Big Budget Boggles Board

The good news is that the Board of Selectmen’s budget for the coming fiscal year looks great, with a probable increase of about 2 percent. The Board of Education's budget bears the bad news: a requested increase of 8.9 percent.

At meetings on March 11 and 18, the Board of Finance tussled with various projected numbers for the schools. The teacher salary line in the CCS budget—the town’s largest single expense—is up to $716,871, a 7 percent increase reflecting contractual pay raises and added teacher time for music and physical education. But that’s less than half the percentage increase coming from the high school. The town will have to pay for four more HVRHS pupils next year (43 to 47), raising our share of an already increased projected numbers for the schools. The teacher salary line in the CCS budget—the town’s largest single expense—is up to $716,871, a 7 percent increase reflecting contractual pay raises and added teacher time for music and physical education. But that’s less than half the percentage increase coming from the high school. The town will have to pay for four more HVRHS pupils next year (43 to 47), raising our share of an already increased projected numbers for the schools.

The Board of Finance will meet on April 1 and 15 to prepare a final budget for presentation at a public hearing on April 23. The final step in the process is a town meeting to vote on the budget on May 21.

—Bob Potter

What Goes Around

For the village of West Cornwall, the brightest countepoint to the sad closing of Hedgeworks Market on March 14 (see Letters) is the imminent opening of the new Station House restaurant in the former Cadwell’s Corner. Partners Debbie Laigle and Peggy McEnroe (who have worked together for years at the Millerton Deli), are hoping to fire up the grill on April 7, following months of work installing new fixtures, flooring, and bathrooms, along with painting and procuring firehouse decorations.

The two entrepreneurs intend to be open six days a week (all but Tuesday), starting at 6 a.m., for breakfast and lunch, with dinner provided Thursday through Saturday. The former bakery will function as a take-out section for hot and cold meals, salads, and desserts, while the main restaurant will feature numerous new touches, including a tripartite American (hamburgers!), vegetarian, and Mexican menu; a long, side-up breakfast counter; and a beer and wine license, anticipated sometime in May.

With the troubling failure of several prominent businesses in West Cornwall, many residents have expressed concerns for the village’s commercial viability. But Ian Ingersoll is one entrepreneur who suggests that a larger perspective is in order.

“There was a point in the mid-1980s when there was sagebrush blowing through West Cornwall, and people said it was dying. But it came back, and it’s about to come back again. The Station House is going to have a positive effect on everything, and the renovation of the Covered Bridge will attract lots of media coverage, drawing all kinds of people back to the village,” he predicted.

Ian added that from a retail perspective, business in West Cornwall is doing fine, pointing among other things to Cafe Lally with its first-rate vegetarian menu, Michael Trapp’s and Dave Mason’s antique dealerships, the flourishing of Harold McMillan’s fly fisherman’s shop, and an ever growing demand for a certain style of furniture.

Blanca Griggs also said that there has been a steady, if gradual, increase in business (continued on page 2)
for her Wish House, once she figured out that relying on the village’s fickle tourist trade was fraught with peril. Persistence and catering closely to the desires of a carefully observed local and regional customer base were the only magic answers she could advise for businesses seeking a toehold in the tight confines beside the Housatonic.

Laigle and McEnroe appear to be heeding to that wisdom—trying to determine which of Hedgerow’s services they should take on (newspapers? deli meats? milk?), while making it known they want to hear from their customers.

Dave Cadwell, who knows a thing or two about the local market, says, “There’s certainly a pent-up demand. People are really hungry to have the place back open. Goodness knows, that location speaks for itself. This will hopefully be the match to light the fire in the village, so that before you know it people will be complaining about too much traffic.”

—David Monagan

Canine Checkups Coming

Starting this month, the State of Connecticut plans to get tough about enforcing dog licensing rules. According to Rick Stone, Cornwall’s animal control officer, he and his assistant, Brad Hedden, will be required to go door to door starting April 16, checking that all the town’s dogs are licensed, and even more important, have up-to-date rabies shots. Noncompliance can result in a hefty fine—$121.

The state’s concern about rabies is fueled by the cyclical pattern of rabies epidemics. Four years ago the Northwest Corner had a major epidemic that wiped out 92 percent of its raccoon population, and another wave of raccoons could sweep up from the south where this has been their home, sometimes their lifelong home.

In the coming weeks the corporation will also be considered in cooperation with other institutional facilities in the Cornwall Plains Zone. Scott Cady and Don Bardot (for Nicholas Bruces et al.) spoke in support of the latter zoning restriction, and in a letter the first selectman suggested that the restriction be town wide. Because of problems with the wording pointed out by town planner Tom McGowan, the board decided to deny the petition and to work on writing new regulations to achieve the same purpose.

