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FEMA Funds Not Expected Quickly

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY — Reimbursements from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are not expected to be paid out before the end of the year. At its meeting last week, Select Board Chair Bruce Urte reported prospects are dim for receiving any funds soon for expenditures for repairs for the Halloween storm. The amount of paperwork in meeting FEMA regulations is monstrous, Urte said. Urte, Vice Chair Jim Jones and Road Supervisor Steve Markers recently attended a FEMA meeting which was required and beneficial for the town officials. The town has to be enrolled in the state's portal by Feb. 14 to be in line for receiving funds.

Urte distributed a Vermont League of Cities & Towns' procurement policy for review by Vice Chair Jones and Steve Houston to be considered at the next meeting. Currently, the town does not have a formal procurement policy, which is a requirement under FEMA regulations. Clerk requirements include data on

the road crew's salary, benefits, uniforms and related expenses; bridge and road standards; and litigation processes. Urte indicated that the town's bridge and road standards have been sent to the state; the town's litigation plan was accepted.

The town was assigned a FEMA project manager and will be receiving assistance from a technical support person. Resident Penelope Doherty attended the FEMA meeting and offered her assistance in researching and preparing some of the paperwork required.

In other road issues, the board signed the Certificate of Highway Mileage, which is filed annually and affects reimbursements received to the state. According to the report, the town has 7,966 miles of state highway, 13.23 miles of Class 3 roads, 6.47 of Class 4 roads; and 2.67 of Legal Trails. The town is reimbursed based on the board voted unanimously to order a new town truck, an International 7900. **See FEMA, 4**



The Colles Pond Sleds Snowmobile Club in Walden held its annual Sled Race on February 16 at the Walden Methodist Church. The group served 234 people.

Four Towns Consider Broadband Internet Question

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Voters in Hardwick, Craftsbury, Greensboro, and Stannard will vote at Town Meeting on a solution to the lack of available high-speed internet, according to Katherine Simas, Director of Northeast Kingdom Collaborative (NEKC). Voters will be asked whether the town should enter into a communication union district (CUD) "to be known as NER Community Broadband, under the provisions of 30 V.S.A. Ch82."

A CUD is made up of two or more towns "with the specific purpose to build, maintain, and operate broadband infrastructure in order to provide high-speed in-

ternet to all residents in member communities." CUDs are funded through grants and loans, and cannot legally be funded through taxes.

"In the next year there will be nearly \$20 billion in grants available through federal and state organizations like the FCC, USDA, EDA and Vermont Connectivity Fund," Simas said. "We will be well-positioned to apply for these funds once the CUD is formed."

The NEKC's action plan proposes using CUDs to obtain "a reliable and affordable high-speed internet option of at least 100 Mbps symmetrical service to every residential and business address in the Northeast."

See BROADBAND, 6

How Broadband Is Measured

by Doug McClure

MONTEPELIER — On recent forum posts, some area residents expressed confusion about how the state determines whether their internet service options qualify as broadband. Much of that confusion is based on how that statistic is obtained, and the state's methodology differs from that of the federal government.

The Federal Communications Commission uses census blocks to determine broadband availability, which for rural areas is **See MEASURED, 2**



photo by Doug McClure

At a Hazen Artisan & Entrepreneurship Academy Advanced Manufacturing Class teacher, Arnie Hagman (pointing) talks about combining Virtual Reality with 3D printing. Among the class (clockwise from top right) were Hagman, Madison Langdell, Academy Coordinator Hilary Maynard, Cassidy Perry, Colton Niemi, class consultant Erin Ranz-Schiller, and Kevin Robertson.

Bill Would Prohibit Activist Flags from Flying at Schools

by Michael Bielawski

MONTEPELIER — A bill proposed at the Statehouse seeks to restrict flag-flying policies on school grounds across the state so that only the American flag and Vermont state flag could be flown. Rep. Brian Smith, R-Orleans-1, sponsored bill H.847 which "proposes to prohibit flags other than the U.S. flag and State of Vermont flag from being flown on public school property in Vermont."

The bill would ban the practice of flying activist flags on school campuses; a trend largely started in Vermont with Black Lives Matter (BLM) flags. Montpelier High School was the first in the state and the nation to raise the BLM flag at its school campus two years ago.

Smith, who has not replied to a request for comment for this story, has told media he finds debates at school board meetings about certain flags detract from more pressing matters, such as school budgets. He said this bill is not about taking sides on issues surrounding the flag in question.

