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She's Practically Perfect... Residents can see Jessica Engster take flight next weekend as Mary Poppins at the Colchester Community Theatre's production of *Mary Poppins* along with a slew of cast members who will sing and dance to memorable numbers. Pictured are Oliver Markham and Elena DeWire who will be playing the roles of Michael and Jane. See story on page 15.

Fourteen Cows Perish in Belltown Barn Fire

by Elizabeth Regan

A fire at an East Hampton dairy farm on Flanders Road last week killed more than a dozen cows.

Farm owner Dori Wolf, who runs Cedar Ridge Dairy with her husband, said two of the 16 cows in the barn were rescued by a team made up of her daughter, a friend and one of the East Hampton firefighters who responded to the scene on that frigid Thursday morning.

Temperatures were hovering around 10 degrees.

Wolf said three calves were unharmed. The babies lived in separate calf hutches away from the barn.

The calves and the two remaining cows are being kept in a shed-style barn they've been able to put together, she said.

Wolf said she has run the farm since 2003 with her husband. The couple has two adult daughters.

East Hampton Fire Marshal Richard Klotzbier said the fire was "electrical in nature." He said he could not pinpoint the exact cause.

Assistant Fire Chief Peter Freund told the *RiverEast* the call came into dispatch around 10:40 a.m. to alert the department to a large volume of smoke coming from the dairy barn.

In addition to East Hampton trucks and firefighters, he immediately called in an engine and tanker from Marlborough. Once he could see "a header" of smoke coming over the trees on his way to the scene, he called in reinforcements from East Haddam, Colchester, Portland and Haddam Neck.

Freund said the everpresent need in East Hampton, where the fire department is made up entirely of unpaid volunteers, is additional manpower. With no fire hydrants in town, they

also require extra tankers to produce enough water to fight large fires.

The barn fire was fully involved when he arrived.

Between the tankers and a hole cut into the ice in a nearby pond, Freund said firefighters had a "decent, constant water supply."

Two ambulances from the East Hampton Ambulance Association were on standby due to cold temperatures and water that was freezing "pretty fast" on the road, he said. A public works crew drove through on a regular basis to sand the road.

The fire was under control by approximately 11:50 a.m., according to Freund. Firefighters remained on the scene until about 4:45 p.m.

When different colors showed up in the smoke, Freund called in the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection based on the assumption that fertilizers were present.

Multiple explosions that shook the area proved to be the sound of large tractor tires failing, Freund said. But he didn't know that at the time.

"I just knew I was parked across the street being shook. Never a good feeling," he said.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal was called to the scene due to the size of the fire, he said.

Wolf said she is grateful for first responders for braving the harsh elements to put out the blaze.

"The fact they were out there in sub-zero temperatures with water, it was huge. I can't thank them enough," she said. "And it wasn't just the firefighters. It was the town crew, it was the police department, it was everybody in our

See Barn Fire page 2

Colchester Residents Push for Paramedic Program

by Allison Lazur

A budget public forum in Colchester Wednesday night quickly became a meeting of advocacy for a proposed town paramedic program, as residents and members of the Colchester Hayward Volunteer Fire Company filled the room to push the Board of Finance to include funding for the program in the upcoming budget.

However, with the town budget less than two months away from presentation to the Board of Finance, finance board Chairman Rob Tarlov called the quick implementation "very difficult."

The proposed program would provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) to residents and cut down on the response time from outside paramedics currently coming from Middlesex Hospital or a Norwich-based commercial ambulance company, as needed, said Fire Chief Walter Cox.

He said despite the fire department providing ambulance transport services for the last 25 years, "there is a gap in service we would like

to provide."

Advanced Life Support includes life saving measures only a paramedic can provide such as starting an IV, having the equipment carried by a paramedic to monitor heart rhythms or the ability to handle a diabetic emergency, Cox said, referring to paramedics as "an ER on scene – the eyes and ears of a doctor."

"The data that we have seen is it's five to six minutes before a medic will get on scene after we arrive," Cox said. "What we are trying to do is increase our staffing to have paramedic firefighters to ride our ambulances so they arrive on scene and you have a paramedic when it's critical that you have one."

He said the town's firefighters and EMTs are not paramedics, and thus "can only provide a certain level of emergency medical service" that they're trained to do.

Cox said the goal would be to hire three full-time paramedic firefighters who will work 48-hour shifts and an additional six to 10 part-time positions to cover the 24 hours not covered in a

week by the full-time crew, as well as any sick or vacation time.

The department currently has one hundred volunteers and a career staff of seven.

With a projected startup cost of about \$450,000 for the first year, Tarlov said Wednesday not knowing the revenue numbers from the additional medical services is a hindrance to the process.

"The numbers keep changing," he said. "We need something that we can look at and say we understand the numbers and we know where they came from and that's what we're struggling through right now."

The fire company's Assistant to the Department Head Jean Walsh said Thursday both the boards of finance and selectmen were sent estimated numbers on the program's cost and the projected revenue – but both Cox and Tarlov agreed the revenue numbers are difficult to determine because of varying insurances with varying reimbursement rates.

However, the fire company's treasurer,

Chuck Maynard, questioned why the proposed program can't move forward with revenue estimates.

"We approved the budget last year not knowing what income we would get from the state so this is not unprecedented," he said.

Tarlov said, "Last year the fire department, through their ambulance service, brought in \$580,000 [in revenue]. The ALS will bring in more, but what we are trying to figure out is how much more."

But some residents simply didn't care about the revenue figures and urged the finance board to include the program in this year's budget.

Resident Evan Evans, a military veteran with stints in such places as Kosovo, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, said, "I am fully in support of the paramedic program even if we got zero revenue because in my lifetime I've watched people bleed out and die because ALS was not available in time. ALS – in the military – arrived in enough time to transport the body back to the

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Barn Fire cont. from Front Page

neighborhood. I'm truly amazed how many friends we have. It takes something catastrophic sometimes for you to realize."

Wolf got emotional when she talked about the support the family received from neighbors and friends immediately and in the days following the fire. They delivered supplies and words of encouragement to help the family cope.

The cows in the barn ranged from 6 months to 6 years, according to Wolf. There were several expectant mothers.

Wolf said the farm has won awards for its Holsteins at local, state and national shows, with multiple All-American nominations over the years. They've had as many as 45 cows at one time.

Those killed in last week's fire were descendants of the award-winning cows, she said.

Two semen tanks and the farm's embryo inventory were in the barn at the time of the fire. The whole building was a total loss.

The 14 animals they lost were "more than just cows" to the family, Wolf said. They had names. They were touched and cared for every day.

Her daughters' relationship with all their cows through the years had a huge impact on them as they grew up, Wolf recounted.

"They learned about the birds and the bees, they learned about life and death, they learned about responsibility," Wolf said. "Just so many life lessons. A ton of life lessons were learned in that barn."

Paramedic Program cont. from Front Page

Despite the town's growing elderly population, resident Kevin Alvarez said he believed the program would also save young lives. He said including funding for the program in this year's referendum is "vitally important."

"I don't think this is an extravagant request by the fire department," he said. "It sounds like a critical part of the service that they are trying to offer and I think if we're going to be looking to the future of our town and try and make sure that it's a good one that attracts people, we need a government that responds to the needs of our

agencies and our community members."

Walsh indicated Thursday that the sooner the town can decide on funding the program, the better, as she said there are multiple steps that have to be completed, such as licensing from the state and meeting certain facility and equipment requirements, if the program is to be included in the upcoming budget.

The fire department will give a detailed paramedic program presentation at a joint meeting of the boards of selectmen and finance planned for Wednesday, Feb. 20, at 6:30 p.m., at Town Hall, 127 Norwich Ave.

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

It was big news in the state last week, and in fact you may have even seen the cover story about the matter in last week's *Rivereast*: regionalizing the state's public schools.

I know it's a very divisive idea, but I think it's one well worth exploring. Because, frankly, we have to do something. The current system of having property tax pay for most of town budgets just isn't working anymore. You'll see stories about some area grand lists in this week's *Rivereast* – and, spoiler alert, the numbers aren't pretty. Grand list increases are low, and have been for years now. Long gone are the days when a town's grand list would climb so robustly it alone could significantly offset any spending increases in a town budget.

