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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

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MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

Selectboard Offers Chief Position to Chris Williams

By JEFF SINGLETON

The Montague selectboard has voted to offer the position of permanent police chief to Chris Williams, who is currently serving as the acting chief.

The vote came at the board's November 26 meeting, after town administrator Steve Ellis informed the board that the state Civil Service Commission had ranked Williams first among three internal applicants for the position. The main factor in that ranking was an evaluation process that took place in Montague in October. Ellis informed the board that they would not be able to see the details of the three candidates' evaluations, only

their Civil Service rankings.

"So where do we go from here? Do we have this on our agenda for next week?" selectboard member Michael Nelson asked after Ellis announced the rankings. "I would be willing to entertain a motion to allow the chair and the town administrator to enter into discussions with number-one-ranked candidate Christopher Williams, to work up a potential contract to go to the board next week for a discussion in executive session."

After a very brief discussion, including a review by Ellis of the options open to the selectboard "just for the record," the board voted 3-0 to authorize Ellis and chair Rich

see CHIEF page A7

G-M SCHOOL COMMITTEE

A Montague Seat Opens Up; New High School Logo Approved

By MIKE JACKSON

GILL-MONTAGUE – At its Tuesday night meeting, the Gill-Montague school committee heard final closure on two major controversies that have spanned the last two years: the selection of a high school logo, and the conclusion of a dispute with the company that oversees the district's decade-long overbilling of the state Medicaid system. It also lost a member.

For the third time in two years, the regional school committee will fill an empty seat until the next election by selecting a volunteer from the community. Montague member April Reipold, who served four and a half years, or a term and a half, announced her resignation prior to the meeting Tuesday.

"My health isn't allowing me to attend such lengthy meetings," Reipold wrote. "The taxpayers and students and their families deserve someone who can commit to every meeting. I will find another way to serve the town and district."

Montague residents interested in filling in on the committee until townwide elections in May are asked to send a letter of intent to superintendent Michael Sullivan by January 2. The committee will select one when they meet January 8.

"I really enjoyed working with April," said Montague's Cassie Damkoehler. "Anyone that's interested in this position should know that they have big shoes to fill."

"We will miss April," said committee chair Jane Oakes of Gill.

see GMRSD page A7



The committee approved this logo, created by local designer Amy Schmidt Bouse and winner of a popular vote at the high school.

GILL SELECTBOARD

Gill Swallows Montague's Sewage Hike, Dreams Of Pumping to Greenfield

By GEORGE BRACE

Water issues were again in the forefront at the two most recent meetings of the Gill selectboard meetings. Acting as sewer commissioners, the board approved a 70.4% sewer rate increase for residents of Gill's Riverside district, who receive sewer services from the town of Montague. The increase had been anticipated for many months, and mirrors a 71% rate increase recently approved in Montague for its own sewer customers.

The board also approved two warrant articles to be voted on at a special town meeting scheduled for December 10 at 7 p.m. The first asks for a sewer budget increase to account for the recent rate hikes from Montague. The second involves allocating money for the rehabilitation project at the Slate library.

The Library project is primarily

funded through a state Green Communities grant, but the grant requires matching funds from the town. The matching funds were informally budgeted for when the grant application was made; the warrant article will formally allocate those funds. The board scheduled a meeting to review the two articles with the fin com on November 29.

In addition to the sewer rate and the budget article, several other water- and wastewater-related issues were discussed at the two meetings.

Administrative assistant Ray Purington reported on initial research into some ideas brought up in response to the sewer rate hike at previous meetings. Purington said he had spoken with a contact in Greenfield about the possibility of Gill tying in with the Greenfield sewer system, whose rates are much lower than Montague's. Based on that

see GILL page A4

MEMORIAL

Donald R. Clegg (1955-2018)



DAVID DETMOLD PHOTO

Don Clegg was a stalwart volunteer with a number of downtown organizations, and an all-around neighborly guy.

By MIKE JACKSON

TURNERS FALLS – Don Clegg worked hard for eleven years as this newspaper's distribution manager, and even in the last few months, as his health began to fail him, he remained earnestly dedicated to the job. When he died, peacefully, at the hospital in Springfield the Friday before Thanksgiving, the friends who attended were colleagues and volunteers from the paper.

