

# The Charlotte News

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## Theater for wishing well unveiled

Scooter MacMillan  
Editor

Saturday had dawned cold, and around 10 a.m., it was still cold outside of the Vermont Teddy Bear Factory. But inside on the second floor, in a space allocated to Make-A-Wish of Vermont and Northeast New York, it was warm and bright with the potential of wishes fulfilled. And hugs. Lots of hugs.

The warm and fuzzy occasion was the unveiling of the new Wish Discovery Theater at the Make-A-Wish Wishing Space in Shelburne.

A group of Wish Kids attended, and as they waited for the ribbon cutting, they decorated cookies and dispensed hugs.

Then they were herded into the Discovery Theater, a 180-degree immersive theater with a huge screen filled with brightly colored swimming fish and turtles. The underwater animation was appropriate because, after the kids filled the room, sprawling on soft bean bag furniture, they saw an animated movie of Jamie Heath telling the story of her book “Wishes Are Medicine: How Make-A-Wish Gave Me Hope and Helped Me Heal.”

Her children’s book tells Heath’s story of recovery from a brain aneurysm when she was 14. Heath, of Barre, was confined to bed for a long time.

She had to relearn how to walk and to read, but when she was finally able to walk, she was slow. So slow, she says on screen, that her pet turtle could walk faster than her.

When she got involved with Make-A-Wish, her turtle provided inspiration for her wish — to swim with sea turtles. Make-A-Wish, the nonprofit organization whose mission is fulfilling the wishes of seriously ill children, sent Heath to Hawaii where she, in fact, swam with sea turtles.



Photo by Scooter MacMillan

Make-A-Wish CEO Jamie Hathaway, left, introduces Wish Kids to the new Discovery Theater as wish manager Jamie Heath prepares to discuss her children’s book “Wishes Are Medicine,” featured in the animated film telling the story of her recovery from a serious illness when she was a teenager with help from the organization.

“As I began counting down the days to my trip, something magical began to happen. I was starting to feel better. I was walking better. I was reading better,” the animated Heath said in the video that played in the Discovery Theater. “My wish had given me hope. My wish had given me

strength.”

After her wish was granted, Heath continued to get better. She began to walk faster. She even began to play sports again.

One day Heath’s mother told her that she was

**MAKE-A-WISH** continued on page 10

## Voters to decide on Australian ballots

Izzy Senior  
Community News Service

For most of the past 236 years, Charlotte residents gathered in person on Town Meeting Day to make decisions. It’s an increasingly rare example of direct democracy.

At this year’s town meeting, two articles propose changing that. If approved, future votes on the town budget and public questions would happen by Australian ballot instead.

Sadly, the Australian ballot is not brought to the polls via kangaroo. It’s a secret, paper ballot, where the voter’s identity is anonymous.

The ballot proved particularly useful during the pandemic. While in lockdown, the Vermont Legislature passed a bill to temporarily allow mail-in ballots for every article on the town warning. This allowed residents to cast their votes safely.

The Legislature allowed this method of voting to continue through 2024. Now that this option has ended, the town of Charlotte has returned to in-person voting, at least for now.

Supporters of the Australian ballot say it is especially important for controversial issues, where voters may want to keep their opinions private.

Additionally, the Australian ballot lets residents vote throughout the day. This is useful for families, individuals with demanding jobs, those with disabilities, etc. Essentially, it allows for people to vote without having to attend the lengthy town meeting.

On the other hand, town meetings are a long-standing tradition. According to the Charlotte Historical Society, the first Charlotte Town Meeting was called in 1789 to decide where to build the town hall. This decision took six decades and many more town meetings to select a place to build.

An important piece of town meeting and in-person voting is the ability for any attendee to propose amendments to articles or bring up other public issues. These amendments and issues are voted on right there and then, allowing for citizens to enact real change.

**VOTING** continued on page 2

## CVSD proposes less than 1-percent budget increase

Scooter MacMillan  
Editor

If you’ve been living under a rock while wearing noise-cancelling headphones, you might not know that school budgets have been a turbulent subject for over a year, and not just in Charlotte, but all over Vermont.

Champlain Valley School District board members and administrators have been holding many meetings around the district to explain how they arrived at the proposed budget voters are being asked to approve.

Although the in-person Australian ballot voting is Tuesday,

March 4, early voting is happening now. Ballots are available at the Charlotte Town Hall.

Among the other district public meetings, Meghan Metzler, chair of the school board and a Charlotte resident, appeared at the selectboard meeting on Jan. 27 and at the Charlotte Senior Center on Friday, Feb. 7. She was joined at this budget discussion by Tim O’Leary, Charlotte Central School principal.

The Champlain Valley School District was one of a third of school districts in the state whose initially proposed budget was defeated last year. It was the first time voters had defeated a CVSD budget since

the district was created by school consolidation.

In the first vote last year, almost 60 percent of district voters voted against that budget. After around \$5 million was trimmed, almost 60 percent voted on the second reduced budget of almost \$101,801,185 million in expenses.

This year the school board is proposing a budget with \$102,724,062 in expenses. The almost \$1 million increase for fiscal year 2026 over the previous budget is a less than 0.9 percent increase.

The district is touting the proposed budget in flyers promoting it as “a responsible budget in challenging times.”

“I have gotten more positive feedback on this budget than last year’s budget,” Metzler said at the senior center discussion. “One thing I’ve learned as a school board member is that no one will ever be happy. A lot of life is that way, but I think that, overall, this budget is the right balance between being responsible and trying to address the factors from last year.”

Metzler said the only silver lining she sees in the proposed budget is that taxes are expected

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**TOWN BUDGET** see page 13

## SCHOOL

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to go down if the state’s forecasted numbers in its annual “December 1 letter” hold true. In Charlotte, that would mean a 2-percent decrease in school property taxes, or a reduction of \$30 per \$100,000 of home value.

She said that if the district kept a level number of services for the next year, it would require an extra \$5.2 million, or a probable increase in school property taxes of around \$10 million.

“We knew that was a nonstarter for our community,” Metzler said.

The board asked the administration what a budget of \$103 million would look like, and it came back with a budget of \$102.7 million. Reaching that proposed amount of spending will require reductions in staff, she said.

“Eighty-five percent of a budget in a school is people. So, there’s no way to get there and keep your building running, oil in the tank, keep heat on in the building, without reducing people,” Metzler said.

The proposed budget will take a reduction of school district personnel of 38.8 FTEs. FTE stands for full-time equivalent and is used to compare the work force by using a factor that combines part-time and full-time employees.

To reduce school personnel by 38.8 FTEs, the district plans to cut three administrators, which is 9 percent of the administrators currently employed by the district. The proposed cuts will eliminate 8 percent of district teachers and 2 percent of support staff.

Metzler said the board had heard a lot of feedback last year because there were no administrators cut, so this year’s proposed budget includes cuts there.

A question was raised from someone who had heard that there was a house director being cut from the current four at Champlain Valley Union High.

This cut looks likely, but it may be that CVU retains four houses and figures out a way to have three house directors covering four houses. The high school is divided into “houses,” a system used so teachers and administrators build relationships with students and their families. Students remain in the same house throughout high school.

O’Leary said that at Charlotte Central School they expect to be down one teacher in kindergarten-fourth grade, one teacher in



Photo by Scooter MacMillan

Meghan Metzler, chair of the Champlain Valley School District board, and Tim O’Leary, lead principal at Charlotte Central School, speaking about the district’s proposed budget for fiscal year 2026 to a group of residents at the senior center. Tinatum tum. Deri pulin

fifth-eighth grade, one music teacher and at least half of an administrator.

Usually, at Charlotte Central School grades are divided in half into two classes. This has meant that classes have ranged from 18-23 students.

The third grade is large, and this year is divided into three classes. A change that would come under this proposed budget is that, when this year’s third graders enter fourth grade next year, they will be in two classes which will have about 24 students in each, O’Leary said.

“From a nationwide advantage, that is super reasonable,” he said. “From what has historically happened at Charlotte Central School, maybe that’s bigger than expected.”

O’Leary said that it is important for teachers to be involved in a “collaborative brainstorming process” about the reorganization for all kinds of reasons: “One, I think it gets us all ready for change. Two, everyone has good ideas.”

But all their planning is contingent on the budget being approved, he said.

Although enrollment is fluctuating at Charlotte Central School, O’Leary said, the plan now is for every grade in the kindergarten-fourth grades to have two teachers.

Metzler said some of the fluctuation challenge at the school is because the school’s

largest class, the eighth grade, is graduating, and it appears the entering kindergarten class will be smaller.

Although there are decreased opportunities in the proposed budget, Metzler said she believes the proposed budget still provides opportunities for all students and meets their needs and addresses contentious factors from last year’s first proposed budget.

O’Leary said, under their tentative plans for the proposed budget, students will still get music, art and the same academics. The impact is more of a stretching. For example, in next year’s fourth grade, class sizes may be closer to 24 students when they have been closer to 20 students.

“I think that one of the primary things that will happen district wide is that class sizes across all of our schools will increase,” Metzler said. “They will still be within educational quality standards.”

The Charlotte Central School educators “are just rock-star teachers, every single one of them, and it breaks my heart that one of those people might have to leave,” Demaris Herlihy said. “One of them is the reason why one of my sons is enjoying school.”

“The cost of living is always going to go up, and if we always try to maintain a flat or nearly flat budget, it’s going to continually to erode the services we can provide,” said JD Herlihy.

## VOTING

Continued from page 1

Supporters of town meeting say it makes voters feel involved in democracy. By voting strictly by Australian ballot, a sense of connection may be lost between voters and the town government.

So what happens next? In order to make voting by Australian ballot permanent, there must be a floor vote at town meeting, according to Charlotte town clerk Mary Mead.

“If those articles were to pass, the town would no longer have an in-person town meeting because we would be voting every article on the town warning by Australian Ballot,” Mead said.

Any changes would take effect next year. Charlotte Town Meeting with in-person voting will take place Saturday, March 1, at 9 a.m. in the Charlotte Central School Multi-Purpose room. The Australian ballot voting will take place on Tuesday, March 4, 7 a.m.-7 p.m. at the Charlotte Town Hall.

For more information, visit [charlottevt.org](http://charlottevt.org).



Photo by Scooter MacMillan

Charlotte Town Hall. In 1789, Charlotte’s first town meeting was held to discuss where to build the first town hall.



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- Reporting on how other towns have addressed challenges similar to our own.

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## Report from the Legislature

# Lots to do to reform education, not much time to do it

Chea Waters Evans  
Representative

I'm on the House Government Operations and Military Affairs Committee. Friday, we had a joint meeting with the Senate Government Operations Committee. Deputy Secretary of State Lauren Hibbert and Elections Director Séan Sheehan were there, too, to talk to us about what needs to happen elections-wise if we were to implement Governor Scott's education reform plan — specifically, what they need and what we need to do in order to create a voting system for the new school districts.



It was kind of wild. We were talking about forming voting districts, essentially, which would be the new school districts, but we don't know how many there will be or where they'll be. We talked about forming wards within those districts so we can vote for school board members, but we don't know how many wards there will be and we don't think they'll be called school boards anymore. We also don't know when we'll be voting on school budgets, but we have to figure out

before June how that voting will work.

It's like someone asking you to create a menu for a gourmet dinner, but you have no idea what ingredients you'll have. Or it's like a twisted version of the Iron Chef, and the ingredients we have are cans of expired refried beans and boxes of Kraft Mac and Cheese.

As the governor and Interim Secretary of Education Zoie Saunders slowly roll out his plan to reform education and education funding in Vermont, one thing is clear: Slowly is too slow. We typically adjourn in mid-May, which means that three months from now, we need to have a concrete plan in place if we have any hope of implementing this in two years, which the governor said is his goal.

We don't even have the plan in bill form yet. Once there's a bill, there will be committee hearings in both the House and Senate, both education committees, government operations in both chambers, Ways and Means in the House, Finance in the Senate, Appropriations in both chambers. Those hearings will involve testimony from dozens and dozens of experts on all kinds of topics relating to education outcomes, classroom size and school choice experts, budgeting and taxes, municipal elections,

teachers and administrators and students and a lot of other important interested parties.

I don't see how it's going to happen, but I guess it will. We don't really have a choice. I do wish this plan was presented all at once in January, the first week we came back, so we could have the entire session to work on it. Letting us know in February that school choice is going to be a feature of this new plan was, in my opinion, not cool.

Here's my problem with school choice: The governor's plan allows each school district to designate a choice school that students from the entire district can then apply to by lottery. Private schools are eligible to be a choice school; they would then get money from the state for each student that gets in by lottery. If private schools start getting money that should be going toward supporting and bolstering our public school system, the public schools are going to suffer. And when the public schools don't get adequate funding or participation from a diverse group of students, schools are going to start being perceived as "good" or "bad" and then inequity creeps in and eventually decimates public education.

This seems dramatic, but I recently went to a conference with legislators from around the country and a state representative from

Delaware told me, when I was discussing my fears that we were moving in this direction, that school choice destroyed public education in her state.

I want our students to be academically successful. I wish there were a way to provide better social services and mental health support to students using money from outside of the education fund so that we could use all our school budget money for education alone. But that's not where we are right now.

As we draw the lines for new school districts and figure out how to create an election system for an education system that doesn't exist yet, I'm keeping the students at the forefront of my mind. I went to Charlotte Central School and Champlain Valley Union High; my kids went to CCS and two are still at CVU. Many things have changed over the years, and we're obviously getting a big shake-up in the years to come. I just hope we're going to come out at the end with something that's affordable and manageable but also does what we're supposed to do: educate these kids.

If you have questions or concerns, I can be reached at 917-887-8231 or [cevas@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:cevas@leg.state.vt.us).

## Secretary of state: New AI bill first logical step for Vermont

Noah Diedrich  
Community News Service

Can Vermont legislators distinguish an AI-generated portrait from a real one? That was the question facing the Senate Government Operations committee last week as members watched pictures from a New York Times quiz designed to test just that.

As each face flicked by, the senators took turns guessing whether it was made by artificial intelligence. In five attempts, they only managed to get one correct.

The Feb. 4 committee meeting was convened to hear testimony on S.23, a bill that would require political campaigns in Vermont to disclose uses of "synthetic media," an image, video or audio recording that creates a realistic yet false representation of another candidate. Failing to do so would come with a fine based on the severity of the violation.

The bill, introduced by Sen. Ruth Hardy, D-Addison, seeks to regulate the use of deepfakes, a type of AI-generated media that alters what a person said or did in a conversation with the intent of deceiving viewers.

The threat of AI in elections is something that has long been a conversation among state election officials across the country, said Vermont Secretary of State Sarah Copeland Hanzas. For her, S.23 is a "first logical step" in AI regulation for Vermont.

"We're really in uncharted territory in terms of the newness of this technology," she said. "We don't have any court precedents saying, 'This is how you can limit this type of speech,' or, 'This is how you can't limit this kind of speech.' So, disclosure seems to be the safest way to go."

