



RIVEREAST

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Excellent Teammates... Alexa Massey of Hebron and Erin Peng of Marlborough, both seniors at RHAM High School and both members of the RHAM Unified Basketball Team, each received The Mike Savage Teammate Award of Excellence at the CIAC Unified Sports Awards Ceremony, held at the Aqua Turf Club on April 30. Pictured from left are Coach Linda Thurber-Lund, Alexa Massey, Erin Peng and Assistant Coach Deb Hunter.

Historic House Hangs in Limbo

by Allison Lazur

The Coggshell-Robinson House, located at 43 Broadway St. in Colchester, in a nationally-registered historic district, tells the story of negotiations, state involvement, lack of funds and uncertain ownership that has left the property gutted and on the brink of destruction.

The house sits on 3.63 acres in the town's Historic Preservation Overlay Zone, out of the jurisdiction of the Historic District Commission, but subject to local zoning regulations and state laws that protect those on the National Register of Historic Places.

And the Colchester Historical Society is also looking to save the house.

A petition started March 23 collected over 300 signatures in a month to save the historic structure, historical society President Gigi Liverant said.

Over the past several months, windows, mechanical and electrical elements and the plaster have been removed from the house, some of which can be seen in a filled dumpster in the rear of the property.

Property owner Jamie Noel – who also owns the abutting Noel's Market parcel – said his plan is to disassemble and eventually reassemble the house once an interested buyer comes forward.

Noel was unsuccessful in locating a buyer who would be interested in moving and rehabilitating the house.

He told the *Rivereast* last week he has "exhausted the options" and has "tried to do all the right steps" in the name of preservation.

Noel purchased the property in 2016 for

\$520,000.

He said last week "it was never, ever, ever my plan to demolish the house," despite applying for a demolition permit last November.

Notice of intent to demolish the 43 Broadway St. property ran in the *Rivereast* on Dec. 21.

Noel said he applied for the permit because he was informed by the town it was necessary for any structural disassembly.

The permit has not yet been issued because of pending environmental evaluations, according to Daphne Schaub, the town's zoning enforcement officer, blight enforcement officer and assistant planner.

According to the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, Colchester is subject to a 90-day demolition delay ordinance which requires a 90-day waiting period from when the demolition permit is pulled before a historic property can be demolished.

First Selectmen Art Shilovsky said no demolition permit is needed for the disassembly of a house.

Other initial possibilities included moving the house to either the lot located behind Noel's Market or the property across from Harry's Place owned by Bruce and Ronald Goldstein, Noel said.

The cost, according to Noel, was estimated to be approximately \$70,000 for the move.

The Goldsteins ultimately decided they were not interested in the idea of moving the house

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Andover Town Administrator Resigns

by Sloan Brewster

Less than two years into the position, Andover Town Administrator Joseph Higgins handed in his resignation Monday – about a week and a half after an elected official warned a "day of reckoning" was coming for Higgins.

As per his employment agreement, Higgins provided 30 days' notice, meaning his last day in office will be Thursday, June 6. In his brief resignation letter, addressed to First Selectman Robert Burbank, Higgins extended his appreciation for the opportunity to work for the town.

"I look to make this transition smooth and hope to be as accommodating as possible," he wrote. "Let me know if there is anything further we can do to ensure the best transition for Andover."

In a phone call Tuesday, Higgins revealed he did not have a future job lined up, and said, "I'm just going to take some time off in the immediate future," he said.

Higgins said "a number of factors" had influenced his decision to resign, and that he sim-

ply felt "it would be best."

When asked pointedly if grilling from selectmen about putting out requests for proposals (RFPs) for roadwork or a threat that a "day of reckoning" was coming had an impact on his decision, he repeated the same answer.

The "reckoning" comment was made by Board of Finance acting chairman and then-first selectman candidate Adrian Mandeville in a phone call to the *Rivereast* following an April 23 Board of Finance meeting.

"This guy's getting paid \$87,000 a year for not doing his job," Mandeville said. "The day of reckoning is coming."

Andover Treasurer Barbara Griffin confirmed this week Higgins' salary is actually \$85,000.

Mandeville later said he was referring to multiple issues in his accusation that Higgins was not doing his job, but said his main concern was that Higgins was allegedly not issuing proper RFPs, or getting sealed bids from contractors for roadwork projects for the Public Works Department.

Mandeville was also visibly frustrated at the April 23 meeting after Higgins departed the meeting midway through, without telling anyone he was leaving.

Newly-elected First Selectman Jeff Maguire – who has said he agreed with Mandeville about the RFP process – told the *Rivereast* this week he would not comment further about Higgins' performance.

"I just want to thank Joe for his service and wish him the best," he said.

Maguire said the Board of Selectmen will take on the task of hiring a new town administrator and that he hopes it is quicker than it was in 2017, when Higgins was hired.

"The last process took three months," he said.

But Maguire emphasized the selectmen will "hire the best person for the job," he said.

Burbank had run the town for 12 years before voters, at a 2016 referendum, approved changing the town charter to hire a professional town administrator to take over those duties. Higgins began work the following June.

Burbank said this week Higgins did not have any experience running a town when he was given the position and that the job can be "a little overwhelming."

The fact that it's a small town with a small staff makes it even more challenging, as the person on top must wear many hats and do several different jobs, Burbank said.

"And the Board of Selectmen didn't see fit to keep me on and even train him so he had a lot to learn under extraordinarily difficult circumstances," he said. "I can't say for sure that that's why he's leaving, but I'll say that he had a very difficult board to deal with. They were always on his back. You do what you can being a one-man operation basically running a town."

Burbank said the board "nitpicked" with Higgins about "minute things," and that it had to be "frustrating" for him.

"I think it was a very difficult situation for him and something he felt he probably couldn't work under," Burbank said.



The Cogshell-Robinson House which sits at 43 Broadway St. in Colchester is part of the local historic district's overlay zone. The house is also part of a nationally-registered historic district and has been a point of interest of historical society members who fear the future of the home. The house has been gutted over the past several months in efforts to disassemble and reassemble the home elsewhere when and if an interested buyer is located. Pictured is the house before being gutted and, at right, as it looks in its current state.

Historic House cont. from Front Page

to their property, Noel said.

When asked why by the *Rivereast*, Ronald Goldstein cited the "economics of moving the house" and "the market generally," adding "it's not because I don't want to see the house saved."

Goldstein said he never agreed to move the house to his property, that it was simply an "idea," and specific plans were never outlined.

An informal meeting on the Cogshell-Robinson House occurred about a year and a half ago between Jamie Noel, Ronald Goldstein, local historian Arthur Liverant and a representative from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation.

The representative from the non-profit deemed the house "saveable" and with "good features," recalled Goldstein.

