"It’s All About the Land..."
Cornwall’s “revaluation year” began to involve most of us in mid-November when Assessor Barbara Bigos mailed out the results of the state-mandated revaluation. The letters shocked some and pleasantly surprised others. They also told us how to estimate the property tax due next year.

For starters, there are positive aspects to the revaluation. First, the tax rate is projected to go down from 21.8 mills to 12.5, based on an estimate made by Board of Finance Chair Ralph Gold. In simpler terms, the rate will drop from 2.18 percent of your old assessment to 1.25 percent of your new one. This rate reduction will occur because the new Grand List will be nearly 100 percent more than the 2001 list, due largely to zooming land values of land and buildings. (To put that in context, the Consumer Price Index rose just 16 percent in the last five years.)

The new Grand List assesses all property as market values on October 1, 2006. The assessment is more art than science. Inevitably, an assessor tries to be precise. Barbara focused more on land than buildings in this revaluation. Her starting point for valuing a residential lot was the value above the basic lot size was valued at 70 percent of the property’s total market value. Barbara notes, because Connecticut statutes require that an assessment must equal 70 percent of the property’s total market value.

Property owners in Cornwall will face much lower tax rates because the new rate reduction will occur because the new Grand List assesses all property as market values.

Some other things you should know about the revaluation:

• “It’s all about the land,” Barbara explained to more than 200 owners at the three sessions she held in the Town Hall. The average assessment will increase by 94 percent from 2001 to 2006. Within this overall change, however, the value of most houses went up only 25 percent to 50 percent, while land values soared by 200 percent or more.

• “The market is what counts.” Barbara says the revaluation is essentially based on what Cornwall properties have sold for in the past two years. To be updated, past sales must be increased by 1 percent a month because property prices have been rising rapidly in the area, at least until recent months. The new Grand List assesses all property as of its value on October 1, 2006.

• Market value is what the assessor looks for. This converts directly into the assessment. Barbara notes, because Connecticut statutes require that an assessment must equal 70 percent of the property’s total market value.

• “Land values vary more than building values.” Barbara focused more on land than buildings in this revaluation. Her starting point for valuing a residential lot was the size of the basic lot, whether it was located in a one-, three-, or five-acre zone. Excess acreage above the basic lot size was valued at $10,000 an acre.

• Positive features of a site—good views, ponds or streams, stone walls, privacy, etc.—can add to its value. Restrictive covenants, rights-of-way, or other constraints on the use of land can lower site value.

• Barbara warns that comparing percentage increases in assessments with those of your neighbors is of no use in obtaining an adjustment. In large part, that’s because she isn’t convinced that Cornwall’s last revaluation was accurate enough.

Another nice feature is that taxes on your car or truck will fall. Those assessments are determined on a statewide basis, so vehicle owners in Cornwall will face much lower taxes next year when our mill rate drops. But the “missing” revenue from vehicle taxes next year when our mill rate drops.

For additions and updating, visit www.cornwallct.org
The Appeals Process
due to what’s described below.
The final Grand List comes out next spring,
• There are now 44 residential properties in
ments soar by between 200 percent and 400
cent. And 105 properties saw their assess-
ses to 373 of them. Another 355 properties got
sessment increases of less than 100 percent
year, compared to $5,200 this year.
$667,000 (two-thirds of a million bucks!).
by implication has a market value of
is now assessed at $467,000—up
percent, a bit less than the
median.
Average
half by more.
• Average market value rose by 94
percent, a bit less than the median.
The average is calculated by divid-
ing total residential property values
by the number of properties.
Cornwall’s “average” house and lot
is now assessed at $467,000—up
from $238,000 five years ago—and
by implication has a market value of
$667,000 (two-thirds of a million bucks!).
This “average” residential property is esti-
ated to pay $5,800 in real estate taxes next
year, compared to $5,200 this year.
• Out of a total of 833 residential proper-
ties in Cornwall, the revaluation gave as-
sessment increases of less than 100 percent
to 373 of them. Another 355 properties got
increases between 100 percent and 200 per-
cent. And 105 properties saw their assess-
ments soar by between 200 percent and 400
percent.
• There are now 44 residential properties
in Cornwall assessed at more than $1,000,000
each. This is up from only seven properties
assessed at over $1,000,000 in 2001.
These numbers may change a bit when
the final Grand List comes out next spring,
due to what’s described below.