Ilana Beller, a lobbyist for national

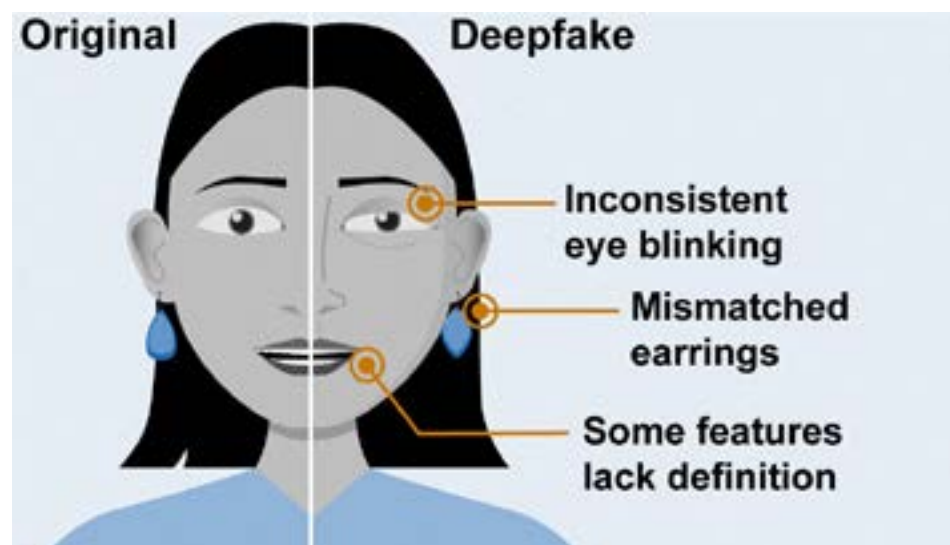


Photo courtesy U.S. Government Accountability Office

A graphic illustrates common features of deepfake imagery.

consumer advocacy group Public Citizen, testified last Tuesday in support of the new bill. She was the one who had brought the quiz to the committee to prove the ability of deepfake tech to confuse and befuddle.

"Whether you're talking about audio deepfakes, images, videos, the technology has gotten to a really good place in terms of being effective at tricking people," Beller said. "We've reached a place where pretty much anyone on the internet can create a deepfake within a couple of minutes, and it costs like five bucks."

Beller said the quality of this technology is rapidly improving and that deepfake use saw an increase in recent election cycles around the world, including in the U. S., India, Turkey and Slovakia.

The impetus of S.23 was a robocall this past year that attempted to bamboozle voters in New Hampshire during the 2024

presidential primary by playing an AI-generated recording of former President Joe Biden, Hardy said.

Phone messages mimicking the voice of the then-president told Granite State Democrats to save their vote for the general election in November, spreading the false notion that they had only the one vote to cast for both contests.

The effects of AI could be detrimental for public trust in the long run, let alone creating confusion during election cycles, Beller said in her testimony.

"If a large percentage of the content or information that's being circulated is realistic-looking video or images that are fraudulent, then it will serve to erode the trust of the general public," she said.

A version of S.23 has been introduced in 49 state legislatures, with 21 states having already passed it with broad bipartisan

support. Vermont's version has tripartisan support, Hardy said.

"One of the things that's great about this issue is I don't think it's a partisan issue," Copeland Hanzas said. "It's really just to make sure that elections are honest and accurate and fair."

Like many of its sister bills, S.23 requires a disclosure of synthetic media instead of an outright ban out of caution for violating the First Amendment. On the question of a complete ban or disclosure for AI use in Vermont elections, Copeland Hanzas said she opts for the latter.

"We have not demonstrated a high enough bar of potential damage to justify a ban," she said. "It is likely there would be a lawsuit if we were to attempt to ban the use of AI."

But the implications of AI in elections could pose questions for matters of free speech.

"Deciding where along the spectrum of acceptable free speech, versus something that is dangerous or damaging and should be restricted, is just completely uncharted here in the AI realm," the secretary of state said. "It was never possible to make such a convincing fabrication of what another person might say."

Despite the risks deepfakes could pose to election integrity, Copeland Hanzas said AI may help leverage the playing field in certain contests.

"It helps a candidate who maybe doesn't have staff or doesn't have the funds to hire a bunch of people to help them write ad copy," she said. "They could, in theory, use AI to form the basis of their campaign materials."

(Via Community News Service, a University of Vermont journalism internship.)

## Around Town

### Condolences

**Joan Mulford Braun** passed away peacefully in the company of family at her home in Shelburne, Vt., on Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025. She was 87. A longtime resident of Charlotte, Joan directed the experiential and service-learning program DUO (Do Unto Others) at Champlain Valley Union High School from the late 1970s through the 1990s.



Joan was born in Philadelphia, Pa., in 1937, the eldest of John Mulford and Virginia Compton Mulford's four children. As a girl she attended the Agnes Irwin School in Bryn Mawr, Pa., and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1959 with a bachelor's. That year she married Theodore E. Braun, Jr., who was completing medical school at Penn. They remained happily married for more than 60 years until his death in October of 2021.

In 1970, Joan and Ted moved to Charlotte where they raised their three sons and were active residents of a town they richly enjoyed for nearly 50 years. Joan was elected to the Charlotte School Board in the early 1970s then pursued a masters of education at the University of Vermont.

After she received her degree, she joined the direction center at Champlain Valley Union High in the fall of 1978. Her leadership of the DUO program took her around the United States as a leader in the then-innovative field of experiential public education. Her work, partnering high school

teens with community mentors, brought her into contact with a great variety of students, people and businesses throughout Chittenden County — a diversity of humanity and experience she sought and nourished throughout her life.

After retiring in 1997, she devoted herself to volunteer work with the Charlotte Senior Center; the Cathedral Church of St. Paul's in Burlington, where she and Ted were engaged members for more than 50 years; international travel; and the lives of her expanding family of grandchildren. She deeply enjoyed activities that brought her into the natural world she so treasured in Vermont; she walked, gardened, skied, biked, swam and kayaked. She also took great pleasure in UVM basketball and the vital artistic community in and around Burlington. Theater, music of all sorts, and the work of local craft and fine artists elicited her delight and support. In 2016 Joan and Ted moved to Shelburne where she maintained a wide circle of strong friendships that sustained and enriched her.

She's survived by her sisters, Margaret Bartholomew of Shelburne, Nancy Burrill of San Francisco, California; her sons Theodore Braun III of Los Angeles, Michael Braun of Houston, Texas, and Stuart Braun of Portland, Maine; three daughters-in-law, Lori Froeling, Sandra Hurtado and Colleen Kelly; and by her beloved grandchildren, Isabella Hurtado-Braun, Daniel Hurtado-Braun, Samuel Braun, Lucas Braun and Grace Braun.

Services will be held at St. Paul's Cathedral Church, Burlington, on Feb. 21 at 1 p.m., with a reception to follow at the Hotel Champlain. In lieu of flowers, donations in

her memory may be made to the Cathedral Church of St. Paul's and the Charlotte Library.

**Claire R. Houghton**, 90, a resident of Charlotte, passed away Jan. 12, 2025, at the University of Vermont Medical Center after a brief illness. Surrounded by her loving family, Claire was welcomed into the kingdom of heaven to reunite with her beloved son Brent, her husband Clifton and her parents Gladys and Cecile Robarge.

Claire was born in Hardwick, Vt., on Dec. 18, 1934, the daughter of Cecil and Gladys Robarge. Claire spent her early years in Hardwick where she graduated from the Hardwick Academy. She married Clifton Houghton on Sept. 21, 1957, at St. Norbert's Church, Hardwick. They then settled in Charlotte to raise their two boys, Brian and Brent, in the house they had built together. Claire continued to live in the house her family shared after Clifton died on Nov. 15, 1992, which is where Claire remained until her final days.

Claire leaves behind her son Brian, with whom she shared a close bond and loved dearly. Together they worked daily at the barn overseeing his cattle, affectionately referred to by Claire as "the girls." It was in this that she found her passion. She never feared hard work nor found a task her strong will could not help her complete. Claire found joy in rising early to go to the barn to spend her day tending to her "girls," maybe mending fences or handling whatever task that day might bring. She continued this daily routine until her passing.

Claire was predeceased by her parents,

husband Clifton and son Brent (April 12, 2011).

Survivors include her son Brian (Nancy Steady) of Charlotte, grandchildren Eric and Ashley of California, sister Cecily Powers (Wendell), nephew David Powers, nieces Sara Magro (David), Mary Jane McCormack (Brad) all of Rutland as well as several great nieces and nephews.

A memorial service will be held at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that tax deductible donations be made to the Charlotte Food Shelf, Inc., P.O. Box 83, Charlotte, VT 05445

### Congratulations

**Stella Martenis** of Charlotte was named to the fall honors list at the Community College of Vermont.

**Lucas Kelley** and **Nicholas Reynolds** of Charlotte were named to the fall dean's list at the Community College of Vermont.

**Zachary Santos** of Charlotte made the dean's list at Fairfield University for the fall semester.

**Parker Main** of Charlotte was named to the University of Hartford's dean's list and president's list for the fall semester.

**Jadin Brown** and **Lily Richardson** of Charlotte were named to the Champlain College president's list for the fall semester.

**Amelia Anair**, **Brennan Murdock** and **Stuart Robinson** of Charlotte were named to the Champlain College dean's list for the fall semester.

**Griffin Veltkamp** of Charlotte earned dean's list honors at the University of Tampa for the fall semester.

## Commentary

# Some personal perspectives on the proposed town budget

Kelly Devine  
Contributor

One of the most important pieces of the work of a selectboard is proposing the town budget. The budget not only determines how much your local tax rate will be, it also sets the priorities for the town.

While the five members of the Charlotte Selectboard must work together and compromise to get a budget created, they rarely agree on all aspects of it. This review of the budget is my personal opinion as a selectboard member and doesn't reflect anyone else's opinion.

### Overall budget number expenses

The proposed budget for 2026 is \$4,265,990. That represents a less than 1

percent increase from 2025. It is important to keep costs in check even though the municipal budget is a small percentage of your total tax bill. Voters spoke in 2023 when they voted down the proposed town budget. And when the cost of everything is increasing, I'm proud that the town was able to contain costs. It was a group effort.

There are two allocation requests coming before voters on town meeting day. One for \$62,000 for the town trails and one for \$40,000 towards a new bath house at Charlotte Town Beach. The existing bath house is nearing 50 years old and is not accessible. Adding those two requests would add about 2 percent to the budget.

The No. 1 way we pay the bills is tax revenue. This year we will ask voters to raise just over \$2.5 million from taxes. The

homestead tax rate is likely to be lower than last year. That's pretty good news considering that things cost more. The town gets money from other sources to make up the difference. This largest amount comes from leases on Thompson's Point (nearly \$1 million); plus over \$300,000 from the state for roads and other tax payments.

### Compared to fiscal year 2025, there are several noteworthy changes:

- The selectboard supported a 3-percent cost-of-living increase for all employees for 2026. Something we needed to get back on track with.

- Bravo to the Charlotte Library for presenting a flat budget. While some staff costs are increasing, the library operations have remained level-funded.

- The senior center increased its revenue projection by 20 percent.

- The recreation department is covering over 75 percent of their costs with revenue.

- The selectboard made the difficult decision to increase its budget for legal fees by more than 100 percent. We expect the town will need additional legal services as it works through its first labor union negotiation. And there are legal fees associated with the flood damage from hurricane Beryl. The good news is FEMA reimburses those.

One word of caution: With so much shifting nationally, we need to keep a close eye on our budgets in the coming year,

including making sure we dot our i's and cross our t's on this flood repair. Committed reimbursements from the state and federal government are crucial to this work. We expect Spear Street to re-open in the spring.

### Actions I support the town taking in the coming year for a strong and financially strong Charlotte:

- Adopt a proactive capital planning strategy. By implementing a comprehensive capital improvement plan, the town can prioritize preventive maintenance, extend the lifespan of its assets and reduce the need for emergency repairs, which often come at a premium. My plan would be for existing town buildings and amenities. It does not include anything new. I do not support adding water and wastewater services.

The town garage is a good example of why you need to be prepared. We relied on a facility leased by our road commissioner. After it was destroyed by fire, the town had to take immediate action to create a new facility. In my opinion, it's always better to be prepared. And while we do have reserve funds for a rainy day, we can do more to manage all of our amazing buildings and amenities.

- Expand the town's access to grant opportunities. I was very supportive of work done by our energy, trails and recreation committees to apply for grants to

## NEXT PUBLICATION DATES



**MARCH 6**  
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**Ad Deadline:**  
Feb. 28

**MARCH 20**  
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## Commentary

# Town priorities, budgeting, leadership decisions' true cost

JD Herlihy  
Contributor

I appreciate the ongoing discussion about the town budget and priorities, as these decisions directly impact our community. In a recent opinion piece and Front Porch Forum posts, selectboard member Kelly Devine stated, "The budget not only determines how much your local tax rate will be, it also sets the priorities for the town."

While I respect this perspective, I take a fundamentally different approach.

The budget should not dictate the town's priorities. Rather, the selectboard, working in consultation with committees, boards, town staff and residents, should first establish clear priorities and then develop a budget that supports them while maintaining a reasonable tax rate. This collaborative, balanced approach is essential to responsible governance, as I emphasized during Candidates' Night.

I was struck by the claim that the 114-percent increase in legal expenses (from \$35,000 to \$75,000) is due to increased "challenges to development review decisions." This implication is misleading, particularly given my experience on the development review board. To my knowledge, this reasoning was never discussed in selectboard budget meetings, and I encourage Devine to provide factual support for this assertion.

In reality, there has been only one legal challenge to a development review board decision since the board's formation three years ago. Moreover, the development review board has rarely issued outright denials. I

believe four in total. Instead, we worked collaboratively with applicants and interested parties to craft conditions that balance landowners' rights with the protection of Charlotte's character and natural resources.

It is also important to note that planning and zoning has a separate legal budget, which covers development review board-related legal expenses. This year, the town budgeted \$10,000 for planning and zoning legal costs, yet only about \$3,500 has been spent to date for fiscal year 25. In fiscal year 24, just \$4,260 of the originally budgeted \$13,000 was used. These figures further undermine the claim that increased legal costs stem from development review board decisions.

The \$40,000 increase in legal expenditures is, without a doubt, tied to union negotiations. While other factors, such as the Spear Street repairs, may have contributed, there is a clear link between these costs and the selectboard's decision to cut \$40,000 in employee benefits and compensation after the fiscal year 24 budget initially failed in March 2023.

Devine led this effort through the Employee Health Insurance and Compensation Working Group, insisting on these cuts even after alternative cost-saving measures were proposed. These reductions played a direct role in the town employees' decision to unionize. Ironically, the \$40,000 in promised savings has now been entirely offset by increased legal expenditures — both realized and anticipated.

Further underscoring the role of union negotiations in driving up legal costs, the selectboard's decision to legally challenge whether library employees were town employees added to over-budget expenditures

in both fiscal year 24 and 25. This dispute, which stretched from April 24 to Sept. 5, 2024, likely contributed to legal expenses that spanned both fiscal years. While the library is managed by an independent board, the employees' salaries and benefits are paid directly by the town. Attempting to separate these employees from the collective bargaining agreement was not only legally questionable but also appears disingenuous and ill-advised.

I was also surprised by Devine's assertion of strong support for the trails, energy and recreation committees' efforts to secure grant funding. While she has acknowledged grants as a valuable revenue source, conversations

with members of these committees suggest a lack of broader support beyond securing outside funding. While volunteers may be hesitant to speak publicly, I encourage residents to engage with these groups and form their own opinions on whether they feel adequately supported by Devine and the current selectboard.