Noel reiterated this week he believes he took all the right steps to try and save the building, even offering to pay for the house to be moved and giving away the house for free.

But First Selectman Art Shilosky said last week the plan to move the house only came after he informed Noel and his father they could not demolish the building.

Shilosky said shortly after he took office as first selectman in 2017, Noel and his father approached him to ask if they could "tear down the old white house."

Shilosky said he told them they could only demolish it if it's not a historic building.

"That's when the plan came to move the house," Shilosky said.

Noel maintained this week that demolition is a "last resort" and was never in the initial plans.

Members of the Colchester Historical Society expressed concerns over the future of the house.

Gigi Liverant said the current, partial disassembly of the house has made it even more difficult to find an interested buyer.

"By the town allowing it to be dismantled without taking a demolition permit it was stripped down to the point where no one can see the value in it, so there's no financial incentive to save it," she said.

State demolition code defines demolition as

"any wrecking activity directed to the disassembling, dismantling, dismembering and/or razing of any structure or part thereof not exempted under the provisions of section 29-402 (c) of the Connecticut General Statutes."

Statutes outline one of the exemptions as "a person who is engaged in the disassembly, transportation and reconstruction of historic buildings for historical purposes..."

But despite missing plaster and molding, Liverant said of the house, "She's not useless. There's still a lot of use in that house, there's still a lot of beauty to that house. There's still a lot left in that house but most people will look at it and say 'Oh it's a goner.'"

She said the historical society would like to see the house saved, but does not have the finances to do so.

At this point, Liverant said the "best case scenario" would be "adaptive reuse of the property," which would include a commercial developer who would "save the exterior to its glory" and update the inside.

"Realistically if a commercial developer were to come along and turn it into an adaptive reuse property, they're going to take the plaster out anyway," she said. "The current status of the house is not a detriment, but the state when it comes to 'historic preservation' doesn't like the current status of the house."

Liverant cited Liberty Bank and Broadway Wine and Spirits as examples of adaptive reuse.

"There are numerous buildings in Colchester that have been adaptively reused and they are an asset to the town," she said.

James McNair, director of development and marketing for the historical society, said, "clearly the owner wants it moved for whatever reason." He said if the objective is to save the house, an option that involves satisfying all parties concerned would be the best case scenario.

The Cogshell-Robinson House is a "fine local example of late 18th century architectural design with interior wood features believed to be the work of local 18th century craftsman Issac Finch," according to the historical society's website.

Input from the State

State Historic Preservation Council member Margaret Faber stated in an email to the *Rivereast* last week the house falls under Connecticut's Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) and is subject to protection.

State statute allows any party to bring a case before the historic preservation council for "unreasonable destruction of historic structures and landmarks of the state," which includes those properties listed as part of any district recognized on the National Register of Historic Places.

Faber said the town's local historical society, possibly in partnership with the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, could bring the case to the Historic Preservation Council. From there, Noel would be invited to appear before the council to answer a series of questions about why he feels there is no "prudent or feasible alternative to demolition," she said.

The Historic Preservation Council would then refer the matter to the attorney general for a possible injunction if deemed appropriate, according to Faber.

But Todd Levine, historian for the State Historic Preservation Office, said this week because the house has been gutted there are questions of integrity.

He said members of the Colchester Historical Society brought their concerns to the state last year, but "backed off" once they thought the house was going to be moved.

He said he believes moving the house now is "off the table" because of its deteriorating condition.

Levine said he thinks Noel was "trying to do the best thing" by taking the steps he has since the home's purchase, with the end goal being to "clear the lot."

Brad Schide, who serves as circuit rider for the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, told the *Rivereast* last week Noel is "inviting things to happen to the structure."

"I didn't pick up walking through there that he had a lot of interest in stabilizing the house," Schide said last week.

He cited the removed windows, which now sit inside the house along with the extracted plaster.

"It's hard to understand what was going on," he said.

Schide said while "really any entity can have standing to file an injunction," the attorney general does not take on every job and that there must be a "prudent and feasible alternative" to demolition.

Options for the home include selling it to someone who is able to rehabilitate the home or move it to a new location, Schide said.

"The attorney general would jump in and take on this project if there was a seller and a buyer," he said.

Schide said he was surprised by the level of deconstruction that has been done to the house so far without the issuance of a demolition permit, adding that Colchester has a "liberal view" of what qualifies as demolition.

Faber told the *Rivereast* it's her understanding that dismantling the house is considered a demolition subject to CEPA laws.

"It also almost always results in de-listing from the National Register," she said.

Ownership Questions

After "exhausting the options," Noel said he signed an agreement with Bill Willard in February 2018 that outlined a plan to disassemble the house.

Noel said the contract states that Willard will own the pieces of the dismantled house.

Because the house has not been completely dismantled, Noel said there is a "gray area" and added, "I'm not 100% sure if I own it or if he owns it."

Noel said he was not sure when the dismantling would be completed.

As far as plans for the parcel, Noel said at this point in time there are no definite plans.

"I don't have an immediate need for that corner," Noel said. He added that once the house is gone, he projects the property will be utilized for residential and commercial development while keeping in mind the "viability of downtown Colchester."

Turnout Down, But Hebron Voters Pass Budgets

by Sloan Brewster

While the town's 2019-20 \$35.65 million budget and \$702,029 Capital Improvement Program budget passed at Tuesday's referendum, officials were dismayed by the low voter turnout.

In total, 1,011 of the approximate 7,000 registered voters took a trip to the polls to cast their votes. At last year's budget referendum, 1,170 voters cast ballots.

The question on whether the town budget should be approved received 734 'yes' votes and 274 'no' votes. The Capital Improvement Program budget passed with a similar 746-261 tally.

Hebron voters also approved the passage of RHAM's \$29.63 operation budget, by a 655-353 vote. They also voted 676-332 in favor of RHAM's \$516,976 Capital Improvement Program budget.

The town's overall budget represents a \$149,076 or .42% decrease over the current year. The \$9.02 million town government expenditures side of the package represents a \$110,290 or 1.24% increase over the current year's spending. Also included in the package is \$11.34 million for the Hebron Board of Education and Hebron's \$13.93 million portion of RHAM's operations budget as well as \$1.28 million for RHAM's debt.

With the budget passed, the mill rate is anticipated to be 37.05 mills, Finance Director Elaine Griffin said. For a home with an assessed value of \$210,510, that would represent a savings of \$92, she said.

However, according to Board of Finance Vice Chairman Malcolm Leichter Jr., the mill rate may change if the town gets additional revenues from the state. He said the Board of Finance

will hold off on setting the mill rate until the state budget is approved – but added that, per town charter, the board must set the mill rate by June 15.

