A Vote That's for Keeps

On Saturday, December 2, a referendum will decide a question that has loomed over Cornwall for half a decade and more. The vote, adjourned from a November 18 town meeting, is to be held at the Town Hall between noon and 8 P.M. The ballot will offer citizens two options for expansion of town office space: one would entail renovation and enlargement of present town government quarters; the other involves the purchase of Marvelwood’s former dining hall. This building would be converted into new town offices occupying the ground floor; the second floor would accommodate some office space and “civic space”—rooms for community meetings, social doings, and recreation. At the referendum, voters will be able to approve either project—or reject both.

Born in the ‘80s, the issue of town office space was shunted aside in a 1993 vote rejecting conversion of Rumsey to a town hall. The problem voters had with this scheme was its cost—approaching $2 million. In late 1994, a proposal to enlarge present office facilities was suggested by the Board of Selectmen. Estimated cost: $100,000.

Last spring, the plot thickened when Ben Gray and Rick Wolkowitz, through their Cornwall Limited Liability Company (CLLC), offered to buy the Marvelwood campus for $1.5 million and give the town dibs on purchase of its three largest buildings for municipal use.

To a number of citizens, the offer suggested a unique opportunity. It allowed conversion of Marvelwood building space to town offices and meeting rooms sufficient for the present and the foreseeable future. Just as significant was the chance to create a community center, something these citizens felt was sadly lacking in Cornwall, with its three zip codes and sprawling geography.

The Cornwall Library Association saw a more specific opportunity: removal of the municipal government to Marvelwood would liberate space long shared with the town and badly needed to accommodate library usage that is increasing by as much as 20 percent annually.

Pervading everything, as usual, was the crucial issue of cost. Those in favor of expanding current offices, including First Selectman Gordon Ridgway, fixed their gaze on that scheme’s bargain price: $271,000 (when the figures shook out in November). As a dollar amount, this is substantially lower than the Marvelwood option’s $781,500 (before the November 18 town meeting).

Also of great importance to proponents of current office-building expansion is the availability of funds in town “savings” accounts sufficient to cover the entire cost, including $12,000 for the purchase of half an acre of land. No direct tax increase would be needed. In contrast, the Marvelwood option would be paid for partly from capital funds (school bond proceeds and municipal savings) and partly from taxes. Depending on actual costs, taxpayers could face an annual increase of as much as 1/2 mill over four years—about 2 1/2 percent or $25 on a $1,000 tax bill—or it could be less.

Moving a step further, some looked beyond the total dollar amounts in the relative costs of the two options and saw another issue: how much would each option actually cost per square foot of expansion or renovation?

Hendon Chubb, of Cornwall’s Board of Finance, answered the question in a recently published letter: buying and renovating Marvelwood’s dining hall, he wrote, would cost $75 per square foot. This would “provide enough space to satisfy Cornwall’s needs” for 20 or more years. The office expansion plan “would cost close to $200” per square foot and provide about half of the space needed over the next two decades (according to a municipal building committee appointed by the town).

At the November 18 town meeting, Paul

(continued on page 2)
Baren echoed these comparisons, calling the Marvelwood option “the best use of the money.” But also at the meeting were some who thought the Marvelwood option’s $781,500 price tag too high. A question from the floor revealed that the $30,000 estimate for removal of two oil tanks near the dining hall had been off: removal actually cost about $6,300. Through an $11,000 adjustment suggested by a CLLC accountant, the town’s cost of purchasing the building from CLLC came down. Responding to these changes, a motion to reduce the total cost of the project to $746,800 carried.

The CLLC has also offered to sweeten the dining-hall deal—if and when the deal goes through—by purchasing Rumsey Hall from the town for $50,000.

However, this potential cost offset will not be reflected on the ballot, which will pose two questions:

1) Shall the Town of Cornwall expand and renovate the town office building for a sum not to exceed $271,000?

2) Shall the Town of Cornwall purchase Lot #3 and renovate the dining hall owned by the Cornwall Limited Liability Company for a sum not to exceed $746,800?

The voters’ answers, “yes” or “no,” can result in rejection of both options, or passage of both. If both pass, the option with more affirmative votes will prevail.

The December 2 referendum ballot is not limited to registered voters of Cornwall. If not registered here, to vote in the referendum you must be at least 18 and own property assessed at $1,000 or more, listed under your name on the Grand List of October 1, 1994. You must also prove U.S. citizenship. Proof can be a passport, birth certificate, naturalization papers, or voter registration card from elsewhere.

Not everyone may remember that the February 1993 vote on Rumsey was non-binding. This referendum is for keeps. So get out and vote.