I urge residents to consider these issues carefully, ask questions and participate in discussions about the future of our town. I look forward to continuing these conversations in the weeks ahead.

*(JD Herlihy is a candidate for a two-year seat on the selectboard, running against incumbent Kelly Devine.)*

## DEVINE

Continued from page 4

support their work. The library and senior center are also working on more grant funding.

All of our boards and committees are doing important work for the town. Access to grants will help them do more when budgets are tight. But grant applications are time consuming. The town and its many volunteers would benefit from professional support with grant writing, and there are professionals who do this work on a contract basis. Working with committees and boards to expand grant opportunities will be a win-win for Charlotte.

- Shared authority for financial decisions. Volunteers are doing important work on behalf of the town. Why not give them more authority over some of the funds the town allocates to their work? I'd like to have the Selectboard discuss, with their input, more sustainable allocations for each of these groups annually and give them some authority over spending.

Giving wider authority to the town administrator for purchasing and contracts will streamline the work of the selectboard and make town operations more efficient. To do this, the selectboard would need to adjust its purchasing policy. This policy is in need of an update if for no other reason than to reflect how much things cost these days. Simple decisions and repeat contracts

could be handled by the town administrator.

- Exploring shared or regional fire and rescue services. Charlotte Volunteer Fire & Rescue Services is our largest single budget item at just over \$1 million. These services are important to our residents. One way to manage these costs would be to consider working with our neighboring towns on shared services. The leaders of the fire and rescue service have voiced support for exploring this. It is time to take a close look at this option.

Finally, a question — Should we grow and diversify the tax-base? More revenue and different types of revenue sources would help the town address the rising cost of almost everything. But is that what the town wants? I'll be asking folks that question. We all love Charlotte for its amazing natural beauty and open space. That must be preserved. At the same time, if we don't grow or grow slowly, our property taxes will increase when costs increase.

The best news is that Charlotte voters get the final say on all of this at town meeting on Saturday, March 1. I look forward to our first town meeting in several years and a chance to hear from our community.

If you have questions, please reach out to me at [kdevine@townofcharlotte.com](mailto:kdevine@townofcharlotte.com). I'd love to hear from you.

*(Kelly Devine is a member of the Charlotte Selectboard.)*

## Snowy pastoral



Photo by Bill Fraser-Harris

This was the view off Bingham Brook Road on Friday.

## Winter vista



Photo by Elizabeth Hunt

Although it's been a couple of years, the town beach is evidence that we're having a real winter this year.

# Letters to the Editor

## Support for re-electing Devine to the selectboard

To the Editor:

Please join me in voting for Kelly Devine for another term on the Charlotte Selectboard.

I had the pleasure of serving with Devine on the planning commission, where she always brought a thoughtful perspective to our discussions. She was a positive contributor, and I appreciated her ability to balance different viewpoints while keeping her eye on what's best for the town. Her advocacy for a long-overdue capital plan is timely. Charlotte needs to plan responsibly for our current obligations while simultaneously planning our future.

During Devine's current term on the selectboard, she has demonstrated her knowledge and expertise, understanding how Charlotte's municipal government functions and what it takes to make it work for the whole town. Her experience on the selectboard includes helping create three town budgets; playing a key role in recruiting and hiring our wonderful new town administrator; and focusing on making the entire selectboard meeting function more efficiently through the introduction of consent agendas. Her ability to ask important and probing questions at the meetings helps bring forth critical information and perspectives needed for a fulsome discussion and well-reasoned decision making.

Kelly has shared her vision for these key ideas:

- Kelly has no plans to expand municipal water and wastewater services.
- Developing a capital planning project designed to address the existing town maintenance obligations and budgeting money each year to improve and repair its buildings and amenities. This includes supporting the plan to replace the bathhouse at the town beach.
- Revising the town's purchasing policy to reflect current costs and give both the town administrator and town committees more authority within the budget.
- Creating a robust, multi-committee and public-input process to help inform our rewrite of the town plan.
- Expanding grant-writing support services for the town.

Kelly brings nearly 20 years of experience in state and local government policy and budgets to her work on the selectboard.

She has worked on everything from fixing parks and trails to making taxes fairer and improving government services.

Charlotte is lucky to have someone as experienced, knowledgeable and committed as Kelly on the selectboard. I hope you'll join me in voting for her on Election Day.

Charlie Pughe  
Charlotte

## Encouraging voting for both Lee Krohn and JD Herlihy

To the Editor:

I'm voting for JD Herlihy to serve on the Charlotte Selectboard. He has already shown that he is committed to our community from four years serving on the Charlotte Development Review Board. His children attend Champlain Valley High and Charlotte Central School, where his wife is active with the PTA. Healthy schools and a healthy community are basics of his desires for Charlotte. Wherever he has lived, he's jumped into serving the community.

I had a chance to meet Herlihy with several others. I noticed that he listened well to our thoughts, not interrupting with his own. That is an essential quality in a selectboard member. He will bring a sense of calm. He'll promote transparency in all actions, avoiding executive sessions except in the case of a legal requirement. He'll listen to those that are attending the meetings. And he'll trust the work of staff, elected officials, committees and commissions.

At that same meeting I met Lee Krohn, who is running unopposed for another seat on the Charlotte Selectboard. He has a long list of accomplishments that include being town manager of Manchester, serving on the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, and five years as Shelburne town manager. He also will bring a sense of calm, good listening and a cooperative spirit to the town's work.

JD and Lee's skill sets complement one another and the rest of the selectboard. Between them both, they bring a wealth of knowledge about small town government and the town of Charlotte. Despite being two Charlotte Selectboard newcomers, their experience will ensure a seamless and smooth transition.

Please join me in voting for JD Herlihy and Lee Krohn.

Ruah Swennerfelt  
Charlotte

## Keep promise to Afghan allies who assisted Vermont veterans

To the Editor:

Thousands of Vermonters served in our nation's longest war, which ended in 2021 with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. Five Vermonters gave the last full measure of devotion to this country, killed in combat in that country.

The men and women we sent into harm's way, with the Vermont National Guard's deployments through the years in addition to Vermonters serving full time on active duty, were helped in their dangerous work by Indigenous Afghan forces fighting alongside them. When Kabul fell, many of these Afghan men and their families were stranded in Afghanistan at grave risk of death or imprisonment.

Since 2021, more than 500 Afghans have resettled in Vermont, including hundreds of men who courageously served alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan. At the Vermont Afghan Alliance, a 501c3 charitable organization dedicated to welcoming these new Americans as they escape brutal Taliban rule, we have been working day and night to find housing, teach English and driving, as well as provide individualized case management tailored to each individual refugee's situation.

The Trump presidency has taken direct aim at Vermont veterans and our Afghan friends through moral injury: to force us to back away from promises made. Federal grants, which the Vermont Afghan Alliance depends on to serve this community, have been frozen.

These Afghan allies risked their lives and the safety of their families to support U.S. missions. In return for their invaluable service, the U.S. government promised them relocation to the United States and the opportunity to reunite with their families here in Vermont. Unfortunately, almost three years later, many of these promises remain unfulfilled.

Many of our refugees worry about ever seeing their families again. Some have taken the massive risk of returning to Afghanistan covertly at great personal cost and danger. Some have been subsequently imprisoned by Taliban courts.

The election of President Trump and his Project 2025 Agenda has stopped all refugee admissions to the United States and specifically calls for the halt of Temporary Protected Status visas and the stripping of such status. Under Trump and Project 2025, the executive branch has now completely shut down new immigration applications to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services if applications become "excessive." Of course, what is excessive is not defined.

The men and women who walked foot patrols in Helmand and Khost alongside Vermonters may never see their families again if Donald Trump and Stephen Miller have their way. These are men and women who were promised a new life in America with their families. Trump has hung these men and women out to dry. We need help, and we need it now.

At the end of the day, we're Vermonters, and up here, our word is our bond. At the Vermont Afghan Alliance, we're not backing down from the challenge.

Please, learn about the circumstances of your new neighbors. Take a minute and read about or work at the [vtafghanalliance.org](http://vtafghanalliance.org).

Write or call your state representative, Governor Scott and our federal representatives. Insist on an "Afghan Exception" to the coming draconian immigration policies. It's the right thing to do, as Americans and as Vermonters.

Dan Barkhuff  
South Burlington

*(Dan Barkhuff is an emergency room physician at the University of Vermont Medical Center, a former Navy SEAL, the founder of Veterans for Responsible Leadership and the co-founder of the Vermont Afghan Alliance.)*

## Please vote for Herlihy and for town charter

To the Editor:

On March 4, we will be voting on some important items.

There are two candidates vying for the same selectboard position, incumbent Kelly Devine and JD Herlihy.

As executive director of the Burlington Business Association, Kelly Devine has been pushing for growth and housing in Burlington for years. Now it appears Charlotte has become her new target. Her major goal: new water and sewer infrastructure for Charlotte. Once this kind of infrastructure is in place, the town has to allow five or more dwelling units per acre. Devine claims that we have to grow fast or taxes will go up, but judging by our neighbors that is simply not true. Neither Shelburne nor Hinesburg had their taxes reduced despite rampant development. Most Charlotters want growth to be modest. Does Kelly not listen or simply not care?

I expect our elected officers to hear and do what residents want. That's why I will be voting for JD Herlihy. While he was serving on the development review board, I found him fair and considerate. He is a good listener and community-minded, and he promises to make the selectboard more transparent, something I have often found lacking.

Another important item is the town charter. In recent years, the state has passed legislation that takes away our rights to govern ourselves. Currently the selectboard has the right to adopt land-use regulations without residents' approval. The charter will change that, and even if the Legislature won't allow it, it will send a signal to our selectboard members that we want a voice when it comes to approving land-use regulations.

So please, consider joining me by voting "yes" on the charter and for JD Herlihy for selectboard. Charlotte's future depends on it.

Claudia Mucklow  
Charlotte

## Think carefully before voting for Article 11

To the Editor:

Article 11 on your ballot this year asks for a new town charter that restores the approval of our land-use regulations (zoning laws) to a town-wide vote. This article is an attempt to bypass recent Vermont legislation (the "Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone," or HOME act) which was enacted in order to promote an increase in housing opportunities in the state.

You can read about the legislation here:

## LETTERS

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<https://tinyurl.com/yc837bwc>.

According to VTDigger, “The new law’s municipal provisions echo ‘Yes in my backyard’ reform movements across the country, whose proponents argue that certain zoning rules — some with segregationist roots — have effectively outlawed cheaper, denser housing in much of America.” The legislation was championed by Sen. Kesha Ram Hinsdale, D/P-Chittenden Southeast, who said, “Vermonters have never been more unified in asking us to prioritize permanent, affordable housing.”

And even if we choose to deny the housing crisis and ignore the wisdom of our elected state and local officials, getting the change made to the town charter would be a cumbersome and likely futile process.

Rep. Chea Waters Evans was quoted in The Charlotte News as saying the Legislature might be reluctant to make this change to a statute that was passed so recently and that could cause confusion if other towns jumped on this bandwagon. Read more here: <https://tinyurl.com/3cwabxbv>.

Please think carefully and be fully informed before casting your vote. Thank you!

Ken French  
Charlotte

### Restore authority for changing land-use regulations to voters

To the Editor:

I appreciated reading Ken French’s post in Front Porch Forum about the proposed charter our town will be voting for by Australian ballot on March 4. I heard French suggest that the charter denies the housing crisis, bypasses legislation, ignores the wisdom of elected and local officials, and may be futile.

Many of us who live here have young adult children, elderly parents or businesses looking for employees. We all feel the effects of the housing crunch. The effort to restore the right to a town-wide vote on changing the land-use regulations of Charlotte is not a denial of this, it’s a call to wider and greater citizen engagement and participation in crafting solutions that work for Charlotte.

Rather than bypassing legislation, the charter is seeking to restore a vote that we have traditionally had. Objections to this specific piece of the Home Act, granting selectboard-only vote on land-use regulation changes, did not begin with this proposed charter. It began when the Home Act was being drafted but fell on deaf ears. Legislators change. There are ramifications to the Home Act that are issues in other towns, too. It is important that our voices are heard.

Ken French suggests that we should be comfortable leaving final decisions on these laws, which can have irrevocable changes to the rural nature and natural resources of Charlotte, to our elected officials. We

cannot predict the future. Members of the selectboard change. Our selectboard has acted to override the decisions of our development review board and conservation commission. If the selectboard and planning commission know a town-wide vote is not required to make changes to our laws, what influence will that have on the way regulations are developed and changed? In Shelburne, the selectboard recently approved a 375-unit development in their rural district, rezoning it on their own.

Residents deserve to have their voices heard, by voting, to determine their own future. Rather than a futile effort, if we succeed or if we fail, we are sending an important message to our elected officials and legislators. Vote yes on Article 11 on March 4 to restore the right to town-wide vote on the land-use regulation laws that will determine this future.

Voting takes place on March 4 at town hall from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Absentee ballots are available from the town clerk’s office.

Karen Frost  
Charlotte

### The Governor’s risky plan: Did voters ask for this?

To the Editor:

In November, Vermonters sent a clear message: We can’t afford these property tax increases. The priority should be tax relief for working and middle-class families, through foundation formulas, second-home taxes and income sensitivity adjustments.

Voters did not ask for school closures, cuts

to student opportunities or a state takeover of public education. Yet, the Governor is using the tax crisis to push a radical overhaul—slashing funding, expanding vouchers and consolidating schools—without transparency or public input.

Major education reforms require time, study and statewide discussions. In 1997-98, Act 60’s funding changes took extensive legislative work and public engagement. Today, the Governor is drip-feeding details to control the narrative and rush massive changes in just months.

Instead, lawmakers must provide immediate tax relief while taking a thoughtful, two-year approach to any structural changes. They should spend this summer and fall engaging Vermonters on the impact of reforms before making drastic decisions.

Vermonters didn’t vote for a Republican mandate; they voted for tax relief, not an education overhaul. We must preserve our strong public schools, attract families and ensure a fair, collaborative approach to funding—not a rushed and risky experiment.

David Zuckerman  
Hinesburg

### Say ‘no’ to privatizing our public schools

To the Editor:

With the recent release of Governor Scott and interim Education Secretary Zoie Saunders’ “Transformative Education

LETTERS continued on page 7

**Vote**  
**YES**  
**ON ARTICLE 4**

**Support Charlotte Town Link Trail**

**CHARLOTTE TOWN LINK TRAIL**

Article 4 will ask for \$62,000 to extend the trail west along Ferry Road, over the train tracks, and across the road to the mowed grass trail that connects with Lake Road.

Our Goal: A trail that links Mt. Philo with the Town Beach and the West Village.

- ✓ Trails Improve Charlotte’s Quality of Life.
- ✓ Trails Keep Us Safe and Healthy.
- ✓ Trails Have Wide Public Support.

# Letters to the Editor

## LETTERS

Continued from page 7

Plan,” many parents of school-aged children in Vermont, myself included, have been left asking, “Who asked for this transformation?” And furthermore, “Whose idea was it?”

Whenever the issue of school funding arises, we are often confronted by our neighbors with citations of Vermont schools’ low national ranking, and the source for these rankings always seems to be the Heritage Foundation. One would hope that, after the last 20 or so days, the Heritage Foundation would be an absolute pariah, especially in Vermont. But since their disinformation continues to be an alluring justification for defunding our supposedly underperforming schools, allow me to remind everyone that the Heritage Foundation is the far-right think tank behind “Project 2025” and funded by some of the wealthiest ultraconservatives in the United States, namely Koch, DeVos, Mercer and Coors.