The referendum also featured three "advisory questions," which allowed voters to offer additional input. For the town budget, 476 said it was too high and 280 said it was too low. For the Hebron Board Of Education budget, 428 said 'too high' and 348 said 'too low,' and, for the RHAM Board of Education budget, 490 said it was too high and 326 said it was too low.

Schools Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel said he was pleased with the outcome of the referendum and thankful the boards had worked together toward the budget.

After the polls closed, Town Clerk Carla Pomproicz, who was among officials waiting for final numbers on and around the stage in the gym at Hebron Elementary School, commented about the low turnout, which at that point was still an estimate. The others chimed in, using words including pitiful and pathetic.

"To only get one-seventh [of registered voters] is pathetic," Board of Selectman chairman Dan Larson said. "Sadly, apathy is rampant."

Larson's mood improved when the voting results came in and he learned the budgets had passed; he credited the approval with "sound fiscal management on all levels of town."

"We try to be very frugal, but with frugalities I always get nervous that we haven't cut the numbers too much," he said.

Larson also pointed out that now the town must wait for the state to pass its budget, which he called "a challenge." Municipal leaders of-

ten decried the fact that the state does not set its budget until after the towns have already approved theirs, as it means the towns often have to guess at how much they will receive in state revenues.

"That always creates a level of anxiety," Larson said.

Town Manager Andrew Tierney said he was relieved the budget passed.

"We were unsure of the outcome," he said. "Historically in the past we normally get about 500 to 600 'no' votes but because this budget was an actual mill decrease, I think a lot of voters just figured it was fine and didn't come out."

Tierney had actually told the *Rivereast* last week he was worried people wouldn't turn out to vote, because they had been quiet during the budget season.

Between about noon and 1 p.m. Tuesday, a slow stream of voters made their way to the polls. Those who agreed to speak to the *Rivereast* had a variety of opinions on the budgets.

Michael Ferrero said he voted 'yes' for the town budget but 'no' for RHAM's, and that one of his concerns was that the RHAM budget continues to go up while enrollment is going down.

RHAM's total budget reflects a 4.12% increase over the current year yet, according to Superintendent of Schools Patricia Law, enrollment is projected to decrease over the next five years and by 2023-24, she anticipates 408 fewer students at the two schools. For the next school year, Law expects a decrease of about 62 students – 40 at the middle school and 22 at the high school.

Jen Russell, a former teacher, voted 'yes' to the town and RHAM budgets and said she trusted the boards of education and finance to make good budgetary decisions for the town and schools.

Some voters spoke about the three advisory questions, saying they felt the questions provided good feedback to the town – especially when people vote against a budget because they thought it was too low since, voters said, officials tend to assume 'no' votes mean the budget is too high.

Ferrero also talked about the high cost of living in the state.

"A lot of people are moving out of the state because it's becoming difficult to raise a family or accumulate wealth," he said.

This year's town spending package also included a new \$71,039 line item, to cover teacher retirement obligations – a response to a proposal by Gov. Ned Lamont to shift 25% the cost of retirements from the state to municipalities.

Malcolm Leichter Jr., vice chairman of the Board of Finance, had a brief discussion with his fellow officials on the possibility of town's being given the onus to pay a portion of the retirements and stated that as long there's a gradual shift from the state to towns, he agrees towns should have to contribute.

Leichter said he too was pleased with the results of the referendum.

"I think it's great that it passed," he said. "I think that we've had a decrease in 'no' votes over the past several years and I think we can credit that to the honesty of the numbers and the openness of the discussion."

\$56.39M Budget Heads to Public Hearing in Colchester

by Allison Lazur

Last week, the Board of Finance unanimously approved sending a \$56.39 million proposed 2019-20 budget to a public hearing after a lengthy meeting that involved cuts to both the town and school spending packages.

The total budget saw a \$1.02 million, or 1.84%, increase over current year spending and includes funding for a new paramedic program, school technology and curriculum.

The current proposal would result in a mill rate of 32.84 mills, up .56 mills from the current mill rate of 32.28, an increase of 1.73%.

One mill is equivalent to \$1 in tax per \$1,000 of assessed property, meaning a 32.84 mill rate would result in a resident paying about \$8,210 in taxes on a home assessed at \$250,000, an increase of \$140.

The town budget totals \$15.15 million, an increase of \$333,676 – but it is down 2.25% from the Board of Selectmen's initial proposal, which featured a \$731,340 increase.

The initial increase was partially driven by a new paramedic program selectmen approved in February. The initial presentation of the town budget included approximately \$268,000 for the program, which would begin to provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) services to residents by a projected date of Jan. 1, 2020.

The proposed program would cut down on the response time from outside paramedics currently coming from Middlesex Health Marlborough Medical Center or a Norwich-based commercial ambulance company.

ALS includes lifesaving measures only a paramedic can provide, such as starting an IV, equipment to monitor heart health, or the ability to handle a diabetic emergency.

The program is projected to cost approximately \$350,000 for the first year and \$450,000 for the second year.

However, the hefty cost of the program was

discussed by finance board members last month and concerns were expressed over whether voters would approve a program that contributed to the town's initial proposed increase of \$731,340.

As a result, Fire Chief Walt Cox recommended an alternative funding proposal to selectmen that was discussed at two special Board of Selectmen meetings last week – one of which was directly before the Board of Finance meeting on May 1.

The proposal – referred to by selectmen as "Plan B" – included deferring the majority of the program's cost to the 2020-21 fiscal year and included \$30,985 in the proposed 2019-20 budget.

The projected date for initial paramedic program rollout would be April 2020 instead of October 2019 under Plan B, with full implementation of the initial phase projected for January-July 2021.

The reductions associated with Plan B totaled \$200,495 with an additional \$37,221 savings through funding a portion of the program's equipment needs through the equipment reserve fund.

Other options discussed by selectmen included removing the paramedic program entirely or leaving the proposal in the budget as initially presented.

Selectman Rosemary Coyle said she believed including some funding in the current budget allowed for the department to continue applying for grants while not risking a loss of funds from any grants already applied for.

The fire department currently brings in an average of \$514,453.40 in yearly revenue. In the program's initial February presentation, it was estimated that if the department had been providing ALS services, an additional \$185,300 in revenue would have occurred based off 2017

figures.

Selectmen unanimously voted to include Plan B in the budget brought to the Board of Finance, which then approved Plan B at its meeting directly following the selectmen's meeting on May 1.

The Board of Finance made a further reduction to the fire department budget by \$16,822 due to a recent decision by the department to change billing companies.

Reductions to the town's proposed spending plan totaled \$397,664 and also included removing the funds of one grounds maintenance person – a savings of \$44,403.

Shilosky had initially requested funding for two additional ground maintenance positions for increased tree removal and general grounds upkeep.

