



CORNWALL CHRONICLE



VOLUME 21 : NUMBER 8 SEPTEMBER 2011

The 2011 Revaluation

Unless you've been living in a cave, you know that the value of your dwelling has decreased during the last five years. You are about to find out by how much.

Assessor Barbara Bigos has recently completed Cornwall's revaluation, which state law mandates every five years. The last revaluation was in 2006, which was the peak of the housing boom. Since then, home prices have declined 33 percent nationally, but Bigos says that the average decrease in Cornwall values will be about 15 percent, reflecting the relative attractiveness of this area. In her recently completed revaluation in Salisbury, values declined only 5.7 percent. (The large number of desirable waterfront properties in that town partially explains the difference.)

This does not mean a decline in your tax bill, since the mill rate will need to be raised to offset the drop in the total assessment. If your assessment *increases* (and some properties will in fact go up) or decreases *less* than the average 15 percent, your taxes will actually rise. Properties that decrease *more* than 15 percent will probably have a lower tax bill. This assumes a minimal budget increase next year, which has become almost routine here but is not guaranteed.

Bigos has worked on seven revaluations

(not all in Cornwall) and says that this one has been the toughest. Sales are an important part of valuations, and activity in Cornwall has been just as slow as in most places. "There have been some high sales and low sales but little in between – and almost no commercial or land sales."

Banks are also depressing activity and prices, according to Bigos. "Interest rates are very low, but getting a mortgage approved can be difficult. If the bank refuses to lend on an offer, then the house will probably eventually sell for less."

"Fortunately sales picked up this year. Studying these sales and properties still on the market made it possible to determine new values – difficult but possible."

Another drag on activity is that home sellers are in denial about how much the values of their properties may have fallen, an analysis from the real estate site Zillow says. It reports that sellers are overpricing homes up to 14 percent.

Here are some factors that may tell you how your property will fare:

- Vacant land: "Currently, you can't give it away," Bigos said, "even beautiful lots. There are too many good homes on the market for buyers to go through the hassle of building."
- Antique homes, premier properties, and

places that have weekender appeal have retained most of their value.

- Neighborhoods are not really a factor, which is not to say that location isn't, and things can change. "Cherry Hill had some old homes in poor repair, but the changes there have made it one of our most desirable spots." Bolton Hill Road was rated down because of the Rumsey eyesore, but now will see a slight increase.

- Current buyers avoid properties that have traffic noise, need renovations, have septic or well problems or deed restrictions. These should show larger decreases.

- Even a perfectly good, average, middle-class home that has no weekender appeal will likely show a larger than average decrease. However, if your average house site has privacy or views, it may appeal to "poor weekenders" (which we take to mean anyone not on Wall Street).

- Houses on leased land (like Cornwall Housing Corp. homes or Yelping Hill) are increasing because they were priced too low five years ago.

You will receive your new assessment in mid-October. Keep in mind that state law requires assessors to value property at 70 percent of market value. Divide your assessment by (.7) to calculate the market value. These new valuations will affect tax bills beginning July 2012.

(continued on page 2)

SEPTEMBER 2011

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Every Week This Month: Tuesdays: Adult Volleyball, 7:30 pm CCS gym Wednesdays: Tai Chi, 6-9 pm CCS; Karate 6:30-7:30 pm CCS; Women's Basketball, 7:30 pm CCS gym Saturdays: Cornwall Farm Market, 9 am-1 pm Wish House Lawn Sundays: Meditation, 1-2 pm, call Debra for location, 672-0229				1	2 ♦ CCS Closed	3 ♦ Hendon Chubb Art Reception 4-6 pm Wish House
4 ☾ 1 st Q	5 ♦ Labor Day ♦ CCS and Town Hall Closed	6 ♦ Park & Rec 7:30 pm Town Hall ♦ Inland Wetland 7:30 pm Town Hall ♦ Board of Selectman 7:30 pm Town Hall	7	8	9	10 ♦ Harvest Sprint Triathlon 8 am CHLA ♦ Agricultural Fair 10 am-4 pm Village Green ♦ Cornwall Association Newcomers' Tea 4 pm Library
11	12 ☉ FULL	13 ♦ P & Z -Library 7 pm	14	15 ♦ Board of Finance 7:30 pm CCS Library ♦ Deadline: October Chronicle Copy	16	17 ♦ Board of Assessment Appeals 9-10 am Town Office ♦ CHS Cornwall Village Walking Tour 10 am 7 Pine St.
18	19	20 ☾ 4 th Q ♦ Board of Ed 4 pm CCS Library ♦ Bd of Selectman 7:30 pm Town Hall	21	22	23	24 ♦ Book Discussion: "Anti-Romantic Child" 4 pm Library
25	26 ♦ ZBA* Town Hall	27	28 ● NEW ♦ CVFD Meeting 8 pm West Cornwall Firehouse	29	30 ♦ Blood Drive 1-6:30 pm UCC Parish House ♦ Town Meeting 7:30 pm Town Hall	