—Anne Baren

Exploring Senior Housing

Petitions and Permits

P&Z met on March 8 and dealt with the wide variety of matters that make such evenings always interesting. In addition to dealing with permits for an accessory apartment, driveways, a directional sign for a church, and an application for a home office, a nine-month extension was granted to the FSB Associates for gravel excavation with no change in the date of final restoration, April 1, 2000. Instead of waiting until all the gravel has been excavated, restoration has been done section by section, resulting in less excavation in the time originally allotted. After two letters of support from neighbors and favorable reports from the board on the work already done, the petition was granted.

Two petitions were denied: one to change the regulation requiring a 50 foot set-back in a five-acre zone for a one- or two-car garage and one to exclude correctional and certain other institutional facilities in the Cornwall Plains Zone. Scott Cady and Don Bardot (for Nicholas Bruces et al.) spoke in support of the latter zoning restriction, and in a letter the first selectman suggested that the restriction be town wide. Because of problems with the wording pointed out by town planner Tom McGowan, the board decided to deny the petition and to work on writing new regulations to achieve the same purpose.

—Anne Baren

Exploring Senior Housing

At its March meeting the Cornwall Housing Corporation launched a new effort to provide senior housing in Cornwall. This effort seeks to increase the local options for seniors who may need smaller or more affordable housing without leaving the community that has been their home, sometimes their lifelong home.

In the coming weeks the corporation will be assessing the extent of Cornwall’s needs, types of housing ranging from independent to assisted living, sources of funding, and feasible sites. Development of a Cornwall senior center will also be considered in cooperation with other interested groups and individuals.

The need for senior housing has been recognized for many years, dating back to the 1970s when the old Rumsey Hall School building was the focus of an earlier effort.

CHC remains committed to providing a wide range of housing options for Cornwall’s diverse population. Kugeman Village, presently fully occupied, contains eighteen units of rental housing with one-, two-, and three-bedroom units. Home ownership is reachable for many through the “parcel program.” CHC’s last two available sites will be leased shortly and the search for more parcels will continue.

For more information about Kugeman Village call 672-4439 and for the parcel program contact Ken Keskenen, 672-6486, or Peter Hammond, 672-6840.

—Peter Hammond

Mastery Tests: Mixed Results

The 1998-99 Connecticut Mastery Test results show that despite some weak spots, CCS scored among the top 25 percent of Connecticut public schools.

Fourth graders show the greatest spread, breezing through the reading test with 96 percent scoring “at or above state goal,” while only 29 percent attained that goal in writing—the lowest score in Region One. Only 53 percent of sixth graders and 69 percent of eighth graders met state goals in that category, prompting Principal Bill Oros’ development of a “writing improvement plan.”

On the brighter side, he notes that math and reading scores are moving back towards pre-1995 (i.e., pre-population boom) levels, with reading scores being especially high. Math results were 68 percent, 82 percent, and 81 percent, respectively, for fourth, sixth, and eighth graders.

—Jamie Monagan

Library Grant No. 2?

A public hearing called by the Board of Selectmen will be held in Town Hall on Tuesday, April 6, at 7:30 p.m. to discuss a proposed application for a Small Cities grant to pay for most of those elements of the new Cornwall Library needed to meet the handicapped accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While no precise cost estimate has yet been made, Library President Lisa Lansing Simont says that she expects the application will request between $75,000 and $100,000 from the State Department of Economic and Community Development, the agency that administers the Small Cities program. Typical items that would be paid for by the grant include handicapped-accessible bathrooms, easy-opening doors, wider aisles between bookshelves and special furniture that is...
Events & Announcements

CCS Kindergarten Registration for the 1999–2000 school year will be held on April 6, 8, 12, and 14. Any child turning five on or before December 31, 1999, is eligible. Parents should call the school office at 672-6617 to schedule a time for their child to visit the kindergarten room and meet Mrs. Wadham, the kindergarten teacher. Parents need to bring their child’s birth certificate with them.

Eighth Annual Benefit Auction of the Cornwall Child Center will take place at Mohawk Mountain Ski Lodge on Sunday, May 2. Come and bid on 200 items including goods and services from area businesses, art work, theater tickets, restaurant meals, and use of New York apartments and an ocean-side home in Ireland.

The silent auction begins at 1:30 P.M. and the live auction at 3 P.M. under the gavel of our fine auctioneer Dave Cadwell. Admission is $5 which includes delectable hors d’oeuvres and beverages. It’s a great time for a good cause. For more information call 672-6880 or 672-4815.

The Fire Alarm Ordinance that was approved at the February town meeting went into effect on March 13. A permit to put in a fire alarm system must also be obtained from the building inspector, Bill Jenks. A permit for existing fire alarms systems must also be obtained to continue operation under the ordinance. The building inspector’s office is at Northwest Lumber (672-0711).

Art in Cornwall: At the National Iron Bank Nona Coffill will be exhibiting paintings during the month of April. Nancy Calhoun’s show of watercolors continues at the Cornwall Library until April 3, followed by Helen Migliacci’s oil paintings until May 8. At the Wish House, Nicholas Jacobs’ photographs will continue through April.