Rep. Joseph "Chip" Troiano said he supports allowing schools to fly the BLM and similar activist flags because it promotes healthy discussion and debate. Sharing an experience from the

civil rights era, he said he was part of a security effort for protests during the immediate aftermath of Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968. His group of men took a managessive, constructive approach to the tense situation, he said.

"A band of U.S. soldiers (mostly Vietnam veterans) were assigned to squash the riots. We were met with respect and gratitude, not one harassed us, everyone was respectful and thankful."

Regarding the BLM flag, which critics claim encourages violence against police, Troiano said any large group will have had examples, but overall is a force for good.

"I look at the recognition that all lives matter and black lives matter in particular," he said. "I've stood with them from day one, and I've seen them work any legislation that would deny students the right to have their voices heard." Rep. Vicki Strong, R-Albany, said she has spoken with Smith

See FLAGS, 3



photo by Vanessa Fournier

Evan Premo of Marshfield, composer/teaching artist for the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, plays his double bass February 14 for Lakeview students. He is conducting four classes at school for grades 4-6 on writing a fanfare. Listening from left are Finn Burgess, Thea Gilbert and Gergor Bowley. On April 9 the VSO Brass Trio will perform the students' composition.

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YOUNGBRER NAMED CO-OP GENERAL MANAGER

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'AS YOU LIKE IT' IN PLAINFIELD REVIEW

Estimated Property Tax, Budgets Set

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — The Town of Hardwick, Hazen Union and Orleans Southwest Union Elementary School District (OSUESD) have released Annual Reports with budgets and estimated tax rates.

The Town of Hardwick Budget for FY 2021 is \$3,465,120, a 3.14% increase from FY 2020. Estimated FY 2021 revenues increased by 1.08% from the previous fiscal year.

FY 2021's estimated municipal property tax rate before appropriations is up 1.02% to \$12.781 per \$100. That equals \$1,278.13 on a \$100,000 property.

If all appropriations pass at Town Meeting, the estimated municipal property tax impact will be \$0.0224, or \$22.40 on a \$100,000 home. With appropriations, the estimated municipal

property tax rate increased to \$13,006, or 3.72% (\$1300.60 on a \$100,000 home). The one new appropriation for FY 2021 is \$1,560 for the Craftsbury Community Care Center. To get on the list of appropriations, an organization needs just 5% of the town to sign on with its request.

In its budget, Hardwick proposed establishing a capital fund for fire equipment with \$65,023. In past years, major firefighting equipment was paid for by bonds. Other departments use a capital fund to avoid bringing a bond to citizens. A capital fund is different than a bond, because the town doesn't pay interest on it. Instead, monies collect on a year-to-year basis and accrue over time which allows the need to go to bond. After a bond at this town Meeting, the estimated municipal property tax impact will be \$0.0224, or \$22.40 on a \$100,000 home. With appropriations, the estimated municipal

See ESTIMATED, 4



photo by Vanessa Fournier

Smoke rises from chimneys during a cold snap on the morning of February 15 in Hardwick. In some areas it was -22 degrees at 8:25 a.m. giving us the coldest temperature this winter.

Residents Propose Second Amendment Sanctuary Town Status

by Michael Bielawski

WOODBURY — At last week's select board meeting a resident read a proposal that the Town of Woodbury become a sanctuary town for Second Amendment rights. The proposal is not expected to be up for a vote at Town Meeting Day because the official warning for the agenda has already gone out, but it could still come up for discussion.

Resident Justin Brown read a prepared statement during the public comment period.

"We the people of Woodbury have taken notice of the recent hostility among our lawmakers towards our inalienable right to self-defense," he said. "This is evident in their attempts to pass legislation eroding our right to keep and have [sic] arms in defense of ourselves and the state as protected by Article 16 of the Vermont Constitution and the Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States."

It continues to state that law-abiding gun owners are taking the full of violent acts by those who will follow new laws.

"The inalienable right to self-defense does not come from man or man's laws. Citizens preexist all governments and are part of our nature as persons,"

He said, is one of the variables that the select board approves by asking that the select board approve the initiative, but the board wants more voices involved. Brown added that he has gathered the required signatures of support from the public.

"I would like this to be a town discussion rather than a discussion between the three of us,"

Crabtree said. Cray said, "It is my understanding, there is at the end of the meeting the opportunity to bring up other business before those who are at Town Meeting, and that could an opportunity for the Town Meeting body to come to discuss this."

Gray said that probably the

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