*Check with Zoning Office—672-4957

(continued from page 1)

Informational meetings will be held in November to explain the process and answer questions. The *Chronicle* will keep you informed about these dates and the appeals process. —Ed Ferman

Elderly Housing Advances

At its meeting on August 1, the Cornwall Elderly Housing Corporation (CEHC) chose Haynes Construction Co. of Seymour as the contractor for its ten-unit facility for seniors in Cornwall Bridge. The facility now has a name, "Bonney Brook," after the stream on the property. Thirteen applications were received from a list developed by CEHC consultant David Berto and architect Paul Selnau. These were winnowed to three and Haynes had the lowest bid.

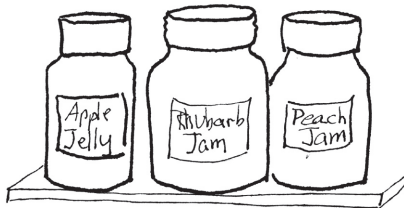
CEHC is moving forward on the long list of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirements that are necessary before any funding can be released. CEHC has been awarded \$1.5 million from HUD, and has another \$500,000 from other sources.

Important on the list is the future management of the housing. The management search committee interviewed several companies and selected Connecticut Real Estate Management, which currently oversees Kugeman Village.

The design and development committee, headed by Will Calhoun, has continued to fine-tune the building plans, including details like insulation and boiler efficiency that will achieve an Energy Star rating and fulfill another of the HUD requirements. (You can view plans and drawings of the project at cornwallhousingcorporation.com.)

"One last big hurdle is matching the design of Bonney Brook to the monies allocated," said CEHC president Cheryl Evans. "With that in place, we expect to get that first shovel into the ground this fall."

—Ginny Potter



Margaritaville

My garden is divided into two countries, north and south. They're separated by the mason line, a stone walkway.

In the north, the garden rises sedately toward the woods, interspersed by stretches of stone ledge. It's a quiet space. The plants are harmonious, the colors subdued – white, pale rose, mauve: lambs' ears, a pale pink anemone, the white cloud of calamintha,

the floating spires of cimicifuga, misty-topped artemisia. The boldest color is the deep purple of heliotrope, the most dramatic shape, the towering nicotiana sylvestris. The stone steps are threaded with creeping thyme. It's a pretty New England garden; Sissinghurst is clearly an ancestor.

In the south, everything is different. Just past the stone walk the ground drops steeply into a rough ravine, a dry watercourse running through it. At the end of the ravine is a rustic wooden bridge; beyond that, the meadow. This garden is not well bred or decorous; the reverse. Native blue lobelias have colonized it, thrusting their bright, bold spires everywhere – among the ostrich ferns and Russian sage and valerian. This harsh lobelia blue is actually the mildest color down here in the south. I've let in the cardinal flower, the native red lobelia, with its six-foot spires of dense, saturated red. "A bit showy," one of my gardening friends said tactfully. She's wrong. It's not a bit showy, it's completely over the top, and it's spreading fast, popping up wherever the blue has not. That's not all. Another gardening friend handed me two small potted annuals last spring. "You can put them anywhere," she said. "They're Mexican sunflowers, bright orange, about six feet tall." In the north they'd look shockingly out of place, but down here in the south, with all those pushy lobelias, they strike a triumphant chord. My Mexican sunflower friend also gave me two vines, which I planted at either end of the bridge. Now scarlet-orange blooms clamber along the railings. Red salvia makes a fine scarlet mist, threading along the banks. On either side of the bridge is the tall, elegant native milkweed, *asclepia incarnata*, whose soft pink flower strikes a muted counter-tone to all the brassy hot notes. Creamy clethra blossoms make thick swathes through the rioting parade.

