CORNWALL CHRONICLE

VOLUME 17: NUMBER 4 MAY 2007

The Road from Revaluation to Tax Bill

The year-long effort of Assessor Barbara Bigos to get Cornwall's property assessments in line with fair market value as mandated by the State of Connecticut has come to an end. She visited every property in Cornwall (no interior inspections this time, except if invited), measured and photographed each dwelling, and transferred that information to her computer. She analyzed recent sales and made models on which to base her assessments. Changes were made most notably in the way one-, three-, and five-acre building lots were assessed, with subjective factors added in for things such as views, location, and privacy. In the fall, she sent out new assessment information to all property owners and held well-attended public informational meetings explaining her methods and the tax implications of the new numbers. She then met or talked with at least 200 taxpayers to answer their questions about their new assessments, sometimes making adjustments, sometimes not. By the end of January, the assessor's work was done, and the revaluation results produced a preliminary Grand List that showed Cornwall's new property assessments, motor vehicles, and personal property, when added together, nearing the half-billion-dollar mark. Mrs. Bigos said of the experience, "It was the most pleasant reval I've done. I think people appreciated the openness of the process, even if some of them weren't happy with their result."

In March, the Board of Assessment Appeals met with those property owners who had filed the required petitions to appeal their assessments and made changes downward to the Grand List of just under half a million dollars. BAA Chairman Richard Bramley characterized this drop as "peanuts" compared to the total net assessment: the perfected Grand List for 2006, after all changes and exemptions, comes to \$443,994,670, nearly double last year's number.

Meanwhile, the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education have prepared 2007–8 budgets that are as tight as they've ever been. Even battling steep rises in the cost of utilities and petroleum-based products, the overall budget increase is being held to 3.3 percent. Part of this is due to an agreement with the Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency (CIRMA) to keep insurance costs the same for the next three years. Since past budgets have been at the mercy of insurance spikes, this year's small increase looks good.

Other areas of increase in the town government budget are employee salaries, up 3.5

percent; Zoning and Land Use, up \$3,700, principally because Karen Nelson is taking on all the administrative roles for that department; Highway Department, up \$15,730, mostly due to petroleum product costs; and the Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department, up \$6,100, almost entirely because of the cost of suiting up and training the new young department members.

Chairman of the Board of Education Barbara Gold says the 2.1 percent education budget rise, which includes Region One, "is the lowest increase of the previous ten years" and attributes the savings to a decline in

school population.

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway sums up this year's revaluation and budget process by giving high marks to Assessor Barbara Bigos and the Chronicle for getting the word out about the process and to BAA for its careful deliberations. "It went as well as possible," he says, noting also that "we've kept spending under control and we have good revenue news to come, so we should be able to keep the mill rate at or below what was projected." Good news when the total budget for the coming year is \$6,068,656. The time to vote on this budget is at the annual town budget meeting on May 18. The Board of Finance will meet immediately after to set the new mill rate. —Cheryl Evans