...THE APPEALS PROCESS
In December, more than 200 Cornwall
property owners made appointments for
15-minute meetings with Barbara to talk
about their new assessments. Mostly, what
they wanted were reductions, but in a num-
ber of cases they merely wanted an explana-
tion. Barbara says that as a result of these
meetings about 100 owners will get reduc-
tions due to the additional information they
provided her. A few owners may see in-
creases! Such changes can happen because
someone points out that property lines dif-
fer from those shown on the assessment
records.
When asked if any of these face-to-face
meetings got difficult, Barbara replied diplo-
matically: “Everybody has been polite; no
one has been rude.” She went on to say that
reactions in Cornwall have been better than
in other towns she has revalued, including
Salisbury, Harwinton, and Morris. “It’s
easier to deal with the wonderful people of
Cornwall.”
The next step in the revaluation process
allows anyone to request a hearing by the
Board of Assessment Appeals (see page 4).
After that, anyone who wants to protest fur-
ther must go to court. The final steps in the
year-long revaluation process will be when
the Board of Finance sets the new mill rate
next May and tax bills are mailed out in June.
—David A. Grossman

KC Baird Tells Why
The West Cornwall Market may have been a
small store, but in a village the size of West
Cornwall, its closing is big news—and sad
news for many of us. The Chronicle sat down
with proprietor KC Baird a few days before
he locked the door for the last time.
CC: The closing of the market is
gclearly going to have an impact
on our community. The first
question we have is why?
KC: It’s simple. Lack of
sales, coupled with rising
costs. Fixed costs not covered by
volume.
CC: What were your expectations when
you opened the market three-and-a-half
years ago?
KC: My original thinking was that there
would be less traffic-generated volume, but be-
cause more people actually live in West Cornwall,
the lack of traffic would be made up by business
from the population of that part of town.
CC: How did your business break down
between full-timers and weekenders?
KC: Between 65 and 70 percent of my sales
came from weekenders. In the beginning the
school was under construction, and that helped
the business. But remember that the previous
store was closed for a number of years, and I think
that locals developed other shopping habits dur-
ing that time—shopping closer to where they
worked in some cases. People were buying food to
last the week and especially stocking up on things
like staples.
CC: The market was one of the few busi-
esses in town that employed high school
students. What will happen on that front?
KC: That is one of the biggest losses in closing
the market. High school-age kids had their first
job working here, and it was a good experience for
them. I can’t hire everyone down at Baird’s. I’ve
had at least a dozen kids working here and they
have been good workers.
CC: What are your plans going forward
with Baird’s?
KC: I want to re-set the store and fill up
the shelves, and I want to bring the atmos-
phere from the West Cornwall Market to
Baird’s, where I feel it has been
missing. Also, I will
talk to an organic food
wholesaler about selling organic items, or
find other ways of going organic, but I
need to know what people are looking for.
CC: Do you have other plans for
Baird’s?
KC: I am considering expanding the
store and am looking at a piece of land immedi-
ately next door. Expansion would allow for an
area for a bake shop, a butcher shop, and more
tables for people to eat at. We will also be prepar-
ing complete meals for customers to pick up,
din-
ers especially. We will also have pizza avail-
able—whole pies for take-out.
CC: Where do you think Baird’s market
now falls short?
KC: Variety is definitely a problem. It’s diffi-
cult because certain distributors have minimums
that we can’t meet. The smaller distributors don’t
have the variety I would like to offer. We lost our
long-time poultry supplier, Stone Church Farms,
for this reason. We didn’t have enough business
for them.
CC: What is your biggest regret about
closing the market?
KC: The feeling of failure, not realizing that
there was something I could do to make the busi-
ness more profitable. On the other hand, I met
a lot of people I didn’t know before and I hope those
people will continue to support Baird’s.
—Tom Levine

Welcome
Isabella Raine Li to Laura Tyson and Ricki Li
Lilliana Maya Wilson
to Maya Foyt and Webster Wilson