Folks who bristle at things like regionalization often say "just cut spending instead," but there's only so much cutting you can do. There needs to be a fundamental change in the way the state does business. One change may be putting tolls back on the roads. And another very big one may be cutting the school administrative bloat we see across the state.

Of the two ideas tossed about last week for regionalization, I like state Sen. Cathy Osten's proposal: to regionalize school districts of less than 2,000 kids. That to me seems more manageable, and more realistic, than state Sen. Martin Looney's plan of aligning school districts according to the current map of probate districts. That could create too many unwieldy behemoths.

But Osten's idea....I think it's worth exploring. There are an awful lot of very small towns in the area that have their own school system; they're so small that some of them even employ part-time superintendents. So why not combine a few of them and have, say, one full-time superintendent in place of three or four part-time ones?

To give another example, Andover El-

ementary School's enrollment is cratering – so much so the town is considering converting an entire wing of the school into senior center space. By the 2020-21 school year, it will have fallen more than 100 kids in just a few short years. Why not see what the benefits are of putting Andover with, say, Bolton, or Coventry, or both?

Heck, why not see if putting Andover, Hebron and Marlborough elementary schools together again has value? I know the linking of the school systems didn't work before, and in fact was such a failure towns pulled out altogether. But that was more than 20 years ago, and it is possible to learn from past mistakes. RHAM is a fantastic school system; year in and year out, its test scores are very good. Students from all three towns routinely excel there. Given this, I think it would be presumptuous to figure that expanding RHAM to the elementary school level would automatically be another failure.

And speaking of RHAM, there are over a dozen regional school systems in the state already, and things haven't fallen apart yet. Is it worth seeing if the regionalization concept has enough merit to take it even further? I think so.

I'm not an education expert. I make no claims to be. This may not be a good idea at all. But that's why you take time to discuss it, to study it, to explore it. To just shoot the idea out of the sky without taking the time to talk about it and consider options – which to be honest I'm seeing an awful lot of, both in social media and in print media – is shortsighted.

Because like I said, something needs to change. The old way of doing things is collapsing. The status quo isn't working. This is an idea that could elicit some real change. Let's at least explore it.

* * *

See you next week.

East Hampton Council Considers Delaying Budget Referendum

by Elizabeth Regan

The East Hampton Town Council is contemplating bucking local law by holding off on the 2019-20 local budget referendum until the state approves its own budget – and the move has the support of the two other boards involved in the budget planning process.

Members of the council, Board of Finance and Board of Education at Tuesday's tri-board meeting agreed to explore the legalities of disregarding provisions in the town charter and code book that govern the timing of budget referendums.

The conversation was broached by Councilor Dean Markham as the members of the three boards discussed their thoughts on this year's budget situation and how much of a tax increase residents could tolerate.

"I think there's several things we need to consider," Markham said. "One is, first of all, not to get ourselves too far ahead of the game and maybe seriously consider deferring or delaying our first budget vote until after the legislature has acted."

Newly-elected Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont's budget proposal is due by Feb. 20, according to *The Connecticut Mirror*. He will be looking to close a \$1.5 billion deficit projected for next year.

The governor's recommended budget will be presented to a Democratic majority in both the House and the Senate.

The proposal must be reviewed by the Finance and Appropriations committees of the state legislature; Then hearings will be held, committee votes will be taken, and the proposal will move to the Senate and House floors for a full vote. Lawmakers are slated to adjourn this year on June 5, though there is always the possibility they can do so without an approved budget.

The East Hampton Town Charter requires the Board of Finance to present its budget recommendation to the council by April 15, while ordinance dictates the approved spending plan be presented at the annual budget meeting by the second Monday in May.

Based on fears stoked during the administration of former Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, officials in East Hampton fear continued cuts to state funding for education as well as the possibility that municipalities will soon be asked to fund a portion of teachers' pensions currently paid by the state.

This is not the first time in recent history that the East Hampton Town Council has explored postponing a budget referendum. Councilors in

2017 – when the town was facing a possible \$1.6 million cut in education aid from the state – ultimately decided to put on hold the town-wide budget vote until they had a better idea how much municipal aid the town could expect from the state.

While that year's local budget was approved at the first referendum on June 13, the state budget wasn't signed into law until almost six months later. The final revenue figures from the state showed a \$600,000 cut to the town's share of education aid instead of the much more drastic cut proposed by Malloy.

Despite having put off a budget vote just two years ago, members of the council did not know – and Town Manager Michael Maniscalco could not tell them – what kind of repercussions might result from ignoring the timeline outlined in charter and ordinance.

Town Council Chairman Melissa Engel asked him to look into it.

"I do think the way we do it is out of sequence because we're trying to plan something and we have no idea what the state's doing and that puts us in a very, very bad position," Engel said.

Finance Director Jeff Jylkka said in public

meetings back in 2017 that violating town charter or ordinance could open the door for a lawsuit. He cited the legal remedy known as a "writ of mandamus," which allows citizens to ask a state Superior Court judge to force the council to follow its own rules. But Jylkka and Maniscalco at the time suggested the town would likely pass a budget by the time such a filing could make its way through the court.

Maniscalco at this week's tri-board meeting expressed caution when it comes to making decisions about the budget timeline at this point. He said local leaders will have a better idea "where the revenue estimates are," once Lamont releases his budget proposal in a couple weeks.

"With the governor and the House and Senate seeming to get along right now, it should kind of move forward in a fairly copacetic way," Maniscalco said.

The state Senate was deadlocked the past two years, with 18 members from each party. But Democrats in the November general election captured 24 of the 36 Senate seats.

"So maybe if we wait just a little bit, see what comes out in the governor's budget, see what those revenue estimates look like, then we can make a decision," Maniscalco said.

Marlborough to House Dogs in Glastonbury

by Allison Lazur

Lost or abandoned Marlborough dogs will now be calling Glastonbury's Animal Control Shelter home.

The Marlborough Board of Selectmen unanimously voted Tuesday to enter into a one year agreement with the town of Glastonbury to share its Animal Control Shelter after Marlborough's use of the Colchester pound was impacted by Colchester's decision to regionalize.

Colchester in recent years decided to join the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) Animal Services program which serves a total of 18 towns.

"We've been using the Colchester pound after years and years ago we helped Colchester renovate its pound," Marlborough First Select-

man Amy Traversa said.

In turn, Traversa said the town of Marlborough utilized the renovated pound and paid Colchester \$195 a month to do so.

Traversa said because Colchester "decided to regionalize with towns that are further east" it did not make sense to keep utilizing the facility, as any dog placed there would be "completely isolated." Colchester's dogs are now housed in a pound in Dayville.

She told the *Rivereast* the town is required by state statutes to have the ability to impound a dog in a facility that meets state code.

At the selectmen's meeting Tuesday, she said Marlborough did not join NECCOG because of the town's location away from the cluster of towns already enrolled with the organization. NECCOG serves towns stretching from

Bozrah to Thompson.

Marlborough will pay Glastonbury \$200 a month, which will cover routine upkeep of the shelter spaces Glastonbury Police Chief Marshall Porter said.

The agreement states Marlborough will also be responsible for any costs related to the care of the dog such as veterinary services, food and medication.

Porter said currently the shelter has a "substantial amount of space" and is "usually fairly empty." He said when a canine comes into the facility it is usually a situation of lost dogs placed under a temporary hold until owners can be located or abandoned dogs held until a home can be found.

Traversa said Marlborough has not had a single dog in the pound in over a year.

"The reason we haven't had a dog in the pound is because the town has been very responsible in helping find the owners and making sure all dogs are properly licensed," she said.

Based on the historic lack of dogs in the pound, Traversa said she doesn't believe running out of space at the Glastonbury facility will be an issue.

This is not Marlborough's first move to regionalize animal services. Traversa said for a period of time the town shared an animal control officer with Hebron until a part-time officer was hired last November.

Selectmen also unanimously voted to implement fees to be billed to the owner of an impounded dog – the fee includes \$15 per dog per incident of impoundment and a daily kennel fee for cleaning and feeding of \$10 per dog.

Capital Spending Drives 4.63% Proposed RHAM Budget Increase

by Sloan Brewster

RHAM Superintendent of Schools Patricia Law is asking for 4.63 percent more in funds to cover school expenses next year – and wants to spend \$888,000 on capital projects that she said have been put off "year after year after year."

