

Craftsbury Considers New Elementary Building

by Emmett Avery

CRAFTSBURY — An informational meeting was held on January 15 to discuss the proposed construction of a new elementary school building in Craftsbury. The current elementary building's library was standing room only with community members there to find out what is going on and to give input.

"The new building is needed, according to Craftsbury School Board Chair Harry Miller, for several reasons. Miller said that the school's enrollment has been increasing to the point now where there are too many students for the building to accommodate. The heating system was replaced recently, Miller said, but it has been problematic and "is not creating a reasonable education environment."

According to Miller, there are also issues with parking, drainage in the basement and a lack of space for nursing staff and one-on-one interventions. Miller noted that the school has some "needs coming up," and that the board thinks it makes more sense to invest in a new building rather than throwing more money at the old one.

According to Miller, there would be an opportunity to collaborate with Spillings in the new space. One of the board's goals is to provide childcare from an upward. A bonus of providing

child care, said Miller, might be a better self retention rate at the Craftsbury Schools, something he said the board has been struggling with. "As a board, we feel it (the new building) would be advantageous to the school system. It would be an opportunity to have increased collaboration between the middle school and the high school."

The board is hoping to have a bond vote in the fall of 2020 and start construction in the spring of 2021.

"I believe we are investing in the future," said Miller, "the future of our town, for the community. I think that it is an important step, and I think the time is right. I think if we are creative, and have the will and the way, it will be worth it."

The new building would be placed along Dustin Road. He also said the new site might include a sliding hill. This was not a surprise for those who gathered around, but Miller was serious; he said that not having a sliding hill had been a major part of bond-vote losses in the past.

There are currently 63 students at the school, which according to the Craftsbury school Principal Merrit Green, is technically overcapacity.

At this presentation, Miller opened up the discussion by public questions and comments.

SEE BUILDING, 2



The East Calais General Store is being torn down. It has been closed since Christmas. A new community group called The East Calais Community Trust is working to purchase and renovate the building and get a new store in the space.

East Calais Store Closes, Efforts to Reopen Begin

by Michael Bielawski

EAST CALAIS — After years of struggle, the General Store in the village along Rte. 14 is officially closed. The building is in poor condition, and the store itself is having financial difficulties.

A GoFundMe fund raised \$12,000, but it wasn't enough. Lesley Lapan had been running the store over the past decade, but she finally closed it up at Christmas.

Now there is an effort underway to re-open the store, which was the last remaining convenience store along the 14 between Harwick and East Montpelier. The organization is called the East Calais Community Trust (ECCCT), a non-profit which is working with the Preservation Trust in Vermont to purchase and revitalize the building and install a new store in its space. The building also has three apartments upstairs.

Jan Orlinson, a director of the ECCCT, said if the trust were to

complete the purchase, it would become the landlord of the building. The directors of the trust are still deciding whether to run the new store or lease the space out. "We haven't decided whether or not our trust organization wants to be the operator and owner of the store," Orlinson said. "We are looking at the way the current owner of the building did that. He owned the building and he leased the store to an LLC or a person who runs the store."

Orlinson cited the success story of the Maple Corner Community Store across town. That store was purchased by a similar community group to keep it running.

"The Calais General Store had been up for sale for a couple

of years, just like the Maple Corner store had been up for sale for a couple of years, and we wanted to keep it locally owned," she said. Denise Wheeler, chair of the Calais Select Board, told media that the board is working hard to make all this come to fruition. She hopes to raise \$200,000 to purchase and remodel.

Orlinson emphasized that the building, which is of significant historic value, will be restored. There is no discussion about taking it down to build from scratch. The building has been a coat and hat store, a library and a popular school has stop over its many years.

Orlinson said there are a lot of creative ideas for how the new store might look.

SEE STORE, 6

Boards Hears Updates on Dams, New Police Car

by Doug McClure

HARWICK — At its regularly scheduled meeting on Jan. 16, the Harwick Select Board wrapped up the budget that will go to voters at Town Meeting. The Harwick Electric Department (HED) on ongoing work at the Wolcott Dam and got an update on the out-of-state Long Pond Dam.

Harwick Police Captain (HPC) Clint Aaron Colburn said the new police vehicle had finally arrived and work was underway to get it ready for service. Road Foreman Tom Fadden was not on hand due to "harsh conditions," but town manager Shaun Finkler had updates from him. Middle-school science teacher Greg Hennessey had news of a project his students want to work on in its town.