Good-Bye to a Friend
Stuyvesant (Peter) Barry

Congratulations
Chastity Parker to Timothy Corvin

Land Transfers
Ronald F. and Ingrid J. Laigle to Peter D. Caruso, 5.3
acres at 92 Cream Hill Road for $400,000.
Arnold H. Leichtman and Nilda Perez-Leichtman to
Kim Savage Realty, LLC, 5,979 acres on Whitcomb
Hill Road for $275,000.
Estate of Desmond Vernon Nicholson to Greg
Galloway, Gina Maoluacci, William J. and Rebecca L.
Hurlburt, half interest in 24 Rocky Cove Lane for
$325,000.
Louise D. Nicholson to Greg Galloway, Gina
Maoluacci, William J. and Rebecca L. Hurlburt, half
interest in 24 Rocky Cove Lane for $325,000.
Myron Hofer to Cornwall Conservation Trust, Inc.,
half interest in 49.2 acres on Route 43.
Adeline Hofer to Cornwall Conservation Trust, Inc.,
half interest in 49.2 acres on Route 43.

Taking to the Trails
Our month for snow has arrived! The Great
Mountain Forest weather station in Norfolk
has daily records that go back to 1932. Aver-
age January snowfall over all those many
years is 21.7 inches. This leaves us with a
good prospect of enjoying the great outdoors
on skis, snowshoes, and sleds.

Gold Rush
Across Cream Hill Road, is a state forest road
(marked) 1.2 miles long (no
cars permitted) with a gentle
slope. For years it has served
as a perfect spot for family skiing
and snowshoeing.

Across Cream Hill Road on the
east is Wickwire Road. This is also a
state forest road (marked), appropri-
ate for snowshoes and cross-coun-
try skiing. The wide road is ap-
proximately 1.5 miles long with
gentle ups and downs. A lean-to used by
hikers when the Appalachian Trail passed
through Cornwall is still in good condition
with the exception of some graffiti. Even
though it is possible to continue after the
“turnaround,” the trails left and right have
not been maintained. Turn back.

The big field at the Hart Farm on Cherry
Hill Road is an ideal spot for family sledding.
Keep in mind, however, that at the end of a
sled run there is apt to be a stone wall.

There are many fields in Cornwall good
for cross-country skiing. (Most land, however, is privately owned and requires permission from the owner.) The big field owned by CL&P off Upper River Road is perfect for cross-country skiing. It is also a place to practice your tracking skills. Animals come down from the mountain to forage for food left over from last year’s harvest.

It is also possible to walk, ski, or snowshoe for several miles on a narrow trail heading south along the river. Drive on Lower River Road past the Trinity Conference Center to a public parking area. A short portion of the trail is flooded due to a huge beaver pond nearby.

One of the most exhilarating spots for cross-country skiing is at the end of south River Road on the west side of the Housatonic River. This great expanse of land, owned by the National Park Service, includes the Appalachian Trail. With a good snow on the ground you can follow the trail along the river on snowshoes. The large fields have been mowed and are perfect for cross-country skiing. To get there from the Covered Bridge, drive down Route 7 and turn left just before you reach Route 4. Follow lower River Road for about a mile until you see the Appalachian Trail sign. Park nearby.

The upper end of Town Street is not plowed in winter. (In fact, most state forest roads are not plowed in winter.) You can park where this road becomes Housatonic State Forest. (Be sure you don’t block a private driveway nearby.) You have two choices. You can ski to the right up the gradual slope of Gray Road about a half-mile to a barrier and then return. Or, you can ski downhill until you reach Music Mountain Road and then return.

This article covers only a small number of trails in Cornwall. More hikes will be reported in a future issue of the Chronicle. Moreover, a map delineating all the trails will be available at the Library in late spring.

Obviously, you hike, snowshoe, or ski at your own risk. Because winter weather is unpredictable, our first selector says it is essential that you dress warmly and take along water and a snack. Even more important, tell someone where you are going and, if possible, when you expect to return.

Marked trails are the safest at this time of year.

—Carla Bigelow

Some Taxes Come Home!

STEAP—a mouthful of letters signifying the state’s Small Town Economic Assistance Program—is now reviewing details of two new Cornwall projects and closing the books on a third.

The larger of the two new grants—$250,000—will go to the Cornwall Historical Society for improvement and expansion of its building on Pine Street. The only certainty here is that the Society needs more space. A building committee is now discussing such things as structural needs and time lines. Additional funds, estimated at $135,000, will be sought by private donation.