Law presented her budget proposal at last week's Board of Education meeting.

The requested \$29.78 million in operating expenses, a number that does not include anticipated revenues, marks a 2.45 percent increase over the current year's \$29.19 million budget. Adding the \$888,000 in capital requests – a \$645,000 hike over the current year's capital budget – brings the overall increase to 4.63 percent.

Some of that increase will be offset by an anticipated \$861,000 in revenue, Law said, which reflects a \$25,000 decrease in revenue from the current year. The anticipated revenues include a \$529,000 Excess Cost and Agency Placement Grant from the state and various fees, such as building and instrument rentals, food service payments, pay for play, and student parking, among others.

Law described the "large increase" in capital spending as "very, very necessary."

"Year after year after year, the district continues to push off necessary capital improvement corrections," she said. "Now we're at a point where we cannot ignore them anymore and they've gotten rather large."

For example, she said, one item on the list, a \$15,000 payment for a truck the district leased last year, has to be paid.

An air conditioning unit and an emergency generator that must be purchased together for \$72,000 will protect technical equipment in the event of a power outage, she said.

The list of capital requests also includes \$125,000 in safety issues that Law said she feels "very strongly" about funding. The list includes upgrading surveillance cameras, putting in double-locking doors at the schools' main entrances and installing dugouts on the softball field – a Title IX issue.

Law put a push for fixing the heating ventilation and air conditioning unit and replacing the carpet in the media center, which she said must be done together for \$410,000.

Moisture, dampness, humidity and dehumidification issues have led to odor issues, according to Law, who added that the district has spent two years trying and failing to fix the problems through cheaper alternatives.

"The media center, it smells, it's humid, it's damp," she said. "It needs to be addressed. It needs to be taken care of."

Other requests on the capital list include a \$35,000 feasibility study for a possible turf field project and \$132,000 for an air conditioner for the weight room.

"In the summer, it gets pretty hot in there," she said.

This is not the first time Law has discussed the proposed hike in capital spending. In November, she presented a similar list of capital recommendations to the board, saying they would be included in her 2019-20 budget recommendation. Board members toured RHAM to see the problems and said they needed to get the word to residents that capital needs are safety issues.

Among the proposed additions to operating expenses are \$54,000 to add a guidance counselor Law had removed from the current school year's budget. She said she found that student's

needs were "not being quite met" with the reduction.

School board member Kathleen Goodwin applauded this move, saying crafting a school spending plan "is not always about reducing the budget," she said.

Law also wants to implement a new "special education transition program" to further develop life skills for special education students aged 18 to 21. The program would include educational opportunities and work experiences so the students can continue "to be a part of the community," she said.

The program would require two new full-time paraprofessionals at \$22,000 each, but Law noted it would represent an overall savings to the budget, as the district currently outpaces such transitional services.

Law also said she wants to make some curriculum changes, including new courses that would not require additional staff. Curriculum for the classes would need to be written and an additional art class would be assigned for a total of \$11,000.

Law also proposed adding a full-time athletic director to oversee sports at the middle school and high school rather than using the two part-timers who now each cover one school. The new position would cost about \$24,000 more due to the need for increased certifications, she said.

"We need someone to bring it together as a whole program," Law said. "I firmly believe that having a single person to oversee the program full-time makes sense."

The superintendent also said she wants to bring on a landscaping contractor for \$77,000. The plan would be to contract with a company

that would provide workers and equipment three times a week.

The budget also features some proposed changes to after-hours security – with the chief one being locking the doors between 3:30 p.m. and 11 p.m., when athletic teams and outside organizations use the building.

"We need the building to be locked down," she said. "We are a huge liability."

The plan would be that coaches and certain individuals would have key fobs and a non-certified staff member would monitor the doors and let other people in.

Law also wants to add two specially-designated substitute teachers for \$21,000 who would be there on a daily basis and could cover for sick teachers or during meetings and professional development.

"They know the building," she said. "They get to know the teachers; they are part of our community."

Department requests Law said she did not fund were \$1,000 in new books for the media center, a new elliptical machine for \$5,000, and \$15,000 for a new stage for the music department.

Personal and benefits are fixed costs and entail nearly 62 percent of the budget, Law said.

The board did not spend much time discussing the proposal but will pick the discussion up at its next meeting.

School board member Judy Benson Clarke said she needed time before she asked any questions about the budget, so the information can "marinate."

The next regular board meeting is Monday, Feb. 25, at 6:30 p.m., in the high school music room.

Mary Poppins Takes to the Skies Next Weekend in Colchester

by Allison Lazur

The Colchester Community Theatre will tackle intricate dance numbers, flying, and singing upside down next weekend at its production of Disney and Cameron Mackintosh's *Mary Poppins*.

On the heels of the movie release of *Mary Poppins Returns*, an increased sense of excitement surrounds Colchester's stage performance, said director Wallis Johnson.

Johnson said while theatre-goers can expect the same heartwarming story, there are slight variations from the iconic movie, including different characters, different scenes and a "sassier" Mary Poppins.

The varying aged cast of about 65 will bring to life the story of the Banks family and their nanny Mary Poppins, played by Jessica Engster, who will be making her debut performance with the community theatre.

She told the *Rivereast* Tuesday Mary Poppins is one of her most favorite roles. From the British accent to taking flight, Engster called the role "fantastic" and the production quality "really high."

"I always liked to do a British accent in my spare time," she said. "I loved the show when I was little so it's really fun to get to play one of my favorite roles and also with *Mary Poppins*

Returns coming out its kind of an awesome time so everyone is really excited about it."

Engster will also be captivating the audience from the air with the help of the Kentucky-based professional flying crew, ZFX Inc.

"[Flying has] been fun, but it's definitely a challenge," she said. "It changed the whole dynamic in terms of costumes and physical and mental preparation – it's a different beast. It's not just putting on your clothes and going and remembering your lines."

While Engster has performed a number of shows with other theatre companies she said Tuesday she has not done a "kids show" in a while and said the experience with the children "must be what people who work at Disney World feel like."

"Just the look on the kids' faces in our cast tickles me – It's fun to spread that magic," she said.

Engster will also be joined on stage by Meg Clifton, who will play the role of Bert, the chimneysweep friend of Mary Poppins.

"*Mary Poppins* is a movie I've been in love with since probably around [age] two and both Mary Poppins and Bert were roles I would try to sing at the same time while watching the movie," Clifton said.

Clifton said she turned to her "childhood idol," Dick Van Dyke – who played Bert in the 1964 movie – for inspiration.

"I watched the movie a whole a bunch and I know some people aren't big on doing that, but *Mary Poppins* is such an iconic movie and people have such associations with Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke that for me I thought it would help to try and imitate his mannerisms a little bit because that would be what people are kind of expecting," Clifton said.

While the cast has been rehearsing four times a week since Jan. 3, auditions, costumes and set design begin in November, Johnson said.

"There are a lot of moving parts; the dance numbers are really huge...[and] it's a lot of work for the cast," she said.

Johnson disclosed that about 125 people contributed to putting on the show including in the areas of sound, lighting, stage crew, makeup, hair and a pit orchestra.

Johnson also called the story "relatable" in regard to how the Banks family is busy with work and various activities causing them to become "splintered."

"I think my favorite part of the show is how the Banks family comes back together," she said. "[Mary Poppins] is really saving Mr.

Banks. ... Mr. Banks realizes that his family and wife and children are really what matters; it's a beautiful story."

Johnson said while the shows are funded through ticket and ad sales, the goal of the community theatre is to bring "high quality musical theatre at a really affordable rate" to people.

"I really believe, from my heart, that the Colchester Community Theatre is a part of the fabric of Colchester and I think really what we do is try to give families magic for a weekend," she said.

* * *

Mary Poppins performances take place Friday, Feb. 15, at 7 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 16, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; and Saturday, Feb. 17, at 2 p.m., at the Bacon Academy auditorium located at 611 Norwich Ave.

Ticket prices are \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors and children age 12 and under. Tickets can be purchased online at <https://www.showtix4u.com/events/1750>; in person by cash or check only at Plotkin's Jewelry located at 119 S. Main Street or at Photo Connection located at 199 Old Hartford Rd. Tickets will also be available at the door on performance days subject to availability. However, advance ticket purchase is recommended.