School Budget Reduced

The Board of Finance mulled over the proposed education budget, questioning Superintendent of Schools Jeffrey Burt over his proposal. The discussions ultimately resulted in a unanimous reduction of \$328,000 from the district's spending plan.

The proposed school budget totals \$41.24 million, an increase of \$687,778, or 1.70%.

The finance board achieved the cut by finding \$28,000 in insurance savings, tasking the school board with identifying \$100,000 in specific reductions, and using \$200,000 of the town's fund balance designated for school capital.

Board of Finance Chairman Rob Tarlov said in an email this week that \$200,000 "was the approximate amount resulting from Board of Education unexpended funds in the 2017-2018 budget year."

The finance board suggested the fund balance could help offset the introduction of a

"one-to-one" technology program in the high school.

The one-to-one program provides a dedicated laptop for each student to use during the school day. It has already been implemented at the middle school and will be maintained through the proposed funding increase.

The proposed education budget also includes a request for \$130,000 for the implementation of new curriculum. Burt told the board this is "a needed area."

"We've had zeroes in that line item for two years because the curricula weren't ready," he said. "Our staff has done an incredible job presenting and creating new curricula to be approved by the board and these funds are central to implement those new curricula."

Board of Finance Andreas Bisbikos questioned how the school would determine whether the new curriculum is successful – and also wondered if the current curriculum is "not satisfactory enough, not rigorous enough?"

Burt said most districts go through a five-year "curriculum revision cycle." As for determining the new curriculum's success, he said it would be measured via a combination of internal assessment, anecdotal observations and input from teachers, and state assessments.

Board of Finance member Mike Egan stated he believed the measurement of a curriculum's success falls to the Board of Education, not the finance board.

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Residents will have an opportunity to voice opinions on the budget at a public hearing on Tuesday, May 14, at 7 p.m., at Town Hall. From there, the Board of Finance will vote on the budgets May 15; the spending packages would then go to town meeting May 29 and to referendum June 11.

Portland Officials Look to Address Excavation Complaints

by Elizabeth Regan

Officials are grappling with how to address complaints about a lack of oversight for some large-scale excavations in town.

Land use staff members are currently finalizing draft revisions to local zoning regulations that they plan to submit to the Planning and Zoning Commission in the coming months, according to land use administrator Ashley Majorowski.

Current regulations call for a special permit to remove earth material from a site. But a list of 10 exemptions has allowed the excavation of significant amounts of sand and gravel without strict regulatory safeguards, leading officials to explore ways to clarify the language and more tightly control the process.

Shortcomings in the current regulations came to light several years ago when local businessman Ben Srb secured zoning approval for a single-family house on the corner of Sage Hollow Road and Cornwall Street without a special permit. The project required the removal of a large but unspecified amount of sand and gravel from the site.

Srb contended the town's earth removal regulations don't apply to his property because he is simply making room to build a house – not running a commercial excavation operation.

By 2017, complaints were mounting about the amount of earth material being removed from the site, the length of the project and its proximity to residential neighborhoods.

The project is ongoing, five years after the permit for a single-family house was approved. Current zoning enforcement officer Dan Bourret in February approved a two-year extension with no objection from the Planning and Zoning Commission.

The draft changes to the zoning regulations would add more definitions, introduce two separate special permit categories for earth removal, and specify the amount of excavation or filling that triggers a special permit.

Objections to the draft revisions were raised at an April Planning and Zoning Commission meeting by Srb, who now serves on the Board of Selectmen, and local project engineer Frank

Magnotta. They cited concerns about vague and subjective terminology as well as provisions that Srb said contradict state statute.

Magnotta told the commission he has to read through regulations in many different towns in order to produce engineering designs for various clients.

"When a lot of terminology that's used is very general and sometimes vague, it's impossible to know what they have to do to comply," he said.

Srb questioned the legality of draft revisions that would require a special permit for any single- or two-family project requiring more than 20,000 cubic yard of excavation. He said building a single-family house is the right of any property owner in a residential zone.

"The irony is what I did at the Four Corners would still be allowed under state statute regardless of what you're doing here, if that was the intent," Srb said. "I'm not trying to stir any pot. It's a single-family lot; anybody that owns it has the legal right to put a single-family home on it."

It is unclear where – whether in state statute or case law – it is specified that towns cannot place special permit restrictions on uses typically permitted by right. Srb did not respond to multiple calls and emails for clarification.

Town attorney Kari Olson did not respond by press time to a request for comment.

Majorowski, the land use administrator, said this week she will be conferring at the end of May with Olson, town engineer Geoff Jacobson, zoning enforcement officer Dan Bourret and planning consultant Terri-Ann Hahn to address outstanding questions, including those raised by Magnotta and Srb. She said that's the earliest time all the parties will be available for a conference call.

Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Bruce Tyler said this week it has "taken too long" to revamp the regulations.

"I'm going to get more obnoxious about this till we get it resolved," he said.

Describing Srb's Sage Hollow approval and extension as a "done deal," Tyler said the

broader issue of how to effectively safeguard the excavation process in town must be addressed through regulation changes.

Srb's zoning permit was authorized by then-zoning enforcement officer Bob Spencer in 2014 despite the official's doubts that Srb intended to put a house on the property. Spencer said in a land use department email that approving the site plan would allow Srb to excavate the property for five years "without the proper safeguards in place."

Faced with advice from the town attorney combined with state and local guidelines that gave him little leeway in denying residential site plans, Spencer approved the zoning permit with the condition any excavation "be in concert with the spirit of" the town's regulations on earth removal – a condition that Olson later told the *Rivereast* would be difficult to uphold in court.

The issue was revisited last year when Srb emerged as the developer of a commercial project on Route 66 near the Ledges that involves a large-scale excavation.

The approval for the 1600 Portland Cobalt Rd. project said an estimated 200,000 cubic yards of earth removal would be required to make room for 8,200 square feet of commercial construction.

The site plan was approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission in August despite a memo from Hahn, the planning consultant, and a legal opinion from Olson, the town attorney, saying it should be subject to a special permit.

The revisions now being drafted by the land use department include a new special permit for "large earthwork activities associated with a site plan application and approval." That's the special permit Srb was talking about at last month's Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, and it means someone clearing more than 20,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from a site in order to put up a house or business would have to adhere to excavation guidelines governing issues like grading, processing and hours of operation.

It also establishes a separate special permit

for quarry/mining operations.

Under the draft revisions, a special permit for large earthwork activities would be good for as long as the underlying site plan. Extensions would be granted only for "unusual circumstances."

State statute gives applicants five years to execute a site plan and another five years of extensions if they need them.

Special permits for quarry operations would be good for three years and renewable in three-year increments, based on the draft changes. Current regulations allow a two-year special permit for excavation operations, followed by two-year renewals.

