the rearview mirror to see how far back the other car was before returning his attention to the road. That's when they saw Moore at the "last minute," the affidavit said.

McDonald's girlfriend told police both McDonald and Moore swerved to the left, the affidavit said. She said McDonald started screaming and she closed her eyes.

Portland and Middletown Police determined the car was traveling at a minimum speed range of 52-62 mph at the time of the crash, police said.

The posted speed limit on the Arrigoni Bridge is 35 mph.

Police identified the other vehicle alleged to be speeding near McDonald's Audi leading up to the crash as a 2000 Silver Chrysler LHS, according to the affidavit. A Middletown man revealed through DMV records to be the owner a car with the same year, make and model was found at his place of employment by Officer Jim Kelly.

The man admitted he was crossing the Arrigoni Bridge on the night in question when he saw the car next to him strike someone on a scooter, police said. The driver of the Chrysler said he didn't stop because he didn't want to get involved.

Police said the driver of the Chrysler has not made himself available for an interview or answered phone calls since then.



McDonald

Police: RHAM Student Threatened to Bring Weapon

A student from RHAM Middle School has been arrested after taking pictures of himself with a weapon and saying he would bring it to school, state police said.

According to schools superintendent Patricia Law, the school is responding with appropriate disciplinary action.

"I can't go into details on that," Law said Tuesday. "We found out about it yesterday."

According to Law, the picture had been posted on social media "over the last few days."

She would not say what weapon the student had in the pictures. Police could not be reached for additional comment.

According to the criminal information summary from State Police Troop K, police responded to the complaint of the incident on Monday.

Police investigated the incident and charged the student with breach of peace, police said. He is scheduled to appear in court on April 23.

Colchester Man Killed in Crash

A 26-year-old Colchester man died last week as the result of an early-morning crash in the vicinity of Riverdale Inn and Suites, police said.

Joshua Ogden was driving a black 2017 Honda Accord Thursday, April 5, around 2:24 a.m. in what appeared to be a single-vehicle crash, according to police.

Police said Ogden was treated on scene and transported to Middlesex Memorial Hospital. He died from his injuries.

Police are asking anyone with information about the crash to call Portland Police Department at 860-342-6780 or Middletown Dispatch at 860-347-2541.

Portland Selectmen Approve \$34.04M Budget

by Elizabeth Regan

Selectmen this week approved a 2018-19 budget proposal amounting to \$34.04 million, or \$389,166 over the current budget.

The 1.16 percent proposed budget increase is expected to raise the current 32.98 mill by 1.42 mills. Officials said the tax increase is the result of a \$1.16 million projected reduction in education funding from the state.

A mill is \$1 tax per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Based on a potential mill rate of 34.40, taxes paid on a home assessed at \$200,000 for the 2017-18 fiscal year would be \$6,596. That's an increase of \$284 over the current year.

The \$20.68 million proposed education budget is flat compared to the current year, and selectmen did not recommend any additional cuts.

The \$13.36M general government numbers – including debt and capital expenses – represent an increase of 3.00 percent over the current budget.

The original budget recommendation presented last month by First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield was reduced by \$470,455 over the course of a budget workshop held by the Board of Selectmen last week and a special budget meeting Wednesday.

The majority of the selectmen's reduction to Bransfield's budget proposal was the result of a plan created with town financial advisors to mitigate the budget impact on taxpayers by issuing bonds in July of this year instead of May.

The budgeting move will push \$416,400 of debt payments into the following fiscal year – at which time the bonds from other projects would be coming off the books, according to Bransfield.

The debt service expenses stem from a \$10

million bond package approved by voters to construct a Route 17 recreation park and to make infrastructure improvements.

Debt service in the budget proposal being considered comes to a total of \$2.06 million, a \$41,190 increase over the current year.

Selectmen also cut \$10,000 from the funds allotted for boarding up windows of blighted properties, \$5,000 from the clean energy fund, and \$500 each in contributions to the Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council and Middlesex Behavioral Health through the social services budget.

* * *

During last week's budget workshop and this week's special meeting, selectman Ben Srb objected to what he considered excessive spending on legal fees. Selectmen ultimately agreed to cut Bransfield's \$97,000 recommended budget for town counsel by \$12,000.

Looking at the budget page, he pointed to overages in the past two fiscal years amounting to roughly \$50,000 in 2015-16 and \$70,000 in 2016-17.

"I can say first-hand I've seen how this has been used where it isn't necessary," Srb told selectmen last week.

Bransfield said the past budget year was an unusually busy one in terms of legal fees, which were spent on issues including the high-profile Brainerd Place project.

The \$30 million plan by Danbury-based developer Dan Bertram to turn the old Elmcrest Hospital property into a mixed-use development was before the Planning and Zoning Commission in 2016 and the subject of extensive discussion by selectmen regarding a tax abatement agreement into 2017.

"We definitely need better control mea-

asures," Srb said of the excessive legal fees. "I can think of one case where the town attorney was involved: It didn't change the outcome, it cost the taxpayers a ton of money, and it wasn't necessary."

According to town charter, the town attorney is the legal advisor to the Board of Selectmen, first selectman and all town departments, officers and boards. The town attorney "shall, upon written request authorized by the first selectman, furnish a written opinion on any question of law involving their respective powers and duties."

Srb argued the entire Board of Selectmen should have more say when Bransfield involves legal counsel in a town matter.

"It's pretty easy to just pick who's going to get an attorney put against him and who's not," Srb said.

Bransfield agreed she would provide monthly reports regarding legal fees in order to increase transparency.

Srb was not deterred.

"I think more to the point, this entire board should weigh in, whether, for example, two people are developing property identically, and only one gets an attorney hired against him. That needs to be looked into. That's what I'm referring to. And I think that is exactly what happened in one of my cases, and the town wasted a lot of money," Srb said.

Srb in the spring of last year proposed a subdivision on West Cotton Hill Road, composed of parcels owned by him and his wife, that spurred questions about whether the property fit the definition of a buildable lot. It was ultimately approved after an extensive back-and-forth in front of the Planning and Zoning Com-

mission between town Attorney Kari Olson, of Murtha Cullina, and Srb's attorney, George Law.

Bransfield said: "Are you talking about your own case?"

Srb said yes.

"And the town spent a ton of money when another person in town had the identical application at the same time and had three out of the same four issues that the town attorney created and they wasted a ton of money on mine and they didn't on the other," Srb reiterated.