Discovery of Clay Prompts Revisions in Park Budget in Portland

by Elizabeth Regan

The unexpected and expensive discovery of a vein of clay underneath the site of the formative Portland Town Park on Route 17 has led to revisions of the \$6 million project in order to keep the budget in check.

Engineers discovered the abundance of clay while remediating pesticide contamination on the former tobacco farm, according to selectman and former Parks and Recreation Commission chairman Ralph Zampano. The remediation effort involved moving the top layer of contaminated soil from throughout the site to the north hill, which was touted in original plans as a sledding hill.

The town purchased the former tobacco farm from Nelson Goodrich in 2005 for \$510,000 by a vote of 118-13. First Selectman Susan Bransfield said studies done at the time and since then have shown the presence of pesticide contamination from tobacco farming.

Zampano said the clay, which sits under a proposed parking lot and a portion of driveway, doesn't provide a suitable base due to drainage and stability concerns. So the solution was to remove the clay to a certain depth and replace it with layers of fabric, stone and gravel material.

Documents show the unanticipated expense to remediate the clay situation came to \$173,600, plus \$59,900 to bring in gravel that officials originally hoped they'd be able to find onsite.

Zampano, an ex officio member of the Route 17 Recreational Complex Building Committee, said there is \$30,462 remaining in contingency funds set aside to cover unforeseen expenses. Officials budgeted approximately \$237,000 in contingency to start with.

Zampano said any contaminated soil from the site was "stripped off and landed on top of the hill, and [was] safely covered with a good, solid layer of clean topsoil."

He said it's not yet clear if the hill ultimately will be used for sledding. But he said concerns about height and steepness – not contamination – are driving that conversation.

"There's enough clean material so there's not a concern," he said.

A hill on the east side of the site will definitely be used for sledding, according to Zampano.

Bransfield said it's hard to find any former tobacco farms that haven't been contaminated by pesticides.

"This has been a known situation before we even contemplated buying the property," she said.

Bransfield and Zampano noted farmers who have leased space on the site since 2005 have contributed to remediating the soil in a natural way simply by aerating it through planting.

Project engineer Norman Ward, of Weston & Sampson, said previous and current site investigations found varying concentrations of pesticides in the soil of areas that had been cultivated for tobacco.

"In general, pesticide levels on site are low and most other agricultural fields in Connecticut have concentrations upwards of 10 times the amount exhibited on this project," he wrote in an email.

Levels of dieldrin found in the soil came in at a maximum of 0.071 mg/kg, which exceeds state limits of 0.038 mg/kg.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency states exposure to dieldrin results mostly from eating contaminated foods. Dieldrin builds up in the body after years of exposure and can affect the nervous system.

The EPA said dieldrin was widely used as a pesticide from the 1950s until 1970, when concerns about damage to the environment and potential harm to human health resulted in its ban – except to control termites. In 1987, the EPA banned the pesticide completely.

Another identified chemical, chlordane, fell below the state's threshold for concern, according to Ward.

Ward said the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection did not require extensive remediation or capping of soil. The agency instead called for the typical four inches of clean soil and vegetative cover placed above pesticide impacted soil as part of the site's turf management plan.

Inland Wetlands Commission members approved the project in October 2017. Meeting minutes indicate Joseph Perugini, of Weston & Sampson, noted "some low levels of pesticides present on the site" that would need to be capped in accordance with DEEP regulations.

An invoice from DeRita & Sons Construction Company, dated Dec. 31, shows the town originally budgeted \$96,240 to strip contaminated topsoil and \$20,415 to strip clean topsoil. The line item for moving the soil to its new location amounts to \$352,320.

Resident Aaron Skelton told the *Rivereast* he's not at all concerned about pesticides in the soil of the town park.

As a foreman for a drilling company, Skelton said he has a lot of experience on job sites where hazardous chemicals are present.

He said signs of extensive contamination yield a comprehensive response from DEEP officials that includes daily reports, soil samples, and stringent requirements regarding personal protective equipment for workers and vehicle washing to prevent the tracking of dirt off site.

"We don't see that happening, and the site isn't even fenced off so I would presume that while a certain chemical in question is present, it's not considered a hazard by those highly-qualified individuals who rely on science and evidence to make their decisions," he said.

Acknowledging Portland's history as an agricultural town, Skelton said many residents' homes are sitting on previous tobacco or corn farms that were sprayed with pesticides. And most of those residents probably haven't tested their own soil, he surmised.

"We know the soil was tested [on the park site] and levels of different hazards identified," he said. "This is where the fear-of-chemicals ideology takes over and most people stop reading [the newspaper] and yell from a hilltop, 'There's poison in the dirt.'"

He advised those with concerns to continue gathering information. Relevant questions could involve safe levels of the identified chemicals, how they should be handled, whether they break

down and what causes them to break down, if they can migrate to waterways and wells, and what precautions need to be taken if removal isn't necessary.

Skelton said he would happily sled down the hill with his toddler.

Cost-Saving Measures

Three rounds of change orders to revise the amount of the construction contract have resulted in savings in several areas for a total of \$290,392. Cost-cutting measures site-wide include using different materials for curbing, retaining walls, and fencing than originally budgeted. The concessions building will have cheaper alternatives for walls, siding, flooring and roofing.

Among the first round of changes was the elimination of the fitness circuit to save \$60,000.

Zampano said he is hopeful that the fitness circuit can be added later in the project if the budget allows. He indicated it's an area that could potentially be addressed through grant funding as well.

A baseball field "warning track," which is designed to enhance safety for outfielders, was eliminated from the plan. So was the one scoreboard that had been included in the original budget.

Zampano said there are additional measures the committee can take to increase the contingency fund going forward. He said one possibility is eliminating a sidewalk in the front of the park.

He remains hopeful there won't be many more budget surprises.

The Dec. 31 invoice from the contractor said construction is 36 percent complete.

"The expectation is that we're through the tougher part of the project, where you're going underground [and] you don't know what you're going to run into," Zampano said. "With the exception of a very small part in the front, you've really gone through the park and done all the digging. Whatever you're going to encounter, you've encountered."

Man Gets Five Years for Portland Arrigoni Bridge Death

by Elizabeth Regan

A Middletown Superior Court judge last Thursday sentenced a Middletown man to five years in prison for "reckless and callous" behavior that resulted in the death of a 22-year-old man on the Arrigoni Bridge in 2017.

Khavar McDonald, 27, of Middletown, pleaded no contest to charges of negligent homicide with a motor vehicle and evading responsibility after police said he struck Daquan Moore, of Middletown. Moore was riding a motor scooter eastbound on the Portland half of the bridge when he was killed.

In addition to five years in prison, McDonald was sentenced to five years' probation with a host of conditions.

Judge Maureen Keegan at the sentencing hearing said McDonald was reckless because he was speeding on the bridge when he hit Moore. She said he was callous because he did not stop to render aid and because he took steps to hide evidence of the crime.

McDonald sat next to his attorney, Gerald Klein of Hartford. A photo collage of Moore's life faced them.

A large group of Moore's family and friends filled the first several rows of the courtroom, with a much smaller contingent sitting behind them in support of McDonald.

Moore's mother, Wilma, spoke at the emotional hearing as one of almost a dozen members of Moore's family asking Keegan for justice.

"I don't understand how someone could hit another person and just leave him there," Wilma Moore said.

The back of her T-shirt was a memorial to her son with a photo and a message: "It's hard to forget someone who gave you so much to remember."

She said she thanks God that nobody else's child got killed that day.

Moore's sister addressed McDonald directly when it was her turn to speak.

"You took away my best friend," she sobbed.

The arrest warrant affidavit by Portland Police Officer Paul Liseo said the crash occurred on Nov. 4, 2017, when Moore's moped 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.

The arrest warrant said McDonald left the scene without stopping before he turned around in Portland and passed by the scene of the crime on his way back into Middletown. Jacqueline Burchard, a passenger in the car identified in the warrant as McDonald's girlfriend, told police they then dropped off the car at a storage unit in Middlefield.

The warrant said Klein contacted the Middlesex Superior Court's state's attorney's office two days later to turn over the vehicle.

Portland police spent the next several months building a case against McDonald that tied the car to the scene and McDonald to the car, the warrant shows. He was arrested in April 2018.