For some who may have noticed that sidewalk clearing had been up to usual standards, Finkler had an answer. The vehicle normally used for clearing the sidewalks is a "modified loader" that has an arm with its bucket system. Finkler said the town had anticipated getting the equipment back from the repair shop the day of

the meeting, but it was still being worked on. In the meantime, the Harwick road crew is doing things old-school. "Our crew is literally spreading salt by hand, and it takes a lot of extra effort. We've done the best with the tools we've got," said Finkler. Select Board Chair Eric Romack said the road crew was "winded to do this work."

Mike Sullivan said HED

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Harwick Budget Proposal Nears Completion

by Doug McClure

HARWICK — Harwick's budget proposal is nearly completed, with just a final point of disagreement remaining. The proposed total of \$3,465,120 would represent a 3.14% increase over last year's budget.

The select board has spent many hours over the past several meetings going over items

SEE PROPOSAL, 4



After a week of refurbishment, the former Harwick Village Wagon, now the Harwick Village Wagon, had its grand opening on Friday, January 17.

New Data Released on Student Risk Factors

by Doug McClure

HARWICK — The Vermont Department of Mental Health just released the results of its annual 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The survey, which has been ongoing since 1998, asked over 15,500 students at 66 Vermont schools 10 questions on issues "that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, injury, and social problems among youth." The 2019 survey's responses showed some areas trending in a negative direction, and one spot for improvement.

Just 8% of students overall and 11% of LGBTQQ students reported feeling unsafe at school. Nearly three-quarters of the students said that their school had someone they could talk to if needed, and two-thirds felt valued in their community overall, with female students feeling somewhat less than their LGBTQQ counterparts, but less so at just over a third.

Much of what the schools have been able to do to help students,

according to the survey, 7% of high schoolers attempted suicide, with 19% of LGBTQQ students reporting an attempt. Almost 20% of kids reported harming themselves without intending to die, with nearly 30% of girls and half of LGBTQQ kids reporting doing so. For all metrics on mental health, there was no significant difference in grades nine through twelve.

In the questions about personal safety, "three in ten (student) went out with someone who purposed tried to coax them or hurt them emotionally." For women, that number was 35% and for LGBTQQ students it was 43%. While one in six students reported being sexually harassed, a quarter of female students and almost a third of LGBTQQ students reported it. Contrary to some media characterizations, the difference reported between in-person bullying and cyberbullying was not significant.

According to Priefhofer, Hazen and the OSSU are utilizing data, 36% had made a plan. A

SEE RIS, 2



Harwick Elementary students Emily Pugmire, Mike Burns and Cassidy Conn perform during the school's grades 4-6 Winter Play and Chorus Concert January 14.

Fentanyl Involved in Majority of Vermont Opioid-Related Deaths

by Michael Bielawski

HARWICK — A new report released by the Vermont Department of Health reveals that fentanyl was involved in a majority of the state's opioid-related deaths in 2019.

Fentanyl is a strong synthetic opioid that is about 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine. When purchased off the streets, it is often mixed into other drugs without the user being aware of its presence. Not knowing what fentanyl is mixed with a drug is a common reason for accidental overdose.

The report states that a total of 86 Vermonters died from opioid-related deaths in 2019. Of those, 83 deaths involved Fentanyl. Locally, Caledonia County saw eight opioid-related deaths in 2019. Lamoille County saw four, and Orleans County saw three.

Harwick Police Chief Aaron

Colburn says about some of the deaths involving Fentanyl. "It's become a mainstay cutting agent with heroin," he said.

"It's taking more Narcan (the life-saving anti-opioid drug) that counteracts the effects of opioid) to bring people who have overdosed out of the state (of unconsciousness)."

Colburn said that in general people don't know what's in the street drugs that they purchase. "They have no idea," he said.

He added that Fentanyl is a powder that can become airborne and pose a danger to those handling the drug. "It's a problem for us. If we're doing a search warrant in a place where there was Fentanyl, a small size amount of Fentanyl to someone who isn't adjusting to any type of opiate use could potentially be fatal," he said.

Capt. Larry Lam, commander of Special Investigations, also commented for the Gazette.

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