Selectmen Candidates Speak Out

A crowd of more than 50 gathered for the Cornwall selectmen candidates’ forum on Sunday, October 20, at the Cornwall Consolidated School gymnasium. There were no heated exchanges, no gaffes, just honest observations on the issues that confront small towns—the local economy, the downward trend of our school population, recreation, the future of the Trinity Center property—all interspersed with some good-natured humor.

Edward Dorsett moderated the forum. For a little more than an hour, Democratic incumbents First Selectman Gordon Ridgway and Selectman Richard Bramley and Republican candidate for first selectman Kenneth “K.C.” Baird (also currently seated as selectman) and the newcomer, Representative candidate for selectman Heidi Kearns added that she would support the EDC and that she would make sure that zoning regulations were updated for the benefit of home business owners.

The best use for the vacant Trinity Conference Center, just recently announced for sale, was pondered by the candidates. Baird envisioned use of the facility somewhat like Geer Village, which opens its doors to local groups for use. Kearns, a planning and zoning commission member, was advised not to answer by the town attorney. Bramley explained that the large tract had three components: a “commercial kernel” in West Cornwall, a preservation piece, and a housing piece. He added that since it is a private property Cornwall could only provide guidance to any future owner. Ridgway said he sees any future sale as a great opportunity and noted that the Castle, another large tract, is also for sale. Ridgway pointed out that Trinity has been engaged in a dialogue with both the EDC and the Cornwall Conservation Trust.

For those who missed the exchange, it was filmed by Civic Life Project and can be seen at www.civiclifeproject.com/index.php. It will also be aired on Cablevision Channel 5 on November 2 at 9 A.M. and November 4 at 4 P.M.

—Pan Longwell

Walking Cornwall

If you are a walker, Cornwall is a paradise. The Appalachian Trail and the Mohawk Trail run through Cornwall, there are state parks, multiple preserves, and wooded walks. And if these are not enough, there are the roads.

Annie Kosciusko, Nancy Van Doren, and Martha Bruehl decided on a goal for the summer and being avid walkers, they set themselves a challenge: to walk all the roads of Cornwall. The three women knew that if it was going to be a viable and enjoyable project, they needed to plan it. Annie printed out sections of the map of Cornwall from the Cornwall website and they diagrammed their walks so that they would not have to repeat too many roads.

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For additions and updating, visit www.cornwallchronicle.org
And they started walking—from four to seven miles a day, five days a week, in all weather. "We usually walked in the morning," said Martha, "or at sunset when it was cooler."

"We were surprised by the extensive number of hills," said Annie. "The hills are really dramatic in Cornwall." Since the town has about 20 roads, each with the word "Hill" in its name, the women undoubtedly had quite a workout. "Great Hill Road, Bald Mountain Road, Whitcomb Hill Road, and Beers Hill on Popple Swamp Road are intensive." The pièce de résistance of intensive Cornwall walks, however, was Dudletown Road—a road without the word "Hill" in its name. "Dudletown Road is probably the toughest and Whitcomb Hill Road the longest."

One of the surprising things they found was that many roads came to an abrupt end. "It was just fascinating," said Annie, adding that she was disappointed that the roads hadn't been continued.

"The most beautiful walk was along Swift's Bridge Road to the Housatonic," said Martha, adding that it would make a lovely place to have a picnic.

Did they run out of things to talk about? Never! "We solved all the world's problems, talked about our children and what our next challenge would be."

The three women kept a log and have made a Facebook page titled "Walking Cornwall" where visitors can see photographs of the walk. "People who no longer live here love it," said Annie, as they can see the changes as the season progresses.

Walking Cornwall took approximately six weeks with two weeks off for vacation. They started at the end of June and finished at the end of August with a stop of a few days for Nancy's shin splints—from walking down Whitcomb Hill Road—to heal.

—Brenda Underwood

Region One Update

The seventh vote was the charm for proponents of the Region One school district budget for fiscal year 2013 to 2014.

On Wednesday, October 17, Cornwall was among three of the six towns comprising the Region One school district that passed the proposed budget. Cornwall voters approved the budget 165 to 108. Region wide, yes votes outnumbered no votes by 73.