The town attorney was also involved when complaints arose about an active sand pit on the corner of Sage Hollow Road and Cornwall Street that is allowed as part of Srb's zoning permit for a single family home.

Srb said after last weekend's meeting that it was self-evident he would recuse himself from any board discussions involving requests for legal counsel related to his cases.

So now Bransfield has vowed to bring regular updates regarding the use of town counsel to the selectmen and agreed, along with the rest of the selectmen, to reduce the town counsel budget to \$85,000.

Srb described it this week as a way to encourage the board to be more "efficient" in its use of taxpayer money.

He also suggested the town reduce the \$10,000 street sign budget by \$2,500, which they did.

After the unanimous vote on the selectmen's 2018-19 proposed budget, Bransfield praised the board.

"United, we will do well in moving our town forward," she said. "I think it's remarkable how well we work together."

PZC Paves the Way for Local Pot Dispensary in Portland

by Elizabeth Regan

The Planning and Zoning Commission last week paved the way for a medical marijuana dispensary in town by adding the new designation to its zoning regulations.

The zoning change request, known as a text amendment, was submitted by Rosario Agostino. He owns a newly-constructed building at 185 Marlborough St. that he hopes will be selected by the state to serve as a medical marijuana dispensary operated by Mountain Laurel Living LLC.

It's up to the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection to decide which licensing applications will be approved as the agency works to expand the number of medical marijuana dispensaries in the state. The deadline for this round of applications was this past Monday.

A spokesman for the Department of Consumer Protection on Tuesday said 73 applicants are vying for up to 10 new dispensary licenses in Connecticut.

There are currently nine licensed dispensaries in the state. The facilities closest to Portland are in Hartford, Bristol and Milford.

The commission held a brief public hearing before voting 3-0 to include "medical marijuana dispensary facility" in the table of permitted uses in the zone covering the more built-out sections of Route 66. According to the regulation, Agostino must now submit a special permit application to get the town's blessing for a dispensary in the building.

A special permit gives the commission flexibility to assign conditions to approvals; it also comes with the requirement for a public hearing.

Mountain Laurel Living investor Dave Smith said he also put in applications for dispensaries in two other municipalities, but declined to say where.

According to the *Meriden Record-Journal*, the Meriden Planning Commission has approved a preliminary site plan application from Mountain Laurel Living for a dispensary on

Broad Street.

The Portland dispensary would be overseen by Jalpa Patel, a pharmacist who currently owns Brass Mill Pharmacy in Waterbury. She attended the hearing with her husband, Mitul Patel, who was identified by Smith as the project's security expert.

"We are fanatics for control, precision and proper operations," Smith said. "Dr. Patel has never had a citation in her career with Walgreens or her own pharmacy, and I think that's very important."

Economic Development Commission Chairman Elwin Guild spoke about his commission's concerns that the regulation could automatically open the door to a retail pot shop if state lawmakers decide to legalize recreational marijuana.

The Connecticut General Assembly is currently considering a bill that would direct the Office of Policy and Management to develop a plan to legalize and regulate the retail sale of marijuana. The bill is on its way to the House floor for a vote after making it out of the Appropriations Committee.

Similar concerns were expressed in a memo prepared by Town Attorney Kari Olson of Murtha Cullina revolved around fears that the proposed regulation lacked a specific definition for a "medical marijuana dispensary facility" as well as an indication whether the commission "wants to limit marijuana sales in Portland to medical users versus recreational users."

But Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Bruce Tyler said the state's stringent regulations for medical marijuana contain all the necessary definitions and oversight.

Tyler emphasized that any proposal to transition from a medical marijuana facility to a retail shop would be a "change in use" that would require its own permit.

Retail stores other than liquor stores are permitted subject to the approval of a site plan. Less onerous than a special permit, the site plan

provision does not give commissioners discretion to assign conditions and does not require a public hearing.

It would presumably remain up to the state to decide which applicants should receive a license to sell the drug if it becomes legal for recreational use.

Smith said switching from a medical marijuana dispensary to a retail facility is not in the investors' business plan. He also said the use of the building currently under consideration is limited by its size.

The new building on the 0.38-acre site was grandfathered into current zoning regulations, which require a 1-acre minimum.

"The fact is that this site is self-limiting because if you were to have a business where scores and scores of people needed access, as an owner you would not want to have it on that site," Smith said.

Mitul Patel gave an overview of the tight security plan for the envisioned medical marijuana dispensary that includes multiple levels of locked doors and presence of security guards. The facility will be on lockdown during any deliveries, which are scheduled by the state.

Smith said all product comes in sealed packages.

"We're not in the back compounding or grinding or chopping," he said.

Mitul Patel said the regulations surrounding medical marijuana are far more stringent than the rules governing the sale of the kind of prescription pain drugs experts say have helped fuel the heroin epidemic.

"We can sell opioids more easily than this stuff," he said.

Commission member Chantal Foster initially wanted more time to look at how other towns have amended their zoning regulations to address medical marijuana and the potential for full-scale legalization. But she ended up voting in favor of the text amendment.

Member Bob Ellsworth responded to a pre-

sentation by Mitul Patel regarding the tight security plan for the envisioned facility when he said the plan "sounds very much like a pharmacy, only probably with more security."

Marijuana became legal for medical use in the state in 2012.

It is approved by the state to treat conditions including cancer, glaucoma, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, fibromyalgia, muscular dystrophy, rheumatoid arthritis, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The law has since been expanded to allow children with certain debilitating conditions – including terminal illness, spinal cord injury and epilepsy – to take non-smokeable medical marijuana.

There are currently 1,506 medical marijuana patients in Middlesex County, according to the state Department of Consumer Protection website.

Mitul Patel said the statewide total – which is currently at 25,371 – grows by about 100 patients every week.

Patients in the Portland area must travel 20 miles or more to get to dispensaries in Hartford, Bristol or Milford.

Smith said patients in the area include a "fairly large" population of veterans.

"A lot of them are affected with PTSD and a lot of them are using medical marijuana," Smith said. "And a lot of them have to travel pretty far to get it."

Smith described Portland as accessible to people from Willimantic to Middletown.

The building itself was a selling point, Smith added. He cited visibility, parking and solid construction.

The presence in town of CT Pharmaceutical Solutions, a marijuana production facility, showed investors there are "open-minded public officials" in Portland, Smith said.