MAY 2007						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Every Week This Month: Mondays: Jam Session, 7:3 Wednesdays: Play Group, Stretch Class, 4 P.M. Town I [continues at other end o	Hall; Tai Chi , 7 p.m. CCS	1 Agricultural Comm. 7:30 p.m. Town Hall Inland Wetlands 8 p.m. Town Hall	Memorial Day Sake Sale Sales Sales		Open House 10 a.mnoon Cornwall Child Center†	Opening Reception Outsiders Gallery 5-7 P.M. † Chris Murphy Report to the Community 4-6 P.M. CCS †
6 "What To Do in Case of a Heart Attack" 2 P.M. Library †	Region One Bd. of Ed. 7 P.M. HVRHS Park and Rec. 7 P.M. CCS Bd. of Selectmen 7:30 P.M. Town Hall Democratic Town Comm. 7:30 P.M. Library	Region One Budget Referendum 12–8 p.m. Town Hall † Red Cross Blood Drive 1:30–6:15 p.m. UCC Parish House † Housatonic River Comm. 7:30 p.m. CCS Library	Mother's Day	10	Film: The End of Suburbia 7 P.M. W. C. Firehouse †	12 Spring Bird Walk 7:15–9:30 A.M. † Weed Walk 10:30 A.M.–1:30 P.M. Cornwall Village † Video: Working the Land 7:30 P.M. Town Hall †
13 MOTHER'S DAY	14 Blood Pressure Screening Noon-1 p.m. UCC Parish House	15 Deadline: June Chronicle Copy P&Z 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	5-8 Spring Concert	H. CCS Lib. Bd. of Ed. 5 P.M. CCS Lib. Bd. of Fin. 7:30 P.M. CCS Lib. VFW Post 9856 8 P.M. W. C. Firehouse	Annual Town Budget Meeting 7:30 P.M. CCS † Family Round Sing 7:30 P.M. Local Farm Barn †	Cornwall Goes to War: 1754–2006 4–6 P.M. Historical Society †
20	ZBA 8 P.M. Town Hall*	All Grades Art Show 6:30 p.m. CCS Bd. of Selectmen 7:30 p.m. Town Hall	23 SHAVOUT	24	25	26 Cornwall Library Book Sale 9 A.M.—4 P.M. † War Veterans' Panel 3:30 P.M. Town Hall †
27	Mem. Day Observ. 9–11 a.m. † Corn. Lib. Book Sale 12–4 pm. † UCC/Child Center Carnival noon UCC † Iraq & Afghan. Mem. Serv. 3 p.m. Tatge/Lasseur (see letter)	29 P&Z 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	Cornwall Vol. Fire Dept. 8 p.m. W. C. Firehouse	31	[continued from other end Every Week This Month: Thursdays: Meditation for Mol Fridays: Story Hour, 1:15 P.M. Sundays: Meditation Group, 1- location	thers, 1:15 p.m. UCC Library

Spring Batta, Batta!

Wonder what's happening at the new baseball field on Route 4? Curious about the Kansas City baseball hats around town? Officially sanctioned Little League is in its third season in Cornwall. Due to low numbers, Cornwall has combined with Kent (thus the KC hats) in a league with five other towns.

The team plays 16 games, at 6 P.M. every Tuesday and Friday night, until mid-June. All-star teams are then picked and have the potential of playing all the way up to the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Just as in major league baseball, pitching and defense are key, with the 200-foot fences making tempting targets for older players.

Foote Field is also home to Cornwall's farm team, consisting of Little League-age players 9 to 12 years old, and to a miniature roster made up of second- and third-graders. On July 7, the field will host a highly competitive battle for the Cornwall Cup, featuring expanded all-age teams from the Bridge, the Village, the other Bridge, and the outlying districts.

The completion of the pavilion floor and the installation of water and power hookups will close this project, funded by a state grant. On a warm spring evening the sun sets over Popple Swamp, honking geese descend into Furnace Brook, the crack of a bat sends the ball through clouds of gnats, and another field of dreams is realized.

—lim Terrall

Keep Cornwall Clean

Keri Enright of Smart Power, a national nonprofit promoting clean energy use, returned to Cornwall last month to again encourage homeowners to buy their energy from renewable sources. A panel of town residents also spoke of their experiences installing their own household systems.

Connecticut Light & Power offers consumers the option of buying half or all of their power from a number of renewable sources at an additional cost of about onehalf or one cent per kilowatt-hour, or perhaps an extra \$5 to \$10 a month for the average household. The town has signed up with Community Energy, according to Board of Selectmen (BOS) secretary Joyce Hart, and will receive a rebate if others sign on with the same company. The BOS has resolved to have Cornwall buying 20 percent of its electricity from clean sources by 2010, and Joyce calls the CL&P option "a great way for us to get involved with green energy without having to put up our own windmills or solar panels." This was echoed by local resident Debby Bennett in a letter read at the meeting. She regards the extra money spent on electricity from renewable sources as a "donation to the environment" and as a message sent to the "shakers and movers of energy policy" that people are willing to pay more to support the exploration and development of new and cleaner energy.