With the budget now passed, the issue that remains for residents of Cornwall is how best in the future to fill the position of representative to the regional school board. (Currently, Phil Hart holds the position through 2014.) According to First Selectman Gordon Ridgway, the position can be filled by appointment or by election. Either method is legal, though the town currently makes the appointment via the Cornwall Board of Education. Residents may, in the future, choose to alter this process by bringing a request to town meeting, but the issue came too late for inclusion on the agenda of the October 25 town meeting. With Phil Hart on the board through November of next year, the town has time to figure out the procedure, says Ridgway. He adds that the board of selectmen thinks this is appropriate for town consideration after all the details of the process are learned. A related issue is how best to synchronize the staggering of terms with the other towns’ representatives. Should Cornwall decide to switch to electing its representative, one option would be to make a temporary appointment for 2014 through 2015, and then elect a representative in 2015.

—Pam Longwell

Battling Bittersweet

Oriental bittersweet (Celastrus orbiculatus) is the scourge of the Cornwall woods—engulfing everything in its path as it moves from sunny roadside edges into the forest. Among botanical types, it is called the kudzu of the north. The plant probably arrived here sometime in the early 1900s, cultivated by passionate gardeners seduced by its abundant yellow and red berries—the same berries that still seduce us when we put them on our Thanksgiving tables. Unfortunately, bittersweet is also attractive to birds that readily eat the brightly colored fruits and disperse the seeds they contain across the landscape.

Being a vine, oriental bittersweet lives what I call a parasitic life style—it invests very little of the carbohydrates it produces into building a self-supporting trunk the way trees do, but instead it produces twining stems that can climb tall trees, take over their structure, and eventually pull them down. As the stems wrap themselves around the trunk of its host, they slowly choke it to death like a botanical boa constrictor. It is a classic example of a strangling vine that gets established along the sunny borders of open habitats and spreads into the interior of the forest from the edges. Under the right conditions, such vines can completely transform a woodland into a “vinescape.”

Getting rid of oriental bittersweet once it has become established on your property is no task for the faint of heart. My experience in this regard comes from dealing with plants growing along a woodland/pasture edge near the top of Cream Hill where I have been hand pulling it for many years. The main thing that makes bittersweet hard to control is that any piece of root left behind after pulling a shoot out of the ground will give rise, Medusa-like, to numerous suckers all along its entire length. To put it another way, if you pull the shoots out of the ground without getting all the roots, you’re actually propagating it.

The best way to avoid this calamitous situation is to make sure you do your pulling in spring or summer when the ground is moist and the roots have not yet established a firm “grip” in the soil. With minimal exertion, the stems—with their shockingly orange roots attached—come up easily in May and June, but in August and September they often break off at ground level, leaving the roots behind. The goal of all this effort is to exhaust the root system; and the earlier in the season you go after the plant, the more effective hand pulling will be.

For large stems, a half inch or more in diameter, I usually cut them off with a small folding saw, leaving behind a “handle” of stem about a foot long. After clearing away the ensuing tangle of stems and leaves, I use this handle to pull the roots out of the ground, loosening them up as I go with a shovel to prevent premature breakage. The good news, and there’s not much of it, is that bittersweet roots typically grow shallowly—within a couple of inches of the surface—and they come out of the ground easily once you start pulling on them. The bittersweet battle requires both brains and brawn and it takes several years of vigilant (and vigorous) pulling to clear an area of the plant.

The ultimate technique for maintaining control of bittersweet is to convert the infested area from edge habitat to something else: if it’s a woodland, then pull or cut the stems and...
let the trees grow up and shade it out; if the area is open and rocky, then annual brush hogging will keep the plant in check; if the area is relatively flat, then it can be converted to lawn and regular mowing will eliminate it. Clearly, bittersweet will always persist around the edges of the vineyard it can be controlled. The key is to become obsessive about pulling the plant out of the ground whenever you see it—put down that coffee mug (or beer bottle) and rip those suckers out of the ground whenever you see them. —Peter Del Tredici

November: Transition to Winter

November; the name derives from being the ninth month of the ancient Roman calendar. After the addition of January and February, the position changed but not the name. We know November for Thanksgiving declared a national holiday 150 years ago this very month by President Lincoln. This year marks 50 years since the assassination of President Kennedy, and the 150-year anniversary of the Gettysburg Address.