"We like this community. They've been friendly to medical marijuana," he said.

Hebron BOF Approves Lean Budget as State Funding Cuts Loom

by Sloan Brewster

With only one resident commenting during a budget public hearing, Hebron's Board of Finance passed 2018-19 budget proposal coming in almost a million dollars below the current budget.

Town officials used a combination of budget reductions, a \$500,000 contribution from the town's rainy day fund, and a tax increase to mitigate the effect of an anticipated \$1.6 million reduction in education funding from the state.

The \$35.79 million spending plan was presented in a PowerPoint presentation by Board of Finance Chairman David Veschi. He revealed the numbers to approximately 25 people assembled in the auditorium at RHAM High School.

The budget reflects a \$940,873, or 2.56 percent, decrease from current year expenses.

The \$8.91 million general government budget, including debt and capital, is down by 4.25 percent or \$395,862.

The mill rate is proposed to go up to 37.44 which reflects a .44 mill increase over the current rate of 37 mills, Veschi said.

The 37.44 proposed mill rate translates to an \$92 increase for properties assessed at \$210,510, Veschi said. This year's taxes are \$7,789, and if the budget is approved, next year they will be \$7,881.

This year's contribution to the open space account is \$75,000, a \$25,000 reduction. The contribution to the revaluation is \$25,000 versus last year's \$41,000.

The one line item that's increasing is funding for capital projects. At \$53,340, it is up by \$9,080 or 20.52 percent. At the same time this

year's contribution to the capital non-recurring fund is \$2,000, a \$1,050 cut from last year; and at \$583,553, the town's contribution to capital improvement is down by \$187,358.

Veschi said the largest expense in capital improvements is road resurfacing, at \$276,838.

The recommended list of capital improvements also includes \$50,000 for a bucket truck for the Public Works Department.

For the Fire Department, there's a \$35,000 request for a final payment for an ambulance; \$55,000 for a new service truck for the fire department; \$50,000 to refurbish a fire engine; and \$27,921 for a utility vehicle.

There's \$28,412 request for a fire panel for the Hebron Education Board.

For the Douglas Library, there's a \$93,000 request to replace the HVAC system and \$25,000 for new windows.

There are also several miscellaneous items in the capital budget.

"These are all recommended improvements that we'd like to have in the budget," Veschi said of the capital requests.

On the education side, the \$11.48 million request from the Hebron Board of Education marks a \$102,125 or 0.88 percent decrease. At \$14.05 million, the town's levy to RHAM is down by 1.48 percent. Debt service for RHAM is \$1.34 million, a \$47,272 or 3.43 percent drop.

"Where [our RHAM levy is] decreasing, you may hear from people from Andover or Marlborough, they're getting the increases," Veschi said.

The number of Hebron students at RHAM has been declining, while that from Andover

and Marlborough is going up, he said.

Discussions during number crunching sessions revolved around what's been happening at the capitol, Veschi said. There were concerns about how much revenue the town would get from the state.

Last year, the town received about \$7.30 million, he said, and "we didn't know how much we were going to get this year."

Veschi's presentation indicated the town is anticipating \$6.13 million from the state this year, a \$1.6 million cut.

"That's a material number in our budget," he said.

To account for the loss, the budget includes \$500,000 from the unassigned fund balance, spending cuts from the Boards of Education and Selectmen and a slight tax increase.

"Our assumption is that we have to be prepared," Veschi said.

Currently, the town keeps a little more than \$6 million, or 16 percent of its operating budget, in fund balance, Finance Director Elaine Griffin said at a meeting in December. The funds contribute to the town's AAA ratings from Moody's Investors Services and Standard & Poors.

Had the funds not been taken from the fund balance, the proposed mill rate for next year would have been at least one mill higher, Griffin said at the public hearing.

"It probably would've been a 1.25 mill increase," Finance Board member Malcolm Leichter said, adding that money from the fund balance would not be available "year after year after year."

Later, when the floor was opened to residents, sole speaker Vince Colonna said other towns have the same concerns about the state.

"These are funds we've been getting for 15 years," he said. "How do you account for that? How do you come up with money you've been getting for 15 years?"

Colonna went on to add that he realized board members and officials had been dealing with the problem for six to eight months.

"And I appreciate it, but people are making sacrifices" through increased taxes, he said. "I just want that to be known."

Leichter took a moment after the presentation to discuss the budget survey the town recently held.

There were 625 responses to the survey, he said. Included in the responses were strong requests not to make any more budget reductions.

"I think this budget deserves a shot to go in front of the public and let them have their say," he said.

Finance board member Peter Kasper applauded Town Manager Andrew Tierney and his team for stretching the dollar. He said he felt good about the proposal.

"Our object is to have it pass the first time," he said. "So I think we're in a really good spot for what we're trying to achieve this cycle."

The referendum will take place at Hebron Elementary School on May 8 from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. There will be four separate ballot questions concerning the budget and three advisory questions about whether or not the general government, Hebron Board of Education, and RHAM Board of Education budgets are high.

Grassroots Revitalization on the Riverfront in Andover

by Sloan Brewster

Get ready to tie those flies and toss them in the Hop River as the current of the newly stocked watercourse encircles your wading boots.

A half mile of riverfront at the 17-acre Andover Veterans Memorial Field has been relieved of an excess of brush and bramble and, for the first time in 20 years, the entire stretch of river has been stocked with trout in time for the first day of fishing.

Mike Beauchene, supervising biologist of fisheries at the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) said while the department had previously stocked in other nearby areas, it had not gone to the area behind the park because it was so overgrown.

Due to efforts of volunteers who cleared the area, it was stocked this year, Beauchene said.

Last Thursday, Planning and Zoning Commission chairman Eric Anderson and local volunteer Scott Person, who took on the task of clearing the area, gave the *Rivercast* a tour of the spruced up riverfront and showed off a new trail loop created as part of the effort.

While the cleanup was Person's brainchild, it is also something encouraged in the latest update to the town's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), Anderson said.

"Three or four years ago when the town updated the POCD, one thing it said was we really needed to recover the riverfront the town had," he said.

While doing some other volunteer work at the ballfield, Person, who was involved with the ballfield committee when the soccer field was put in in the summer and fall of 2016, noticed the tangled mess along the river.

"The riverfront looked like heck," he said. Anderson concurred.