When Cornwall meets the short-term

goal of having 10 percent of households (85) sign up with green providers, the town will get a one-kilowatt photovoltaic system to generate free power at the Town Office or CCS. Two systems will reward us when we reach the 20 percent mark.

Later in the evening, Irv Robbins and Tom Wolf discussed their own off-the-grid energy experiences, with First Selectman Gordon Ridgway and others adding comments.

None of these men feel as though they have had to compromise how they live (no wives spoke), although they acknowledged having to think differently about overall consumption and long spells of sunless weather. The panel its collective het to the chade of

tipped its collective hat to the shade of J. T. Welles, whom it credited with keeping the drive toward energy self-sufficiency constantly on the boil: thinking, talking, improvising, building.

Richard Griggs said he learned practical things like siting solar panels to maximize exposure while still being able to remove snow or keep batteries warm, and felt that additional meetings would be helpful for those eager to generate their own power. Bruce Bennett agreed that a nuts-and-bolts forum about home systems would fill a big how-to gap, both as to financing (grants are available) and installation. He feels that the few contractors operating in the state need the tightening that comes from more competition.

For sign-up forms for the CL&P options, check your bill, visit the Town Offices, or log on to www.ctcleanenergyoptions.com.

-Maggie Cooley

Room Without a View

Like many early Litchfield County homes, the intriguing Cape Cod-style farmhouse on Hollenbeck Road that Billy and Debbie Morehouse purchased in 2001 is built around a massive brick and stone central chimney. This contains fireplaces for the bedrooms as well as one in the living room and basement, each with a traditional beehive oven whose little opening leads to a dog-house-sized chamber resembling the interior of an igloo built of brick instead of snow. Unlike the earlier Massachusetts design famous for setting skirts on fire, the opening here is not in the back of the fireplace but, more housewife-friendly, off to the side.

All the above is typical of Colonial and post-Colonial homes of this style. But in the course of his restoration, Billy stumbled upon something very much out of the ordinary. In the basement, a chink in the back wall of the fireplace revealed an entire room in the base of the chimney, complete with stone floor. Not huge, perhaps five feet square.

It probably wouldn't rent for much more than \$500 a night in a Tokyo hotel.

Speculation is rife. Is this a hiding place on the Underground Railway? No, that is one of the few areas of Cornwall in which no remnants of subterranean iron tracks have been unearthed. An oubliette into which you entice a foe with promises of a cask of Amontillado? You probably would have had a hard time finding a decent beer in Cornwall back then much less a fine sherry. Revolutionary War bomb shelter? The RAF was not particularly active in that conflict.

It could be merely a giant ash pit, but the room was devoid of ashes and the roof was soot-blackened, indicating substantial fires within. A more likely possibility would be the oven of a proto-Pepperidge Farm, a Cornwall bakery that was cranking out loaves by the wagon-full.

Later additions of stone hint that there was once a now-walled-up pass-through slot from the huge basement fireplace. Was this to slide the dough in?

There is another small chamber in the chimney on the second floor. Billy thinks it was for smoking meats. It is even possible that it was once connected to the basement mystery room.

The Morehouses have been told that the premises may have once been an inn or tavern, a stopover for wagoneers midway between Canaan and Litchfield, but to date there is no confirmation.

—Matt Collins

Good-Bye to Friends

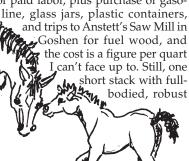
Ethel B. Jamgotchian Arthur Lorch

Land Transfers

Jerome and Cynthia Cohen-Congress to Push-'Em Up Farms LLC, property at 192 River Road for \$4,840,000.

Sugar Season, 2007

Someone once asked me, through the foggy, dim sugarhouse light, what the cost of making a quart of maple syrup is. It was easy to name three pairs of gloves, two burned pants and Band-Aids for same, Bag Balm for the chapped hands, torn boots from a snow-covered piece of barbed wire, and a dented front fender on my truck when it slipped into a tree in the back forty. And that was just the beginning of sap season. Add in the lost hours of paid labor, plus purchase of gaso-



mid-season syrup, and you have a fair trade.

