

Despite Concerns, HCTV Funding Seems Safe

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — In August, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted 3-2 to allow cable companies to use “in-kind” services, such as public, educational or government (PEG) channels, as part of the statutory five percent franchise fee owed to communities those companies serve. The five percent, capped by Congress, represent fees charged to cable companies for using public property and rights-of-way. Hardwick Community Television (HCTV) receives approximately 80 percent of its funding from that five percent figure, according to Executive Director Lutz Goldberg. The implications for what the rule would mean for community television have raised concerns in Hardwick and statewide. HCTV is a member of the Vermont Access Network (VAN), an organization that promotes the advancement of the state’s PEG Access Management Organizations (AMOs). VAN President Kevin Christopher characterized the FCC action as “especially discouraging.” VAN expressed concerns that the new rule would allow cable companies to dictate prices for in-kind services. “The new rules would allow cable companies to assign market values to these non-cash services, shift the amount back to local communities, and pocket the money,”

Christopher stated in a written report. “So, in effect, the cable companies will be allowed to pay their rent for use of public lands with ‘in-kind’ donations, and the local governments will have no say in whether this is acceptable or not.”

Goldberg said a separate settlement with the state’s FCC ruling could limit the impact of the FCC ruling. Concast must receive a Certificate of Public Good (CPG) to operate on Vermont, and Concast is remaining agnostic since the CPG agreement went there earlier in October,” Goldberg said. In response to VAN’s long-held objection to the exclusion of PEG channels from the Concast television channel guide, the cable company agreed to relocate PEG stations to their own line and include them in the guide. The public should be aware that the relocation will result in a change from HCTV’s current channel 16, to an as-yet-unknown number, Goldberg said. Concast gave such stations “a few thousand dollars to re-brand logos depicting the station’s channel,” Goldberg said. He added that the changeover is likely to occur in January, with a three-month overlap. “The changeover is taking



The first show of the season (fall November 1-8). This scene was captured on West Hill Road in Hardwick. Tuesday’s storm added another three inches to the mix of snow, sleet and freezing rain.

ATVs in River Spark Concern

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY — Damage from All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) driving on the Wild Branch River at the Eden/Craftsbury town line were reported at the last select board meeting. Photographs depicting a large number of ATV tracks and damage to the riverbank were submitted to the board.

Three years ago, sightings of ATVs driving up and down the river were reported at the Craftsbury/River line and ATVs driving on the river instead of the bridge, were reported. Concerns for damage to the riverbank and wetlands were reported to the Conservation Commission, which asked the board to place signs at locations where crossings occurred. Signage was placed to remind ATV drivers that, under Vermont statutes, it is illegal to ride on public water bodies. Penalties include fines up to \$300. A sign reading “not a through road” was placed on the Craftsbury side of the bridge in winter.

Signage for the river crossings have been ordered and received, according to Town Clerk Yvette Brown. A suggestion was made to

Hardwick Confronts a Towering Issue

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — At the regular Hardwick Select Board on November 7, the board heard again from ATRF Site Acquisition Coordinator Janelle Smith regarding use of a town trail on Buffalo Mountain to access a potential new tower. Town Manager Shaun Fiedler provided an update about the Carey Road property, and Hardwick Police Department (HPD) Chief Aaron Cochran and Road Foreman Tom Fiedler provided equipment updates. East Hardwick’s request for a speed limit reduction was also on the agenda.

Hardwick Electric Department Commissioner Mike Sullivan was scheduled to speak to the board but did not attend. Fiedler thanked veterans in the town’s effort for Veterans Day, honoring Scott Gagnon, Nick Steller, Tom Fiedler, Mike Grovel, and Ken LaCase.



Construction continues on the town reservoir on Bigdollar Hill in Hardwick. Last week, site prep superintendent Dana Spotts of Spotts Construction, Inc. led by and Town Manager Shaun Fiedler. The work will be done at the facility, completed, which began the end of September, is scheduled to be constructed by the end of December.

Wolcott Gauges Storm Damage

by Doug McClure

WOLCOTT — The effects of the Halloween storm dominated the discussion at the November 6 Wolcott Select Board meeting. The town sustained significant damage to property and infrastructure, and road commissioner Lucien Gravel was commended for the road crew’s quick response. Estimates for damage repairs could not yet be available. East Engineering’s Dyer Billingsley and Select Board Chair Eric Furs met the Monday following the storm. Furs said a Request for Proposal (RFP) for bids was ready to go out. North Wolcott Road was “made safe” according to Gravel. Damage to Elmore Pond Road was addressed, as was the washed-out end of Brook

Road. A resident held a large wooden sign reading “The Post Road” in an effort to make the select board aware of significant damage to that road. “Our culvert washed out, my husband’s truck went into it, but more importantly ambulances and fire can not get in and elderly neighbors are having to cross streams,” the resident said.

Gravel said he would immediately send a truck to haul some material in the interim. Grant funds can address a permanent fix, he said. “Our families sitting there with no fire protection, I don’t blame them for being upset,” Gravel said. He added that he is discussing the damage for every road with photographs to make it easier to apply for reimbursement from the federal government.