"We couldn't access – get in – last year to see how bad it was because it was brushed in with so many pricklers," he said.

That was not always the case.

"Scott and I, as kids, fished this river," Anderson said. "Used to be you could walk the riverfront."

Person, with his brother Jessee Person, got

right to rectifying the problem, bringing his brush hog – a mower for blowing through the brush that he joked everyone living in the country should have.

While the Conservation Commission and other boards support the effort, it was done entirely by Person, Anderson said.

"Week in and week out, it's been Scott," he said.

The goal was to make the impassable riverfront accessible to residents.

Anderson did his share too. He helped Person and his son Justin Person build a bridge in an area that gets flooded and build benches and a picnic table, setting them in good spots to watch the flowing river. He plans on building some more, assuming the town agrees to pay for materials, he said.

The picnic table, which is bolted to the ground to prevent it from being washed away in a flood, sits next to a deep section of the river, near the remnants of a dam that, according to Person and Anderson, was destroyed in the hurricane of 1938.

"For years I wanted a picnic table here," Anderson said. "It was too brushed over and (I) couldn't get it here. This has always been my favorite section of the river because it's so pretty."

The spot is ideal for more than just picnicking.

"This is probably a very good fishing spot right here because it's very deep," Person said. Apparently the fish also like the locale.

"It's one of the few spots deep enough that the trout winter over," Anderson said, pointing to a pool where he said he could see some of the fish swimming through the current.

In addition to clearing away the mess of brush, Person said he was able to get the DEEP to restock the whole half mile stretch with trout.

Sitting at the picnic table, Anderson pointed to a mess of tall impassable brambles and brush at the edge of the clearing, saying that was what the entire riverfront looked like before Person and his mower got to work.

Orange blazes on trees along the river's edge mark a half-mile loop trail Person created when he did the cleanup. He and Anderson said they



Scott Person, his son Justin Person and Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Eric Anderson built this bridge on a flood-prone area near the Hop River behind Andover.

hope more people will take advantage of the quiet, scenic trail.

"Very few people know about this but it's still getting daily use," Anderson said.

The section along the river will be seeded with a conservation mix grass and the plan is to keep mowing the area so it stays open, the men said.

In related news, property around another local trail with a watercourse running through it will soon belong to the town. At a special town meeting March 29, electors approved a motion for the town to purchase three parcels surrounding the Hop River Rail Trail for \$30,000, plus closing costs, from the open space fund.

The fund currently has \$233,000 and, according to state law, can only be used for land preservation or to make improvements to public

land, Anderson said.

A fourth parcel will be donated by the landowner.

The four parcels border three roads - Lake Road, Merritt Valley Road and Route 6, Anderson said.

They will be used to increase parking at the rail trail, for a small park and to protect land around Blackman's Brook, a tributary to the Hop River that runs through the parcels, Anderson told the group assembled for the meeting.

All the parcels are in the industrial/commercial section of town but only one is buildable, Anderson said. Rather than having the town purchase it with the open space money, the landowner agreed to donate it so it can still be built on it in the future.

Opening day of fishing season is Saturday.

Marlborough Finance Board Squabbles Over Social Media Use

by Allison Lazur

At a Board of Finance meeting Tuesday, board member Ken Hjulstrom was scolded for several Facebook posts discussing business matters previously examined at various public meetings.

The posts were printed by Board of Finance Chairman Douglas Knowlton and distributed to the rest of the board. While some of the members were familiar with Hjulstrom's use of Facebook, others were completely caught off guard.

"The problem that it brings up is that once an individual posts this, it precludes any other member from commenting on the same topics," said Knowlton. "That individual has stolen the rights of everyone else on this board because the minute that anyone else comments on that posting, it then constitutes an illegal meeting."

Without a proper 24 hours' notice given to every member of the board and the public, a "meeting" cannot be conducted on Facebook or anywhere.

The problem that arises is the possibility of a debate taking place between one or more board members, according to Tom Hennick, spokesman for the Freedom of Information Commission. He said even without a quorum, a Facebook post could be considered a meeting depending on what they're talking about.

Hennick explained that although there is nothing in the FOI Act that prevents individuals from stating positions, a person can be held responsible for being the original creator of a post that cites business matters. If even a single other finance board member were to comment on Hjulstrom's post, he would still be held accountable for creating the initial post and establishing its topic.

For the finance board, the content of the posts was less of an issue than the act of actually posting on social media at all.

"Last year we agreed the chair is the only spokesperson to the outside public or the chair has to appoint somebody," said finance board member Dieter Zimmer. "Therefore this year it is definitely a violation to our policy and a violation to our ethics."

Knowlton added that when the social media policy was discussed previously, it was stated that as an elected official "you cannot escape representing the board in the minds of the public."

Knowlton further criticized Hjulstrom for displaying a "one-sided presentation without consideration of other views."

"I feel there is misrepresentation mostly by omission," Knowlton said after Hjulstrom questioned what specifically in his posts was misleading.

Hjulstrom cited other members of the board who had submitted letters to RHAM's education board, encouraging cuts, as a comparison.

"How is that different as far as perception [from the public] and representing the board?" said Hjulstrom.

Board of Finance alternate member Deborah Bourbeau explained that the letter she sent served as almost a public comment, since she was unable to attend a meeting. Board of Finance Vice Chairman Susan Leser also said she sent a letter "speaking as an individual and as a resident of Marlborough [not as a Finance Board member]."

Knowlton further advised Hjulstrom to refrain from posting on Facebook about finance board matters in the future and to strictly utilize meetings to voice his opinions.

While the rest of the Finance Board backed Knowlton, Hjulstrom stood by his actions.

"I don't necessarily agree [that] I will refrain from speaking my mind, so let the chips

fall where they may," said Hjulstrom. "I'm not making any commitments at this point."

Finance Board Member Erik Young stated he felt Hjulstrom's response was unacceptable and disrespectful to the entire board. This led Knowlton to issue a final admonishment to Hjulstrom by articulating the "possibility of public sanction and [the option] as chair to go out and repudiate each and every posting."

"[If] somebody makes a comment against the comment [on Facebook] and starts a dialogue, then we file an FOI complaint and let the chips fall where they may and see what kind of penalties get handed down by the FOI commission – and I would suggest if that happens, individuals doing the posting would not be protected by the town's attorney and would suffer their own legal expenses," Knowlton said.