Assistant State's Attorney Steve Lesko told Keegan during the hearing that Moore's death could have been prevented if McDonald was adhering to traffic laws. He said McDonald's failure to stop and his "series of deliberate actions" to evade responsibility merit a strict sentence.

"Accidents do happen, but it's expected we will conduct ourselves in a responsible manner" after the fact, Lesko said.

McDonald's attorney asked the judge for leniency, noting the state could not prove McDonald was racing another vehicle at the time of the crash and that the case did not involve alcohol or drugs.

The remark about drugs or alcohol elicited a

reaction – with one person asking aloud "How do we know that?" – from Moore's family and friends.

Klein described McDonald as a naturalized U.S. citizen and a high school graduate who has "never been without a job." McDonald had no criminal record prior to the events on the Arrigoni Bridge on that November night in 2017, according to Klein.

"He's not a thief. He's not a drug dealer. He's not a violent individual, as far as I can see," Klein said.

While acknowledging that "clearly, he should have stopped," Klein said his client's evasion of responsibility did not prevent a quick emergency response after Moore was struck. He said 911 calls from passing motorists yielded an immediate emergency response.

McDonald declined to make a statement at the hearing.

In announcing the sentence, Keegan noted the "palpable" effect of Moore's death on the family members filling the seats of the courtroom.

"Anyone sitting here today can feel their loss," she said.

Keegan described the need to balance McDonald's "reckless and callous" behavior with his lack of a prior criminal record, a "limited history" of substance use, and support from his family and employer.

"Part of your sentence will be examining yourself," she told the defendant.

McDonald in December struck a conditional plea deal for four years in prison and five years of probation. But Keegan at the sentencing hearing tacked on an additional year in prison based on McDonald's arrest just last month on charges related to a single-vehicle crash.

McDonald was charged Jan. 21 with improper use of a license plate, operating an un-

registered motor vehicle, failure to carry an insurance card and traveling too fast for conditions.

Lesko argued the charges represented a breach of the conditional plea agreement.

Alleging the license plate was not on the car when police arrived at the scene of the Jan. 21 crash, Lesko said the attempt to conceal the plate "speaks directly to what happened" when McDonald evaded responsibility after hitting Moore.

"It appears the defendant just doesn't get it," Lesko said.

Keegan concurred, finding the subsequent motor vehicle charges merited "a greater sentence."

The sentence of five years in prison and five years' probation includes eight conditions once he is released. He will not be allowed to drive or consume alcohol during probation and will be required to perform 100 hours of community service. He will also be required to submit to substance abuse evaluation and any recommended treatment as well as random urinalysis and breathalyzer testing.

Liseo, the arresting officer from Portland, said after the hearing that the sentence represented "some closure" for Moore's family.

Wilma Moore voiced a similar sentiment in the lobby of the courthouse as she spoke to reporters.

"At least we can get some type of closure," she said.

Having waged her fight for justice "since day one," she said she will continue fighting to ensure McDonald completes his full sentence.

Liseo said a man reported by a witness to have been racing McDonald on the bridge that night will not be facing charges, because police can't prove racing was involved.

Sunday Fundraiser to Support Andover Senior Luncheons

by Sloan Brewster

A fundraiser Sunday at Andover Elementary School will support weekly senior luncheons.

Every Friday, seniors meet at Andover Pizza for a hot meal that includes a main course such as pasta or meat, veggies, salad, rolls, beverages, coffee and dessert, Cathy Palazzi, senior coordinator, said.

Seniors pay \$5 for the meal and a fund held by the town covers the rest; the fundraiser will support that fund.

Palazzi started the luncheon program eight years ago. For the first five years she held fundraisers in her home to support the meals.

Smaller affairs than the event taking place Sunday, the fundraisers at Palazzi's home offered admittance by invitation only. Palazzi donated the food and raffle prizes were donated by shops in town and in nearby towns.

Tables were set up and savories and teas served while folks purchased raffle tickets and prizes were awarded. All the guests went home with something.

"Everybody was so generous," Palazzi said. "It was wonderful."

All proceeds, which according to Palazzi usually amounted to about \$1,000, went to the luncheons.

"It always took care of our luncheons," she said. "That was eight years ago; it was cheaper."

After holding the fundraisers for five years, Palazzi stopped and instead advertised a request for donations.

She was pleasantly surprised when local veteran Gerald Wright gave her a \$1,000 check – money he got after selling a John Deere tractor, Palazzi said. The tractor had initially come from her; it had been her father's and she had sold it to Wright. When he decided he could no longer use it, he sold it and gave her the money, a gesture that touched her deeply.

"He's an awesome guy," she said.

Last year, Palazzi held a fundraiser in the

community room in Town Hall. It was so well-attended that she had to turn people away for fire code reasons. That's why she moved this year's affair to the bigger space in the school.

With 37 vendors, kids' booths, baked goods and entertainment by local musician Tony Susi, it promises fun for the entire family, Palazzi said.

"I have some awesome, awesome vendors," she said.

Susi will sing and play guitar on the stage while folks meander through the booths checking out wares by local artisans and crafters, including handmade candles, cosmetics and oils, crocheted items, jewelry and clothing. There will be a bake sale with goods donated by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Andover Fire Department as well as coffee and refreshments.

Raffles, with prizes donated by vendors will also be offered as well as a 50/50 raffle, in which half the total ticket sales will be split between the winner and the luncheon fund.

Last year's raffle winner took home about \$250, Palazzi said.

"She took a good sum home and then we had a good sum in our kitty that we were happy about," Palazzi said.

There will also be gift baskets, some will be available for straight purchase and others will be included in a silent auction.

The baskets, which were made by Town Clerk Carol Lee and Assistant Town Clerk Therese Gorry, include gift certificates and other items, most of which were donated, Gorry said. There are baskets for children, kitchen baskets and gift baskets for Mother's Day and Valentine's Day.

"[There are] all sorts of gizmos and gadgets in these baskets – jewelry [and] tea baskets," Gorry said.

As of Thursday, 50 baskets were tied up and ready for the fundraisers.

Recently the senior luncheons have gone up



Gift baskets for children, kitchens and Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, among other things will be available at a fundraiser Sunday for the senior luncheons. The baskets were made by Town Clerk Carol Lee and Assistant Town Clerk Therese Gorry, and are filled with all sorts of "gizmos and gadgets," Gorry said, as well as gift certificates.

in price, Palazzi said. In past years, when the meals were delivered to seniors at the now-shuttered Old Firehouse, they cost \$7.50 for each meal, with the seniors paying \$5 and the \$2.50 balance coming from the luncheon fund. But after the move to Andover Pizza, Palazzi said, the meals have gone up to between \$8.50 and \$10 each – adding that one reason for the increase is that a tip is needed for the wait staff at the restaurant.

Seniors still pay their \$5, so the fund needs to pay the higher balance, she said. This year the town contributed \$1,000 to the fund, and this week Palazzi requested the same amount be included in next year's budget.

In September, the lunches were moved to the restaurant because the center was not able to get a permit from the Eastern Highlands Health District as the kitchen was not in compliance with town and state health codes.

Then, in October, selectmen officially closed the building after air quality tests confirmed what folks around town have said they have known for decades – it is infested with mold.

The fundraiser takes place Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Andover Elementary School.

"We just pray that we get a lot of people out there," she said. "We want them to have fun, we want the vendors to have fun and we want to make some money for the seniors."

Architect Hired for Andover School Conversion, But Questions Remain

by Sloan Brewster

The Board of Selectmen has officially hired the architect that will complete a feasibility study for converting the third and fourth grade wing at Andover Elementary School into a community or senior center – but the memo of understanding between selectmen and the Board of Education for use of the wing remains unsigned.

At Wednesday's Board of Selectmen meeting, the board agreed to hire Silver/Petrucelli and Associates, the architect the Board of Education selected last month. The cost of the feasibility study must not exceed \$10,000. The money will come from the school improvement fund, which has about \$117,000, selectmen said.

At the same meeting, Selectman Julie Haverl pulled a motion that would have authorized First Selectman Robert Burbank to sign the memo of understanding after some selectmen raised concerns that the most recent version of the document did not address comments made at a public hearing last month on use of the wing – specifically, those about security.