Its metrics for ranking American schools are not based on any widely accepted quantitative or qualitative measurements, and they have supported litigation in various states that erode civil protections for students and dissolve the separation between church and state.

For instance, Florida ranks No. 1 in the Heritage Foundation’s “transparency” ratings.

What the Heritage Foundation calls

“transparency” is actually their completely subjective rating of a state’s willingness to force its teachers to make their course material open to public review and comment, along with the public’s ability to veto material that they don’t like. It shouldn’t need explaining where this would lead. I will just say that the states that the Heritage Foundation ranks highly in “transparency” are the ones that have aggressively targeted curriculum that teaches about the history of slavery and civil rights, or what has lately been maliciously dubbed “critical race theory.”

In Florida, one parent’s objection to a teacher’s offhand comment to the parent’s child led to the “Don’t Say Gay” law signed by Governor Ron DeSantis in 2022. This legislation was shaped by the Heritage Foundation, along with powerful conservative Christian legal group Alliance Defending Freedom, and the Christian nationalist lobbying group Family Policy Alliance.

The Heritage Foundation has heaped praise and high rankings on Florida schools as Ron DeSantis has purged any meaningful discussions of race, gender and sexuality from the classroom, which is much easier to do in Florida as it has the highest percentage of students in charter and private schools in the nation.

Phil Scott’s interim Education Secretary, Zoie Saunders, worked for seven years under Jonathan Hage as the Director and Vice President of Strategy at Charter Schools USA, based in Florida. Charter Schools

USA took taxpayer money to create 37 for-profit schools in Florida that Hage owned, developed, leased to himself, and then managed under separate business entities, thus funneling every penny into his pocket, or what is otherwise known as a “sweeps contract.” Meanwhile, student outcomes were no better than the Florida statewide average. Charter Schools USA, which has expanded to 87 schools in six states and launched an extremely profitable online “mobile classroom” program, has revenues exceeding \$1 billion.

Before founding Charter Schools USA, Hage was a researcher at the Heritage Foundation.

To be clear, people like Hage and the Heritage Foundation and their ultrawealthy, ultraconservative backers have a formula for public education, and it does not include fixing the funding formula for public schools or guiding states toward a more robust and resilient public-school network.

Anything they say about Vermont schools should be viewed with utmost skepticism.

What can be trusted are the entities that aggregate a more reliable set of metrics, such as Wallet Hub and Forbes, in whose ratings Florida K-12 ranks middle to bottom nationally while Vermont is in the top 5 to 10. Vermont also ranks seventh in combined grades 4-12 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) math and reading scores, also known as the nation’s report card.

As much as some might want to get their hands on them, our schools should not be for sale.

Peter Macia  
Charlotte

### Get the Town Report to aid participation at town meeting

To the Editor:

The Town Report is the most important document to have either on your phone or in hand when you go to the annual town meeting on Saturday, March 1.

It is called the 2024 Town Report because it is the document that reports what happened during 2024 from a budget and governmental perspective. It also lists the names of our town officials and their terms of office as well as the new budget that has been proposed by the selectboard and that we will be voting on at the meeting.

The report used to be mailed to every resident of Charlotte, but to save money fewer copies are printed now and people have to pick them up at the town hall. Hopefully, someone will take a handful to the senior center, library, Grange and local stores so they are more accessible. However, it is also posted online on the town website. The link is at <https://tinyurl.com/25bczxxb>.

When you go to town meeting, arrive early to check in. When the gavel falls at 9 a.m., the first article on the warning is to discuss the reports in the Town Report and to approve them. Sometimes people are so busy finding a seat, they don’t pay attention to this article, and it’s just approved without anybody asking questions or commenting. But this is your chance to respond to what is written in their reports by any of the elected or appointed officials of the town. This is not the time to talk about budget items, but rather other plans, activities or information, or lack of information, in the reports. This includes the report of the past year’s

financial statements.

Later, when the budget discussion takes place, here are all the line items of both revenues and expenditures that need to be understood and discussed if necessary.

Here also is an estimate of what our property taxes will be next year if the budget is passed as proposed. The voters at the meeting have the option to amend it.

For new people in town, this will be your first opportunity to share in this traditional New England-style town meeting, a rare chance to participate in direct democracy. We have not had an in-person town meeting since 2019, due to COVID and later decisions by the selectboard not to have town meeting, which they were allowed to do by state statute up until last year.

In 2019, we voted to change the in-person meeting from the traditional Tuesday to Saturday in order to allow a greater number of people to come without losing days at work. I am hopeful that many people in town will decide that this is the year, whether they have ever come before or not, to participate. We are so lucky to live in a state and town where this is still possible.

Nancy Wood  
Charlotte



Courtesy photo

Lois and Mac at the library dedication in 1997.

### Grateful to Lois McClure for library funds and name

To the Editor:

When John Rosenthal, Alice Lawrence and I approached Lois and Mac McClure in the early 1990s about building the new library in Charlotte, we asked if they would be willing to pledge one third of the estimated price of \$350,000 as a match. (We had already procured the first third.)

In asking for this amount, we also had to offer a naming opportunity. Fortunately, Lois spoke up immediately and said that she favored calling it the “Charlotte Library.” In truth, we were almost as grateful for this name as for the fantastic financial support.

Lois McClure was a remarkable lady with



## LETTERS

Continued from page 8

deep roots in Charlotte at Cedar Beach and with a great love of all things library related. She was an avid supporter of the library throughout her life.

All in Charlotte should be grateful to this very generous and warm-hearted person who did so much for so many.

Nan Mason  
Charlotte

### UVM health network's academic mission critical to state's health

To the Editor:

Recommendations from the Act 167 report in Vermont state, "The University of Vermont Health Network should reevaluate whether its medical education and research programs are contributing to better health outcomes for Vermonters." The report asks how relevant the university's research is to the health needs of Vermonters and questions the benefit of time spent by University of Vermont Medical Network physicians on research. It also asks whether the time spent by physicians on these activities helps to train the next generation of physicians in Vermont.

I would like to address these questions within the context of my experiences as a physician scientist at the University of Vermont Medical Center.

My personal story illustrates the many benefits of research within the University of Vermont Medical Center. I began my career at the University of Vermont as a medical student in the 1980s and completed my residency in internal medicine and fellowship in hematology and cardiovascular research in the early 1990s.

Owing to the outstanding academic environment here, I made the decision to stay at University of Vermont Medical Center to serve fellow Vermonters as a physician and to conduct research. I started my clinical career as the only specialist in care of patients with abnormal blood clots called venous thrombosis — deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism — a leading type of potentially fatal

cardiovascular disease.

Thus, I am an example of how research can attract physicians who train at the university to remain in state to serve Vermonters. In fact, statistics from my department (Department of Medicine) from 2016 onward show that greater than 50 percent of the residents we train remain in Vermont. This could be lost if we de-emphasize research training.

Three decades later, I have overseen a thriving research program that has garnered tens of millions of dollars of research funding from the National Institutes of Health and included research studies that specifically address the health needs of rural populations. These research dollars directly contribute to advancing science and training the next generation of researchers, but also to helping our local economy and providing stable jobs. We have made many breakthrough discoveries, including that excessive body weight and oral contraceptives increase risk for venous thrombosis, as well as multiple causes of racial disparities in stroke affecting Black Americans.

Our original research group of three faculty is now 15 faculty at the University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine. Of these researchers, seven are physicians and seven were trained here. Thus, from my own personal experience, research and educational activities of the University of Vermont Medical Center physicians helps to train the next generation of physicians who will serve Vermonters.

On the clinical side, based on successful research and building a program for care of venous thrombosis and bleeding disorders, we now have a thrombosis and hemostasis program that is staffed by six dedicated hematologists, three nurse practitioners, one physician's assistant and two nurses. We see about 1,500 new patients from our region every year, a number that is rapidly growing with the aging of our population. We provide holistic care to these patients to improve their vascular health and apply the most recent research-based knowledge to their care, including from our own research.

One can't discuss impact of an academic

medical center without mentioning the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting in spring 2020, I participated in conducting National Institute of Health-funded rapid-response clinical trials on treatments for COVID in hospitalized patients. Results led to the rigorous testing of different blood-thinning medications and new clinical practice guidelines less than one year after we started, improving recovery from this deadly infection.

Bridging from this research, we are now studying causes of long COVID, and we aim to develop knowledge that will bring treatments to the community of patients in Vermont suffering from the long-term debilitating effects of the virus.

If University of Vermont Medical Network were to severely reduce or eliminate its research and educational activities, it would prevent stories like

mine from being told. Ultimately, this will reduce the number of physicians trained at the University of Vermont, who remain in Vermont and reduce the benefits that an academic environment brings to the health of Vermonters.

We will also lose our ability to train the next generation in research. While we all agree that we must address issues of access to and the rising costs of health care, we should not undertake short-term solutions that have long-term detrimental effects for the health care and health of Vermonters.

Mary Cushman  
Charlotte

*(Dr. Cushman is co-director of the Vermont Center for Cardiovascular and Brain Health at the University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine.)*



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## Extinguishing the competition

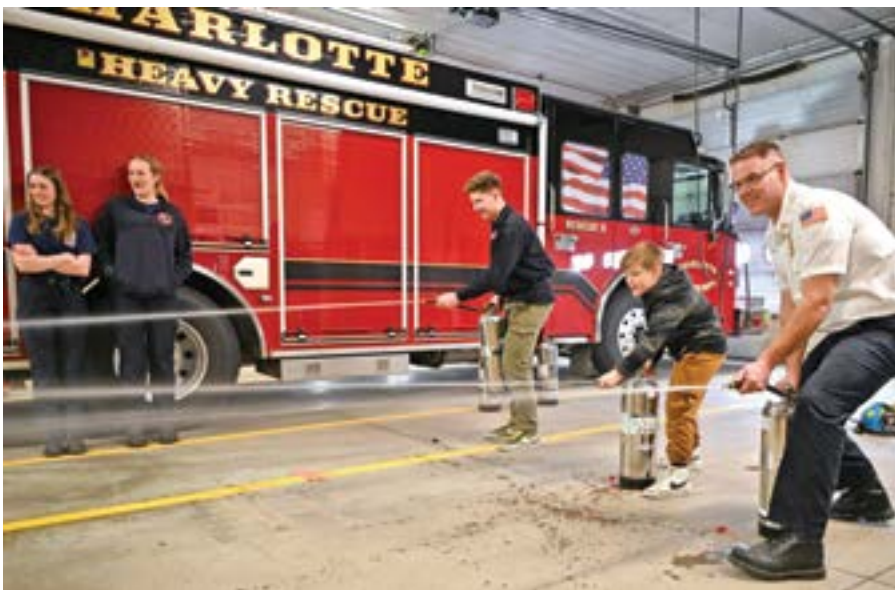


Photo by Lee Krohn

Jamie Valyou, director of Charlotte Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service, and kids attending the station's open house on Saturday engage in a friendly fire extinguisher competition.

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# Human Rights Commission asks legislators for more staff

Charlotte Oliver  
Community News Service

Facing record caseloads and short staffing, the Vermont Human Rights Commission has turned away dozens of Vermonters attempting to file complaints of discrimination in recent years. The cases it does accept have taken about six times longer than the state standard.

“It’s a really gut-wrenching situation for all the parties involved,” said Big Hartman, the commission’s executive director. The commission simply lacks the capacity to take some cases on.

Hartman and others from the commission have talked about their concerns with legislators in recent weeks, and the House Committee on General and Housing is weighing a bill, H.38, that would give the commission more staff.

But a similar bill last year never made it to the House floor. Supporters of the new proposal believe the commission’s work will only grow more important in the future, and staff at the commission want to take on the cases.

The commission investigates and litigates discrimination complaints. The cases often come from vulnerable Vermonters who might be unable to pursue legal action themselves.

Records show the cases can range from discrimination in employment and housing to cases verging on violence. In one case in 2021, the commission took legal action after determining that a family in St. Albans, originally from Mexico, was subject to racist harassment and threatened by their next-door neighbors for years.

In one instance, according to court



The Vermont Statehouse in Montpelier.

File photo

records, a neighbor threatened the family with a gun in response to having their property surveyed. In another, a neighbor pushed the mother, who was holding her daughter, to the ground during an argument.

Employees at the commission have seen a rise in cases since the beginning of 2024. While the trend is hard to attribute, officials think it may be a perfect storm of the housing crisis in Vermont combining with “emboldened” hate speech nationally, Hartman said.

The new bill, sponsored by Reps. Kevin Christie, D-Hartford, and Tom Stevens, D-Waterbury, could almost double the commission staff, adding six full-time and two part-time positions to the ranks.

The commission “is doing the work of the people who are forgotten,” Stevens said in an interview.

Hartman partially attributes the rise in complaints to outreach success and greater public awareness of the commission’s work. While that’s a victory officials want to celebrate, the commission only has three investigators currently and has a hard time retaining employees due to burnout.

“You are just under this constant pressure to move people’s cases forward because they need that from you,” Hartman said.

Victims of harassment are often working through traumatic moments, Hartman said. Managing moments of crisis, especially in high volume, is emotionally heavy for staff, too.

One investigator recently left the commission due to burnout, and until that position is filled, a pile of cases will sit on pause, said Hartman. They wish the commission could take on more cases for

people who come to “seek justice” and turn cases around faster.

On average it took commission employees 649 days to settle a case in fiscal year 2023, according to Hartman. That stat improved in fiscal year 2024, but the state sets a goal of closing cases within six months. The commission also receives 10 percent of its funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which sets a standard of closing cases in 100 days. The federal department has been sympathetic to the commission’s situation, but the long turnaround time could become a problem, Hartman said.

Last year, Christie and Stevens worked on a similar bill that would’ve added three full-time positions to the commission. But the proposal wasn’t passed.

The new bill responds to the most recent needs of the commission, Stevens said, and he sees it as more timely than ever.

Stevens said he fears that President Donald Trump will condone antagonizing and discriminating against people based on their identities. It’s important for people to know the state “has their back,” Stevens said, “and will try to provide some form of justice when they are being discriminated against.”

Hartman isn’t exactly optimistic that legislators will prioritize the commission when funding decisions come around. But they are “hopeful that the administration and leadership in the Senate and the House will support this investment in human rights that is currently needed.”

*(Via Community News Service, a University of Vermont journalism internship.)*

## Put a rink on it



Photos by Elizabeth Hunt

From left, Jessica Scriver, Zech Gardner and Charlie Moore practice their hockey moves in a backyard pond ice rink on Greenbush Road.

## MAKE-A-WISH

Continued from page 1

no longer like a turtle anymore, but Heath disagreed: “But I am. I’m just like one of those baby turtles fighting through the ocean, and I’m going to be one of them that makes it.”

Like so many children who have had their wishes fulfilled, the experience was healing for Heath, so healing that today she is an adult and a wish manager for Make-A-Wish.

The \$120,000 Discovery Theater was made possible by an in-kind donation from Vermont Construction Company, which supplied the materials and nine months of labor to build it.