The point of all this is the visitors: lots of these bright-hued plants are native, which makes the southern garden a destination, a flight hub. Butterflies flutter through all day: on the milkweed are clouds of amber-colored monarchs, yellow tiger-swallowtails, russet spangled fritillaries and iridescent pipe-vine swallowtails. The butterflies hover absent-mindedly, then alight. They breathe with their wings, inhaling, exhaling, lifting dreamily off. Zillions of bees, focused and serious, climb in and out of the clethra. Cadres of hummingbirds, those tiny avian helicopters, swoop up and down the cardinal flower spires. Fat striped monarch caterpillars march lumpily along the bridge, on their way somewhere else. It's a thriving community.

The northern garden - so decorous, so pretty, so polite! - has bees among the calamintha, not much more. Everyone else has gone to Margaritaville.

—Roxana Robinson

Welcome

Owen Kayleb Elsner to
Stephanie and Jeffrey Elsner

Congratulations

Juliet Wade Lyon and Scott Billy Edwards
Rebecca Schultz and Djibrine Mainassara

Land Transfers

Laura Kirk to Robin B. and Karen Lacy, two parcels of land with buildings and improvements thereon, at 26 Dudleytown Road, for \$795,000.

Michael A. and Paul R. Nyklicek to Hamilton D. South IV and Manuel Bellod, land with improvements thereon at 209-211 Whitcomb Hill Road, for \$1,100,000.

Eileen Pond Levine, Successor Trustee of the Mildred Jean Pond Living Trust to Peter M. Gorat, Jr. and Michele M. Gorat, 12 acres with residence and other improvements thereon at 112 Sharon Goshen Tpke., for \$350,000.

Marydale Debor to Peter and Erin Donohoe, land with buildings and improvements thereon at 24 Dark Entry Road, for \$600,000.

John B. Wolfe to Wayne Wolfe, land with all improvements thereon at 145 Popple Swamp Road, for \$50,000.

Local Politics

Cornwall politics inhabits an alternate world from Washington in that both parties appear to be satisfied with the work of town government, as evidenced by the cross-endorsements of First Selectman Gordon Ridgway, Town Clerk Vera Dinneen, Treasurer John Green and Tax Collector Jean Bouteiller.

However, there are some interesting contests to make your votes count in November. Four candidates are running for two seats on Planning and Zoning; four are running for three seats on the Board of Education; and three for two seats on Zoning Board of Appeals.

"So far willingness to serve on boards is holding up OK," Ridgway told us. "But there are concerns for the future." He mentioned town demographics (with over 65s and 85s the fastest-growing groups), the large numbers of unaffiliateds, and the fact that "boards are dealing with more complicated issues and regulations that require more time and commitment."

Here are the candidates chosen at the July party caucuses:

Democrats: First Selectman, Gordon Ridgway; Selectman, Richard Bramley; Town Clerk, Vera Dinneen; Treasurer, John Green; Tax Collector, Jean Bouteiller; Board of Education, Rebecca Hurlburt and Thomas Levine; Board of Finance, Celia Senzer and alternate Maureen Donahue;

The E-Mail Bag

CORNWALL ON THE WEB

Here are two websites we like:
 simontcartoons.com: *Marc's political cartoons, 1960 to date; you can order prints for framing.*

zillow.com: *All you need to know about real estate. Type your address, and up comes a satellite photo of your home and a depressing graph of its value over the last several years. We posted these on the Cornwall Community Network and elsewhere and asked readers for their favorite sites or blogs.*

whatsthatbug.com: *A one-stop way to identify the wide variety of insects in Cornwall. You can browse the database or submit a photo of the bug in question.* —Lori Blakey Welles

funtrivia.com: *Competition/tournaments in lots of different fields, all free.* —Tom Bechtle

yummly.com: *The best recipe site out there!* —Heather Dinneen

foodpolitics.com: *A blog by Marion Nestle, an expert in public health nutrition.*