In a more current and practical sense, November is a transition month for seasonal change. By now we realize that yes indeed, summer sped by, and we are quickly approaching winter. No time to pull the covers over our heads; there is much to do. Gardens are put to bed, wood is stockpiled, the town garage is loaded with salt and sand, along with a pile of sand for residents’ use. Buddy Dawson at Hall’s Garage reminds us that it is a good month to check the car before the snow and freezing rains of winter arrive. Water added to a radiator during the summer will compromise the abilities of the antifreeze. All weather tires should be checked for wear. Rusty brake lines, older batteries, and well-used belts and hoses are subject to failure in the bitter cold. Windshield wiper blades and washer fluid also need attention. With all chores completed, a meal on the table, family and friends gathered, we give thanks for this time to prepare. And if we were in the Southern Hemisphere we would be transitioning into spring… —Diane Bebe

CCS Prepares for Emergency

On the morning of October 2, there was an evacuation at the Cornwall Consolidated School. Not a real emergency, just a drill. A practice evacuation, if you will. Several types of drills are practiced at the school, from lockdowns to fire drills to evacuations. All are done in an effort to keep students and staff members aware of how to handle certain situations should an emergency arise. This particular drill was a hypothetical propane leak.

The drill began at 8:45 A.M. when the "call" went out. By 8:48 A.M. everyone was out of the building, and at 9:02 A.M. school buses arrived to pick up 135 people (students and staff members). The buses were loaded and on the way to an off-site facility to allow the emergency personnel to check the school and clear it for re-entry. The buses with students returned at 10 A.M.

In an interview with Principal Croft, he stated that the drill went very, very well, thanks to the adults and students who understood the situation. The students were great, following directions and doing as they were instructed. This was a good test for the Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department to be able to get into the locked building (as it is locked all the time). Croft offered thanks to the CVFD, the Connecticut State Police, parent volunteers, town officials, the Department of Homeland Security, and of course, the well-behaved students. —Erin Hedden

Cornwall Briefs

•Town Report: The current 2012/2013 edition is available at a variety of locations: town hall, transfer station, library and all three post offices, and the town website.

•Pickle Factory Redux: The Chronicle story last April about a future pickle vat on the Trinity Conference Center property in West Cornwall turned out to be nothing but a rumor. Truth be told, rumor is too weak a label. Better to call it an outright lie dreamed up by an April editor. Now comes word that the owner, Trinity Wall Street, is putting the almost 500-acre property on the market. And if only this column was for the next April Chronicle we would tell you that Yale and UConn are in a bidding war in hopes of creating a new woodsy satellite campus on the shore of the mighty Housatonic. No word at press time on either a price for the property or where it will be.

•Four-way Sign: You’ll find it at the intersection of Great Hill and College Street, a handsome wood post created by neighbor Ted Hein that directs drivers to such nearby places as Mohawk Pond and the ski area.

•In Our Future: Cornwall’s cap-

ital budget includes money for a new, four-wheel-drive, one-ton truck that will come in handy when big snows hit our most challenging roads which, we are told, include Dudleytown and Dark Entry. Also in the town’s future (2015) is a new ambulance for the Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department. A committee headed by EMS Captain Zach Sawicki has been appointed to research potential vehicles. The CVFD has also been putting funds aside to help pay for it.

——John Miller

Letter to the Chronicle

SHARING A FAMILY FAVORITE

I discovered this recipe in an issue of Cook’s Illustrated magazine. I happened to be reading on my lunch break. I love sweet potatoes and decided to give it a try for supper that same night. It was an instant hit! I decided to bring the casserole to Thanksgiving at my parents’ house as my offering, and my family fell in love with it as much as I did. It’s now a regular offering at holidays and is always well received. Below is the recipe with a few changes to ingredients and procedure to suit my taste. —Meredith Gray

Sweet Potato Casserole

7 lbs sweet potatoes (each about the same size so they roast evenly)

Poke potatoes with a fork, place on a baking sheet lined with foil and roast at 400 degrees for 45 minutes to one hour. Potatoes should be easily squeezed with a pair of tongs. Let cool.

Streusel:

1/2 c. all purpose flour
1/2 c. dark brown sugar, packed
1/4 tsp. salt
5 tbsp. unsalted butter, slightly softened, cut into chunks
2 c. chopped pecans

Combine all ingredients into a bowl and blend with a pastry cutter, or your hand, to form a crumb topping (or pulse in a food processor for the same result). Set aside.