The Planning and Zoning Commission in 2017 submitted and subsequently withdrew a set of proposed regulation changes after complaints that the language was too restrictive. There were also objections from those who wanted to make sure regulations specifically addressed the amount of material that could be excavated before a special permit became necessary.

The process of trying again to draft revisions to the regulations began in July of last year, according to Majorowski. She said she worked with the town engineer and the planning consultant to look at regulations in other towns and to compare those ideas to "what works and what doesn't" in Portland's current regulations.

The document has gone through 11 revisions so far.

Majorowski said scheduling issues around the winter holidays contributed to delays in the revision process, combined with other pressing issues in the department.

"We wanted to get it done, but we also wanted to do it right, and that takes time," she said.

She emphasized the importance of excavation regulations in a town built on quarries.

"We have a lot of sand and gravel in this town, just because we're so close to the river," she said. "We have to be careful, because it's very applicable here."

\$35.05M Proposed Budget Heads to Referendum in Portland

by Elizabeth Regan

Portland voters on Monday will have the opportunity to cast their ballots for or against a \$35.05 million spending plan that represents a 2.97% increase over the current budget.

A total of eight taxpayers came out to the May 6 town meeting to send the budget to referendum, according to Town Clerk Ryan Curley.

The proposed general government budget – including operations, debt and capital – comes in at \$13.65 million. That's \$295,189, or 2.21%, over the current budget.

The education budget comprises \$21.39 million of the total budget. The figure represents a \$65,000 reduction from the amount originally approved by the school board in January. The cut, requested by First Selectman Susan Bransfield, brought the education budget from a 3.78% increase over the current year to a 3.47% increase.

The total budget was approved unanimously by the Board of Selectmen in April.

The projected mill rate increase based on the proposed budget would be 0.58 mills, or 1.71%, over the current mill rate. With a mill rate of 34.39 mills, a taxpayer with a home assessed at \$200,000 would pay \$6,878 in the coming year. That's an increase of \$116 over the current tax bill.

First Selectman Susan Bransfield said one of the hallmarks of Portland's budget planning process is the cooperation between the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education.

"I visit many, many towns where that's just not the case," she said.

She noted the school board last year approved a flat budget that cut one teaching position each in kindergarten, first grade, third grade and fourth grade. A special education teaching position, a full-time custodian and a full-time library assistant position were eliminated through

attrition.

"So this year, we need to make sure that they have what they need to run our schools," Bransfield said.

The school board's 3.47% increase over the current year is driven by special education expenses, according to Superintendent of Schools Philip O'Reilly.

State law requires towns to provide special education services for all qualifying students who live there, which can result in expensive outplacement costs if the school district is unable to meet the students' needs through its own existing programs.

The proposed school budget adds one special education teacher to an initiative at Valley View School that gives students with autism and other developmental disabilities specific techniques and principles to help them learn, communicate and interact with peers more effectively.

O'Reilly throughout the budget season has emphasized no additional staff members are being requested in the upcoming budget.

The education spending plan also includes \$75,000 to begin replacing Chromebooks for students in grades five through 12. The program, which began in 2016, ensures that all students in those grades have a computer tablet to use during the school day.

The school rolled out 775 Chromebooks in 2016.

On the general government side of the budget, staffing changes include full-time administrative assistants in the Parks and Recreation Department and at the Waverly Center. Bransfield said the two departments were each previously filled for 17.5 hours a week by a shared assistant.

Oversight of the senior center and youth services department is shared, according to the

proposed budget.

Bransfield also added five hours to the part-time land use and economic development coordinator position and approximately five more hours for the zoning enforcement officer.

The proposed \$1.02 million capital plan comes in at an increase of \$294,740, or 40.39%, over the current year's budget.

The plan includes \$188,500 in technology upgrades for the school system as part of what O'Reilly has described as "huge, huge changes in technology" in the coming year.

The school board decided to move several technology purchases from the education spending plan to the capital budget before voting to approve the proposal unanimously in January. The technology needs include \$131,500 for the secondary school Wi-Fi system; \$35,000 for a new Science, Technology, Engineering and Math lab; \$10,000 for smart boards; and \$6,500 for projectors.

A request for \$41,500 to upgrade a heating, ventilation and air conditioning system in the district brings the capital requests for education to \$230,000.

The town side of the capital improvement plan includes \$88,000 to replace a police cruiser; \$50,000 for communication equipment upgrades in the fire department; \$40,000 to save up for the planned 2021 revaluation; \$30,000 each for sidewalk and municipal parking parking lot improvements; and \$10,000 for work on the Air Line Trail.

The largest chunks of the total 2019-20 spending plan include salaries, at approximately 33% of the total operating budget; employee fringe benefits, at 22%; and debt service, at 13%.

Bransfield noted a \$151,204 decrease in the \$1.91 million debt service line item compared to the current budget, despite the issuance of a

significant bond package approved by voters in 2016.

The \$10 million bonding project funded the Route 17 recreation park and infrastructure improvements to roads, sidewalks and a few buildings.

She said the decrease is the result of some previous bonds being paid in full.

This year's revenue figures are seeing a slight boost from the state due to an increase of approximately \$70,000 in education grants. Bransfield said the funding formula instituted by Gov. Ned Lamont to determine each town's level of need is more favorable to Portland than calculations used by other governors.

But there is also talk in the halls of the state Capitol about a cost-sharing arrangement, championed by Gov. Ned Lamont, that would require municipalities to pay a portion of teachers' pension costs. Figures from Lamont's plan show the move could result in a bill of \$59,327 for Portland's share of the expense if the governor gets his way.

Teachers in Connecticut do not pay into the Social Security system. Instead, they make a mandatory contribution of 7 percent of their annual salary into the state retirement fund, according to the 2018 Connecticut Teachers' Retirement Handbook.

But the state underfunded the Teachers' Retirement System for decades and is now grappling with how to keep the spiraling costs in check.

Bransfield has said the potential teacher pension contribution is not factored into Portland's proposed budget.

The budget proposal is available online at portlandct.org.

The 2019-20 budget referendum will be Monday, May 13, from 6 a.m.-8 p.m. at Portland Middle School, 93 High St.

East Hampton Library Honored for Role in Village Center Success

by Elizabeth Regan

The East Hampton Public Library has earned one of the Connecticut Library Association's top community service awards for its role in making the Village Center a more vibrant place.



Library director Ellen Paul accepted the Excellence in Public Library Service Award for towns with fewer than 15,000 residents, along with awards for best new website and best new logo, at the association's annual conference last Tuesday.

"I've always thought it is not up to a community to make a library great; it's up to a library to make a community great," Paul told the *Rivereast* this week.