The brief season's most frequently asked question is: how much sap does it take to make a quart of syrup, and the answer is always a source of awe to any casual visitor to the whole process. If you put your face flat down to the surface of a 100-gallon tank of clear, cold, February sap, what you can't see is the ten quarts or so of syrup lurking there. According to the common rule of thumb, if you divide 86 by the known percentage of sugar in the sap (as determined by a refractometer), the answer will always be the quantity of sap needed to make a gallon of syrup. If that 100-gallon tank averages 3 percent sugar, quite reasonable in Cornwall, then my 100-gallon tank

holds close to 14 quarts of syrup.

The rewards for all the gritty labor are both sweet and social. There is Jamie Murphy and Margaret Hopkins hanging off the collection trailer and racing to brimming buckets, sugarhouse picnics, people dropping by just to visit, and all the charcoal artwork left behind. This season, Don and Bob Whitford with grandson Hunter worked the ancient ritual of tap, collect, and boil, while Chris Hopkins in his new digs managed a few quarts of nature's best. The Ridgways held forth on Town Street, as did Gregory Oracz, working out of a shed at Ella Clark's place using an evaporator that once belonged to Bob Potter. Jim and Keaton Terrall boiled on the Harts' evaporator—recently rebuilt by Steve Scoville-in a

sugarhouse now owned by Shaun Donovan and Elizabeth Gilbert. The Heddens, three generations strong, collected on Cherry Hill, the Hurlburts on Hautboy Hill Road, and Denny Frost and Garrick Dinneen at Whaletail Farm.

Sugarmakers agreed that this was the least productive season in many years: too late, too cold, short runs, harsh weather, with sap collecting difficult in flinty snow. There was no sustained gentle rhythm of cold nights and warm days; no runs when one can hardly keep pace with the sap flow, the boiling, the bottling; no balmy nights when you could walk and hear the ping of the sap dripping into the buckets; and no long winter yielding by degrees to sweet spring—just dampness and mediocre runs, a sap season of occasional ooze. But spirits were high, and the next sugar season is not —Phil Hart that far away.

The Way We Vote Now

The Optical-Scan machines do work! The new devices will be used in Cornwall for the first time on May 8 for the Region One budget referendum.

Cornwall's two registrars of voters attended training sessions to learn about equipment and procedure, but in fact, the system is basically simple. As voters arrive, they can view a short video explaining the process. A sample ballot is available, and a

Letters to the Chronicle

MEMORIAL SERVICE

We invite you to our home on May 28 at 3 P.M. for a memorial honoring servicemen and women who have died in Afghanistan and Iraq. The guest speaker will be Dr. Gilbert Bond, Anabaptist theologian and president of the Leadership Center for the Practice of

Christian Reconciliation. A small fellowship reception will follow. Please R.S.V.P. to us at 672-4419, (212) 222-5677, or ctatge@tatgeprod.com.

—Catherine Tatge and Dominique Lasseur MORE TICK TALK

Those who missed the informative Tick Talk last month may like to visit two websites where they can find more information about this infestation that has given the Northwest Corner Connecticut's highest infection rates. For tick management and control, see www.tahd.org. The state's Agricultural Experiment Station has a comprehensive Tick Management Handbook at www.saes.state.ct.us.

—Mark Wilson

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poll worker will be ready to describe the sequence:

- Show the checkers your I.D.—as usual.
- Receive your paper ballot.
- Go to a vacant "booth" and, using the pen provided, fill in the oval beside your choice.
- Take your ballot to the electronic scanner and slide it into the slot.

The smart scanner reads ballots face down or up, top or bottom first. If you look at the small LCD display beside the slot, you will see the number advance by one as your vote is counted. Absentee ballots are run through the scanner by election officials.

At the end of the day, the moderator will electronically "lock" the machine and "ask" it to print out the total vote. The paper ballots will be kept, as legally required.