Jeff Maguire, vice first selectman, also said he needed more time to mull over the docu-

ment.

"We're going to approve something that we haven't read because I haven't read this yet," Maguire said. "What I have a problem with [is] I didn't get the document until I sat down here."

The memo has been passed back and forth between the two commissions for a few months as they and their attorneys tweak it and consider each new version. At Wednesday's meeting, Superintendent of Schools Sally Doyen handed in the latest version.

Maguire was not the only one to raise a red flag about the memo.

"At the public hearing, there were comments made about the space not being used for community use," selectman Cathleen Desrosiers said. "I never heard anything about that."

During the public hearing several speakers said having people in the space during the school day was a security concern.

Resident Lori Blake and School Nurse Karen Zito were among those who said they worried about the children's safety. Using the space exclusively for seniors, at least during the day, would allay some of the concerns, Blake said.

"Using it at night is not a concern," she said

at last month's hearing. "It's just during the school day."

Doyen said Wednesday the education board did not specifically address the matter in the memo, but that it was one of the things the architects are charged with addressing in the feasibility study.

"There's a lot of detail about security and there are many different ways that security would be provided for that particular wing, background checks when needed, very limited access to that facility, no access [from the wing] to the rest of the school," Doyen said. "Security is one of the biggest issues in the whole project."

Haverl said certain security measures were pointed out several times in the document.

Maguire asked Doyen specifically if the memo stated that the wing would be exclusively for seniors – at least for the first year while town officials hashed out how to address security issues – and when Doyen said 'no,' Maguire flatly said he would not vote to sign the memo.

Maguire also had concerns that Town Attorney Dennis O'Brien had not specifically cleared the document for signing by selectmen.

"Have you brought it to Dennis and had him review this on behalf of the Board of Selectmen?" he asked Burbank, grumbling that O'Brien was working with the Board of Education and not Selectmen on the document.

Maguire said he had asked O'Brien if he had specifically been asked to review it for selectmen and was told he had not been requested to do so, but Burbank said he had asked him to review it and assumed he knew it was for the Board of Selectmen.

"I asked him to review this; I did not say specifically for the Board of Selectmen," he said. "He said he'd been in constant discussions with Sally and their attorney."

In October, selectmen officially closed the Old Firehouse, where the senior center had been located, after air quality tests confirmed what folks around town have said they have known for decades – it is infested with mold. The Board of Education subsequently offered the wing, which is largely vacant due to declining enrollment.

Selectmen will consider signing the document at a budget meeting Monday.



Last Thursday, Hebron Community Emergency Response Team [CERT] responded to assist the Glastonbury Police Department in a search and rescue effort for a lost hiker. CERT's staging area was near the pond at Gay City State Park in Hebron (shown left). The hiker was found in adjoining woods in Glastonbury near the Hebron town line (shown left).

Shared Hebron Ambulance to Enhance Civilian Emergency Response

by Sloan Brewster

A retired Hebron ambulance will be shared by three towns and used for a variety of purposes.

The Community Emergency Response Teams [CERTs] from each of the three towns – Hebron, Andover and Marlborough – will use the old vehicle, as will RHAM High School.

Last month, the Hebron Board of Selectmen endorsed the transfer of an old ambulance currently in use by the Hebron Fire Department to the Department of Emergency Management upon the receipt of a new ambulance.

In December, selectmen awarded a \$221,000 bid for a new ambulance to replace the aging one, which, according to Fire Chief Nick Wallick, was purchased in 2002 and is still in service but “overdue for a replacement.”

In December, the Andover Board of Selectmen also supported the idea.

Both boards said funding for the ambulance's maintenance and fuel would be included in next year's budget.

Hebron Emergency Management Director Paul Bancroft said Marlborough's Roy B. Pettengill Ambulance Association has verbally agreed to fund the ambulance for that town's emergency response team, but it has not been formally approved.

The ambulance would have been useful for a

recent operation, according to Bancroft.

Last Wednesday, Hebron CERT was called to assist the Glastonbury Police Department with a search and rescue effort for a lost hiker, he said. The hiker was lost in the woods on a trail system that connected to Gay City State Park, in Hebron.

The CERT staging area was on the Hebron side, near the pond at Gay City, Bancroft said.

“That would have been an ideal use for the vehicle – as shelter from the severe cold and snow and as a mobile command post,” he said. “That's a capability we don't have now, especially in the winter.”

Corey Davis, public information officer with the Glastonbury Police Department, said the hiker was rescued at 5 p.m. in the woods on Birch Mountain Road behind Horizon Lane. The uninjured hiker was in Glastonbury near the Hebron town line.

The local emergency response teams will use the ambulance to move cones and barriers in traffic control operations and to provide visibility when members are on the roads, according to Bancroft.

“So it will increase their safety because they'll have more visibility,” he said. “It's a large vehicle they can shelter behind. It's a safety issue for the team.”

It will also serve as a command post, as it would have during the search and rescue operation, with someone in the vehicle manning the radio.

The ambulance will be used for an Emergency Medical Technician [EMT] certification course that will be offered at RHAM High School next year, Bancroft said.

“So having an actual ambulance to train in is ideal,” he said.

Bancroft described CERT as a training program for civilians.

The training serves dual roles in the three towns, he said. The primary focus is for disaster response.

CERT started on the West Coast when officials realized that in major disasters first responders could be stalled.

“People were dying,” Bancroft said. “The idea was to provide some basic training to civilians so they can hold their own while they're waiting for the first responders.”

CERT members receive training in first aid, triage, the use of fire extinguishers, turning utilities off, organizing people with skills, communicating with first responders, dealing with victims and some light search and rescue skills.

“In major disasters such as category 3 hurricanes, the CERTs would take care of their fami-

lies and their friends and neighbors while waiting for help to reach them,” Bancroft said. “Once the immediate crisis passes, they open disaster shelters and distribute food and water to the population.”

On a day to day, non-disaster basis the team keeps skills sharp by getting involved in local events, such as fairs, festivals and races.

The secondary role for the team is to offer traffic control and first aid during those events and for local parades.

Basic CERT training is composed of 24 hours of classes and is usually spread over multiple weekends, Bancroft said. A new course will take place in Marlborough this month through June. Folks from Hebron or Andover can take the class to be certified in their towns.

“We need more [people],” Bancroft said. “We're encouraging people to take the class in Marlborough.”

Basic CERT training will be held in Marlborough on the fourth Sunday of the month from February through June (2/24, 3/24, 4/28, May TBD, 6/23) from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. May is TBD because the fourth Sunday falls on the Memorial Day holiday weekend. Classes will be held at Marlborough Town Hall.

Anyone interested in taking the course should contact jennifer.c.pietrzak@gmail.com.

Hebron Grand List Sees 2.34 Percent Increase

by Sloan Brewster

Hebron's 2018 Grand List has come in, and the net list reflects a 2.34 percent increase over 2017.

Town Manager Andrew Tierney said the modest increase is good news overall.

“It's going up, [though] not as much as we'd like,” Tierney said. “We're going to strive to get more, but it's going in a positive direction.”

Assessor Debra Gernhardt said the October 1, 2018 net Grand List came in at \$778.56 million, an increase of \$17.78 million, or 2.34 percent, over 2017.

Number one on the tax roll goes to Colebrook Village, despite a tax incentive that reduces the tax burden on the facility for five years. The 113-unit 113,630-square-foot senior living facility is nestled in the Village Green District on John E. Horton Boulevard behind CVS.

For assessor's purposes, the assisted living facility appears at the top of the Grand List with its full assessment of \$12.40 million. But tax bills will actually be calculated based on a \$2.87 million incentivized assessment.

“If they did have to pay taxes without this [Economic Development Commission] tax cut they would be the highest [taxpayer],” Gernhardt said.

Connecticut Light & Power, known as Eversource, is number two on the list with an assessment of \$11 million. Hebron Lincoln LLC, which is the CVS at 110 Main Street, is third with an assessment of \$2.5 million. They are followed by Connecticut Water Company

at \$1.96 million, Village Shoppes LLC at \$1.84 million, Hebron Country Manor at \$1.81 million, Hebron Properties LLC at \$1.51 million, Blackledge Country Club Inc. at \$1.47 million, 41-61 Main Street at \$1.31 million, and Toyota Lease Trust at \$981,600.