The recognition caps two years of work stemming from a series of "community conversations" about the future of East Hampton. The series of summer meetings back in 2017 were initiated by the newly formed library advisory board and the newly hired director as a way to bring the residents' vision for their community into focus.

"We didn't ask people what they wanted from their library. We asked people what they wanted for East Hampton," Paul said.

It turned out residents' biggest concerns revolve around the Village Center, according to Paul. Participants in the community forums cited empty storefronts, decaying buildings and a general lack of vitality going back decades.

The library's solution was a range of initiatives to encourage new businesses in the town's historic center and to bolster existing ones.

A dozen programs brought local business owners into the library to lead programs ranging from a bicycle maintenance workshop to a daddy-daughter hair styling class.

The library also joined forces with the volunteer Service Corps of Retired Entrepreneurs and local experts for workshops to help promote new business in town. Paul said the library's "Simple Steps to Start Your Own Business" seminar series was taught by locals like attorney Kenneth Barber, accountant Ted Hintz and marketing professional Mary Ann Dostaler.

One of the Village Center success stories that emerged from the entrepreneurship series is Black Walnut Artisan Bread Company, which

opened its doors late last year to early-morning sellout crowds. Owner Christian Michalowski, who has been critical of the bureaucratic aspects of starting a business in town, had nothing but praise for the library program he described as instrumental in getting his business off the ground.

"It opened a lot of doors for me and also was very educational," he said. "It gave me a lot of insight."

Paul said the library's Village Center focus led to a "Shop Local" holiday program, which provided shoppers with a raffle ticket every time they made a purchase at one of 12 participating businesses during the holiday season. The customers were invited to bring the tickets to the library to enter to win a basket of products and gift cards donated by local merchants.

There were 450 tickets tossed into the raffle, according to Paul.

"Each one of those represents money that was spent in the Village Center," she said. "That was money that stayed in East Hampton. It didn't go to a big box store or online."

AirLine Cycles owner Brian Holdt credited the library with playing a significant part in the recent "rebirth" of the Village Center.

"Our village has had its ups and downs through the years, and the last few years have been a slow climb up out of a pretty serious slump," he wrote in a letter of support for the library's award nomination.

He credited the library with luring more and more people to an area that's "off the beaten track."

"The holiday foot traffic this season was definitely much stronger than in past years, and many customers excitedly entered the store with arms full of shopping bags and a fist full of raffle tickets. It wasn't quite Wonka's golden ticket, but it was close," Holdt wrote.

Two other Connecticut Library Association awards recognize the library's efforts over the past two years to rebrand itself in an era marked by a new director, a resurrected advisory board and reinvigorated Friends of the Library support.

The new website and logo complement the internal changes that in 2018 led to a 20 percent increase in borrowing compared to the prior year, according to Paul. The increase is spurred in large part by the decision to join the statewide Libraries Online consortium, which



A contingent of East Hampton Public Library staff members, volunteers and supporters descended on the Connecticut Library Association's Annual Meeting and awards ceremony on April 30 to celebrate the library's three recognitions. From left are Michael Maniscalco, East Hampton town manager; Michele Kaminski, children's librarian; Mimi Jones, Library Advisory Board member; Tessa Handy, library assistant; Ellen Paul, library director; Melissa Jones, Library Advisory Board member; Victoria Fielding, Friends of the Library president; Jack Solomon, Library Advisory Board member; Cyndi Shirshac, Library Advisory board vice chairman; and Amy Ordonez, Library Advisory Board chairman.

promotes the sharing of services and resources among more than 35 participating libraries.

Paul said the consortium gives library patrons access to 2.6 million items in all the participating libraries combined, compared to just the 65,000 items in the East Hampton library.

Victoria Fielding, a mother of three children under the age of 10 and the president of the Friends of the Library, said she used to be more inclined to visit other, larger libraries with more offerings before East Hampton joined the statewide consortium.

Now, they're more likely to stay local.

"We're frequently able to get things on reserve from other libraries and they're here super fast," she said. "It's nice to be able to support and also spend that time in the library that your tax dollars are going to."

Fielding over the past year has worked to increase membership in the Friends of the Library organization that she said has been carried for more than a decade by a singular friend: Alan Hurst.

It's now up to 57 members, according to Fielding.

The Friends group focuses on fundraising and publicity, while the advisory board takes a

broader and more policy-based look at library operations and its role in town.

Library Advisory Board member Mimi Jones told the *Rivereast* she first came to the library in 1975 as the mother of young children – but hasn't always found it to be the welcoming place it turned into when Paul arrived.

"When you come into the library, you feel so much more welcome now," she said. "There's just so much going on that every week there's some kind of program, almost every day."

Paul replaced the former director, Sue Berescik, who resigned suddenly in late 2016.

The library's new award-winning logo is a testament to East Hampton's unique history and the library's place in it, according to Paul, Fielding and Jones. The graphic was created by the Massachusetts-based Stirling Technologies design firm with input from the library's advisory board.

Paul said the logo combines the town's bell and ship making past, while the open pages at the bottom "does triple duty" as a book, the bottom of a bell and ripples on the river.

"This logo wouldn't work anywhere else but here," she said. "You see it and you know this is East Hampton."

East Hampton Man Charged with 2017 Rape

by Elizabeth Regan

An East Hampton man has been arrested on a rape charge related to an incident reported almost a year and a half ago, according to police.

James Harris, 20, of 3 Terp Rd., was arrested April 26 on a warrant and charged with first-degree sexual assault and first-degree unlawful restraint.

Middlesex Health Marlborough Medical Center reported the alleged sexual assault on Nov. 17, 2017, according to the arrest warrant affidavit.

The alleged victim told police she had been hanging out at an East Hampton home from the previous evening into the morning with Harris and another friend, the warrant said. The three were listening to music and drinking Smirnoff vodka and strawberry margarita malt beverages until the third friend went to bed around 2 a.m., the warrant said.

The woman told police she repeatedly told Harris "NO" and "STOP" from the point he started kissing her against her will throughout the rest of the alleged rape, according to the warrant. Police said the incident involved oral and vaginal penetration.

The alleged victim was eventually able to escape to the bathroom and then to another room despite attempts from Harris to grab her arm to get her to stay, she told police in the

warrant.

Forensic evidence analyzed at the state laboratory found two vaginal and genital swabs from the victim were consistent with Harris's DNA, while a third was inconclusive.

Harris that evening provided a video recorded interview and a written statement, the warrant said. He told police he had been drinking "very heavily" and could not remember anything past 3 a.m.

"I must have blacked out after that point because the only recollection I had from that night was what I thought was a dream," he said in written statement. He said he texted the victim to ask "what happened last night" after he woke up with his underwear missing.

"I figured the dream I had was most definitely real, but I felt okay because I felt there was a comfort level between [the alleged victim] and I," he told police in the affidavit.