sustainabletable.org: *Celebrates local sustainable food and educates consumers on food-related issues.* —Tom Levine

hort.uconn.edu/plants/: *Descriptions, pictures, and advice on Connecticut plants, trees.*

victorianweb.org: *Run out of Brown University, it offers the comfort of the Victorian era for those in denial of modern life.* —Jim Fishman

rottentomatoes.com: *Over 350,000 movie review links.* —Gail Jacobson

BoingBoing.net: *Real news and all things peculiar.* —Nick Pohl

manhattanusersguide.com: *Interesting ideas about lots of things, including, but not limited to, Manhattan.* —Phyllis Nauts

snopes.com: *I use this at least weekly to debunk various claims and pass-along craziness that I receive.* —Jeff Jacobson

cathypareto.blogspot.com: *Cathy Pareto's blog; sound, happening financial advice for all.* —Darilyn Woods

pandora.com: *Personalized Internet radio.*
 cornwallfarmmarket.org: *You're virtually there.* —Richard Griggs

philosophydog.blogspot.com: *Brian Thomas's blog on his large rescue dog Guy. Pictures.* —Hendon Chubb

sparklepony.blogspot.com: *Concentrating on the hairdo and makeup aspects of politics.*

internetslang.com: *For old folks; tells them (all right, us) what WTF and OT and OMG mean.*

badattitudes.com/MT/: *Didn't think I'd leave my own blog out, did you?* —Jerry Doolittle

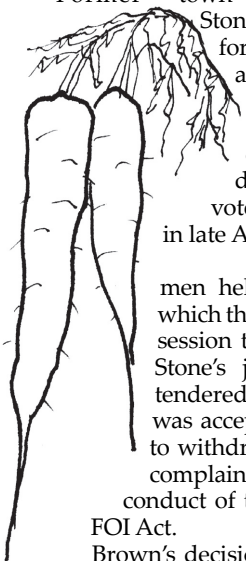
Yes, we know: the above piece should ideally be read on a *Chronicle* website, so you could instantly go to these interesting sites. We're working on that. —The Editors

Board of Assessment Appeals, Natuerlal Patel; Park & Rec., Kenneth Considine, Johan Winsser, Bridget R. Lynch and Erin Hedden; Planning and Zoning, Jill Cutler and John Miller; Zoning Board of Appeals, Amy Worthington-Cady.

Republicans: First Selectman, Gordon Ridgway; Selectman, Kenneth C. Baird; Town Clerk, Vera Dinneen; Treasurer, John Green; Tax Collector, Jean Bouteiller; Board of Finance, Ralph Gold and alternate Jack Preston; Board of Education, Tracy Gray and Carl Hermann; Board of Assessment Appeals, Roger Kane; Planning and Zoning, Steve Saccardi and James Young; Zoning Board of Appeals, Joanne Wojtusiak and Priscilla Miller. —Audrey Ferman

FOI Complaint Denied

Former town crew foreman Richard Stone's Freedom of Information (FOI) complaint against the Board of Selectmen was recently denied by FOI hearing officer Tracie Brown. Her decision is subject to a vote by the full commission in late August.



Last October, the selectmen held a special meeting at which they discussed in executive session their dissatisfaction with Stone's job performance. Stone tendered his resignation, which was accepted. He then attempted to withdraw the resignation via a complaint that the notice and conduct of the meeting violated the FOI Act.

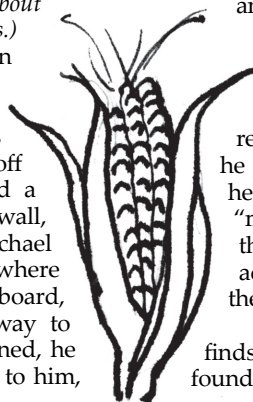
Brown's decision stated that, while the notice of the meeting was too vague to communicate to the public the business at hand, the selectmen did not violate the FOI Act as alleged.

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway acknowledged that FOI requirements are complicated, and that they would be more specific in posting meeting notices in the future. An FOI workshop is planned for all boards and commissions. —Ed Ferman

This Potter Is a Wizard Too

(This is the fifth in our series about longstanding Cornwall businesses.)