The Top 10 list includes all three parts of the Grand List – real estate, personal property and motor vehicles, Gernhardt said.

Personal property soared 20.75 percent over the previous year, she said. Totals rose from \$16.22 million in 2017 to \$20 million.

The increase is due to the completion of Colebrook Village and to Eversource, which had to run power lines to a new subdivision on the south end of town, Gernhardt said. Connecticut Natural Gas also had an increase in personal property due to the installation of new underground lines through the center of town.

Real estate went up to \$682 million, a \$13 million – or 1.89 percent – increase over the previous year's \$669.31 million.

Gernhardt attributed the increase to new residential construction.

Motor vehicles went up to \$77.04 million, a \$1.78 million increase over the previous year's \$76 million.

The net totals are the numbers before reductions due to tax exemptions, Gernhardt explained. Once the numbers are tweaked to account for the cuts, the Grand List comes in at \$768.72 million, an increase of \$10.58 million

or 1.4 percent over 2017.

The biggest exemption goes to Colebrook Village, or Hebron Senior Living LLC. Colebrook Village opened last May and is in the second year of a five-year tax incentive that, according to Tierney, helped bring the facility to town.

The company has refused to build in towns where incentives were not offered, Tierney said, reiterating it would ultimately be the number one taxpayer.

“The tax incentive is working,” he said. “Before you know it, [taxes for the facility] will be at 100 percent.”

Personal property is not included in the tax break, Gernhardt said.

The other reduction goes to homeowners with crumbling foundations.

“[There are] three [properties] that have been reassessed to take into consideration that their foundation is in poor condition, so it kind of reduces their assessment drastically,” Gernhardt said. “We had four; one had his foundation replaced.”

The reductions are due to Public Act 16-45, which allows individuals with crumbling foundations, who provide an engineer's report at inspection, to have their assessments reduced for up to five years, Gernhardt said. The amount of the reduction depends on the severity of the crumbling foundation.

Gernhardt said she followed the reduction

recommendations issued by the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CROG).

CROG's guidelines, which are available online, suggest a 20 percent reduction for foundations deemed defective through petrographic analysis but with no noticeable signs of problems. For foundations with minor degradation, with no repair required, a 60 percent reduction is advised. For foundations with minor to moderate degradation with repair recommended, the reduction would be 75 percent. For foundations with moderate to severe degradation requiring significant repair, 90 percent reductions would be applied. For foundations with severe degradation and imminent threat of failure, the discount would be 100 percent off the building's value.

There are potentially 36 towns that have homes affected with crumbling foundations, according to the CROG website.

The Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection's website identifies concrete aggregate from Becker's Quarry, in Willington, as the source of the problem. The material contains more than trace amounts of pyrrhotite.

The mineral was affected by moisture and water, causing the foundations to fail, Gernhardt said. Some of the buildings with the defects have even been condemned.

As of press time, Gernhardt was scheduled to present the Grand List to the Board of Selectmen at its meeting Thursday.

Obituaries

East Hampton

Stephen M. Banning

06/07/1955 - 01/31/2019

Stephen M. Banning, 63, of East Hampton, passed away peacefully Thursday, Jan. 31, with his family by his side after his last valiant effort to defeat his cancer. Steve is the second of six children of the late Joseph Banning and Barbara (Ackley) Banning.



Steve was a Master Carpenter most of his life, after starting at his father's side when he was 16 years old. He spent many years learning the trade and went on to have his own successful businesses. After his first diagnosis in 2011, he was no longer able to enjoy his trade and moved onto other journeys, but he was always willing to lend his hand as well as his expertise to anyone that needed it.

Steve volunteered for over 15 years at the Old Home Day Festival. Every year, without being asked, he would go down and meticulously construct the dance floor for everyone's enjoyment and then go back on the day after the festival and deconstruct it for another year. He also spent many years volunteering at Amazing Grace Food Pantry in Middletown CT, where all of the staff and people loved him.

Besides his mother, Steve leaves behind his four children, Stephanie (Jim) Froncak and his grandchildren Natalie, Nicholas and Lukas of Savannah, GA, Stephen Banning of Boston, MA, Rachel (Luis) Banning of Middletown, CT and their mother Elizabeth (Sweet) Banning, Alise Banning and her sister Alex Tupper, as well as their mother Sheri Taylor; his siblings Joseph Banning, Dennis Banning, Laura (Ron) Landry, Karen (Rob) Ennen as well as several nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles and cousins.

Stephen was predeceased by his father Joseph Banning, his brother Richard (Dick) Banning and his nephew Andrew Ennen.

A celebration of life service is planned for Saturday, Feb. 9, at 2 p.m., at the VFW, 20 North Maple St., East Hampton, with light refreshments immediately after. Burial will be at the convenience of the family. There will be no calling hours.

In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to Amazing Grace Food Pantry, 16 Stack St, Middletown, CT 06457

Abbey Cremation Services is in charge of the arrangements.

East Hampton

Nancy Strong Pratt

Nancy Strong Pratt, 84, of East Hampton, beloved wife of the late John H. Pratt, passed away Friday, Feb. 1. Born Sept. 11, 1934, in Middletown, she was the daughter of the late Clarence H. Strong and Ann Orth. She resided in East Hampton for most of her life.



A devoted mother and wife, Nancy always placed the well-being of her family first. She worked at Doctor Louis Soreff's practice and Connecticut Bank and Trust. Nancy assisted with her husband's businesses, helping with billing and bookkeeping for United Rental/Rent it, Inc. She was active in the day-to-day operation of East Hartford Power Equipment. Nancy cherished her family and loved to be with them. She will be missed, but always remembered.

Nancy is survived by four sons, Ronald J. Pratt and his wife Colleen (Hall) of East Hampton, Steven G. Pratt of Thatcher, Ariz., Craig J. Pratt and his wife Colleen (Connelly) of East Hampton, Chris R. Pratt of Thatcher, Ariz.~ eight grandchildren, Christen, Craig, Elliot, Garret, Sheryl Beth, Jeffrey, Gregory and Haley; three great-grandchildren, Craig, Abigail and Marjorie.

Nancy was predeceased by her husband, John H. Pratt, and their son, Richard S. Pratt.

The family would like to thank all staff at Cobalt Lodge Healthcare and Middlesex Hospital Hospice.

Friends may call at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, today, Feb. 8, from 6-8 p.m. Burial will be private at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the East Hampton Food Bank.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Colchester

Walter Shumbo

Walter Shumbo of Colchester had a specific destination two years ago. He boarded a Carnival Cruise Line ship for Hawaii, having one of the best times of his life. He had the hope that one day some family members and friends would visit him there. Sadly, Walter passed away from cancer in Hilo, Hawaii, Saturday, Dec. 22, 2018, at 63.



Born in Connecticut, he spent most of his life there, attending East Haddam Elementary and Hale-Ray High School. He lived in several places in the following years: California, Catalina Island and Block Island. During his life, he had various occupations but loved working with his hands. Walter liked living near the ocean, fishing and spending time at a beach. He had a theme-oriented talent for creating very detailed miniature buildings out of book matches and toothpicks, carving walking canes out of tree branches and building unique bird houses. His passion was music by The Beatles, owning Beatles T-shirts and he was an avid collector of Beatles photos.

He is survived by his mother, Ruth (Zeleny) Shumbo and her companion, Austin Gardner of Colchester; brothers, Theodore Shumbo and his wife Jennifer of East Hampton, Joseph Shumbo and his companion Kim Pruitt and daughters Caley and Corrin of New Hartford, Thomas Shumbo and his wife Dawn of Colchester; two half-brothers, Steven Shumbo and his wife Kim, their children, Braden and Samantha of Plainville, Alan Shumbo of Farmington; a half-sister, Lisa Elliot of Manchester. Walter also leaves several nieces and nephews, Lesley Kapernaros, husband Dean and son Blake of East Hampton, Sarah Palmer and companion Josh Harris and their children, Barrett, Jaxson, Olivia and Ella of Englewood, Fla., Austin Shumbo and fiancé Katy Petrie of Smyrna, Ga., Ashley Shumbo and companion Ryan Wetmore of Colchester, Jake Shumbo of Colchester; and many aunts, cousins and extended family in the Shumbo and Zeleny families.