Although the method of casting your ballot has changed, the general process is the same. At any point from check-in

to getting your "I Voted Today" sticker, poll workers will be ready to answer questions. Voters can even designate someone to accompany them

and mark the ballot. Children may go to the booth and watch, but only the voter should touch the ballot.

Next November, Cornwall will have a long ballot with many choices for municipal boards and commissions, and the scanners will be programmed for our unique ballot. The registrars hope that voters will come to the polls on May 8, not only to perform their civic duty, but also to check out the new equipment. See for yourself that it really does work.

—Jayne Ridgway and Ginny Potter

Rumsey Hall Update

The notice of foreclosure on Rumsey Hall was released last month, and in a phone call with the *Chronicle*, owner Andrew Hingson stated that restoration may well begin sooner than expected.

—Maggie Cooley

Events & Announcements

"What To Do in Case of a Heart Attack," a public health presentation by doctors from New Milford Hospital, will be hosted by the Library on Sunday, May 6, at 2 P.M.

Art in Cornwall: The Insiders/Outsiders Gallery will host an opening on Saturday, May 5, from 5 to 7 P.M., for *All About Africa*, a show of artists and artifacts depicting Africa.

At the Library, Danielle Mailer's paintings, *Dreaming in Color*, continue through May 26. Russian miniature papier-maché fairytale boxes dating from the 1960s will be displayed in the case.

Congressman Chris Murphy will report to the community on Saturday, May 5, at 4 P.M. at CCS on his first 120 days in Washington and his recent congressional fact-finding trip to the Middle East. Refreshments will follow. Sponsored by the Democratic Coalition of Northwest CT. Call Paul Baren, 672-6637, for information.

Open House for prospective students and their parents at the Cornwall Child Center, Friday, May 4, from 10 A.M. to noon, at 8 Cream Hill Road. This is a real opportunity to see how children play and interact and to meet the teachers.

The Annual Town Budget Meeting will be held on Friday, May 18, at 7:30 P.M. at CCS. In addition to voting on the budget for fiscal year 2007–8, two other items for voter consideration are on the agenda. One is to act on discontinuing a 200-foot spur of town road off Swifts Bridge Road. The other is the adoption of a town ordinance that will allow landowners to make an additional free cut from their land if the lot created is designated for affordable housing.

ArtWorks! The Library's celebration of children's book illustration opens with a month-long exhibit on Tuesday, May 29, and features a Festival Day on Saturday, June 2. See insert.

Motherhouse Events: Join "Weed Walk," part of the Old Style Life Skills series, on Saturday, May 12, from 10:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. at the UCC Parish House. Herbalist Alicia North will instruct on how to identify and use edible and/or medicinal plants growing in the village. Share in a potluck lunch and taste some. \$35 per family. Please pre-register at 672-0229.

A free Family Round Sing will be held on Friday, May 18, at 7:30 P.M. at Local Farm Barn. Call Nan Frost at 672-6013.

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Stim

Meditation for Mothers meets from 1:15 to 2:15 P.M. on Thursdays at the back of the UCC sanctuary.

A Referendum will be held on Tuesday, May 8, at the Town Hall, from noon to 8 P.M., for the purpose of voting on the Region One school budget. Absentee ballots are available at the Town Clerk's Office.

A Red Cross Blood Drive will be held at the UCC Parish House on Tuesday, May 8, from 1:30 to 6:15 P.M. To register call the Red Cross at 1-800-GIVE LIFE, or Pat Blakey at 672-6516. Walk-ins will be taken as quickly as the schedule permits.

Park and Rec.'s Spring Bird Walk will be led by Art Gingert on Saturday, May 12, from 7:15 to about 9:30 A.M. (rain date: Sunday, May 13). Beginners are welcome. Bring binoculars and wear waterproof boots; expect ticks. Call Art at 672-0077, or Carla Bigelow at 672-0283, for meeting place.

A Bike-a-Thon to raise money to support UCC's La Casa Project in Mexico will take place at the end of May or early June. Bikers ride up to 100 miles. Proceeds will purchase materials for volunteers to build four houses in northern Mexico this June. Non-riders can send contributions to UCC, P.O. Box 35, Cornwall, CT 06753. Call Bill Gold, 672-3049, for further information.