Todd Piker began dabbling in the arts and pottery early in his life. When he didn't get accepted into the college of his choice, he opted to take a year off to travel overseas. He landed a coveted apprenticeship in Cornwall, England with master potter Michael Cardew. Pottery was a trade where you could barter for room and board, so Todd not only found a way to support himself while he learned, he found a craft that truly spoke to him,



so he stayed with it.

While he was away, his father, Myron, purchased property in Cornwall Bridge with author and dramatist Richard Nash. Upon Todd's return to the U.S., he and his father concocted the idea of a pottery business, with Todd the maker and Myron the seller. Todd was only 20 years old when they launched the business in 1973.

For the first ten years, the business only "took orders," since his property was not zoned for retail business. Todd found a mentor in Town Clerk Kay Fenn, whom he recalled was incredibly helpful to the fledgling business.

In 1984, wanting to become a more visible business in a proper selling venue, and realizing that he had "an ice cube's chance in hell" to get proper zoning to sell in Cornwall Bridge, Todd found a vacant building in West Cornwall, negotiated a low rent, then purchased the building that he still occupies today. Todd solicited help from Homer Page, a well-known "man of all trades" to help redesign the store. With The Deck restaurant across the street serving as a draw, the business took off.

Fast-forward 27 years – Todd still finds his work satisfying. He actually found that the economic downturn played

in his favor by creating a more "direct to customer" connection via his website. The site offers a wide range of his wood-fired work: from collectible exhibition pots, to tableware, to lamps.

Todd has been involved with the Cornwall Economic Development Committee, which gives him an opportunity to network with other local business owners. This group is continuing to reinforce the Cornwall brand and our enchanting village.

In thinking of the future, Todd mused that "maybe I'll have a grandchild or great-grandchild that will want to be a potter." If only we could be so lucky! —Janet Sanders

Cornwall Briefs

• **Cornwall's Economic Development Study Group:** The Board of Selectmen has called a town meeting for September 30 at 7:30 P.M. to act on a series of recommendations by the above study group, including changing its status to a permanent commission (CEDC) with no more than nine active members representing "a cross section of Cornwall businesses and residents." Members would be appointed by the selectmen, who would include one of their own as an ex-officio member. The CEDC would be asked to



"cultivate, strengthen and sustain a vital, viable and evolving business climate" and to "identify and monitor existing assets and potential challenges."

• **CCS:** School was back in business Monday, August 29, with an estimated 107 students, down nine from last year. There is a new principal, Michael Croft, two new teachers, Tara Roby, middle-school English, and Danielle Krueger, middle-school math and algebra, and, for the first time, an all-day kindergarten.

• **Rumsey:** Yes, it's down but not out of our heads. There's the matter of collecting the cost to Cornwall of bringing the old girl down; over \$43,000. Actually the amount owed the town has grown by several thousand because of accrued interest. The mortgage is held by JP Morgan Chase, who sent the town a letter last year saying we would have our money by January. But January is now ancient history and the bill remains outstanding. The bank has told town attorney Perley Grimes that it will be paid by September 1. If not received the town will proceed with foreclosure action.

• **Sedgwick Monument Redux:** Remember we said in July that a maple planted by the CCS class of 1950 had fallen and been replaced by a tree planted by the class of 2011? And we further asked if there were any relatives of the Civil War general in the earlier class. An e-mail arrived from Charlie Gold filled with good Cornwall history. The 1950 tree had been planted by "Cornwall School Children" two of whom were related to General Sedgwick: Charlie's sisters, Catee Gold (Hubbard) and the late Rebecca "Becky" Gold (Williams). Charlie explained the Gold-Sedgwick connection: "Our grandfather, Charles L. Gold, married Clara Sedgwick in 1900, and, in 1758, our great-great-great-grandfather, the Rev. Hezekiah Gold, married Sarah Sedgwick." Charlie was in high school by 1950.

• **The Planning & Zoning Commission** has amended its bylaws: Henceforth, members must attend at least half of the meetings held during each year, and anyone who does not will be asked to resign. (Elected officials cannot be ordered to vacate a seat.) Apparently P&Z has frequently lacked a quorum for its votes.

To Our Out-of-Town Subscribers

If you see a red circle on your label date, it means your subscription has expired, and it's time to send us a check. Thank you!