The following evening, the Finance Board held a second meeting where Hjulstrom took the opportunity to address the board and pass out packets to support his viewpoint during the public comment portion.

"The reason I'm passing these [packets] out is last evening I was cited and complaints were made by the board chair about my posting on Facebook," said Hjulstrom. "I went to some of the Facebook pages around town and pulled out some of the postings. The first one is by our chairman, Doug Knowlton, from last fall when he was promoting the passage of the charter revision. ... Mr. Knowlton referred to himself as chairman when pushing his agenda on Facebook.

"The other attachments are numerous postings from our first selectman," he continued, "where she goes on and on about positions on various budget issues and whether a budget should fail or pass from last budget session. So I guess my point here is [Tuesday] night,

I was singled out as a person who posts on Facebook, when at least one other member of the board posts on Facebook and I'm certainly not the only elected official that does so."

Because Hjulstrom's statement was made during public comments, only brief discussion was permitted. During that time, Knowlton took the time to reiterate that "posting in itself is not a violation; the violating occurs once debates start to occur, which is the danger of posting to social media."

Other individuals siding with Hjulstrom, included Sue Rapelye, Board of Education member of RHAM and Marlborough Elementary, who submitted an e-mail to be read as a public comment.

In her e-mail, addressed to Knowlton, it was stated that she was speaking as an individual who had concerns that the discussion of social media at Tuesday's meeting was "unprofessional and extremely one sided."

"The discussed elected official's social media post provides the community with information on his points of view," said Rapelye. "We both know we have very low attendance at all our town meetings. However, with social media it provides an avenue to the community to stay up to date on topics and create awareness."

Hjulstrom concluded his statement to the finance board by stating what he felt was the real reason behind being reprimanded by Knowlton.

"I feel as though I was singled out," Hjulstrom said. "I believe there was an agenda behind doing so and I just would like to be treated equally if there are other people on boards and commissions that post on Facebook. I feel as though as long as you're stating your own opinion, you're not representing the board. I feel as though people should have the right to speak their mind. ... That's my opinion on this."

Marlborough Finance Board Makes Cuts to Budgets

by Allison Lazur

Tuesday night, the Board of Finance held a special meeting where the boards of selectmen and finance each presented changes to their 2018-19 budget, after being advised by the Finance Board to make cuts the week prior.

The finance board's goal was to keep the tax increase under 3 percent over the 2017-2018 budget for the residents, by requesting the Selectman Board cut \$155,000 and the Education Board cut \$117,000.

First Selectman Amy Traversa presented the selectmen's budget noting that they had satisfied the request to cut \$155,000, bringing the town operations budget to \$4.89 million. Initially, the selectmen were advised to cut \$80,000 from the operations budget and \$75,000 from the capital budget, but had decided at their meeting the night before to cut the entire \$155,000 from the capital budget only.

Traversa said she and department heads "took a very hard look at absolutely everything and we don't feel at this time we are able to touch operations... We are running out of shoe string," Traversa said. "We are the ones that actually have to make the town run and have some level of comfort with it."

The Capital Expenditure Reserve for general government decreased by \$25,000, resulting in a figure of \$50,000.

"That's the money that will allow us to do things," Traversa said. She explained that it allows the town to prefund items and seek reimbursement later.

"It gives us the flexibility to do the things when we need to be able to do them; whether it's the construction season when things have to be done and what order they have to be done [or] if the state imposes additional mandates

on what needs to get done, that's [the capital expenditure reserve] that allows us to have a cushion to do things," said Traversa.

Other items that faced a cut were painting the food bank – a decrease of \$19,570 – which Traversa said was a priority, but would now have to wait.

The cost for the police replacement vehicle was cut by \$5,000, a number the selectmen felt comfortable with. Public works, which needed to replace two trucks and two mowers, would now be forced to replace only one of each for a combined decrease of \$95,495.

"The bigger truck is not an optional item right now," said Traversa. This meant the town would have to settle with cutting the smaller truck.

The final aspect that saw a decrease was a partial revaluation which Traversa explained was cut by \$10,000 with the idea that if several of the towns could "go in on one purchasing unit" the town would be able to complete the revaluation at a lower cost.

"It was unanimous with the Selectman Board and department heads that this is where the cuts should happen," Traversa said.

The majority of the Finance Board was satisfied with the cuts and voted to approve the selectmen's new budget 5 to 1.

"It's painful to cut and I know that there are capital needs," said Board of Finance Chairman Douglas Knowlton. "It's just facing the cuts that we've got from the state and the other thing is in the increase in the assessment out of RHAM that makes it very difficult to squeeze things [to the point] where we can get a tax rate that is affordable for the people of this town."

* * *

Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz presented the school board's original \$7.43 million budget for the 2018-19 year, after just having met two hours prior for a special meeting with the rest of the Board of Education. Although the finance board had proposed the education board cut \$117,000 from its budget, Sklarz stated that no further cuts had been made.

"The board looked at the impact of the reductions that could possibly be made and determined that the board had presented a budget that already had numerous reductions," Sklarz said. "Any further reductions would've had an impact on the classroom presentations and also services that we provide our children. The board unanimously decided that no reductions would be made at this time."

If the finance board had accepted the lack of change in the school budget, this would have left the residents with a 4.13 percent increase. If the education board had trimmed its budget by the requested \$117,000, the tax increase would still have been at 3.55 percent, a number Knowlton said would be too high to accept.

"While everyone's felt they've done as good a job as possible at trimming down the budget it comes in at just under a 5 percent tax increase and that's a lot for people of this town to swallow," said Knowlton. He went on to explain that heading into the next fiscal year, Marlborough has faced a \$716,000 cut from municipal aid and "a cumulative increase of assessments for RHAM over \$800,000," leaving the town with a 1.5 million gap.

"The only way we are going to do that [fill the gap] is if all components of the budget share in addressing that kind of a gap and that includes a little bit of raising the taxes and also [cutting] town operation, capital, contingency

and Board of Ed's budget," said Knowlton.

According to Knowlton, Marlborough spends 3.5 times the amount spent in the town operating budget on education – including RHAM spending – whereas other towns in the area spend between 2 and 2.5 times their operating budgets on education.

"The numbers may be off slightly since RHAM trimmed a couple thousand off their budget," said Knowlton. "[But] think about the ratios; think about what the town has to support; think about the funding gaps—RHAM increase and what was cut from state. Yes, we had over a \$600,000 [surplus] coming out of town operations; we need to retain a great amount of that if not all of it."