The company’s co-founder, David Richards, was at the unveiling with his family and became choked up during a press conference discussing what the theater had meant to him and Vermont Construction Company. The partnership seems like “a perfect fit” for his company because they build houses and Make-A-Wish builds community.

“Granting wishes is like raising a barn where the real magic is in all the hands that come together to make it happen,” Richards said.

Jamie Hathaway, president and CEO of Make-A-Wish of Vermont and Northeast New York, said the goal of the Discovery Theater is to make every contact a child has with the Make-A-Wish fun.

The space is intended to inspire the kids it helps to decide on what wish they want to ask for.

“This is a space which inspires the imagination and lets kids know that they have agency over this part of their illness,” Hathaway said. “The journey that these families are on is really scary.”

He came to the realization that his organization’s job is to confront fear with love.

“Look at all these people work. Work is love made visible, right?” Hathaway said. “My work is love made visible.”

Leaving after the unveiling, things seemed warmer outside than the few degrees rise in temperature indicated.



# CCS teacher named a Rowland Foundation Fellow

Naomi Strada  
(Summarized by Tom Scatchard)

Eighth grade humanities teacher Julia Beerworth has been named a 2025 Rowland Foundation Fellow. During the 2025-26 school year, Julia will focus on increasing opportunities for project-based and experiential learning at Charlotte Central School, with a particular emphasis on middle-level students.

The fellowship funds will allow the school to retain a middle-level teacher for the year, a position that would have been financially unfeasible otherwise, enabling Beerworth to focus on this important work, instead of her usual class schedule.

## Music news

On Friday and Saturday, Jan. 31 and Feb 1, Liam Anderson, Nathan Woldow and Ansel Schwartzman represented the school at the District 3 band, orchestra and chorus festival held at the A. D. Lawton school in Essex Junction. They all auditioned and scored the highest in their sections.

## Administrators' note to the Charlotte community

Tim O'Leary, principal, and Beth Slater, assistant principal and director of student services, released a note to the Charlotte community addressing recent national political actions that have sparked a range of reactions, raising deep concerns for many while being applauded by others.

In their note they said that this

complexity is challenging, and it underscores why the school's commitment to creating an inclusive space for all and fostering responsible citizenship is more important than ever.

The administrators said that in moments like these, the school returns to its core values as a school and a community, reaffirming a shared responsibility to ensure that every student — no matter their identity, background or family structure — feels safe, valued and supported.

On Jan. 24, Superintendent Adam Bunting wrote to the entire Champlain Valley School District community, recognizing that many in our schools, including LGBTQIA+ students, New Americans and immigrant families, are feeling particularly vulnerable right now. He made it clear that it is both our ethical and legal duty to educate all students while honoring their stories and identities. He also emphasized that district schools will continue to ensure that every student feels safe, supported, able to learn and thrive.

Soon after, Vermont Secretary of Education Zoie Saunders addressed all superintendents across the state (<https://tinyurl.com/4c6wu5p2>), reaffirming Vermont's commitment to upholding both state and federal laws protecting students.

Charlotte Central School strives to teach and live by a simple but powerful commitment:

Take care of yourself.  
Take care of each other.  
Take care of this place.



Courtesy photo

From left, Liam Anderson, Nathan Woldow, Ansel Schwartzman and music teacher Andy Smith at the District 3 band, orchestra and chorus festival where the students scored the highest in their sections.

# Testing as a reality check for college readiness

Margo Bartsch  
Contributor

“Should we make reservations at Halvorson’s?” is a common question when it is University of Vermont graduation weekend.

Although reservations are not required, it is probably a good idea to nab a table to beat the Catamount rush on Church Street.

Like limited seating at Halvorson’s, college applications are also increasingly competitive. This January, Forbes reported that the 2024-25 application cycle showed these increases: 7 percent more applications, 2 percent more colleges each student applied to and 5 percent more students applying to college. With more applications and limited spots, having test scores can help a student nab an acceptance to their favorite college and thrive in the classroom.

Sadly, the national average of test scores continues to plummet. In January, the Wall Street Journal explained the testing results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The report shows that test scores were declining even before the pandemic and continue to fall.

Nationally, only 67 percent of eighth graders and 60 percent of fourth graders score a basic or better reading level, which is a near-record low. With math, eighth grade scores were flat, while fourth grade had a minor uptick. Results



Adobe Stock image

were substantially below pre-pandemic benchmarks.

The Vermont Agency of Education reported in January that scores for Vermont students in the fourth and eighth grade significantly declined from the prepandemic 2019 to current performance.

By being woefully underprepared with basic skills, students' high school test scores continue to decline. Girls' scores dropped sharply to their lowest levels since 2019. Boys' have also fallen, but not as steeply as girls'. The Wall Street Journal

reported in January that girls have not recovered from pandemic learning loss and are erasing the longstanding improvements they were achieving.

“This not only hurts girls now — it will change college enrollment; it will change the talent pool we have,” explained Harry Patrinos, the University of Arkansas chair in education policy.

Vermont's SAT results continue to hover in the 50th percentile of test takers, equivalent to a 2.7 GPA.

The SAT Suite Participation Summary

compared 2024 test takers to the 2019 pre-pandemic levels. Vermont showed a 34.8-percent decrease in testing: 43 percent of Vermont students for the class of 2024, down from 66 percent in 2019.

Nationally, there was a 19 percent increase in SAT testing: 1.97 million students in 2024, up from 1.6 million in 2019, according to the College Board, who administers the SAT.

Last March, the Washington Post reported that students taking the SAT continue to increase each year since 2020.

For the 2024-25 application cycle, the SAT reported a national 3-percent increase in taking the exam for the class of 2024 compared to the class of 2023.

Why are so many Vermont high school students not taking standardized tests or diligently preparing for them? During the 2020 pandemic, most high schools were not open to proctor the exams. Most colleges responded by becoming test optional. Although standardized testing returned in 2021, the test-optional movement continued.

The University of Vermont is test-optional and published its Admitted Student Profile for the fall, 2024. For those submitting SAT and ACT, scores are in the top 10th percentile, equivalent to a 3.7 or higher GPA. With last year's applicants, 57 percent of admitted students did not submit

COLLEGE continued on page 13

# Selectboard proposes budget with small spending increase

Scooter MacMillan  
Editor



Both the Charlotte Selectboard and the Champlain Valley School District board have worked to propose budgets with very small increases in spending over their respective budgets from last year. Both initially proposed budgets were defeated by voters in 2024.

This year, town and school proposed budgets for the upcoming fiscal year are almost flat — not south Texas flat; they're more like south Georgia flat.

The school system is asking voters to approve a budget with a .9 percent increase in expenses, while the Charlotte Selectboard is presenting to voters a budget of \$4,265,990, an even smaller .58 percent rise in town spending.

But the really important figure, town administrator Nate Bareham said in a conversation, is the amount to be raised by property taxes (\$2,531,353). This means the selectboard is proposing a budget that would increase property taxes by .07 percent.

If passed, meeting this town budget would require an estimated tax rate of .1825 or about \$182.50 per \$100,000 of property value.

The selectboard engaged in a long process to arrive at a final budget for residents to approve by voice vote at a town meeting on Saturday, March 1.

At the selectboard's last meeting on the budget on Jan. 23, town clerk Mary Mead was clearly ready for the board members to make a decision. One of the final pieces of the budget puzzle was deciding how much to propose allocating for Charlotte Volunteer Fire & Rescue Service.

"You've had a long time to think about the budget," Mead said. "Put in what they want; put in what you want to put in; if that's the same, that's great. You just need to make a decision."

Board member Kelly Devine said this will be the first time in a few years with an in-person town meeting where the budget will be decided by voice vote. This means, if fire and rescue service members feel the selectboard has trimmed too much from their proposed budget, they have the opportunity to suggest an increase to their

budget from the floor.

"They certainly can," acknowledged Chair Jim Faulkner.

Ultimately, the selectboard decided to propose \$1,020,246 for fire and rescue in the fiscal year 2026 budget. If approved, this will be a 3-percent increase over last year's expense allocation for the department.

Fire and rescue operated without a chief for most of the past year, so funding this salary is one increase in fire and rescue spending, said board member Lewis Mudge.

The first two articles attendees at the in-person town meeting will be voting on are basic boilerplate, having to do with approving the gathering to hear from town officers, having the chance to act upon those reports and approving the payment of property taxes by town residents with a deadline for payment of Friday, Nov. 14.

Article 3 is the budget article where voters will have to approve or disapprove of the expenses the selectboard has proposed in its budget.

Article 4 is whether voters want \$62,000 to be raised by property taxes for the Charlotte Trails Fund.

Article 5 asks voters to authorize the selectboard to allocate \$5,000 from the town's trails fund for maintaining town trails.

Article 6 is the request from the recreation department for \$40,000 to be raised by property taxes for a new bathhouse at the Charlotte Town Beach.

If voters at town meeting approve articles 4 or 6, it will mean that the budget estimates and projected percent increases will go up by either or both of those amounts.

Article 7 gives residents the opportunity to vote for all budget articles to be decided by Australian ballot going forward. If approved, this would mean that in the future the budget will be approved by voice vote.

Likewise, Article 8 would change all voting on public questions from voice voting to Australian or secret ballot voting.

Articles 7 and 8 are required by state statute to be decided by voice vote. According to statute, since these items were initially adopted by voice vote, to change them they have to be adopted the same way. These two articles would basically end voting by voice vote in a town meeting for Charlotte.

Article 9 is more boilerplate. This article, if approved, gives voters in attendance at the town meeting the authority to decide any other issues that come up at the meeting.

## Spear Street on track



Photo by Dave Speidel

The repairs to Spear Street at Muddy Hollow Brook appear to be proceeding smoothly. Since the Sept. 10 selectboard meeting when it was reported workers were saying they were two-three weeks ahead of schedule, Charlotte has gotten a lot of snow. As selectboard Chair Jim Faulkner said at the time, "We're having a real winter." His words proved prophetic, but still confidence is high that the work will be finished by the April deadline.

## COLLEGE

Continued from page 12

scores.

According to Opportunity Insights, an educational research non-profit, standardized test scores can be a better predictor of college student achievement than GPA. The report compared performance gaps of admitted students who submitted scores to those who did not.

During the 2024-25 application cycle, Dartmouth, Brown, Yale, University of Texas-Austin and University of Tennessee all required scores. They join MIT and Georgetown, who reverted to being test-required for the 2021-22 admissions cycle.

Whether to take tests and submit scores can depend on the student's academic program of interest. Last March, The Wall Street Journal profiled Quinnipiac

University, which is test-optional, test-recommended or test-required, depending on the applicant's intended major. Submitting scores can be essential to compete in highly competitive majors like engineering and business.

Preparing for standardized testing may seem optional, but analyzing test scores can be helpful in identifying academic gaps to improve upon. School is a journey, where learning loss is a speed bump to recognize and overcome.

Like making a restaurant reservation, test scores can be useful for college applications in both getting into and succeeding in college.

*(Margo Bartsch founded College Essay Coach, a full-service college admission business, and has been an adjunct professor in business at Champlain College and at Middlebury College.)*



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## Hi! Neighbor

# Dinnan sees Grange increasing in-person gatherings

Phyl Newbeck  
Contributor

For many people, the notion of a Grange conjures up images of days gone by. Tai Dinnan wants to make sure the organization stays relevant in the 21st century.

Dinnan grew up in Charlotte and has fond memories of community gatherings including Town Meeting Day. She recognizes that times are changing and feels a degree of nostalgia toward how things used to be. That's one of the reasons she agreed to take on the role of president of the Charlotte Grange.

Dinnan got a degree in community health and child development from Tufts University. She was working as a school gardens coordinator in Somerville, Mass., when she realized how much she craved clean air, water and soil and a quieter environment. So, she moved back home to Charlotte in 2012.

"Most of my work has the underlying theme of community connections and understanding that people who are connected to their local community and are engaged and have purpose are healthier and happier," she said. "I seek those things out."

When she returned home, Dinnan saw that most members of the Charlotte Grange were in their 80s or 90s. She noted that a few key people kept things going, but the membership had diminished. There were some social events, often involving music, but Dinnan wasn't feeling personally drawn to the organization.

That changed when then-President Mike Walker asked her to join in 2021. Dinnan volunteered to serve on the program committee but made it clear she would

only attend one meeting a month and didn't want to be involved in the bigger organization.

"The Grange Hall has been underutilized recently," she said. "I felt like it had exciting potential."

By the fall of the following year, the executive committee had retired. Dinnan said she'd be willing to take the role of president if Sally Wadhams would serve as vice president. "We were slowly growing," she said, "but many of our members were brand new."

Dinnan said the Grange came out of COVID having no programming except for the Grange on the Green summer music series and business meetings. These days, there are four programs a month and membership has grown to almost 50 people.

"We are growing exponentially," Dinnan said. "Programming grows memberships and when membership grows, people have more ideas, and then there is more programming."

She said some programs are those the Grange has committed to doing over the years, but others are brand new ideas, put forward by the new membership.

The Grange is considered a "third space," which Dinnan described as a gathering place in the community separate from traditional spaces like homes and work places. She recognizes that traveling in Charlotte can be inconvenient, and in the aftermath of COVID, there are new ways of meeting virtually but there is a different dynamic when you gather in a room with people.

"It could be a pub or hardware store or playground," she said. "Right now, the Grange Hall isn't open most of the time, but it's there, and we are doing more and more every year."



Photo by Tai Dinnan  
Tai Dinnan sledding at Mt. Philo.

In high school, Dinnan was involved with the work of Amnesty International. During college, she spent a summer abroad in France. Recognizing that she preferred her travel to not take place in a bubble with other Americans, she subsequently spent several months in Tanzania, training local gardening groups through the Global

Service Corps.

These days, Dinnan is happy to be contributing to community closer to home. "As things are happening in the bigger world, we have so much access to information that it's easy to get overwhelmed," she said. "I'm so busy with doing what I can to strengthen and connect my local community that I feel like this is an area where I have the most ability to have an impact."

In furtherance of that, the Grange is creating a directory of volunteer opportunities in Charlotte. It will list the different organizations that seek volunteers and how people can connect with them and will be available starting on Town Meeting Day.

Dinnan, the daughter of Lewis Creak Association co-founder and long-time Charlotte volunteer Marty Illick and artist, sculptor and stone mason Terry Dinnan, grew up in a home filled with community spirit.

"Our town is run by volunteers and small Vermont towns have been run by volunteers forever," Dinnan said. "It is a trend for people to be caught up in national and international events from their seat in their home on their phone, but there is so much we can do here. I encourage people to engage in person in real life if they're feeling hopeless."

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## Environment

# Road salt contamination in focus for state legislators

Sam Hartnett  
Community News Service

Salt can be found just about everywhere outside in the winter — cars, roads, sidewalks — but where does it all go in spring? The answer often is streams, rivers and lakes; a situation clean water advocates and scientists say is getting worse.

Chloride, a chemical that leaches into waterways from road salt, compounds in the environment, particularly in smaller streams and brooks near multiple roadways. Too much chloride can be toxic to aquatic life and corrodes pipes and plumbing, among other things.

The citizen committee that advises the state on managing Lake Champlain recently told legislators that excess chloride in the watershed could soon require state or federal regulations.

“The chloride is really a looming thing that I don’t think most people realize,” said Bob Fisher, member of the advisory committee and South Burlington water quality superintendent, before the House Committee on Environment late last month. “It’s

coming hard here, and there’s going to be federal stuff coming down on this.”