—Charles Osborne

Where to Get Your Tree

No need to go beyond Cornwall to get your Christmas tree. There are at least four sources right here. The largest, oldest, and best-known is the high school (technically in Falls Village) where trees are grown, harvested, and priced (from $5 to $30, depending on quality) by VoAg students as part of their training. Tree sales begin December 2.

You can cut your own Douglas Fir, Frazier Fir, or Norway Spruce at Benjamin’s Farm on Route 4 (115 Furnace Brook Road), where all trees are $20. Weekends after Thanksgiving, and by appointment (672-6976).

Up on Great Hollow Road (No. 269) Rick Lynn has been growing trees—Douglas Fir and White Spruce—since his son was born, just 13 years ago. Cut your own. All trees $20. Weekends and by appointment (672-6572).

And for those who are tired of perfectly symmetrical trees and want something a little different, Lydia Wolf offers trees “in oddball shapes and sizes” at her Cream Hill spread. Cut your own. All trees $20. By appointment only (672-6273).

—George Kittle

Yutzler’s Redux?

For ten months Yutzler’s has been dark, lifeless. Now it seems it will soon be reborn as—guess what?—Yutzler’s.

The situation as we went to press was this: Phil Bishop, owner, had signed a contract with Don Cain, buyer, but they had not yet closed. If all goes as planned, Russ Sawicki, currently dinner chef at Cadwell’s, will run it, along with his wife Sharon. It will be a grocery store, probably with a gourmet deli. “But there are a lot of details that have to be worked out,” Russ said. Watch this space for a January update.

—George Kittle

Dems Win Big

It was the lowest voter turnout since 1983 (621 out of 946 or 65.6 percent) and more Republicans voted (227 out of 291) than Democrats (214 out of 290), yet Democrat Gordon Ridgway easily won a third term as First Selectman, defeating Republican Ray Augustyn, 466 to 139. Less than half of Cornwall’s unaffiliated and small-party voters went to the polls: 180 out of 365. In other contests and non-contests:

- Democrat Earl Brecher defeated Republican Jack Preston in the selectman race, 314 to 258. Preston’s total was higher than Augustyn’s, so he joins Brecher and Ridgway on the Board of Selectmen.
- Unopposed incumbents, Town Clerk Cheryl Evans and Tax Collector Helen Migliacci, both Republicans, received more votes on the Democratic line: Evans 320 and 258; Migliacci 311 and 269.
- Former Republican Selectman Steve Hedden won the Town Treasurer post over Democrat Todd Aichele, 322 to 262.
- There were four candidates for two spots on the Board of Finance and each party got one: Republican Bill Hurbut with 366 votes and Democrat Willis Ocain with 289 beat out Don Hedden, 285, and Irvie Piker, 234. Each party sent an alternate to the Board: Democrat Celia Senzer, 376 votes, and Republican Denton Butler, 294.
- Democrats won three seats on the Board of Education: incumbent Jim Terrall defeated Jim Levy 350 to 227, Phil Hart bested Sandra Ripley 318 to 258, and Anne Zinsser beat Margaret Bardot 335 to 241. Terrall’s term is four years; Zinsser and Hart will each serve two years.
- Each party won a seat on P&Z: Democrat John (Denny) Frost, next to Gordon Ridgway the biggest winner with 417 votes, and Lynn Scowill with 313. Republican Anne Kosciusko trailed with 273.
- Democrats swept two open spots on the Zoning Board of Appeals: Ella Clark, 359 votes and John Miller, 329, defeated Joanne Wojtusiak, 246, and Paul Baren, 203.
- There were five openings on the Park & Rec Commission. Democrat Caren Nelson won an uncontested race for a two-year term. And in four races for four-year terms, Democrats Mark Pastre, 377 votes, Joe Gwazdauskas, 326, and Deidre Fischer, 313, were winners. And even though the low Democrat, Sharon Sawicki, outpolled the top Republican, Don a Bishop, 291 to 253, Bishop gets the required minority seat on Park & Rec.

—John Miller

Welcome

Katelyn Marie to Jean and Thomas Kearns
Lydia Grace to Avery and Susanne Holland Gilbert

Good-bye to a Friend

Sophie K. Winkelhorn

Land Transfers

Douglas and Connie Gordon to Ralph Dzenutis 4.8 acres on Route 7 for $40,000.

Roanna S. Hammond to Rebecca Laughlin 7.69 acres on Fox Road for $60,000.

Cornwall Limited Liability Co. to Cornwall Housing Corp. a house and lot at 42 Jewell Street for $100,000.