The decision to deposit the town's \$600,000 surplus in the "rainy day fund" was a matter that returned periodically throughout the meeting. A motion was finally made by Board of Finance Vice Chairman, Susan Leser to utilize \$100,000 of the surplus to offset the tax increase as well reducing the school budget by \$132,000 – a figure that included the initial request of \$117,000 plus an additional \$15,000, bringing the tax rate increase to just under 3 percent for residents and the school budget to \$7.29 million – the motion was approved 4 to 2.

The budget will be sent to a public hearing on April 23 at 7 p.m. in the Marlborough Elementary Cafeteria, followed by a town meeting on May 7 at 7 p. m. in the school cafeteria, and a referendum the following day. This is the first year voters will be able to vote from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the community room at Marlborough Elementary, or by absentee ballot that must be applied for in advance for those unable to be present for the vote.

Andover School Budget Presentation to Finance Board Goes Well

by Sloan Brewster

Superintendent of Schools Sally Doyen told the Board of Education this week she presented its \$4.19 million 2018-19 budget proposal to the Board of Finance at its March 28 meeting – and finance board members “were not at all critical” of the spending plan.

The finance board did ask what the education board’s long-term plan was related to potential funding changes at the state level, Doyen said.

“I said we could reduce the budget a little bit more, but the board had not chosen to do that,” Doyen told the board.

The finance board did not recommend any changes or reductions to the numbers, Doyen said.

“The budget stands as it was when you accepted it,” she said.

Shannon Loudon, board chair, said she had heard from finance board chairman Daniel Warren about Doyen’s presentation.

“[He] was very complimentary,” she said.

The proposed education budget, which Doyen presented to the school board in January, and which the board approved in March without making any changes, represents \$80,000 in reductions for the next school year.

The \$4.19 million budget proposal is 1.89 percent less than last year’s \$4.27 million budget, she said. The reduction reflects an anticipated \$58,000 in Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) cuts from the state this year and \$22,000 in expected ECS cuts for next year, she said.

An additional \$95,000 in ECS hold backs is not in the budget.

Overall, the budget is a maintenance one, Doyen said.

“Not a lot of new initiatives,” she said. “We are happy and hoping that we can maintain the staff and programs that we do have already.”

The budget covers the costs to continue working on ongoing projects that have been underway for the past two years, Doyen said. It pays for some new Chromebooks, software, technological upgrades and brings a literacy program, which started this year in kindergarten to first grade.

Administration costs are down with the elimination of the assistant principal position at Andover Elementary School.

“Those responsibilities have been picked up by other people,” Doyen said.

Additional administration cuts are due to the consolidation of building administrator posi-

tions, she said.

Other reductions include the elimination of a speech and language position that was made last year but not reflected in the budget and the elimination of an outplacement student.

The teacher line item is going down because she is funding some positions through grants, Doyen said.

All told, salaries are down by \$250,000 for next year, she said.

The retirement of a teacher will further reduce the line item but as the announcement of the retirement is new, it has not yet been calculated into the numbers.

Fuel costs are up by \$11,000, Doyen said.

Other costs in the budget include funding for new copiers, Doyen said. The plan is to upgrade the copiers and add a printer. Then, as smaller classroom printers break down, they can be eliminated. The new equipment would be put in a room designated as a workroom for teachers.

The budget does not include cutting any classes or teachers, Doyen said.

Enrollment numbers at the elementary school will go below 200 with the graduation of the current sixth grade, which is the grade in school

with the most students, Doyen said.

The district will also be paying less for substitute teachers next school year as there will be fewer teachers out.

“There were a lot of maternity leaves last year,” she said.

Infrastructure is doing well, with a few things that need to be replaced.

Wednesday, the board approved one infrastructure fix, agreeing to spend \$38,400 to replace a water tank.

After three bids came in Inc. Doyen chose LaFramboise Well Drilling to do the project, she said. The water treatment and filtration company provided the lowest, most thorough bid.

The project is slated to begin at the end of June.

“It’ll be nice to get this going, to get this done,” Doyen said.

The Board of Selectmen is expected to present its budget to the Board of Finance Monday, April 16, at 7 p.m., at the Old Firehouse on Center Street. There will then be a Board of Finance public hearing on the budget Wednesday, April 18, also at 7 p.m., at the Town Hall community room.

Obituaries continued

Marlborough

Rose Marie Brown

Rose Marie Brown, 95, formerly of Marlborough, widow of William Brown, died Tuesday April 10, at Glastonbury Health Care. Born March 24, 1923, in Hartford and raised in East Hartford, she was the daughter of the late Nicholas and Mary (Pinto) Repoli.

Rose had worked as a supervisor for SNET until her retirement in 1985. She was a member of the Telephone Pioneers Club and was an avid bowler.

Rose is survived by her daughter, Nancy Myshrall and husband Ricky of East Hampton; sons, William Brown Jr. and wife Kathleen of Ellington, Paul Fortuna and partner Patricia Jarvis of South Carolina; stepson, James Brown of California; brother, Donald Repoli of Andover; ten grandchildren, Michael Brown, Kelly Briers, Pam Jeroszko, Sharon Johnson, Jessica Hebert, William Brown III, David Brown, Ricky Myshrall, Amy Myshrall, Amanda Myshrall; 11 great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild.

She was predeceased by her brother, Francis Repoli, and her sisters, Diana Kamis and Theresa Rizzo.

A funeral liturgy will be celebrated today, April 13, at 10 a.m., in St. John Fisher Church in Marlborough. A private burial will be held for immediate family only at Marlboro Cemetery after Mass.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to St. Jude Children’s Hospital at stjude.org.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Portland

Richard R. Gildersleeve

Richard R. Gildersleeve, 75, of Westbrook, formerly of Portland, husband of Lynn (Carey) Gildersleeve, died Sunday, April 8, at Middlesex Hospital.

Funeral services and burial will be announced at a later date. Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, is in charge of arrangements.

Hebron

William A. Merry



William A. (Billy) Merry of Woodside Village in Oak Bluffs, Mass., formerly of Hebron, died Saturday, March 17, at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. He was 81.

He was a well-known local stone mason and especially known for his many beloved rescued black labs.

He is survived by his daughter, Lynn Merry; his son, Dana Merry; his step-daughter, Sheila Woods; and the rest of the extended Merry family.