State regulators seemed to agree about the problem last year, when they stepped in to address Sunnyside Brook in Colchester routinely exceeding legal limits for chloride levels.

The state developed a plan last winter to reduce the chloride entering the stream and limit how much can be present in the water every day while still being safe. That limit, called a total maximum daily load, was the first in the state to specifically regulate chloride, officials said.

Now, Sen. Anne Watson, D/P-Washington, has introduced a bill to create a state program focused on curbing chloride contamination from road salt by better training salt crews.

The program, housed in the state Agency of Natural Resources, would provide education, training and certification for road salting across the state. Watson chairs the Senate natural resources committee, which has been discussing chloride contamination this session. Watson said she hopes the bill, S.29, can help reduce stress on wildlife as well as save contractors and municipalities money on salt expenses.

On Feb. 4, the Senate committee heard from various environmental organizations detailing the rising chloride contamination across the state.

Over the last 30 years, the Winooski River has seen chloride levels more than double, Lake Champlain Basin Program chief scientist Matthew Vaughn said. As more and more waterways upstream of the river become impaired, those chloride levels have risen sharply.

A speaker from AdkAction, a New York nonprofit that has run projects to reduce salt use in the Adirondack Mountains, described to committee members how it worked with road crews and citizens to tune equipment and prevent using more salt than necessary.

The nonprofit recommends public-private cooperation and teaching people ways to conserve salt when treating roads or driveways.

“Anywhere where we deploy these



Photo courtesy town of Colchester

A plow truck clears away snow from a road.

standards, and there’s buy-in, we’re seeing a 50-percent reduction in salt use,” Phill Sexton, technical advisor for the group, told legislators.

Over the last decade, the Adirondacks’ Lake George area has attracted much attention for its road salt-reduction work. For many years, about 30,000 tons of salt were used annually around the tourist destination. Now, some towns around the lake have cut their winter salt use by as much as a half per year, according to the Lake George Association.

Craig Digiammarino, manager of conservation and stewardship efforts at the Vermont Agency of Transportation, said in an email that officials are aware of the impacts road salting has on water quality and aim to avoid excess salt near impaired waterways. The agency’s snow and ice control plan describes, among other methods, using brine instead of rock salt.

Mixing road salt with water to produce

brine can greatly lower the amount of chloride used because it helps melt snow and ice faster.

But much of the chloride entering the environment comes through private salting of parking lots, driveways and other property where there is little regulation, Tim Clear of the state Department of Environmental Conservation said in an interview.

Experts said people and companies salting private property might be using more salt than needed. According to the Lake Champlain Sea Grant Program at the University of Vermont, a 12-ounce cup of rock salt can effectively cover a 20-foot-long driveway or 10 sidewalk squares.

*(Via Community News Service, a University of Vermont journalism internship.)*



## Gardening

# Bewitching witch hazel tree

Deborah J. Benoit  
University of Vermont Extension

You may be familiar with its name from the bottle of astringent found in your home medicine cabinet or for sale on pharmacy shelves near rubbing alcohol and hydrogen peroxide. What you may not know is that the leaves, bark and twigs from American witch hazel, a small native tree, are used in the manufacture of this product.

Historically, witch hazel was used by Native Americans and, later, colonists for a variety of medicinal treatments.

To a gardener, witch hazel is something else entirely. Depending on the variety, it might be the very first plant to bloom in your garden in the spring or provide the very last flowers in the fall. There are four species of witch hazel.

American witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is native to the eastern United States, ranging northward to Nova Scotia in Canada and south to Florida, and to the west from the Great Lakes south to Texas. Also called “common witch hazel,” it is a deciduous small tree or shrub, generally 6 to 15 feet in height though sometimes as tall as 20 feet. Its leaves turn yellow in autumn with fragrant yellow flowers blooming after its leaves fall.

Witch hazel’s seeds mature the following fall and take a year after that to germinate.

American witch hazel is hardy in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Plant Hardiness Zones 3 to 8.

Ozark witch hazel (*Hamamelis vernalis*), also called vernal witch hazel, is native to the southern and central United States. Unlike American witch hazel, Ozark witch hazel blooms in late winter or early spring.

Its fragrant, spidery yellow flowers can be seen January to April before its foliage unfurls. Its seeds mature in early fall and require cold stratification over the winter, before germinating in the spring. This small tree or shrub grows 6 to 10 feet high and is hardy in USDA Zones 4 to 8.

Japanese witch hazel (*Hamamelis japonica*) is native to Japan and blooms in the spring for up to four weeks. It grows 10 to 15 feet high with mildly fragrant yellow flowers. Its foliage turns yellow, red or purple in the fall. It’s hardy in USDA Zones 5 to 8.

Chinese witch hazel (*Hamamelis mollis*) is native to China and is also hardy in USDA Zones 5 to 8. It grows 10 to 20 feet high. Its fragrant yellow flowers appear January to March.

In addition to the four species of witch hazel, there are numerous spring-blooming hybrid varieties (*Hamamelis x intermedia*) available that are crosses between Japanese witch hazel and Chinese witch hazel.

Hardiness varies, so be sure to check the hardiness zone for the cultivar you are



Photo by Deborah J. Benoit

Witch hazel with its clusters of vibrant, four-petaled, spidery flowers is sure to brighten any garden when in bloom.

interested in.

Whatever type of witch hazel you choose, you can expect a show of bright yellow (or orange or red) clusters of four-petaled, spidery flowers to brighten your garden when there is little other color. For spring-blooming varieties, leaves will unfurl after the flowers have faded.

Plant witch hazel in light, richly organic, well-drained soil in full sun or partial shade. As with any new plant, be sure it’s adequately watered until it’s established.

Overall, witch hazel is easy to grow and low maintenance. It can serve as a focal point

in a garden or as a stand-alone feature.

If you already have a spring-blooming witch hazel in your garden, pruning a few small branches in February, bringing them indoors and forcing them to bloom can provide an early preview of spring. You can find information about forcing branches here: [go.uvm.edu/forcing-branches](http://go.uvm.edu/forcing-branches).

*(Deborah J. Benoit is a University of Vermont Extension master gardener from North Adams, Mass., who is part of the Bennington County Chapter.)*

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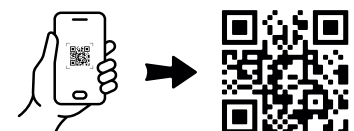
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## Gardening

# Winter should not interrupt your composting

Benjamin Block  
University of Vermont Extension

Compost, the dark, crumbly, earthy-smelling material produced by natural decomposers, provides many benefits to gardeners and non-gardeners alike. Converting garden waste, kitchen scraps and various paper items into compost at home reduces the amount of waste that ends up in landfills and saves households money on garbage fees. Most importantly for gardeners, compost provides a nutrient-filled soil amendment.

“Hot composting” is commonly done by creating a “compost pile” that is a combination of greens (material high in nitrogen) and browns (material high in carbon). The process is pretty simple given the right ratio of materials and enough water and oxygen.

Here in Vermont, however, a critical component of composting is missing during our many months of winter: heat. Compost piles generate heat through aerobic decomposition (with oxygen).

Piles, with the right combination of greens and browns, can exceed 160 degrees Fahrenheit. Compost temperatures depend on a number of conditions, so different decomposers, including microbes and other critters, do their jobs at different temperatures.

As decomposers use up oxygen, nitrogen and water at the center of the pile, temperatures begin to drop. In winter, outside temperatures wick heat away from the pile until these decomposers significantly slow down or, if frozen, stop altogether.

So, what options are available to continue composting through the winter and have material ready for spring planting?

Here are some options that may be right for you:

- With hot composting, don’t let winter stop you. Some intrepid gardeners don’t let Mother Nature stop their hot composting.

A sufficiently voluminous compost pile, with enough thermal mass as well as insulation, can keep a compost pile warm enough through winter to continue decomposition. The goal is to prevent the center of the pile from freezing, so, the warmer you keep the pile, the faster the materials will decompose.

This option likely would take some experimentation and continual active management. There are examples online of DIY-insulated compost bins. Some commercial options also are available.

- If braving the elements to compost is not your idea of fun, indoor vermicomposting may be right for you. Vermicomposting relies on worms, usually red wigglers, to turn kitchen scraps into a compost called “worm castings.”

A small worm colony can munch through a pound of food scraps in a week. There are many commercial containers designed for vermicompost and plenty of guidance online on how to properly care for your colony of banana peel-munching buddies.

- Another indoor-composting option is called “bokashi composting.” While technically not composting, it is an



Photo by Amy Record

A “compost thermometer” can be used to determine if compost is at the optimal temperature for active decomposition.

anaerobic method to break down food scraps. The input material is fermented by bacteria, not decomposed. Beyond normal food scraps, bokashi will also process cooked leftovers, meats and dairy products.

Mix the fermented solids, considered a pre-compost, deep into soil or add to compost to finish the decomposition process. Bokashi-specific composters and the starter bacterial inoculant (sometimes called bokashi bran) are available online.

- Cool composting refers to a technique where microbes and other decomposers take their time, especially during winter months when decomposition slows considerably. You may need to dig snow out of your compost bin to find room for food scraps and other nitrogen-rich

materials.

A compost recipe should include browns, so be sure to have easy access to leaves, wood shavings or other carbon materials to layer with the greens. Come spring, mix them up, and your compost will come alive again.

The first three options will yield soil amendments for spring gardening, whereas a cool composting pile will need warm temperatures to break down winter additions.

*(Benjamin Block is a University of Vermont Extension master gardener intern from Montpelier.)*



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## Weed's in the Garden

# Wait for growing season with a good gardening book

Joan Weed  
Contributor

Whenever someone asks for a recommendation for a gardening book to offer as a gift, especially for a beginner, I suggest Barbara Damrosch's "A Garden Primer." It was first published in 1988 and has in recent years been revised. It's a very thick paperback and will take the gardener from soil, to seedlings, to growth, fertilizing and harvesting.

Not only that but she lives in cold Maine and manages to produce food for 12 months. It covers ornamental and edible plants. Imagine my delight when I saw that Santa had brought me her newest book called "A Life in the Garden," a memoir of her life as a gardener.

At my stage of life, I am not buying many new gardening books but there are some classics from extraordinary plants people which never go out of style. Like Damrosch, many have updated their particular classic.

Here are a few that I have referred to in recent years.

"Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs" is the bible for this subject. He has included his own photographs and knows his subject well.

For wildflowers, I turn to William Cullina's "Growing and Propagating Wildflowers of the United States and Canada."

You can't go wrong with any of Ken Druse's books on various aspects of gardening, propagating, shade gardening and passion for gardening. He's personable and I've heard him speak. In signing my copy of a book, he mentioned that I was appropriately named.

Any books by the late Christopher Lloyd of Great Dixter in England or Daniel Hinkley who founded Heronswood Gardens will delight you, I promise.

There are a few books that are interesting not so much for techniques but for historical facts. Alex Pankhurst wrote "Who Does Your Garden Grow?" This fun volume fills you in on who the people are that some plants commemorate. Did you know Nora Barlow columbine was named



Photo by Scooter MacMillan

Joan Weed sits with a gardening book in front of a shelf filled with her gardening books.

after Charles Darwin's granddaughter? How about Miss Willmott's ghost? Why is she important?

William Stearn has compiled a scholarly source called "Stearn's Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners." For those with a fondness for the proper Latin names and the sources for those names, this is your book. I use it to check spelling constantly.

Andrea Wulf wrote "The Founding Gardeners: The Revolutionary Generation,

Nature and the Shaping of the American Nation." Perhaps very timely? I enjoyed learning about the early leaders who also happened to be great gardeners. Jefferson, Washington and others of that period are highlighted.

Books that follow Frederick Law Olmsted's accomplishments are especially interesting to city planners. He was a fervent abolitionist though not outspoken. He designed so many of our revered

public spaces, including Central Park, Boston's Emerald Necklace, Grounds in Washington, D.C., and Yosemite. He wrote too many books and papers to name, but they are accessible on line.

Marta McDowell has a book called "All the Presidents' Gardens." This is a fun tour through the history of gardens on the White House grounds. Interesting details.

There are specialty books for certain species such as hosta, dianthus and roses. The late Wayne Winterrowd wrote one on annuals and also one on roses. Diana Grenfell covered hostas.

Allan Armitage, whose day job is at the University of Georgia, is another favorite. He wrote two books I cherish, "Armitage's Native Plants for North American Gardens" and "Field Guide to Specialty Cut Flowers: A Growers' Manual."

Many of these books can be bought second hand from on-line sources, so even if out of print, they are still available.

I listen to a couple of podcasts that feature gardening. Margaret Roach has a weekly one called "A Way to Garden," which is also the title of her gardening book, newly revised. She began as Martha Stewart's horticultural expert. By the way, her "Martha Stewart's Gardening Handbook" is full of serious info and lovely photographs.

Another podcast is "Gardener's Question Time." This is British and light-hearted. Ordinary gardeners ask questions of a panel of three experts, and I've learned a lot.

Since we can't be out in the soil for a few months, one or two of these volumes might help speed the time along till we can get our hands dirty again. I have a library of garden books and if anyone wants to borrow one, I am happy to oblige. Mention by name or come and see what you might enjoy.



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The Charlotte News

# Calendar

Send your events two weeks in advance to [news@thecharlottenews.org](mailto:news@thecharlottenews.org).

## Milton Winter Festival

**Saturday, Feb. 22, 3-5:30 p.m.**

Games and activities galore are promised at the Milton Winter Festival. Although the celebration runs from Friday-Sunday, the official festival is 3-5:30 p.m., Saturday, at Sharp Park at 204 Cobble Hill Road in Milton. Attractions include fireworks, horse-drawn wagon rides, snow tubing, sledding and concessions. Admission is free although some activities may have a fee.

## Youth Engineering Day

**Saturday, Feb. 22, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.**

A free day-long event, hosted by Vermont 4-H and the University of Vermont College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences, will expose young people to different engineering fields and career opportunities. Discover Engineering Day will take place on Feb. 22, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. on the campus. Fifth-grade students through seniors are invited to participate to learn about engineering, build skills through hands-on workshops and network with college students, professors and industry professionals. The deadline to register is Feb. 17 at 5 p.m. Register at [go.uvm.edu/2025](http://go.uvm.edu/2025). Location and parking details will be emailed to registrants. Lunch will be provided. The event kicks off with an engineering scavenger hunt involving interactive exhibits showcasing various types of engineering and career pathways. Afternoon workshops will focus on topics including Python programming, robotics, bridge design, cartilage construction, lift and force and renewable energy.

## Wassail celebration

**Sunday, Feb. 23, 3-6 p.m.**

As the days begin to lengthen with the coming of spring, Champlain Orchards is inviting the community to join the orchard in the blessing of the trees with food, drink, songs, dancing and a bonfire. If the weather permits, come early to cross-country ski, snowshoe or sled.

## Project Wild workshop

**Tuesday, Feb. 25, 5-8 p.m.**

Kindergarten-12th grade teachers and other science educators in Vermont interested in ways to connect students with science and nature can sign up for a free Project Wild workshop and training on Feb. 25. The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Department of Fish and Wildlife is sponsoring the workshop at University of Vermont Extension office in Morrisville. It will involve both indoor and outdoor activities, so participants



Courtesy photo

Bunny Harvey's paintings at Burlington City Arts are inspired by the rural landscapes of Vermont and the urban environs of New York City or Rome.



