

# Hardwick Gazette

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## Peaceful Second Protest Held over Floyd Death

by Doug McClure

**HARDWICK** – On Saturday, June 6, a protest took place in Hardwick over the May 25 death of George Floyd, who died after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for close to nine minutes as he lay in the street, and scores of previous similar deaths.

The protest, like the one held the weekend before, was peaceful and in keeping with a long, local tradition of peaceable assembly, including ongoing protests in the Peace Park by Martha Zweig. Most participants were teens who felt an immediate urgency to make their voices heard, according to Alana Considine. All wore face masks to protect against the pandemic.

The adults included Anne Hanson and Paul Fixx. While holding their signs, protestors discussed how just a short time ago the Black Lives Matter movement barely registered for many citizens in the area.

Hanson said, "it wasn't that long ago, Black Lives Matter was a radical statement."

What changed, according to Hanson, Fixx, and Considine, was

a rising awareness of how serious the problems with racism and inequality are, and a new "alternate reality" promoted by some at the highest levels of national leadership. It was noted that, even in Vermont, recent data showed a huge disparity in policing for whites and non-whites. Also mentioned was recent data from the Department of Health that showed black and brown communities suffered significantly worse outcomes from COVID-19 in Vermont than did white communities.

The students displayed mostly handmade signs with the messages "Black Lives Matter," "Justice for All," "Resist," and "Now." Passing vehicles frequently honked or waved their support. A few drivers shouted, "All Lives Matter," sometimes peppered with obscenity, at the students. The protestors mostly resisted the temptation to shout something back, heeding Considine's cautionary advice about "throwing gas on a fire." Considine framed it as analogous to "a parent eulogizing their child when suddenly someone grabs the mic and says, 'actually, all children are special.'"

The students were hesitant to



photo by Doug McClure

On Saturday, June 6, at the intersection of Routes 14 and 15 in Hardwick, just over a dozen people protested the death of George Floyd. (left to right) Ella Considine, Kai Gilbert, Mariana Considine, Audrey Grant, and Ollie Grant.

speak at first. One said, "There's not a lot to say, it's disgusting we're still arguing about this. It makes me sad." Another said, "America was built on systemic racism." Another offered, "I know I don't

have to worry about being killed by HPD or other Vermont cops, but I have that privilege to speak out about those who do."

"Lots of racism, people don't even see," said another.

## Town Takes Initial Steps to Reopen Economy



photo by Doug McClure

Part of the town-owned parking lot adjacent to the Village Restaurant was blocked off to make way for diner seating.

by Doug McClure

**HARDWICK** – At the select board meeting on June 4, the town put forward some ideas to bring Hardwick out of its pandemic-induced economic and social slumber.

COVID-19 lingers over Hardwick as a threat not yet fully dispatched, and an outbreak is emerging sixty miles away in Winooski. The impact here has been small compared to other parts of the state. Three towns immediately adjacent to Hardwick have had 1-5 cases: Craftsbury, Wolcott, and most recently Greensboro. Morrisown had reported seven cases since March 5, which has not increased in weeks.

Hardwick is trying to find a way to slowly restart with "baby steps," said Town Manager Shaun Fielder. He updated the board on a business revitalization initiative in the village. With the town's assistance, businesses in the village – especially restaurants – are seeking to revitalize a COVID-slammed hospitality economy. Fielder also spoke to the "anxiety and stress" felt by residents due to COVID-19 and the May 25 murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police.

With no financial commitment needed, the town agreed to sign a Memorandum of Intent with the Restart Vermont Loan Program. Select board chair Eric Rennie described the concept as "joining forces with other communities in the state and the Agency for Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) to pool resources" in the process of getting the economy back on its feet. "It's an opportunity for us to join together with other communities and be part of a larger solution without losing control."

Several restaurants in the village continue to work with the town to establish outdoor seating. The town has blocked a portion of its parking lot on South Main St. to augment the limited sidewalk space, said Fielder, and the group of restaurants is working to source umbrellas and

has ordered tables. He said the hope was to encourage people to return to local restaurants and enjoy the weather. "Tonight's a good example where it would be nice to have dinner outside."

Fielder spoke of the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police on May 25. He said that Hardwick's thoughts went out to Floyd's family and those affected, and that anxiety was already high due to COVID-19. He encouraged people to keep that level of stress and anxiety in mind and "just be respectful" of one another.

Earlier last week, Rennie said "I thank the death of George Floyd is tragic. It's tragic for his friends and family. It's tragic for the city of Minneapolis and for our whole country. From time to time, tragic events startle us and demand that we look at the world with fresh eyes. George Floyd's death is such an event. Our fresh eyes may be dismayed to see the racism that is still such a part of the American fabric, nearly one hundred sixty years after Abraham Lincoln delivered his Emancipation Proclamation, almost sixty years after Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his 'I have a Dream' speech. We may wonder, how we really progressed so little? We could despair but we would do better to hope. Progress often happens in fits and starts and maybe this is a moment of change."