A graveside service was held Saturday, March 24, in Massachusetts. A local memorial service will be held at a later date.

Donations in his memory may be made to the Animal Shelter of Martha’s Vineyard, P.O. Box 1829, Edgartown, MA 02539.

Arrangements are under the care of the Chapman, Cole and Gleason Funeral Home in Oak Bluffs, Mass. For online condolences, visit ccgfuneralhome.com.

Obituaries

Hebron

Martha Brooks

Jesus called our Martha home and she now rests in the arms of our loving God. Martha M. (DeConti) Brooks, 50, of Hebron, passed away suddenly at her home Saturday, April 7.

Martha was born Nov. 29, 1967, in New Britain, the daughter of Phillip V. and Marjorie (Claffey) DeConti. She lived in Hebron for the past 20 years where she, and the love of her life, Tim, raised their three beautiful daughters.

Martha devoted her life to her faith, her family and her friends. To know her was to know the love of Jesus, for she walked Christ's path so perfectly. Through her extraordinary grace and beauty, her kindness and unconditional love, she enriched the lives of all who knew her. She was a vessel through which God's goodness flowed – her heart was filled with the deepest empathy, compassion, humility and gratitude. Martha was the anchor who brought people together – her family and friends – and made us all better people.

Martha enjoyed every moment of every day and lived her meaningful life with the greatest optimism and passion – and gorgeous smile! She was the hope in time of renewal as the tulips burst through in spring; the joy in riding in her convertible on a stunning summer day; the gratitude in a glorious sunset at day's end; the magnificence of the autumn foliage; the calmness and warmth of a roaring fire on a cold winter day, and always with Timmy by her side.

Martha leaves her devoted husband of 30 years, Tim, and their three incredible children, Kelly (Shawn) Brunner, Erika Brooks and Nicole Brooks. She also leaves her precious four-month-old grandson, Cody David Brunner. She is also survived by her parents, Phillip and Marjorie DeConti, and six siblings, Pam (Robert) Dorn, Phillip (Tamera) DeConti, Christopher (Phyllis) DeConti, Patrick DeConti, Matthew DeConti and Amy (David) Tupper. Martha also leaves her father and mother-in-law, Wayne and Susan Brooks, as well as many nieces, nephews and dear friends she loved so much.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held today, April 13, at 10 a.m., at the Church of the Holy Family, 185 Church St. in Hebron. Burial will follow at Holy Cross Cemetery, 1318 Hebron Ave. in Glastonbury. Family and friends called at the Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury, Thursday, April 12.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made in Martha's memory to the Make A Wish Foundation, 126 Monroe Tpke., Trumbull, CT 06611, wish.org.

Martha was an extraordinary person who made a difference in everyone's lives. She was a gift, a blessing, and a light. Forever in our hearts she will shine so bright! We are truly grateful for her beautiful legacy: Kelly, Erika, Nicole, and Cody who are filled with Martha's beautiful heart and soul. Rest in Peace, our amazing Angel. We love you, forever.

East Hampton

Arvard Vernon Cook

Arvard Vernon Cook, "Cookie," of East Hampton, died Tuesday, April 10, at Autumn Lake Health Care in Cromwell. Born Oct. 15, 1939, in Vermont, he was the son of the late Hubert and Vaun Cook.

Arvard lived in East Hampton for more than 60 years. He was the owner of Cook's Dry Wall and Cook's Waste Removal. Arvard was home Monday nights and he taught his children how to play checkers and card games. He also taught them how to cheat at them. Arvard loved his children dearly. Arvard also helped with Old Home Days supplying his time, truck, helping to build the dance floor, and taking away the trash after.

He is survived by his ex-wife and mother of his children, Janet Cook of East Hampton; four children, Deborah Stockburger, Donna Cook, Daniel Cook and wife Bonnie, Danielle Zoldak and husband Brian; six grandchildren, Marshall, Sarah, Erick, Thomas, Adam, Emily; four great-grandchildren, Vincent, Aubrey, Annebell and Tessa.

He was predeceased by a grandson, Justin Stockburger.

Friends may call at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Wednesday April 18, from 9:30-11 a.m. A funeral service will be held at 11 a.m. Burial will follow in Lake View Cemetery.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Hebron

David L. Zimmerman

David L. Zimmerman, 62, of Amston, departed life Friday, March 23, at Hartford Hospital. Born May 12, 1955, in Washington, D.C., he was the eldest son of the late Harry and Donna (Babb) Zimmerman.

Dave grew up in northern Virginia, and learned to hunt from his father. An activity he later shared with his best friend, Russ Geer, as well as teaching his own wife, Debbie Dudley. Mr. Zimmerman served our country for 14 years in the U.S. Navy, earning a dozen of combined commendations/awards/ribbons/metals throughout his career. Which he began by graduating first in his class (1975) at the Nuclear Power School, then becoming a nuclear instructor.

He served on several boats which carried him around the world, and under the arctic ice, and included memorable ports of call in Australia; Toulon, France; Israel; and an island in the Indian Ocean. In addition to being a chief electricians mate, "Z" also served as a military customs inspector, and he finished his service on the USS City of Corpus Christi with an honorable discharge.

In his civilian career, Dave worked in manufacturing and maintenance, which provided him with a broad spectrum of experience including printing, ammunitions/blasting caps, and ball bearings. He also worked for a period of time in the deli at Stop & Shop, where he made many dear friends.

Dave enjoyed following sports, and was a dedicated gym-rat in younger years, as well as a >50 yrs. old runner when he ran in the Manchester Turkey Day race. As an adult he learned and participated in skiing and golf. After moving to Amston with his wife in 2008, they both enjoyed the hiking programs organized by the Colchester Land Trust.

Dave was a man of many interests and talents. After the Navy, Dave obtained his associate's degree from MCC. From magician to locksmith to writer, he taught himself the trade. He loved flight, and enjoyed two piloting experiences. Later in life, Dave pursued his love of music by learning to play guitar. His 12-string was dubbed "Tomorrow." Dave and Debbie loved attending the Podunk Bluegrass Music Festival throughout its 21-year history, and especially when it moved to Hebron.

A love of the arts was a joyful discovery for Dave. He loved ballet, and modern dance. Became a major cheerleader of his choreographer niece, Arianna Dudley. He loved history and taking tours of historic abodes and gardens. His interest in art included museum collections, as well as learning oil painting, drawing, and a stint with clay pottery. He was a collector of literature, coins, art prints, sculpture and pottery.