Don came to Franklin County in 2006 at the tail end of a period of personal crisis none of us would

ever learn much about. He landed on his feet in downtown Turners Falls, and made a home here by throwing himself into a life of grassroots community service.

With a knack for creative problem-solving and steady good humor, he rolled up his sleeves and did great "behind the scenes" work.

Don's orderly, cursive script lines thousands of homemade ledger pages, tracking the territories of our different delivery routes, the new subscribers and those who had lapsed, the sales of each edition on each newsstand. Whenever the board of directors needed to

compose thank-you notes to benefactors, he would agree to contribute his time and penmanship.

He would beam with open pride at a difficult job well done, and despite the meagerness of his stipend here, would call me off the clock to report on all the loose ends tied up that day, and share incisive ideas of ways to fuel our growth. If you've read this newspaper in the last decade, it's because Don Clegg made sure you got it.

Don connected genuinely with many of his neighbors, and with many others he met through his

see CLEGG page A5

Interest-Free Loan Program Pitched As Relief For Sewer Bill Anguish

By MIKE JACKSON

MONTAGUE – Last spring we reported on a new program that offers local residents experiencing a cash crunch a better alternative to predatory payday loans. The Montague Community Loan Program has been successful so far, its coordinator says, and it might be able to provide assistance to those feeling the sting of Montague's 71% sewer rate hike.

Applicants must be residents of Montague, including Turners and Millers Falls, and must be able to show some form of regular income. If they qualify, they can receive a zero-interest loan, in the form of a payment directly to a vendor – a landlord, dentist's office, power company, or even town hall.

They will receive financial counseling from Community Action's Money Matters program, and must repay the loan within a year before

they can borrow again.

"The maximum we do is \$500," coordinator Shannon Martineau explained. "We don't pull their credit... We're trying to reach a segment of the population that isn't typically familiar with reaching out to social services."

The loan program is a one-year pilot, funded with \$10,000 by Greenfield Savings Bank. In May, Denise Coyne, the bank's chief

see LOANS page A4

DISPATCHES

Getting Ready for Katowice

By ANNA GYORGY

BERLIN – It's not just the climate that is heating up. Around the world, official country delegates, environmental organizations and international energy corporations are gearing up for the next round of international climate meetings – although with differing goals on how fast and how honestly to confront what almost everyone now accepts is an ongoing crisis, with no clear end in sight.

Last November I reported for the Traprock Center for Peace & Justice from Bonn, Germany, where the 23rd "conference of the parties" to the UN Convention on Climate Change took place. A short video report on citizen action and issues there is available at www.traprock.org.

In 2018, the 24th Conference of the Parties (COP24) will be held in Katowice, Poland, from December

2 to 14. The world will be watching, and I will be reporting from Berlin on citizen action and climate justice work during the summit, there

and internationally. For without strong citizen action and demands for change, entrenched energy and

see DISPATCHES page A4



GYORGY PHOTO

Project Unbearable: Danish sculptor Jens Galschiot made this full-sized copper bear mounted on oil pipe, symbolizing the increase of atmospheric carbon dioxide up to 2015, for the Paris climate summit. Our correspondent took this photo last year at Bonn.

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political forces will continue to delay, block needed change, and thus guarantee more and greater disasters ahead.

Goals for this international meeting include: increased action on national climate targets; providing financing for “developing” countries’ efforts to both mitigate and adapt to climate change; and finally, to set up the implementation guidelines of the Paris Climate Agreement (adopted in 2015). These include ways to set and evaluate national climate plans.

This summer’s heat wave created near-unlivable situations in many regions, historic hurricanes and storms, fires and droughts that wreaked great personal and monetary damage. The recently published special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasized that the window on limiting the climate crisis is closing.

The seriousness of the situation is also laid out in the 1,500-page Fourth National Climate Assessment, the report mandated by Congress every four years. This is the one quietly issued by the US government on the Friday after Thanksgiving, perhaps in the hope that people wouldn’t notice, won’t care, or will accept the president’s dismissal of its conclusions, not that he reads them.

And they don’t make for easy reading. Take, for example, the summary findings on “interconnected impacts”:



A graphic from Ende Gelände (Stop Coal) website: Unterlassen? Unten Lassen (Refrain? Leave it Under!)

Climate change affects the natural, built, and social systems we rely on individually and through their connections to one another. These interconnected systems are increasingly vulnerable to cascading impacts that are often difficult to predict, threatening essential services within and beyond the Nation’s borders.