Filling:

5 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
4 tsp. lemon juice
1 tbsp. vanilla extract
2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg
1/2 tsp. pepper
granulated sugar, to taste (I use a 1/4 c.)
4 large egg yolks
1 1/2 c. half and half

Once the sweet potatoes have cooled slightly, add them to a large bowl and mash. Add in all of the filing ingredients except for the half and half until well blended. Then stir in the half and half slowly, until it’s incorporated. Spread the sweet potato filling into a buttered 9 x 13 baking dish. Sprinkle the streusel over top of the filling and then bake at 375 degrees for 40-45 minutes. Crust will be somewhat browned and the filling will have puffed around the edges.

—Cook’s Illustrated

—Meredith Gray

Illustrated
No Questions, Only Food

The Cornwall Food Pantry, an ancillary arm of the Cornwall social services office, is housed in a discreet location at the rear of the United Church of Christ (UCC) on Bolton Hill Road in Cornwall Village. It provides non-perishable foods, dish and laundry soap, toilet paper and shampoo—and sometimes even pet food. Usually, fresh eggs, veggies, and meat are available too.

The pantry has helped many people through intermittent difficult times. Anne Scott, the volunteer facilitator of the pantry, says that unexpected medical or car-related bills are often at the root of temporary hardships. There are regular pantry users, but many come only once or twice when bills overwhelm them in a given month. Scott says that if a little extra food will relieve an immense stress or help feed your children, then the pantry is worth a visit. There is no paperwork to fill out, there are no questions to answer and there is no “means” test.

The pantry is currently supported by generous and ongoing donations from many individuals, and through all of the churches in town. If you are able to give, donations may be dropped off Monday through Friday inside the back door of the UCC. When asked what is needed most, Anne said, “Everything!” She suggests that when you shop, choose an aisle and pick out what you can afford on that trip from that one aisle. All items are important and very much appreciated. The pantry is open 11 A.M. to 12 P.M. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and by appointment. Please email Cornwallfood@optonline.net or call 672-0595.

—Mickiunn-Miller

Serve Your Community

You may have seen them march, or you may have used their services; you may have even won their cow chip raffle! This group of dedicated individuals, your volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services team members, is seeking new recruits. Men and women, 18 years of age and older who are interested in serving the community, are welcome to join. Training is provided and applications can be picked up at the Cornwall Town Hall. Training drills are held every Wednesday evening at the West Cornwall Firehouse at 7 P.M., except the last Wednesday of each month when the all-member department meeting is held at 8 P.M.

—Diane Beebe

Events & Announcements

Cornwall Conservation Trust: Deeply Disturbed, The Emergent Forests of the Future, a talk by Peter Del Tredici, Saturday, November 2, at 4 P.M. at the town hall.

Motherhouse Events

Family Country Dance, Saturday, November 2, at 7 P.M. at the town hall with National Heritage Fellow Dudley Laufman teaching and calling to music by Still, the Homegrown Band. Donation $3–$5/child and $5–$10/adult. For information, call Jane Prentice at 672-6101.

An Ornamental Experience, Saturday, November 9, from 10:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. Make festive seasonal items. Potluck lunch. Suggested donation: $35/family. Write lifeskills@motherhouse.us or call Debra Tyler at 672-0229 to register and for location.

At the Library

Come help close up demonstration garden Monday, November 4, from 9:30 to 10:30 A.M. Celebrate and discuss future programming. Refreshments served.

The family movie series continues with The Fantastic Mr. Fox, based on the Roald Dahl story, Friday, November 15, at 7 P.M.

The dance movie series continues Wednesday, November 20, at 7 P.M., title to be announced.

In a change with tradition, the library will be open the day after Thanksgiving, Friday, November 29.

Election Day Lunch: Tuesday, November 5, from 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. at the United Church of Christ Parish House. Soups, rolls, desserts, and coffee or tea available. Donations benefit the Cornwall Food and Fuel Bank.

Public Meeting on Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan: Residents’ input sought regarding storm and natural hazard damage and in developing prevention/mitigation plan: Thursday, November 7, at the town hall. Or, participate via online survey by visiting www.surveymonkey.com/s/northwestctplans.

Hunker Down

November can really make you sit up straight. Gone are the summer’s easy delights; in their place come gales of bad weather intended to stiffen our spines for the winter to come. Never lose heart. Keep the Chronicle coming by writing a check and thanks!