• **Fred Bate** has retired as assistant manager of the Transfer Station. Fred has worked at the station since Art Breaun retired in 2001.

—John Miller

Events & Announcements

Art in Cornwall: For the month of September, the Library will feature "Anxious Chickens: Daily Painting Narratives" by Tilly Strauss.

At The Wish House, "Rugs & Hangings" designed by Hendon Chubb will be featured, with a reception for the artist on Saturday, September 3, from 4 to 6 P.M.

Artwork by Treasa Pattison and Lauren Kendrick will be shown at the National Iron Bank.

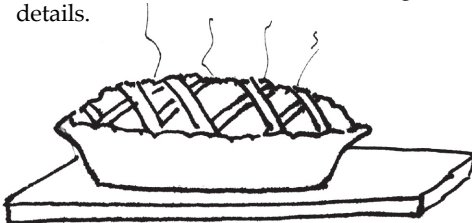
Cornwall Historical Society: Join CHS and the Cornwall EMT for Family Emergency Awareness September 10 at 11 A.M. at the Society's table at the Agricultural Fair. Children will learn gently what to expect if the EMT comes to their house and will tour the ambulance.

Walking tour of Cornwall Village: Stroll around the Green and hear stories about the town's history, the Foreign Mission School, and Dr. Brad Walker, the town's last resident physician, subject of the Society's current exhibit. Saturday, September 17, 10 A.M. Meet at 7 Pine Street.

The memories of Dr. Brad Walker by his family, friends, and patients are now available at: cornwallhistoricalsociety.org. The "Care to Cure" exhibit is open weekends and continues to October 10.

Cornwall Association Annual Meeting and Newcomers Tea will be held at the Library Saturday, September 10, at 4 P.M., following the Ag Fair. Gordon Ridgway will give his State of the Town address, and there will be other speakers, including the new CCS principal, Mike Croft. Refreshments.

Second Annual Cornwall Harvest Sprint Triathlon: Saturday September 10, at 8 A.M. at Cream Hill Lake Association. No preregistration needed. Entries limited to 60. Proceeds will benefit the Cornwall Child Center. See cornwallchildcenter.org for details.



The Cornwall Agricultural Advisory Commission's 20th Annual Agricultural Fair: Saturday, September 10, 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. on the Village Green. See insert.

The Board of Assessment Appeals will meet Saturday, September 17, 9 to 10 A.M., at the Town Offices for the purpose of hearing appeals regarding motor vehicle assessments. No appointment is required. There will be no other time for hearing such appeals.

At the Library: Author Priscilla Gilman will discuss her new book, *The Anti-Romantic Child*, a lyrical memoir about raising a child with special needs. Books will be available for purchase and signing: Saturday, September 24, at 4 P.M.

Red Cross Blood Drive: At UCC Parish House on Friday, September 30, from 1 to 6:30 P.M. Refreshments. Call 1-800-RED CROSS for an appointment. Walk-ins welcome.

Cornwall Child Center Fall Registration is still open: Monday through Friday 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. for one- and two-year-old toddlers and three- to five-year-old preschoolers. New After School Enrichment Program at CCS: Monday through Friday, 2:55 to 5:30 P.M. for kindergarten through fifth grade. For information on both programs cornwallchildcenter.org or you can email cornwallchildcenter@yahoo.com.

Parcel Program: Applications for the single-family lots on Dark Entry Road are now being accepted by the Cornwall Housing Corporation. For more information contact Heather Dinneen at heather.dinneen@gmail.com or 672-6740.

CORNWALL CHRONICLE

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Jane Bevans, Illustrations
Ed and Audrey Ferman, Editors

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Barbara Gold and Franny Taliaferro, Editors
candbgold@cs.com or telumferre@earthlink.net

MANAGING EDITOR Ruth Epstein

CALENDAR EDITOR Erin Hedden
Mom917@sbcglobal.net

CIRCULATION Nan and John Bevans
Lucy and Jack Kling

DIRECTORS

Annie Kosciusko PRESIDENT
Paul De Angelis VICE PRESIDENT
Audrey Ferman TREASURER

Tom Barrett • Tom Bechtle • Edward Ferman • Erin Hedden
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