And on health:

Impacts from climate change on extreme weather and climate-related events, air quality, and the transmission of disease through insects and pests, food, and water increasingly threaten the health and well-being of the American people, particularly populations that are already vulnerable.

The US report analyzed predictable results of inaction. Meanwhile, “The Brown to Green Report 2018” issued here in Germany in mid-November detailed climate action – and inaction – in the industrialized G20 countries. These states account for 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

According to a co-author from Germanwatch, one of the 14 research organizations and NGOs from the G20 countries producing the report, “The G20 economies actually need to cut their emissions by half by 2030 to keep warming below 1.5°C,” or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit. (See the extensive data presented at www.climate-transparency.org/g20-climate-performance/g20report2018.)

To do that will mean dramatic shifts away from fossil fuels, as the report concluded that 82% of the G20’s energy supplies still come from fossil fuels, and that “in Saudi Arabia, Australia and Japan fossil fuels make up even more than 90% of the energy supply, with little or no change in recent years.”

As has been seen in the many years that international delegates have met to discuss climate under the auspices of the United Nations, prog-

ress and action are slow, given the huge economic investments and corporate interests behind fossil fuel development and assets worldwide.

Here in Germany, it is clear that this country’s earlier goals for reducing carbon emissions by 2020 will not be met. A major struggle is on continued reliance on coal power, and when and how to phase it out. Decades of solar and wind development have not been able to displace the entrenched, decades-old development of dirty open-pit brown coal (lignite) mines.

A national “coal commission” charged with planning an exit from coal was supposed to give its final report in December, but opposition from coal regions – especially in economically weak former East German areas – has delayed action, probably for months.

Meanwhile, a major environmental movement in recent years has focused on closing these mines and preventing their expansion through cutting the historic Hambach Forest to dig up the “brown gold” below.

Thousands of people have taken part in well-organized civil disobedience actions to immobilize work at the Garzweiler surface mine complex, a giant scar covering 30 square miles, with more excavation planned. (Shots of this moon-scape are in the video mentioned above.) Others have lived for years in “tree houses” to block cutting of the forest. Some of those arrested are in court this week.

Their actions have helped focus public attention on the climate killer energy source that must be rapidly phased out. And many Germans will greet the opening of COP24 in Katowice, itself in a major coal region, with national “Stop Coal – Climate Protection Now!” demonstrations. These will take place on Saturday, December 1, in the capital Berlin and in Cologne, not far from the Garzweiler open pit mine.

My next dispatch will report on the politics and goals of these gatherings, as the focus shifts to Katowice.



GILL from page A1

discussion, he said he believed it was at least a theoretical possibility.

Purinton said he had spoken with the engineer who had studied Gill’s inflow and infiltration (I&I) issue five years ago, and asked for a proposal for a feasibility study on connecting with Greenfield, and also on the possibility of Gill operating its own treatment system.

Sniffing Out Infiltrators

Purinton also reported on discussions he’d had regarding the town’s I&I issues, “just bouncing around ideas” with several people.

“Inflow and infiltration” refers to clean water getting into the sewer system, which is pumped and processed along with sewage and adds to the cost of sewer services. Additional water can come from a variety of sources, such as unsealed pipes, storm drain runoff, and the illegal practice of pumping water from sump pumps into the sewer system.

One of the ideas Purinton came across was a town which periodically sent “no sump pump” letters to realtors in addition to homeowners, asking them to either notify the town, or request buyers and sellers to notify the town, of the existence of illegal pump setups. He also brought up the idea of requiring sewer inspections, similar to smoke detector inspections, when a property changes hands.

“Why not? We require a septic inspection,” responded board member Randy Crochier. Purinton and Crochier agreed that such measures are probably often circumvented by homeowners disconnecting illegal systems before inspection, but were worth thinking about.

Selectboard member John Ward asked if Purinton had come across any estimates of the economics of another investigation into the source of I&I, similar to the one

done five years ago. Purinton said it did not look to him like the earlier study ever got to the point of running numbers, because it had been obvious from initial work that it did not make economic sense to fully investigate and repair the system.

Purinton and the selectboard agreed that with sewer rates now twice what they were then, it may be worth a second look.

Flood Mapping

In other water news, Purinton notified the board of a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Risk Mapping, Assessment, & Planning Meeting to be held on November 27 at the Great Falls Discovery Center.