The Hughes Memorial Library in West Cornwall is also in line for a STEAP grant: $200,000. According to First Selectman Gordon Ridgway, the project will eventually involve more than the Library itself. The building and grounds constitute the only “public space” in the village of West Cornwall. Initial plans call for a septic system, restrooms, a kitchenette, and meeting space with a large table for various organizations. The rooms will not be open to the public during non-library hours, although toilets with public access may be added at some time in the future.

Nearly complete is the ball field/pavilion/ parking lot/walking track complex adjacent to Foote Fields, below Cornwall Village on Route 4. The ball field—built to Little League specifications—has enjoyed a first year of use with the turf still intact. The pavilion is structurally complete, with plans for power, water, and a concrete floor ready for different times in the future. More picnic tables are coming soon, open to the public. Other uses will add to the original call for a “Cornwall bandstand.” Rumor has it that Fred Thaler and the Town Hall Players are eying the facility for fair-weather productions.

A town meeting will be scheduled—probably in early February—to approve the Historical Society and Hughes Library projects. As with the ball field and pavilion, funds will initially come from town reserves, to be reimbursed at 100 percent by the state. Town expense will be minimal, mainly for necessary legal and financial details.

—Bob Potter

Gettin’ Ready!

The Town of Cornwall has received Homeland Security grants over a three-year period to provide for equipment, training, and planning to meet the needs of local first responders in regional or national emergencies. Funds received were, in 2004, $19,518; 2005, $12,911; and 2006, $5,355.

Some of this money has gone to meet requirements imposed by the Department of Homeland Security, such as a high-band radio base station in Cornwall’s Emergency Operations Center, i.e., the West Cornwall Firehouse. High-band radios will be used for communication between Cornwall and the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security regional office. Also required is personal protection equipment provided for first responders. This includes

Letters to the Chronicle

A LETTER WE LIKE

Kudos to Ed Ferman for his informative and concise article about the new property assessments. It answered questions we’ve asked our neighbors and questions yet unasked. Even in my state of 100%+ shock, I am well informed. He did what a good editor should do: address a hot button topic and address it with authority and clarity.

—Malou Rawls

CEMETERY REMEMBERED

My article about Cornwall’s cemeteries (Chronicle, November 2006) should have included one that really belongs in the list: St. Bridget’s burying ground in Sharon, west of Cornwall Bridge (River Road, north side of Routes 4 and 7). Founded in 1883, it was laid out in a rare and graceful concentric design. The former Catholic church in Cornwall, now converted to a residence, is next to the Wandering Moose on Route 128.

—Ann Schillinger

GREMLIN GRIPHE

Certain rituals occur when I receive a new Cornwall Report: cover appreciation, a first reading of the Animal Control Officer’s report, then a quick scan of the whole book. This year I made a photocopy of the crossword puzzle to work on later, admired the stamina of Rick’s dog Lucky, and decided I liked the use of blue paper.

Then I found some errors—caused by gremlins?—on the pages listing “Town Officials of Boards and Commissions.” First, “HISTORIAN Michael Gannett” was missing from the list, leaving a space in the column. Mr. Gannett continues to serve as our Cornwall historian. Second, the phone number for the Cornwall Historical Society should be 672-0505, not the number for Jim Gold, former CHS president.

—Ginny Potter, President, CHS

ARE RESERVATIONS NECESSARY?

After reading Ann Schillinger’s intriguing piece on Cornwall cemeteries (December Chronicle), I wondered how many of these sites are active and how one would go about arranging for a burial plot. Are these places hard to get into? Are there any prerequisites, other than the obvious one, for admission? Perhaps a follow-up article offering useful phone numbers, etc., might be helpful.

—Don Bachman
impervious coveralls, boots, gloves, and gas mask assemblies.

Other funds have been used for 40 cots should the CCS gym be needed as an emergency shelter, a generator for the Town Hall to power that building as a supplemental emergency operations center, and a portable ham radio system to be used in the field. Some of Cornwall’s portion of the grant money is spent regionally. We hope Cornwall will never suffer a regional or national emergency, but it is good to know preparations are being made. —Joyce Hart

Events & Announcements

A New Year’s Pancake Breakfast will be served in the UCC Parish House on January 1 from 8:30 A.M. on to benefit the La Casa Project.

Who Killed the Electric Car? If interested, come to a 92-minute documentary at the West Cornwall Firehouse on Thursday, January 11, at 7 P.M. Learn more about the possibilities of renewable energy and sustainable living. Discussion will follow. The program initiates an ecological effort in Cornwall, a collaboration of Filmshare, the UCC, and the Library.