Walter was predeceased by his father, Theodore E. Shumbo Sr., and grandparents, Bertha and Richard Zeleny and Mary and Stanley Shumbo, all of whom were of Moodus.

Visitation is Saturday, Feb. 9, from 10-11 a.m., at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, before an 11 a.m. chapel service. Burial will be private.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

East Hampton

Judith Morrow

Judith (Zocco) Morrow, 73, of East Hampton, beloved wife of Hubert Morrow, died Friday, Feb. 1, at her home, surrounded by her loving family. Born March 29, 1945, in Brooklyn, N.Y., she was the daughter of the late Paul and Natalia (Zitkor) Zocco Jr.



Judith was a communicant of St. Patrick Church in East Hampton. Before her retirement she had worked for Companion Services, The Hartford Insurance, Hartford National Bank and Windsor Federal Bank.

Besides her husband, she is survived by her son, David Morrow and his partner Diane Lux of Vernon; three daughters, Suzanne Morrow of East Hampton, Lynne Morrow of East Hampton, Beth Anne Morrow of Coventry; brothers, George Zocco and partner Joanne Johnson of Rocky Hill, Peter Zocco of South Windsor; sisters, Josephine Loomis of Wethersfield, Gloria DuBois of Granby; several nieces and nephews; and her beloved grandchildren, Joseph, Corey and Kaitlyn.

Friends called at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Thursday, Feb. 7. A funeral liturgy will be celebrated today, Feb. 8, at 10 a.m., in St. Patrick Church, East Hampton, with burial in Rose Hill Cemetery in Rocky Hill.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Colchester

John James Hirsch

John James Hirsch, 68, of Colchester, passed away in Hartford Sunday, Feb. 3, following a short battle with cancer. He was surrounded by his loving family. Born Jan. 26, 1951, in Nyack, N.Y., he was the son of the late John and Charlotte (née Bernhardt) Hirsch.



From a young age, he showed a proficiency in both music and engineering. He skillfully played violin for many years, before learning to play the tuba so that he could join his high school marching band. Under the loving guidance of his father, a machinist and World War II veteran, he learned how to fix just about anything, and created his own inventions, including a go-kart made with a lawnmower engine.

After graduating from Clarkstown High School in New City, N.Y., in 1969, he attended Manhattan College in New York City, majoring in civil engineering. While at school he worked as an electrician to support himself, and joined a music fraternity. After graduating from college in 1973, he went on to a long and distinguished career as a nuclear engineer, working for Electric Boat, Northeast Utilities and Pratt & Whitney over his 46 years in the field. He loved his job, and was known for evading questions about specific details, because most of his work was classified.

His love of music remained a constant throughout his life. He performed in musical theater in New London County and won the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center award for Best Actor in a Musical for his performance in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* in 1976. The award was presented to him by esteemed actor James Earl Jones. He sang in the Colchester Federated Church choir for almost 40 years, performed with the Colchester Community Orchestra, and most recently found joy singing with the Electric Boat a capella group, the SubTones, performing for senators, governors and military leaders.

John was devoted to his community, most notably volunteering as a fireman with the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company for over 25 years. During that time he served as president and sat on the board of directors of the firehouse. He was also active in his local Jaycees chapter and spent many happy years volunteering as a coach with Colchester Youth Soccer. Faith was important to John and he was a member of the Colchester Federated Church for 39 years. During that time he served on many committees, and was recently honored with the distinction Deacon Emeritus of his congregation.

But most of all, John loved spending time with his family and friends. He was the first to offer help when someone needed it, and never complained about the trouble. He loved holidays (particularly Christmas), traveling with his beloved wife, especially in their motorhome, spending time with his three children, and doting on his granddaughter.

He is survived by his wife of 41 years, Shelly (née Hamel) Hirsch; his daughter, Lisa Hirsch Lozano and her husband Gualberto of Los Angeles, Calif.; daughter, Megan Hirsch and her partner Jeffery Strong of East Hampton; son, John Eric Hirsch of Los Angeles, Calif.; granddaughter, Diana Lozano of Los Angeles, Calif.; sister, Judith Hirsch and her husband Angel Alicea of Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.; parents-in-law, Joseph and Mary Hamel of Niantic; brother-in-law, Joseph Hamel and his wife Carol of Syracuse, N.Y.; and several nieces and nephews.

He is predeceased by his parents and his brother-in-law, Eric Hamel.

The family received guests Thursday, Feb. 7, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A Celebration of his Life will be observed at 10 a.m. today, Feb. 8, directly at the Colchester Federated Church, 60 Main St. in Colchester. Burial will follow in Linwood Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks for donations to the Colchester Federated Church or the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company.

Tractor-Trailer Overturns, Closes Route 2

A tractor-trailer that overturned Tuesday morning left the driver with minor injuries, the road closed for about seven hours, and caused a diesel leak.

At approximately 3:32 a.m. a tractor-trailer driven by John Puzio, 61, of 115 Bergen St., Garfield, N.J., was traveling eastbound on Route 2 near exit 17 when the vehicle exited the left side of the roadway and overturned next to an embankment, police said.

The Colchester Fire Department said both eastbound lanes were closed about one mile before Exit 18. One lane reopened at approximately 4:30 a.m. and the second at about 11:35

a.m.

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection responded to the scene for a diesel leak.

DEEP spokesman Chris Collibe said the department did not serve a “primary role” in the incident because of the likelihood the tractor-trailer was only carrying 50 to 100 gallons of diesel fuel.

Puzio was transported by Colchester Fire Department to Backus Hospital with suspected minor injuries and was issued an infraction for failure to maintain lane, police said.

East Hampton Police News

1/26: After an investigation into a one-car motor vehicle crash, Maria Pouliot, 56, of 717 Myrtle St., New Britain, was arrested and charged with driving under the influence and failure to drive right, East Hampton Police said.

1/30: After an investigation into a one-car motor vehicle crash on Middletown Avenue, in the area of Chestnut Hill Road, Rocky Spedaliere, 46, of 617 Levita Rd., Lebanon was arrested for and charged with operating under the influence and failure to drive right, police said.

Also, from Jan. 21-27, officers responded to 20 medical calls, four motor vehicle crashes and eight alarms, and made 15 traffic stops.

Portland Police News

1/25: Erich Hanson, 37, of 11 West Blvd., East Hampton, was charged with improper use of marker plate, insufficient insurance and traveling unreasonably fast, Portland Police said.

1/28: Nathaniel Gauthier, 22, of 374 Main St., was charged with operating under suspension, police said.

2/2: Zayden Flood, 25, of 27 Botsford St., Meriden, was charged with breach of peace and second-degree criminal mischief, police said.

Hebron Police News

1/28: State police said Bernard L. Wagner, 42, of 37 Senate Brook Dr., was arrested and charged with risk of injury to child, disorderly conduct and second-degree threatening.

Colchester Police News

1/28: State police said Talique Blizzard, 20, of 373 Laurel St., Hartford, was arrested and charged with reckless driving, operating a motor vehicle without a license, criminal impersonation and interfering with officer/resisting arrest.

1/29: State police said Travis Schubel, 34, of 25 Salem Ridge Dr., Salem, was arrested and

charged with violation of probation.

2/3: State police said Renee Jakubowski, 57, whose address was listed as P.O. Box 39, Colchester, was arrested and charged with second-degree criminal mischief, assault of public safety or emergency medical personnel, disorderly conduct and first-degree reckless endangerment.

Man Runs Red Light in Hebron

State police said failing to stop at a red light left one man and one woman with possible injuries.

At approximately 2 p.m. on Feb. 1 a Chevrolet Tahoe driven by Raymond J. Amore, 67, of 60 Pine Hill Rd., Carolina, R.I., was traveling north through the intersection of routes 85 and 66, as he had a green light, police said.

A Jeep, driven by Jonathan W. Comtois, 33, of 17 Parker Rd., Marlborough, was traveling east through the same intersection, even

though he had a red light.

The Jeep and Tahoe collided, police said, resulting in possible injuries to Amore’s passenger, Dara L. Amore, 72, of 60 Pine Hill Rd., Carolina, R.I., and Comtois.

Dara Amore and Comtois were both transported to Middlesex Hospital Marlborough Medical Center with possible injuries, police said.

Comtois was found at fault for failing to obey a control signal.