REFLECTING ON HEDGEROWS

Closing Hedgerows Market was like saying good-bye to a dear friend or losing a childhood dream. Only yesterday, combining a quality market with a sit-down restaurant had seemed like a surefire answer to Cornwall’s needs. Moreover, we’d hoped our organic Angus beef and other town-grown produce and selected products would be widely appealing to locals and tourists alike. The business plan seemed sound.

Unfortunately, in the two years Hedgerows was open, we gained enough know-how on what not to do in a small business to last a lifetime—at perhaps less cost (we console ourselves) than an MBA. Some of our fondest theories did not quite match the reality of the West Cornwall market, and our financial obligations came down fast and furious.

We now measure the “success” of Hedgerows not in financial terms, but in the good memories it produced, friends otherwise never met, and the acceleration of our personal transition from casual weekenders to full-fledged town residents. We’ve found our roots.

Hedgerows will surely move on to a new life, but it is also important that Cornwall understand it too has lost something and perhaps learn from our mistakes. A successful “general store” surely contributes to the quality of our community life.

The entrepreneurial risk-takers in our town need to be nurtured and encouraged. The Café Lolly and new Station House can only thrive (especially through the long winters) if we collectively help them succeed, and are thereby able to retain their services.

To all of you who supported Hedgerows Market, we are sorry for this loss and appreciate your friendship and patronage. Let’s hope a new enterprise will take its place for our collective enjoyment, and the realization of a new owner’s dreams.

—Dan and Kathy Cain

AN ENDURING LEGACY

As Hedgerows Market closes, I thought it important to take the moment to thank Dan and Kathy Cain for the effort that they have extended during the past years.

Their labors to keep the market open are appreciated by those of us who live and work in West Cornwall. And though the market may be closed (we hope only temporarily), the renovation of the building leaves a lasting testimony of their good will toward the village. The “old grocery store” is an important piece of architecture in West Cornwall that had suffered decades of neglect and needed to be extensively renovated.

The Cains successfully undertook this effort and, in doing so, helped preserve an important piece of our village, both for us and for future generations. For this, we will always be thankful.

—Ian Ingersoll

RINK REPORT

With the meltdown of spring, the organizers of the new skating rink wish to extend a wide circle of thanks for the community’s support: to the 32 contributors of just over $1,500 (including $200 from Park and Rec.); to the five local businesses that volunteered labor or materials; to contributors of roughly 550 hours of organization, construction, and maintenance time; and in particular to Rick and Howard Stone (and supporting cast) for their magnificent contribution of five days of labor and materials to let there be lights. Also, to the Fire Department for their help and forebearance, and Gordon Ridgway for his critical support.

Despite the fickle winter, an estimated 150 people (predominantly kids) hit the ice perhaps a couple of thousand blade hours, innumerable wild hockey scrimmages, and nice learn-to-skate times with parents and young children. With expenses running at around $1,300, approximately $200 should remain in the till until next December, when we hope to construct an expanded rink, roughly 30 percent larger than this year’s 95 x 48 foot skating surface.

—The Cornwall Rink Committee

PAINTED ROCK MYSTERY

What happened to the bright green and yellow spotted rock snake head on Kent Road in Cornwall Bridge? At first, I thought someone had managed to steal his bright red tongue, but after several passes in the car, it looks as if a wet, freezing winter has shattered the lower half of the head. Does anyone know what happened? Can he be restored? Will a Good Samaritan come to the rescue?

—Anne Baren
Spring Bird Walk on Saturday morning. May 1, will be led by Art Ginger, birder and photographer/naturalist. Meet at 7 a.m. at the North Cornwall Meeting House and return around 9 a.m. Bring binoculars, waterproof hiking boots, and energy. Beginning birders are definitely welcome. Call 672-0283 to reserve a place.

Congratulations to Brittany Zuckerman, an eighth-grade student at CCS, for winning first place (Best in Show) in the Connecticut Scholastic Art Awards. Her sculpture of 20 clay peas will be part of an upcoming national competition among artists in grades seven through twelve.

A Parent Support Group for parents of three- to five-year-old children meets every other Wednesday (this month, April 7 and 21), from 6 to 8 p.m. at the UCC Parish House. For information call the Housatonic Youth Service Bureau, 842-4720.

Artist Robert Andrew Parker will show slides and talk about his work and travels on Sunday, April 11, at 4 p.m. at the Cornwall Library. Refreshments. Presented by the Friends of the Library.

Gymnastics Classes for children pre-K to sixth grade will meet for six consecutive Saturday mornings, beginning on April 17. Classes will be from 10 to 11 a.m. and from 11 a.m. to noon at CCS. Fee, $27. To register call Sharon Sawicki, 672-2975.

Story Theater, a collection of classic fairy tales and fables with modern music and dance, will be performed by CCS upper grade students on Thursday, April 8, and Friday, April 9, at 7 p.m. in the gym. Tickets ($4) are on sale in the school office.