The warrant was submitted to Middlesex Superior Court on April 1 and signed by Judge Maureen Keegan on April 11.

Police said Harris turned himself in on April 26 and was arraigned the same morning at Middletown Superior Court on a \$150,000 bond.

He posted bail and was released from custody, according to the State Judicial Branch website. His next court date is May 14.

Hebron Student Brings BB Gun to School

A student who allegedly brought a BB gun to Hebron Elementary School faces school sanctions, according to a report by state police.

Police said the student showed the BB gun to his friends during recess on April 29. Another student told the teacher that was monitoring recess, who subsequently took the BB gun away from the student.

The student's father was notified and called to the school, the report stated.

The student was referred to the Hebron Juvenile Review Board and faces school sanctions for possessing the BB gun, police said. There was no threatening involved and the matter is still under investigation, police said.

Superintendent of Schools Timothy Van Tasel would not elaborate on what any potential sanctions would be, simply saying he would comment on the case "due to this being a confidential student matter."

East Hampton Police News

4/18: Ann Jewell, 51, of 70 Harris St., Glastonbury, was arrested and charged with sixth-degree larceny, East Hampton Police said.

4/27: Rodger Goss, 74, of 14 Elmwood Dr., was arrested and charged with DUI and failure to drive right, police said.

5/2: Stephen Robbins, 24, of 303 Lebanon Ave., Colchester, was arrested and charged with DUI and failure to obey a stop sign, police said. The charges stemmed from a two-car motor vehicle crash that had occurred July 15, 2018, at the intersection of Comstock Bridge Road and Colchester Avenue (Route 16), police said.

Also, from April 22-28, officers responded to 19 medical calls, four motor vehicle crashes and 13 alarms, and made 22 traffic stops, police said.

Vehicle Collides with Tree in Andover

State Police said a collision with a tree left one man with suspected minor injuries.

At approximately 1:09 a.m. on May 5, a Subaru Legacy driven by Andrew Maulucci, 27, of 1696 South St., Coventry, was traveling northbound on Skinner Hill Road just before the intersection with Wheeling Road when the vehicle veered into the right lane, struck a tree and rolled onto the driver's side.

Police said Maulucci was transported to Windham Hospital by the Coventry Volunteer Fire Association and was cited for failure to maintain lane.

Marlborough Voters Quietly Approve 5.54% Spending Increase

by Allison Lazur

Marlborough voters decided Tuesday night to send the proposed 2019-20 budget to victory by voting 'yes' on the \$25.99 million spending package.

A 264-167 vote was the result of a quiet budget season with no cuts to the town or school budgets by the Board of Finance after the board agreed their initial proposals were already lean.

Only about 10% of the town's 4,242 registered voters came out to cast a vote Tuesday, down from last year's 13%.

Board of Education Chairman Ruth Kelly expressed her dismay Wednesday with the low participation.

"I was a little disappointed with the numbers. I was hoping that more people would take advantage and vote, but we are certainly glad that those who came out did," Kelly said.

The budget includes town, local Board of Education and Marlborough's portion of RHAM operational and capital expenses – an increase of 5.54%, or \$1.36 million, over current year spending.

The local school operating budget totaled \$7.41 million – a 1.59%, or \$115,882, increase

over current year spending. Town operations came in at \$5.04 million, an increase of 3.13% or \$153,103.

A \$1.46 million capital improvement plan included funds for both the town and Marlborough Elementary School.

Although the finance board did not make any cuts to the budget proposal, members did decide to use \$375,000 of the undesignated fund balance to offset the mill rate.

The finance board on Wednesday set the mill rate at 37.25 mills. That's an increase of 0.73 mills, or 2.01%, over the current mill rate.

Without using a portion of the fund balance, the town would have been looking at a 3.77% increase to the tax rate.

One mill is equivalent to \$1 in tax per \$1,000 of assessed property, meaning a 37.25 mill rate would result in a resident paying about \$9,132 in taxes on a home assessed at \$250,000, an increase of about \$182.

While acting Board of Finance Chairman Susan Leser said she is pleased the budget passed, the success doesn't come without fu-

ture fiscal concern.

Leser said in an email to the *Rivereast* Wednesday she is worried about rising costs at RHAM and MES in the face of declining enrollment.

"I want to remind residents that the Board of Finance was able to lower the actual tax increase this year, but will most likely not be able to do so next year," Leser said.

A total of 420 students are projected for the 2019-20 year for Marlborough Elementary, down from the current enrollment of 449 students.

The referendum results revealed a number of voters agreed with Leser.

An exit poll question asking if the local school operations budget is too high revealed 200 voters thought 'yes' while 216 thought 'no.'

A total of 182 voters thought the town operations budget was too high, while 221 voters thought 'no.'

Despite 200 voters believing the local school budget is too high, Kelly said the Board of Education didn't hear these concerns from residents

during the budget season.

"The board had put out to the public there was an email address they could email [with budget comments]. There was no one who emailed – not even one person," Kelly said.

She said she was "thrilled" the budget passed after a season of "very little controversy."

Marlborough's contribution to the RHAM operations budget totals \$9.88 million, an increase of 5.78%, or \$539,543, over the current year. The \$172,308 capital budget is up by 120.5%, or \$94,164.

With an approved budget, First Selectman Amy Traversa shared not only her satisfaction, but also sadness over the budget season.

Board of Finance Chairman Douglas Knowlton passed away suddenly on April 1, leaving the remaining finance board members to see the budget season through.

"I miss my chairman; I miss my friend," Traversa said. "Susan will certainly fill his leadership spot, but it's been a sad season and I'm glad to see that it's been successfully completed."

RHAM Budget Passes on First Try

by Sloan Brewster

Tuesday, in three separate referendums, voters in each town that comprises the RHAM school district approved its \$29.63 operations budget and \$516,976 capital budget.

The district's operations budget passed in Hebron with 655 'yes' votes to 353 'no' votes. Andover officials tallied 138 'yes' votes and 96 'no' votes and, in Marlborough, there were 242 'yes' votes and 189 'no' votes.

The capital improvement budget passed in Hebron by a vote of 676-332, in Andover by a vote of 139-92, and in Marlborough by a vote of 256-174.

The budget will be spread between the three towns in the district. Hebron's levy will be \$14.95 million, Marlborough's will be \$9.88 million and Andover's will be \$4.47 million.

Schools Superintendent Patricia Law said she was "thrilled" with the passage of the budgets.

"The board worked, really hard to develop a budget that represents the needs of the district," she said.

The budget includes innovative technology for students, Law said. For example, classrooms will get updated white boards for shared learn-

ing opportunities.

Law was also pleased that voters finally responded to repeated appeals to fund capital needs to "make sure the building will be a quality building."