Photo by Robert Nickelsberg

Robert Nickelsberg of Charlotte will share his photos from El Salvador, Iraq and Afghanistan he shot for Time magazine at Middlebury College on March 3 and talk about his book, "Legacy of Lies, El Salvador 1981-1984"

should dress appropriately. Register at 802-656-7562 or [holly.ferris@uvm.edu](mailto:holly.ferris@uvm.edu). Registration deadline is Feb. 14.

## 'Legacy of Lies, El Salvador 1981-1984'

**Monday, March 3, 4:30-6 p.m.**

On Monday, March 3, Robert Nickelsberg of Charlotte will present photos of insurgents and counter-insurgents in El Salvador, Iraq and Afghanistan he shot for Time magazine at Middlebury College. Nickelsberg will talk about his book, "Legacy of Lies, El Salvador 1981-1984" and how U.S. support for a rightwing dictatorship not only motivated many to flee to the U.S., laying the groundwork for present-day chaos at the southern border.

## Vermont Flower Show

**Friday-Sunday, March 7-9**

The 2025 Vermont Flower Show at the Champlain Valley Expo will celebrate gardening through the ages and how to learn from the past in cultivating our gardens for the future. At this year's

show you will stroll through fields of tulips, experience an English cottage garden and a tea house garden. You will take a walk back in time through Medieval, Islamic and Victory gardens. The show is Friday, March 7, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Saturday, March 8, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; and Sunday March 9, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Daily admission is \$28 (\$26 until Dec. 31) for adults, \$23 (\$21 until Dec. 31) for seniors (60+) and college students, \$10 (\$8 until Dec. 31) for students (ages 5-17) and free for children 4 and under. Tickets can be purchased at [vnlavt.org/event/the-vermont-flower-show](http://vnlavt.org/event/the-vermont-flower-show). Free parking.

## St. Patrick's Day luncheon

**Tuesday, March 11, 11:30 a.m.**

St. Catherine of Siena and Age Well are offering a St. Patrick's Day luncheon on March 11 for anyone 60 or older in the St. Catherine of Siena Parish Hall at 72 Church Street in Shelburne. The check-in time is 11:30 a.m., and the meal will be served at noon. There is a \$5 suggested donation. The menu is

Irish stew with corned beef, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions and celery; green leaf salad; buttermilk biscuits; and leprechaun cake. The deadline to register is March 5 at 802-662-5283 or email [mbongiorno@agewellvt.org](mailto:mbongiorno@agewellvt.org).

## Grain Growers Conference

**Wednesday, March 12,**

**9 a.m.-5:30 p.m.**

Randy George, co-founder of the Red Hen Baking Company in Middlesex, is among speakers for the 2025 Grain Growers Conference at the Essex Resort and Spa in Essex on March 12. George will describe his decades-long journey working with local grain farmers to source product for his wholesale bakery and café. Register at [go.uvm.edu/2025graingrowers](http://go.uvm.edu/2025graingrowers) or by calling 802-656-8407 until March 7 or at 8:15 a.m. on the day of the event. View the agenda at [go.uvm.edu/conferences](http://go.uvm.edu/conferences). The conference fee, which includes lunch, is \$85 per person and \$60 for Northern Grain Growers Collaborative members. The conference will include two baking sessions, a networking social hour and concurrent workshops on organic dry bean research, fusarium disease management, peri-urban grain growing, rye in the broader grain economy, sensory evaluation of malt products and managing fertility and soil health on an organic grain farm without livestock, among other topics.

## Underground Railroad exhibit

**Saturday, March 15, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.**

Find out what the Underground Railroad was at Rokeby Museum on Saturday, March 15. Admission is free. Explore the main exhibit Seeking Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Legacy of an Abolitionist Family. The trails are open for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing or walking. The gift shop will be open.

## Woodland Legacy Planning Workshop

**Friday, March 21, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.**

Discover strategies to ensure your land remains intact and supports your goals at What's Next for Your Woods? A Legacy Planning Workshop. This full-day workshop will be held at the St. Albans Town Hall on Friday, March 21, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Co-hosted by Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife and the Vermont Woodlands Association, this workshop brings together experienced estate-planning professionals and landowners who have navigated the woodland succession process. Through a mix of presentations, panel discussions and breakout sessions, participants will gain insights into the planning steps and explore key topics tailored to their specific interests. A registration fee of \$30 per person, or \$50 per couple, covers all sessions and lunch. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/yjf35k4k>. For more info: [laura@vtcoverts.org](mailto:laura@vtcoverts.org).

## On Books

# Blueberries, a missing child, a Supreme Court justice

Katherine Arthaud  
Contributor

It's been a while since my last article, and because I read a lot, books have been accumulating like the recent snows. Too many to tell about, really, but I will do my best. So many good books, so little time and space.

I picked up "The Berry Pickers" in an airport bookstore while making my way to Florida last month. I'd seen it mentioned several times on the Historical Fiction Lovers Facebook page (I tried to boycott Facebook. I really did, but I so missed the lively community there that I am back on.) along with many positive comments, so when I saw it on the shelf, I figured it was probably a safe bet.

And then there was its cover. I know, I know, you can't judge a book by its cover, but when you see this one, you will see what I mean. The cover is blueberries. How could I resist?

"The Berry Pickers" takes place in the early 60s and begins with the musings of a man named Joe: "The sun is beginning to fade outside the window, and I am marveling at how I've been shaped and molded by women, even though I was absent from them most of my life."

Joe is going on about his hurting legs. He's no spring chicken and clearly not in the best of health, when his sister Mae walks into his room and says, "Joe, there's someone here to see us. And I think we might have some catching up to do."

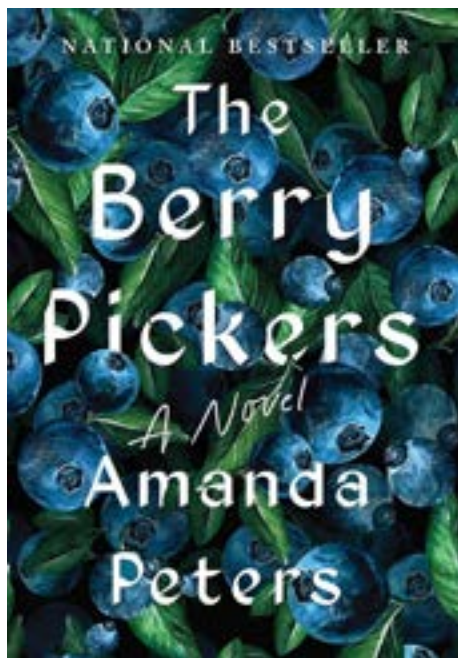
That line hooked me right away. Turns out Joe has a missing sister, the family's youngest child, Ruthie, last seen sitting on a rock at the edge of a berry field near Bangor, Maine. The family was there to pick blueberries for the season, a tradition of Indigenous Mi'kmaq workers from Nova Scotia.

Ruthie was one of two girls in a family of five and the family searched for her for six weeks. But to no avail. The berry fields were empty and the potatoes had all been pulled from the ground when the family packed up camp and drove off in their truck.

"No one spoke about her," Joe recounts, "but when we passed the small stone where I saw her last, a sandwich in her hand, I just knew that we were leaving Ruthie behind."

Over the course of the novel, which is simply told, yet in a way that evokes both deep emotions and a strong sense of scenery and place, we learn more about Joe, his family, the Mi'kmaq berry pickers, and more about the mystery of Ruthie and what befell her that summer day in Maine. The pull of love and memory, the importance of intuition, serendipity and the deep pain of loss and injustice are all alive and singing in this short, very good book.

Amanda Peters is a Canadian writer from Nova Scotia. "The Berry Pickers," her debut novel, received the 2024 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction and the 2024 Crime Writers of Canada Award of Excellence, along with other prizes. Peters' heritage is a mix of European and Mi'kmaq. She was born and raised as a member of the Glooscap First



Nation. Her perspective is important and unique.

I hate spoilers so I'm being careful to say very little about the plot of "The Berry Pickers" and the unspooling of the mystery of Ruthie. Suffice it to say, I found the story moving, straightforward and incredibly hard to put down.

Poignant and compelling. Highly recommend. Great for vacation reading.

Another excellent read (or listen — the author reads the book herself) is "Lovely One," a memoir released in September 2024 by U.S. Supreme Court justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. Though the book has apparently gotten some flak for not being as sharp as some of her judicial writing, I found it to be down to earth, wise, warm, honest and illuminating. I guess I am thankful it bears little resemblance to legal writing, as that would likely render it not only unpleasant but entirely inscrutable to this mostly fiction reader.

Brown's excellent memoir tells about her life, from her grandparents and parents, to her days growing up in Miami, to her years at Harvard, to encountering her soulmate Patrick, to having children, but it is speckled with super-interesting tidbits and detours, such as details of her work analyzing sentencing and plea bargaining, and the time she helped investigate the unjustly harsh sentence of her uncle, and how she finally found a way to care for her hair in a way that's manageable, practical and natural, and about what it was like to meet, befriend and become engaged to her best friend, "a quintessential Boston Brahmin," as she says — sixth generation in his family to graduate from Harvard.

"By contrast," Ketanji Brown Jackson said, "I am only the second generation in my family to go to any college, and I am fairly certain that if you traced my family lineage back past my grandparents — who were raised in Georgia, by the way — you would find that my ancestors were slaves on both sides."

Jackson is open and honest and so straightforward in this memoir it makes me wish she lived closer so we could be friends. I can see us: cross-country skiing



at Shelburne Farms, animatedly chatting about this and that, grabbing a decaf latte at Village Wine and Coffee, catching a movie at Majestic 10.

She speaks with striking candor about the difficulties of raising a brilliant but seriously challenged and challenging daughter who was finally diagnosed with autism. She is forthright about the pain of being at a loss as to how to help her child find belonging and happiness, and unflinchingly honest about her regret vis a vis some of the choices she made for her child while not yet understanding the forces at play.

In this greatly troubling time, living in a great country pummeled by an ongoing coup, in the middle of a constitutional crisis, news of fresh trespasses, breaches, plane crashes and horrors assailing us like hailstones every five minutes, this book has been a calming, reassuring antidote. Ketanji Brown Jackson is brilliant, ambitious, clear-eyed, incisive and stunningly accomplished, and yet her warmth, honesty, humility, common sense and passion for justice and a level playing

field come through like a colorful banner in a blinding blizzard.

It has been a lifesaver for me these past weeks to be able to switch from the radio to Audible and hear Jackson's reassuring, loving, grounded, caring, cheerful, wise, no-nonsense, illuminating words, knowing that this shining star of a person is sitting in real life and real time on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Knowing she is there gives me the feeling that we might be alright somehow.

"My hope," she writes, "is that the trials and triumphs of my journey as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, litigator, and friend will stand as a testament for young women, people of color, and strivers everywhere, especially those who nourish outsized ambitions and believe with stubborn faith in the possibility of achieving them. I want to encourage these bold dreamers not to be turned aside by adversity, because life will always present challenges. We must allow them to teach and fortify us and help us build confidence in our ability to find a way though."

"In the end, we must trust the path we choose to walk, anchored by a firm sense of our potential, inspired by the people with whom we surround ourselves, and bolstered by our willingness to keep on."

And hear this: "We must not choose harsh words that tear people down. We must choose kind words that lift people up."

If you need some comfort these days — some reassurance, some inspiration, some evidence of that long arc of the moral universe bending towards justice — read or listen to "Lovely One" (which is, by the way, the English translation of the word ketanji).

Take heart, keep the faith and stick with the winners. We're gonna get through this.

### CHARLOTTE TOWN MEETINGS AND AGENDAS

Visit [charlottetv.org](http://charlottetv.org)  
for more information

**Planning Commission Meeting**  
Thursday, Feb. 20, 7 p.m.

**Regular Selectboard Meeting**  
Monday, Feb. 24, 6:30 p.m.

**Conservation Commission Meeting**  
Tuesday, Feb. 25, 7 p.m.

**Development Review Board Meeting**  
Wednesday, Feb. 26, at 7 p.m.



**Town Meeting Day**  
Saturday, March 1, 9 a.m.

**Voting by Australian Ballot**  
Tuesday, March 4, 7 a.m.-7 p.m.

**Planning Commission Meeting**  
Thursday, March 6, 7 p.m.

**Charlotte Energy Committee Meeting**  
Tuesday, March 11, 7 p.m.

# Valentine's Day, also Douglass Day celebrates Black history

Margaret Woodruff  
Director

Friday, Feb. 14, was not only Valentine's Day, but also Douglass Day. Although Douglass never knew his birth date, he chose to celebrate every year on this day. It is celebrated with a collective action that serves and celebrates Black history.

The library helped transcribe Black and African American-related archives from the Library of Congress.

The Charlotte Library thanks everyone who contributed to the MLK Day Care Kits. Your donations of "care kit" personal health items will help create kits for the Joint Urban Ministry Project to distribute in Burlington.

## Programs for kids

### Preschool story time Tuesdays, 10 a.m.

Come to the Charlotte Library for preschool stories, crafts and activities. No registration required. Age 2 and over.

### After-school book club Tuesdays, 3 p.m.

Do you enjoy reading and talking about books? Ride the bus to the Charlotte Library and enjoy an afternoon of book sharing and crafts every Tuesday after school. Grades 1-3, registration required. Contact Cheryl at youth@charlottepubliclibrary.org.

### Preschool free play Wednesdays, 10 a.m.

Play in the preschool years enables children to explore and make sense of the world around them, as well as to use and develop their imagination. Explore the sensory table, sorting, playing with blocks, playdoh — these are a few of the open-ended projects planned for Wednesday morning play-based learning at the Charlotte Library.

### Babytime Thursdays, 9:30 a.m.

You're invited to an unstructured hour for parents, caregivers and babies to play, explore books and chat in the young children's area. Ages birth to 18 months.

### Let's Lego Saturdays, 10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Drop-in for Lego free play. We'll have loads of Lego bricks out, along with some books and prompts for inspiration. For all ages. Please note: Children under 10 must be accompanied by an adult.

## Programs for adults

### Stillwater meditation Saturdays, 9 a.m.

Poetry and meditation are offered freely and in person to the Charlotte community. Come for quiet reflection, contemplation and gentle meditation instruction. Respect for all beings and faiths is a foundational quality of our time together. Beginning and experienced meditators are welcome.

### Houseplant Healthcare 101 Thursday, Feb. 20, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Master gardener Judy Mirro (aka: the Houseplant Hero) will provide an introduction on everything houseplants. Whether you're better at making compost of your houseplants or whether you like a challenge, you'll devel-

op your green thumb and enjoy some great tips for growing green, indoors and year-round.

### Tea and movie Friday, Feb. 21, 2 p.m.

Join us for the showing of a movie based on a Jane Austen novel of the same name. Enjoy tea, homemade cookies and the good company of Jane Austen's characters and fans.

### Sunday afternoon music jam Sunday, Feb. 23, 1-3 p.m.

A "jam" is sharing a tune or song of your choice going around in a circle of people. Participants may join in but no pressure to perform. Sit in or sit out. Share or pass. Any age or ability. Guitar, ukulele, mandolin, banjo, fiddle, bass, keyboard, harmonica, hand drums ... anything goes. Questions: Sallie Mack 802-425-6212 or salliemack@gmavt.net.