In addition to his wife of 20 years, Dave is survived by his sister and brother-in-law, Linda and Bob Johnson of Petersburg, Mich.; two brothers and sisters-in-law, Les and Sue Zimmerman of Culpeper, Va., and Chuck and Janet Zimmerman of Fairfax, Va.; six nieces and nephews, James and Michael, Marcie and Bethany Zimmerman, Cara and Arianna Dudley; as well as his brother-in-law and his wife, John Dudley and Alicia Isicson; and two beloved cats, Madelaine Wu and Phoebe Foo.

Among the bereft are his many friends from Stop and Shop, from Cindy at Colchester Barbershop, from Mackey's, from the Dial-A-Ride program at the Senior Center in Hebron, from his employer, Amgraph Packaging and the exceptional friends/co-workers there who made his final journey filled with love and care. David's family would like to thank Kenny, Danny, Gary, Pamela and Paul, whose thoughtfulness sustained us all.

A celebration of his life will be observed at his home later this spring and will be announced.

Donations in his memory may be made online at podunkbluegrass.com, birdnote.org, rescueme.org or cthumane.org.

Care of arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester. For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

East Hampton

Walter Joseph Curran

Walter Joseph Curran, 91, of East Hampton, beloved husband of Dolores (Zacharkiewicz) Curran, passed away peacefully at home Thursday, April 5. Born July 9, 1926, in Cohoes, N.Y., he was the son of the late Matthew and Helen (Kennedy) Curran.

Walter proudly served his country in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He was a graduate of Siena College and had worked as a sales and marketing executive in the manufacturing industry until his retirement.

Besides his wife Dolores, he is survived by his sons, Michael Curran of Amsterdam, N.Y., Joseph Curran of Coatsville, Pa.; daughters, Karen Arsenault (Paul) of East Hampton, Christine Curran (Jordan Murphy) of Jersey City, N.J., Patricia Curran (Paul Lounsbrough) of Laconia, N.H., Paula Mattson (Phil Stearns) of Upton, Mass.; grandchildren Julie Feeney, Joseph Mattson, Chelsea Curran, Michelle Arsenault, Corey Lounsbrough and Kristy Lounsbrough; and two great-grandchildren, Owen and Casey Grace.

He was predeceased by a son, Edward J. Curran, and his siblings, Robert, Mary, Helen and Matthew.

A funeral liturgy was celebrated Thursday, April 12, in St. Patrick Church, East Hampton. Burial followed in the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery on Bow Lane in Middletown.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Marlborough

Jane M. Doucette

Jane M. (Molleur) Doucette, 93, of Marlborough, passed away Thursday, April 5. She was born in West Stewartstown, N.H., the daughter of the late Auguste and Cecilia (St. James) Molleur.

Jane was a charter member of Saint John Fisher Church in Marlborough and was a loving and devoted wife, mother, sister, grandmother and great-grandmother. She will be greatly missed by family, friends and neighbors. She was predeceased by her beloved husband Alyre Doucette, her brothers Albert, Arthur, Joseph and Donat Molleur, and her sister Eda Kolodziej.

She is survived by her two sons, Richard Doucette and his wife Joan of Hebron and David Doucette and his wife Cathy of Woodland Hills, Calif.; her two daughters, Carol Sylvester and her husband Robert of Orefield, Pa., and Kathy Sutton and her husband Philip of The Villages, Fla.; one sister, Rita Lemire of East Hartford; five grandchildren; and several great-grandchildren.

The family would like to thank Jane's caregiver and friend, Esme Hemans, for her loving care and devotion.

Funeral services are Monday, April 16, at 11 a.m., at Saint John Fisher Roman Catholic Church, 30 Jones Hollow Rd., Marlborough. Burial will follow in Marlboro Cemetery, Route 66, Marlborough. There are no visiting hours.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to: Roy B. Pettingill Ambulance Association or the Marlborough Volunteer Fire Department.

Glastonbury Funeral Home, 450 New London Tpke., Glastonbury, is in charge of the arrangements. For more information, or to leave an online condolence, visit glastonburyfuneral.com.

Colchester

Joshua Andrew Ogden



A lover of peanut butter cups and the healing power of Epsom salt baths, Joshua Andrew Ogden (pictured on right), 26, of Colchester, died suddenly Thursday, April 5. Born May 11, 1991, in Farmington, he, along with his identical twin Aaron, was the son of David and Gwendolyn (Getzke) Ogden of Colchester.

Josh was a 2009 graduate of Bacon Academy in Colchester, where he had played both football and basketball. He loved "mellowness" and cultivating a little vegetable garden in his backyard, where he also used his own money to build a fence to keep the family dog safe. Josh aspired to one day establish a farm. Most recently, he was proud and enthusiastic about his career as a blackjack dealer at Foxwoods, where he earned multiple Five Star Customer Service Awards and made many new friends as well. Josh was a quiet, low-key yet skilled dealer, who handled even the most difficult players with great ease. There was never a problem on his tables.

Josh was a man of heart and he never stopped trying to lead a healthy life. His last text to his father reflected that: "I need to stay the path." He was a proud member of UAW Local 2121. He loved his brothers and his whole family. Josh and his twin were apart only eight days during the 26 years of his life. He also loved Poet's Island in Maine, taking care of his grandmother's cat, music, creative writing, and checkmate in a game of chess. The cause of death was injuries sustained in a motor vehicle accident.

In addition to his twin, Aaron, and his parents, of Colchester, he leaves a brother and sister-in-law, Scott and Aarthi Ogden of Staten Island, N.Y.; his grandmother, Ruth Woodcock of Glastonbury; his grandpa, Donald Getzke of Newark Valley, N.Y.; his longtime girlfriend, Stephanie Mikan of Colchester; his beloved Canadian Eskimo dog, Akia; and numerous aunts, uncles, cousins and friends. He was predeceased by his grandmother Helen Dickinson Getzke of Owego, N.Y.

The family received guests Monday, April 9, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A service celebrating his life was observed during the visitation. He was laid to rest Tuesday, April 10, in the Old Church Cemetery, 1361 Main St. (rear of the Audubon) in South Glastonbury, with his late grandfather, Hugh Ogden.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in Josh's name may be made online at rlht.org, norml.org or to the charity of one's choice.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.