Emergency Management Co-Director Ryan Berke said that “despite having people who hadn’t worked together before, [the response] went reasonable.” He suggested an after-action postmortem. Wolcott faces obstacles to effective emergency response due to its lack of widespread internet service. While some residents still have landline phones, most need electric to be able to operate. “We didn’t end up having to open the town offices, [but] we came close,” said Berke. “How do we notify people if we do? I would like to have the names of people who need to be checked on and their original addresses.”

Berke said opening a shelter would be less effective if people could not be notified and that a pool of volunteers was needed. Immediately following the storm, Wolcott Volunteer Fire Department made rounds to check on a list of people who might need assistance. While Berke acknowledged “it’s not a perfect answer, [but] we can try to have answers for people.” Utilizing radio stations to get the word out during emergencies was suggested.

In other highway department matters, Gravel said that the town’s equipment was “very poorly maintained.” The Town Garage, which is a public facility, should a non-function generator.



photo by Vanessa Fournier. Identified Wildlife Biologist Cindy Alexander collected scientific data on deer tracks on the at the Ripaway Sport Shop during youth hunting this past weekend. After 40 years as a Wildlife Biologist in Vermont, he is retiring as of January 1, 2020.

Stranahan Forest Improvements Planned for Roads

by Will Walters

MARSHFIELD — Stranahan Stewardship Committee member Rich Phillips provided the select board with a link to the Stranahan Forest, including drainage projects, including improving road conditions in the forest would make the forest more accessible for public use, Phillips said. He added that better drainage would reduce mud conditions and allow for easier entry with equipment.

Board member Rich Baker said some residents prefer not to have trails in the forest, while others want improved conditions. Phillips said the gravel pit is closed for the winter and any remaining work must be done next year. He estimated 80 hours would be needed for excavating and 52 hours for hauling. Phillips asked what portion of the expense will be covered by the Stranahan fund and was told the fund would cover the cost of labor and materials, but not the cost of town equipment. Current equipment estimates are \$15,000, plus the cost of the Stranahan fund. The Stranahan fund has a current balance of \$3,100.

Town Clerk Bobi Brimblecombe advised the board that the State of Vermont error, the town was on temporary (Walden) Union School District nearly \$50,000. Brimblecombe has appealed to request to correct the error and contacted State Rep. Janet Ansel (Cady) for assistance.

The board received a request to include domestic partners in its health insurance coverage. The members asked Brimblecombe to change town policy to be consistent with the state (definition) for domestic partnerships lasting more than one year. Now that he has returned from his travels, cover belonging to a handful of Hardwick residents are again escaping out roads and property taxes. In his absence, the towns were cared for

by his stepson and did not escape the storm. Ox Cpr reported the cows have been coming onto his property. Some cows have been held but all have been captured. Residents on Folsom Hill have raised concerns over ditching work performed during the winter. Some far the ditches could erode during the winter, so they were not stone lined and no oak logs was done. Road crew member Shasha Brickey said they



photo by Vanessa Fournier. Identified Wildlife Biologist Cindy Alexander collected scientific data on deer tracks on the at the Ripaway Sport Shop during youth hunting this past weekend. After 40 years as a Wildlife Biologist in Vermont, he is retiring as of January 1, 2020.

Integrated Studies Class has a Unique Classroom

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY — The capstone of saws and hammering emanating from the Rural Center for Arts Space on Thursday afternoon suggested a different kind

of classroom. Students of the Integrated Studies Class, which combines mathematics, science and social studies, were hard at work building Aldo Leopold-style woodlots. The year-long class, open to



Senior Parker Clark expressed the combined excitement of his peers: “I like hands-on learning. [This class] is different. Less paperwork and more hands-on work. Clark said “teamwork” and “learning to work with different types of people” are important elements. Mathematics teacher Margaret Bledsoe described the class as part of a state and nationwide initiative to allow students greater choices in their programming. In the math component of the class, students were engaged in a goal deal of map-making, measurement, and naming. “Bledsoe said, “Principal Merris Greening agreed that the class provides students with greater choices and is tailored for students interested in a hands-on learning experience.”

“It is designed to give kids a chance in alternative learning pathways in gaining their professional for graduation,” Bledsoe said. “There are independent selections of projects.” Not all students’ 14 students were engaged with County Forester Jerald Nurney last week in assembling the Aldo Leopold benches; others worked on graphic arts projects. Nurney said he worked with other schools in the same capacity and his role is limited to helping teachers connect with the woodlot and other community members. Nurney said the goal is to connect students to the land, teach them to appreciate the resources

photo by June Pichel Cook. Mathematics teacher Harry Bledsoe and County Forester Jerald Nurney explain the elements of building an Aldo Leopold bench to Craftsbury Academy Senior Parker Clark. Clark is one of 14 students in an interdisciplinary class that integrates science, mathematics, and social studies and uses the CA Woodlot on Myrtle Hill as a classroom.

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