Purinton said he believed the meeting was an initial step in FEMA seeing if updates were necessary to the flood maps for the middle Connecticut watershed. The board briefly discussed the subject of flooding, but off the tops of their heads, did not come up with any changes they thought might be necessary in Gill’s risk assessment.

Purinton noted he’d had recent reassurance that the sewer pump station was safe from any flooding effects. He also said he thought it might be best to fill out a survey provided by FEMA as part of the assessment, after the meeting, when he had a better idea of what they were really looking for.

Quality of Life Policing

Gill resident Jeff Suprenant appeared before the board to complain about what he believes to be unregistered vehicles at a location on South Cross Road, in excess of the two allowed by town bylaw. He also asked that something be done about vehicles parked on the side of the road at a Barney Hale Road location, pointing out that the roadside was town property.

After a discussion, the board decided to send a written notice to the property owner on South Cross Road, potentially triggering penalties and further action.

Chair Greg Snedeker said he had personally spoken to people at the Barney Hale Road location in the past, due to the presence of cars near the road creating a dangerous situation. He also noted the cars have been there for a very long time. “You kinda hope that being neighbors, people would eventually comply, but that’s not happening,” he said. “So I agree, I think it needs to be addressed.”

Suprenant also said he believed there had been a fire at the house on the property, and that people were living there without having filed permits for fixing the property. He said he had spoken with the building inspector, but was unsure where the matter stood.

Crochier said the selectboard would work with the building inspector, health agent, and police department as necessary in dealing with the situation.

Other Business

Purinton said there had been a “good inspection” of the new Gill Elementary School drinking water treatment system by the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on November 21. He said the installer is hoping to continue work on December 5.

Randy Crochier reported on Gill’s 225th anniversary activities, including the recent showing in the town hall of Free Spirits, the documentary about the Renaissance Community, followed by a discussion with four former members of the community. He said about 40 people showed up, and having the former members on hand to discuss the film and community added greatly to the event, providing different perspectives to those presented in the movie.

Crochier said the next event on the 225 calendar was not finalized yet, but he is hopeful former state senator Stan Rosenberg and current senator Susannah Whipps will be in attendance at the December 10 special town meeting. Snedeker added that it is possible senator-elect Jo Comerford may also attend.

The historical commission was notified that the Gill Center Historic District has been accepted by the National Park Service to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Purinton said the historical commission had worked hard on the project for several years, and called it “a job well done.”

Purinton informed the board that Gill has been awarded a \$12,000 grant from the DEP for a curbside compost collection pilot program. Jan Ameen of the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District had discussed the idea with the board earlier in the year, at which time it seemed like it might not make sense financially, but the board decided to ask her to apply for the grant to further investigate the possibility. Gill does not have to accept the grant.

Purinton said Ameen recently pointed out that, since the earlier discussion, the company Gill uses for trash and recycling sold their business to a larger company, which changes the picture. Crochier agreed with her assessment.

The board approved bids the town received on a group of surplus equipment that had been put up for auction, including a bid of \$1,850 for the fire department’s 1986 rescue van, \$200 for a 2008 Crown Victoria police cruiser, and varying amounts for several other items.

The board authorized Snedeker to sign Gill’s Green Communities annual report, which is required by the state for the town to maintain its standing in the program.



LOANS from page A1

operating officer, told the Reporter that she hoped its success would prompt other banks to participate.

“We’ve had sort of a slow response in finding eligible community members and getting the word out,” said Martineau, “but the people who have signed up for the program have so far been successful.”

Martineau, a Montague resident herself, said she has reached out to town administrator Steve Ellis and treasurer/tax collector Eileen Seymour to publicize the program to taxpayers struggling to cover this month’s sewer bill.

“I saw on Facebook other residents complaining, and someone said ‘So much for Christmas presents this year,’” she said. “This is something that is available to help these people.”

The town has already reduced the interest rate on overdue bills from 14% to 7%, but Martineau said the zero-interest loan would be much better option.

“There’s a lot of seniors on fixed income who having a 71% increase in one of their main bills is going to have quite an impact,” she said.

“If we can help them to spread out the payments over the next six months, and start to plan for the payment due six months from now, I think it will be good for the community.”

Interested residents can contact Shannon Martineau directly at (413) 376-1179.



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