The Board of Assessment Appeals will hold hearings by appointment in March. Applications to schedule a hearing will be available at the Town Clerk’s Office between January 15 and February 20.

911 House Numbers must be clearly visible from the road at all times, not concealed by grass or long lasting holiday greenery. Local Rescue Squad and Fire Department drivers may or may not know your house without a number. Ambulance drivers from out of town almost certainly will not, and may be delayed in emergencies. This has happened more than once.

We Get a “D”

Back in November, the Chronicle announced a test in this corner: We would compare that month’s response to the coupon below with a study of advertising effectiveness conducted by the Harvard Business School. Sadly, our coupon failed to beat the average.

The money that came in didn’t cover our costs; we had an operating deficit of $294 for the month. If November was typical, the Chronicle will soon be out of business. We hope January will bring new resolution to those readers we didn’t hear from last year. We depend totally on your support. Thanks.

Art in Cornwall: At the Library, Ken Krug’s show of Book Paintings will continue through January 20. Beginning January 23, David Nickeson will exhibit photographs from his extensive travels.

At the Insiders/Outsiders Gallery, there is a rotating group show of New England artists going through the winter.

At the National Iron Bank, Dennis A. Swett will be showing his paintings in acrylics during the month of January.

Motherhouse-Sponsored Events:
- Saturday, January 13: the Old Style Life Skills Series will continue with Wyatt Whiteman demonstrating open-hearth cooking from 10:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. Bring a lunch dish to supplement the hearth-prepared food. Cost is $35 per family. For information and reservations: Debra Tyler, 672-0229, or lifekills@motherhouse.us.
- Saturday, January 20: A family-style contra dance will feature the Homegrown Band and Bill Fischer at the Town Hall from 7 to 10 P.M. For information: Debra Tyler, 672-0229, or Rachel Gall, 672-6328.
- Friday, January 26: An informal round sing at the Town Hall will start at 7:30 P.M. For information: Debra Tyler, 672-0229.

Park & Rec. Activities:
- Every Saturday in January there will be ice skating for Cornwall residents at the Schmidt Rink at the Hotchkiss School from 7 to 8 P.M. All skaters must wear hats.
- Registration for baseball and softball is coming soon; check for details and forms at www.cornwallparkandrecreation.org.
- Note that some of the times for adult sports in the CCS gym may have changed (see calendar).

Short Biographies on the Cornwall website (www.cornwallct.org) now number ten, with Denny Frost added to Ann Peterson, Elizabeth Locke, Charlie Gold, Pat and Jerry Blakey, Helen Tennant, Ralph Scoville, Marc Simont, Fred Bate, and Bill Beecher. All the bios are interesting, most surprisingly so. And while you’re at the site, look at “Planning Cornwall’s Future,” especially David Grossman’s “Cornwall in the Zeros Decade,” probably as detailed an MRI as any town ever received.

“Support Cornwall Agriculture,” says the cover of an informative new brochure prepared by the Ag Commission and Local Food Project. The folder contains a map showing Cornwall suppliers and detailed information on what is available from different sources. The brochure is available at the Town Office, the Post Offices, Baird’s, and other locations.

The Cornwall Historical Society will host a winter-warming open house on Saturday, January 27, from 4 to 6 P.M. Although the exhibit “What Did We Do Before TV? Leisure Time in Winter” shows some non-electric examples of an earlier time, the lights and the furnace will be turned on, and refreshments will be served. Everyone is welcome; bad-weather date is January 28.

Taxes Due: The second half of real estate, personal property, and motor vehicle tax bills is due January 1; payments must be postmarked by January 31 to avoid interest. No additional bills are mailed; use bills that were mailed in July. The tax office is open Mondays and Wednesdays from 1 to 4 P.M. Call 672-2705 for further information.

THE CHRONICLE NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

We hope you enjoy this on-line edition of the Cornwall Chronicle. Remember that all our revenues come from readers like you, and we need your help to continue producing this electronic edition along with the print edition. If your contribution is $10 or more, we’d be glad to mail the print edition to any out-of-town address. Please mail your tax deductible gifts to: Cornwall Chronicle Inc. 143 Cream Hill Rd., West Cornwall, CT 06796. Comments, letters and news may be e-mailed to the publishers at: elfhill@aol.com