From Rags to Riches

The Chronicle Board of Directors assembled for an annual meeting on Friday, April 13, and Lady Luck failed to show up. In fact, our concerned treasurer informed us of an operating deficit of \$1,427 for 2006. We survived only because of a thin cushion left from a fund drive the previous year. So stated simply: WE NEED HELP. Erase our deficit, and we promise never again to meet on Friday the 13th. Thanks.

Bradford Scholarship: The Cornwall Board of Education invites any Cornwall student who is planning to enter the University of Connecticut in the fall of 2007 to apply for this scholarship. The award goes to one student and continues throughout that student's enrollment at the university. An application with two letters of recommendation should be sent to the Cornwall Board of Education, Bradford Scholarship, 5 Cream Hill Road, West Cornwall, CT 06796, and should be received by Friday, May 25. Criteria to be considered include grades, extracurricular activities, community service, goals, and creativity. A personal interview will be scheduled.

Farming Video: The Cornwall Agricultural Commission will show Working the h Land, a 45-minute video about Connecticut agriculture narrated by Sam Waterston, at 7:30 P.M. on Saturday, May 12, at the Town Hall.

Circle the Dates: Electronic Waste Collection Day, Saturday, June 2, from 9 A.M. to 1 P.M. at the Torrington Water Pollution Control Plant on Bogue Road. No registration necessary. Proof of residency required, such as a driver's license or bill with Cornwall ad-

Hazardous Waste Collection Day, Saturday, June 9, from 9 A.M. to noon at the Falls Village Highway Garage. Registration with the Selectmen's Office is required.

Look for fliers on these events at local post offices and the Transfer Station, or call the Selectmen's Office for more details, 672-4959.

The End of Suburbia, a documentary that examines the history of suburban life and its relevance to land development, will be shown at the West Cornwall Firehouse on Friday, May 11, at 7 P.M.

Cornwall Goes to War: 1754-2006, an exhibition at the Cornwall Historical Society, opens with a reception on Saturday, May 19, from 4 to 6 P.M. Photos, diaries, and personal possessions from the Society's collection and on loan from community members will show what soldiers wore, their equipment, and how things were here at home.

Memorial Day Weekend Book Sale at the Library, Saturday, May 26: Early Birds, 9 to 10 A.M., regular sale from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.; Monday, May 28: post-parade to 4 P.M. (No sale hours Sunday.) Donations of gently used books and movies are welcome through May 25.

Cornwall Veterans to Share Memories on Saturday, May 26, at 3:30 P.M. at the Town Hall. Speakers will recall experiences during recent conflicts, and letters from the Cornwall Historical Society's collection will document thoughts from the American Revolution and the Civil War. Following an open discussion period, refreshments will be served. The program is sponsored by CHS.

Rural Transit Dial-a-Ride serves 16 towns, including Cornwall, providing people of all ages with transportation to and from such destinations as shopping, medical appointments, social, or personal visits. All vehicles are wheelchair accessible. For more information call (866) 906-7433 or go to www.nwcttransit.com.

Memorial Day: On Monday, May 28, at 9 A.M., Charles Gold will lead a service at the North Cornwall Cemetery. Bring flowers to decorate graves. At 10 A.M., the Seamen's Service will take place at the Covered Bridge in West Cornwall. The parade and ceremony begin at the Town Green in Cornwall Village at 11 A.M.

After the parade and CARNIYAL ceremony, join friends on the UCC grounds for a carnival sponsored by UCC and the Cornwall Child Center. Enjoy games for children of all ages and grilled burgers and hot dogs served up with other traditional carnival fare.

Proceeds support CCC scholarships and a variety of UCC charities. and a variety of

Calling Cornwall Artists: The Second Annual Cornwall Open Studio will be held on Saturday, June 16, from 1 to 5 P.M. Those interested in participating should contact Dave Colbert at ourmaridog@yahoo.com, or 672-0064.

CORNWALL CHRONICLE

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