### Mystery book group Monday, Feb. 24, 10 a.m.

Once again, the game's afoot in "The House of Silk." It's London, 1890. 221B Baker St. A fine art dealer named Edmund Carstairs visits Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson to beg for their help. He is being menaced by a strange man in a flat cap, a wanted criminal who seems to have followed him all the way from America. In the days that follow, his home is robbed, his family is threatened. And then the first murder takes place. Holmes and Watson find themselves being drawn ever deeper into an international conspiracy connected to the teeming criminal underworld. Copies available at the circulation desk.

### Short story selections Wednesday, Feb. 26, 1 p.m.

Join library director Margaret Woodruff to share and discuss short stories old and new. The group meets on the third Wednesday of each month. Story selections are sent out by email the Friday before the meeting date. Contact margaret@charlottepubliclibrary.org if you'd like to join the group or would like the Zoom link to attend remotely.

### 'How to Be Animal' Wednesdays, Feb. 26-March 26, 7 p.m.

There will be a discussion of "How to be Animal" by Melanie Challenger on Wednesday through March 26. Blending nature writing, history and moral philosophy, the book is both a reappraisal of what it means to be human and a robust defense of all that is rewarding about being an animal. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/mb2j56wa>. Copies available at the circulation desk. The discussion will also take place on Zoom.

### Men's book group Wednesday, March 19, 7:30 p.m.

The group book will be discuss "Agony Hill" by Sarah Stewart Taylor. The men's book discussion group meets monthly. Join us at the library or on Zoom. Copies available at the circulation desk.

## Recurring programs

### Book chat Wednesdays, 3 p.m.

Meet each week to discuss new books, old books and books we might have missed. Each week, library director Margaret Woodruff selects a theme and highlights related titles from the library collection. No registration necessary.



Photo by Susanna Kahn

Janice Heilmann joins the online archivist project for Douglass Day.



Photo by Meg Berlin

The library light glows on the snow at night.

### Crochet & knit night Wednesdays, 5-6:30 p.m.

Join in a casual weekly session of crocheting and chatting, knitting and catching up. Bring your project or start a new one with yarn and needles available at the library, along with plenty of books to instruct and inspire. For teens and adults.

**Library contact information:**  
Margaret Woodruff, director  
Cheryl Sloan, youth services librarian  
Susanna Kahn, tech librarian  
Phone: 802-425-3864

Email: [info@charlottepubliclibrary.org](mailto:info@charlottepubliclibrary.org)

For the latest information about programs, books and activity kits, sign up for the newsletter at <https://tinyurl.com/n5usd25r>.

The Charlotte Library Board of Trustees meets the first Thursday of each month at 6 p.m., except the month of August or otherwise rescheduled following the Opening Meeting Law. The next scheduled board meeting is Thursday, March 6, at 6 p.m. Contact the library or visit the library website ([charlottepubliclibrary.org](http://charlottepubliclibrary.org)) for more information.

# Senior Center News

## Lots of engaging and supportive programs for seniors

Lori York  
Director

The Charlotte Senior Center is committed to enhancing the lives of older adults by offering a wide range of engaging and supportive programs.

Whether participants are seeking guidance and community through the Alzheimer's Caregivers Support Group, exploring meaningful topics such as natural burials through documentary screenings or gaining valuable insights into essential services like Medicare through informative presentations, there is something for everyone.

The center also provides creative outlets through art programs, opportunities for physical activity with exercise classes and a chance to connect during the weekly Monday lunch.

### Programs

#### Alzheimer's Caregivers Support Group Wednesday, March 12, 3-4 p.m.

Are you caring for someone with Alzheimer's? Do you know someone who is? Please join us for our monthly Caregivers Support Group on the second Wednesday of each month 3-4 p.m. The meetings provide a safe place for caregivers, family and friends of persons with dementia to meet and develop a mutual support system. Please note the earlier time during the winter months. For additional information please contact Louise Fairbank: [louisefairbank67@gmail.com](mailto:louisefairbank67@gmail.com). Free. No registration required.

#### 'From Earth to Earth: A Documentary on Natural Burials' Thursday, March 13, 1 p.m.

Join us for a presentation of an award-winning documentary on natural burials, "From Earth to Earth: The Lost Art of Dying in America." This 20-minute documentary describes the reemergence of natural burial as an eco-friendly alternative to current funeral practices and cremation through personal stories of some of its major proponents that led to the (re)legalization of natural burial and the founding of the first cemetery devoted entirely to natural burial in Vermont and from people who have experienced the ways that natural burial can help with the grief of the death of loved ones and bring comfort to those facing their own deaths. The documentary will be followed by a question-and-answer session and time for personal discussions. Free. Registration suggested at 802-425-6345.

#### Understanding Medicare

##### Wednesday, March 19, 12:30-1:30 p.m.

This informative session will help you navigate the complexities of Medicare and empower you to make informed decisions about your healthcare coverage. Topics include: How Medicare works, how to avoid future Medicare penalties, what Medicare will cost in 2025, assistance available for low-income individuals and how to cover costs that Medicare doesn't pay. Join for a clear, concise overview of Medicare and the support options available to help you make the best choices for your healthcare needs. Free. Registration suggested at 802-425-6345.

### Art

#### February exhibit

The February art exhibit will feature a diverse collection of works from several artists from the Wake Robin community, showcasing a variety of artistic mediums.

#### Ceramic mug workshop

##### Thursday, March 6, 1-2:30 p.m.

Learn the art of creating a slab ceramic mug in this hands-on workshop. In this hour-and-a-half class with potter Judy Devitt, you will construct a pottery mug using the slab method of hand building. You will cut your slab from a template, add texture by rolling fabric or lace into your clay. Then, adding the three pieces: handle, base and body of clay together, forming a mug. The mugs will be left to be fired and glazed, returned to the senior center in about three weeks. Cost: \$20 plus a \$10 supply fee. Registration and payment required by Monday, March 3. To register, call 802-425-6345.

#### Creative arts & crafts group

##### Wednesdays, 10 a.m.-noon

Come create, experiment, share ideas, encourage others and have fun with the Creative Arts & Crafts group on Wednesday mornings! Bring whatever creative endeavor you're working on, enjoy doing, or thinking about trying out—painting, drawing, writing, scrapbooking, coloring, origami, cardmaking, knitting—the opportunities are limitless. Free. No registration required. For questions, email Katie Franko at [kfranko@gmavt.net](mailto:kfranko@gmavt.net).

#### Photo discussion group

##### Sunday, March 9, 2-4 p.m.

Join us for our monthly photo discussion group where photographers of all skill levels share their work, ideas and experiences. Bring a photo and a story to share with the group. This is a great chance to engage in creative dialogue, get feedback and explore the impact of your images in a supportive environment. For questions or more information, contact Emily Cross at [ecross@ecrossphoto.com](mailto:ecross@ecrossphoto.com). By donation. No registration required.

### Exercise

#### Yoga dance

##### Fridays, 12:30-1:30 p.m.

Let Your Yoga Dance incorporates basic dance-like movements to music, guided by the body's energy system (chakras). It is a safe, compassionate, gentle movement practice, allowing for individual expression and nonjudgemental acceptance. This class is appropriate for all levels of fitness and abilities. Everyone can "let their yoga dance." Cost: \$10 a class. No registration required.

#### Tai chi

##### Thursdays, 9:45 a.m.-10:45 a.m.

The Yang international short form is the most popular form of tai chi practice. It consists of slow continuous soft circular movements which are coordinated with breathing. Regular practice helps to improve balance, mind-body connection, mental awareness, flexibility, stability, coordination and overall health. When practiced in the company of others, it is both uplifting and energizing. Taught by a certified instructor who has studied with the founder of the Tai Chi for Arthritis Association. Email questions to [belizahammer@hotmail.com](mailto:belizahammer@hotmail.com). \$10 a class.



Photos by Lori York

A diverse collection of paintings created during the Coffee & Canvas workshop.



A group of volunteers from the Monday Munch cooking team, enjoying the meal they've just prepared.

No registration required. \$10 a class. No registration required.

#### Bone Builders

##### Mondays, 9:45-10:45 a.m., Tuesdays, 10:30-11:30 a.m., & Wednesdays, 1:30-2:30 p.m. & Fridays, 11 a.m.-noon

RSVP Bone Builders, a program of United Way of Northwest Vermont, is a no-impact, weight-training program designed to prevent and even reverse the negative effects of osteoporosis in older adults. Bone Builders consists of a warm-up, balance exercises, arm and leg exercises, and a cool down with stretching. Free. No registration required, but there is paperwork to complete for the RSVP Bone Builders program.

#### Pilates fitness

##### Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:30-9:30 a.m.

Join Phyllis Bartling in this pilates class, geared to folks 55+. This class is challenging and includes upper-body strength work with hand weights and mat exercises while working on core muscles to improve balance, strength and posture. \$10 a class. No registration required.

#### Yoga strength-building practice

##### Wednesdays, 11 a.m.-noon

Heidi Kvasnak leads an integrative practice that builds strength and stability while maintaining a sense of ease and spaciousness in both body and mind. The group will practice longer-held postures that strengthen

muscles, bones and core, as well as breath-led flowing movement, including sun salutations. Prerequisite: Must be able to easily get down to and up from the floor with or without props. \$10 a class. No registration required.

### Meals

Menus are posted on the website: [charlotteseniorcentervt.org](http://charlotteseniorcentervt.org).

#### Monday lunches

Served weekly. Lunch is served 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., or until the food runs out. Suggested lunch donation \$5. No registration required.

#### Senior center info:

The senior center offers programs for adults 50 and older from Charlotte and surrounding communities. Priority is given to seniors, but programs are open to adults of all ages. Interested in receiving a weekly reminder about what is happening? Sign up for the email newsletters at [charlotteseniorcentervt.org](http://charlotteseniorcentervt.org). The "Week Ahead" email is sent out on Friday mornings with activities, lunch menus and special programs for the upcoming week.

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212 Ferry Road, Charlotte  
802-425-6345  
[charlotteseniorcentervt.org](http://charlotteseniorcentervt.org)

Follow the senior center on Facebook or Instagram at [charlotteseniorcentervt.org](http://charlotteseniorcentervt.org).

## Write Ingredients

# Senior center's mulligatawny soup, tasty and fun to say

Susan Ohanian  
Contributor

Upcoming Monday Munches at the Charlotte Senior Center, where you are invited to enjoy meals served from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

### Monday, Feb. 24

Mulligatawny soup, Caesar salad, rolls and cake.

### Monday, March 3

Lasagna, green salad and dessert (TBA).

To enjoy the mulligatawny soup at the Charlotte Senior Center, start by enjoying just saying it: mulligatawny, mulligatawny. Hoorah!

“The Oxford Companion to Food” describes mulligatawny as Anglo-Indian cookery, the name coming from mulligatawny, pepper water. By the end of the 18th century, the spicy soup was popular with employees of the East India Company, and when families returned to their homes in Britain, they brought the recipe with them.

William Kitchiner, a celebrity chef whose 1817 cookbook, “The Cook’s Oracle” was a bestseller in Britain and the United States, offered 11 ketchup recipes, a recipe for wow-wow sauce (beef stock with port, wine vinegar, parsley, pickled cucumbers or pickled walnuts, mustard, mushroom ketchup, flour and butter) and a recipe for mulligatawny soup.

In September 1859, writing about an African trip, a Scottish physician, missionary and explorer obsessed with learning the source of the Nile, Dr. David Livingstone, suggested an illness he’d suffered was the result of the cook adding mulligatawny paste to the soup “rather rashly.”

One might guess that “The Escoffier Cook Book,” by famed chef Georges Auguste Escoffier, would not have anything to say about mulligatawny. But surprise, surprise: Recipe #748 offers directions for preparing soupe mulligatawny. To prepare this, you need a small fowl plus sliced carrots, onions,



Photo by Misa S of Pexels

mushroom peelings, white consommé and curry. The French touch comes with the instruction, “When ready to serve, add a few tablespoons of cream.”

For those of a political bent, in Economic and Political Weekly (Aug. 7, 2010), Modhumita Roy’s “Some Like It Hot: Class, Gender and Empire in the Making of Mulligatawny Soup,” offers the opportunity to think about the histories of cultural exchange, revealing the linkages between food, identity and power.

“No purveyor of domestic advice in the 19th century could afford to ignore the mulligatawny soup. ... All the great writers of cookery books of that period had their own recipe for the soup, the most celebrated of Anglo-Indian dishes.”

East Indian merchants returning to Britain set off a craze for the soup. Even Heinz in the U.S. got into the act. They put the soup in cans, added “beef curry” to the label and sold it in Britain. These days, we can’t find mulligatawny on our local grocery store shelves, but Amazon offers

Heinz classic mulligatawny — made in Britain. It contains water, tomatoes, apples, beef, rice, sugar, modified cornflower, vegetable oil, curry powder, wheat flour, salt, flavorings, color and plain caramel.

In 1861, Mrs. Beeton’s “Book of Household Management” contained pickles. Other recipes of the period contained pickled mango, grated coconut and stewed calf’s head. One writer advised that calves’ feet can be substituted to reduce the cost, or just use calves’ scalp or skin. A recipe from the chief cook to Queen Victoria called for onions, unpeeled apples, poultry, game or pork, along with curry paste.

In our own times, a Seinfeld Soup Nazi classic that first aired November 1995 (<https://tinyurl.com/bdhd8bwt>) offers a look at what happens when Jerry Seinfeld gets hungry for soup. Along with the hijinks at the soup counter, there’s a recipe for mulligatawny containing potatoes, celery, eggplant, frozen corn, tomato sauce, pistachios, cashews, parsley, lemon

juice, sugar, pepper, sea salt, thyme, bay leaf and, yes, curry.

In the preface to Jesse Conrad’s cookbook, “A Handbook of Cookery for a Small Planet,” the author Joseph Conrad praised “the conscientious preparation of the simple food of everyday life” rather than the “concoction of idle feasts and rare dishes.” He offered his disturbing version of “you are what you eat,” claiming the diet of America’s indigenous population explained their “savageness.”

Today, we’d do better not to worry about what other people eat and instead confront the issue of what happens when people have nothing to eat. On Feb. 12, The Wall Street Journal posted the number of 4 billion pounds, explaining: This is the weight of U.S.-grown grains, soybeans, lentils, rice and other commodity staples that American farmers sold through Food for Peace in 2022. The food-aid program is administered by USAID, which has been largely closed by the Trump administration in recent weeks.

Note: According to Webster’s Dictionary, the term mulligatawny was first used in 1784. Webster’s also provides a fascinating glimpse of other words first appearing that same year. Some will surprise you with their very modern ring: attitudinize, camp follower, neurosis, riot act.

This group of words comes close to offering a contemporary political headline. Rest assured that there’s no politics involved in accepting the invitation to eat Monday Munch at the Charlotte Senior Center: One Monday offers mulligatawny, and the next presents lasagna, which needs no introduction.

Let us give thanks to those volunteer cooks and dishwashers who make this good eating possible.

Note: Here’s a free link to a Washington Post story: [wapo.st/3X189rq](https://wapo.st/3X189rq). It has nothing to do with food but is about someone “doing good,” and right now we all need as many “feel-good” stories as we can get.

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