The Fawn that Followed

The Housatonic River holds many fascinations, and I’m always amazed on every walk by the beauty I see. I thought I was getting used to it until one day this fall...

Cream, the dog, and I often do the “loop” walk at the end of River Road south of Cornwall Bridge. We swing up the dirt road, cross two big meadows, then go back by the river’s edge. Part of the path is quite overgrown, making it hard to see ahead. I heard a noise in the tall grass, sort of a rustling sound, and decided to stop and see what it might be. A fawn appeared on the path about 15 feet behind me. He looked at me, wiggled his enormous ears, and flicked his tail. After I walked a few more yards I realized the little guy was following. When I stopped, he stopped. I was sure his mother was nearby, ready to charge me, so I went, frequently looking over my shoulder. Still he followed, prancing, eating leaves, and pawing the ground. Worried about his mother, I told him to scam. His long skinny legs splayed out, making him look ready to jump in the air at any time.

Suddenly, we both heard a high-pitched sound, sort of like “EEUUU.” The fawn reared his head, twisted around in midair, and took off up a little incline. He jumped an old stone wall, and stood there bleating. The dog and I hid behind a tree and waited. Soon a doe stood in the path. She threw her head up and made the noise again. The fawn

(continued from page 1)
Letters to the Chronicle

BEST MATCH
With buildings again being offered to Cornwall, townspersons need to decide what we should own, how it should be used, and how much we should pay. Town offices are cramped and the Library would like more space, but is the purchase of the Marcel-wood dining hall for government space the best solution? I think not! Town workers need office rooms and a vault, while libraries function delightfully well in large open spaces. So why take a building with an open floor plan (the dining hall) and convert it into office cubicles and leave the Library with the awkward task of connecting two buildings?

We in Cornwall pride ourselves on our Yankee ingenuity and our ability to "make do." It always pleases me when I can patch something together and make it last just a little longer.

For years we have been "making do" with substandard conditions in the Town Office, and the proposal has been made to make it last a little longer. The only problem is that it will cost about $200 for each square foot of office space, and in a few years we will have to put another Band-Aid on the Band-Aid.

On the other hand, we have been offered a building in excellent condition which will meet our needs well into the future. It looks like a barn, but I've always liked barns. What I particularly like about this one is that it will save us all money in the long run.

—Tim Prentice

Making Do

We in Cornwall pride ourselves on our Yankee ingenuity and our ability to "make do." It always pleases me when I can patch something together and make it last just a little longer.

For years we have been "making do" with substandard conditions in the Town Office, and the proposal has been made to make it last a little longer. The only problem is that it will cost about $200 for each square foot of office space, and in a few years we will have to put another Band-Aid on the Band-Aid.

On the other hand, we have been offered a building in excellent condition which will meet our needs well into the future. It looks like a barn, but I've always liked barns. What I particularly like about this one is that it will save us all money in the long run.

—Rita G. Quinn

The Christmas Box

Military people will tell you that the most important gear to pack when moving a family overseas is the box of Christmas ornaments, physical nostalgia for the home.

Here at home the Christmas ornaments box inspires nostalgia, maybe, but also an urge to weed out the duds whose useful life ended sometime back in 1982. Such things as:

- The formerly edible—popcorn and cranberry chains, fossilized gingerbread persons, and once-a-tangerine with a clove-studded smiley face, reduced to the size of a walnut as if by a head-shrinking tribe.
- The once-cute—things made with pipe cleaners and construction paper, paste and glitter. These can be safely thrown away because the little boys who made them are now

(continued on page 4)
Last Chance to Order

The 1996 Chronicle Calendar

1996 is almost upon us, but you still have a few weeks to order the 1996 Cornwall Chronicle Calendar, available for the first time ever. It has lots of space to note important appointments and over 100 wonderful drawings by your favorite Chronicle artists to lift your spirits as you move through the months of the year. A terrific Christmas gift, it's available for only $10 at the Library and local stores, or $11.50 by mail. We'll be glad to mail calendars direct to your friends along with a card (yours or ours) announcing that it's a gift from you. Just send us your list.

Yes, I want the Chronicle to continue. Here is my tax-deductible contribution of:

Name
Address
City/State/Zip

Send ___ copies of the 1996 Calendar: $11.50 each.
Mail the Chronicle to the out-of-town address above: $10.

CORNWALL CHRONICLE
DECEMBER 1995

CORNWALL CHRONICLE, INC.
143 CREAM HILL ROAD, WEST CORNWALL, CT 06796

Bulk Rate
Car-Ri Sort
U.S. Postage
PAID
West Cornwall, CT
Permit No. 6

CORNWALL RESIDENT