"I am incredibly appreciative that the board was able to recognize the needs and create a plan that the communities were able to understand," she said.

The day after the budget passed, Law and her staff started to contact vendors and firm up contracts to get work started on July 1, she said. Some of the projects may be completed by the start of the next school year, but major projects, including fixing problems with the media center heating, ventilation and air conditioning unit, may take longer as requests for proposals must be issued and they must go to bid

Throughout this budget season and last year as well, Law entreated voters to approve the repairs to the unit, often augmenting her point with complaints that "the media center smells."

Replacing the unit will cost \$325,100 and an additional \$85,000 will be spent to replace

the carpet. To make the fix more palatable, Law last month tweaked her budget request, taking \$269,494 out of surplus to partially fund the media center work and leaving the balance in the capital request.

The capital list also includes a \$132,000 air conditioning unit for the basement weight room and two classrooms, which Law – also throughout the past two budget seasons – has repeatedly implored voters to fund, describing hot and humid conditions students and athletes must deal with during the summer.

Another important component of the budget Law pointed to when expressing her satisfaction is funding for heightened safety and security measures, including locking the doors of the schools between 3:30 p.m. and 11 p.m., when athletic teams and outside organizations use the building and adding an alert system for the louder areas of the building.

Law has said the new monitor will admit people during scheduled events and will run \$28,618 at the high school and \$2,560 at the middle school.

Between about noon and 1 p.m. Tuesday, a slow stream of voters made their way to the polls in Hebron.

Jen Russell, a former teacher, voted 'yes' on the town and school budgets and said she trusted the boards of education and finance to make good budgetary decisions for the town and schools.

Michael Ferrero said that while he voted to approve the town's budget, he cast 'no' votes for RHAM's budgets and said among his concerns was that the RHAM budget continues to go up while enrollment is going down.

RHAM's total budget reflects a 4.12% increase over the current year – yet, according to Law, enrollment is projected to decrease over the upcoming five years. For the next school year, Law expects a decrease of about 62 students, 40 at the middle school and 22 at the high school. She anticipates 408 fewer students by 2023-2024.

"I don't have kids and our taxes are very high in Hebron and those kinds of things concern me," Ferrero said.

Colchester Police News

4/29: State Police said Nicholas Smith, 22, of 304 South Burnham Hwy., Lisbon, was arrested and charged with DUI and improper turns.

4/30: State Police said Michael P. Cordova, 40, of 27 Sunset Blvd., was arrested and charged with operating an unregistered motor vehicle, improper use of marker/license/registration, improper rear/marker lamps, use of drug paraphernalia and possession of controlled substance of less than one-half ounce of cannabis.

5/2: Colchester Police said Elizabeth A. Siler, 25, of 15 Stanavage Rd., Apt.2, was arrested and charged with risk of injury to child and disorderly conduct.

Two-Vehicle Collision in Hebron

State police said a rear-end collision was caused by a person who evaded the scene.

At approximately 4:13 p.m. on May 2, a Toyota Prius, driven by Katherine A. Swenson, 59, of 14 Stonecroft Dr. Apt. C3, was stopped in traffic on Route 66 prior to the intersection with Route 85, waiting to make a left turn on Route 85.

Swenson was subsequently rear-ended by an unknown vehicle that evaded the scene, police said. A description was not able to be obtained.

Swenson was transported by Hebron EMS to Middlesex Health Marlborough Medical Center with possible injuries.

Vehicle Stolen in Colchester

State Police are asking for the public help's in locating a stolen vehicle.

At approximately 4:46 a.m. on April 29, state police responded to a Reservoir Road residence for report of a stolen two-door, white Audi RS5 with tinted windows.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Troop K at 860-465-5400.

Stolen iPhone in Colchester

State Police are looking for a man who stole an iPhone on May 1.

At approximately 12:36 p.m., a man described as Hispanic, in his 20s, approximately 5 feet 9 inches, thin build and wearing a dark-colored hoodie, white shoes and baggy blue jeans walked into the AT&T Authorized Retailer located at 95 Linwood Avenue and stole an iPhone XR.

He was seen driving away in an older model 4-door silver Sedan, police said.

This is currently an active investigation.

Maguire Wins First Selectman, But Recount Looms in Andover

by Sloan Brewster

The town's new first selectman is Jeff Maguire....maybe.

Maguire, a Democrat, topped Republican Adrian Mandeville in a squeaker of a vote on Election Day Monday. Maguire won 264-249, a 15-vote margin that automatically triggered a recount, which Town Clerk Carol Lee said will take place next Monday.

Maguire said whatever way the recount goes, he will work for the town and do the best job he can.

"No matter what happens I will end up serving on the Board of Selectmen, it will be my honor," he said.

As per town charter, since Maguire and Mandeville each collected more votes than the lowest vote-getter of the Board of Selectmen candidates, they will each be on the board regardless of how the recount goes.

Maguire, who called the recount "a democratic process," said he will be happy to serve with Mandeville whichever of them ends up in the number-one seat – and said that on most issues they are on the same page.

"I'm very thankful for the people that voted for me," he said.

To those that did not vote for him, Maguire promises he is "still going to work as hard as I can for the people of this town."

Mandeville said he's looking forward to the new-look Board of Selectmen. Aside from Maguire, none of the board's current members sought re-election; Maguire and Mandeville will be joined by Democrats Eric Anderson and Scott Person, and Republican Jeffrey Murray. The new board members will begin their terms in July.

"I think we have a good board and we're all kind of looking to dive in and to getting some things done," Mandeville said. "I'm looking

forward. There's a lot of things that need to be addressed."

Mandeville said the members of the board would be putting together a to-do list for the town.

Mandeville elaborated on some of the items he feels need to be addressed.

He said finding a place for seniors is first and foremost on his mind. He also said he would support a plan championed by his new fellow board member Anderson to create a walking corridor on Route 316. Mandeville also said that he'd like to see a paving schedule created for local roads.

But, Mandeville stressed, determining what issues need to be addressed should "be a conversation that the whole board has."

If the recount confirms Maguire as the winner, Mandeville said "he'll do a good job."

As for current First Selectman Robert Burbank, he'll now get ready to say goodbye to the board after serving on it for the past 13 years.

With worries about board meetings and signing municipal documents soon to be a thing of the past, Burbank said Monday he plans to take some time to "relax and recuperate."

"I love the town of Andover; I've lived here for over 50 years, I've been involved with multiple boards," he said. "For that reason, I will miss [the Board of Selectmen]. I mean, I always want to do what's best for the town of Andover."

However, Burbank said that for the past couple of years, his fellow members of the Board of Selectmen have been difficult to work with.

In November 2016, Burbank was stripped of most of his responsibilities as first selectman when voters, at a referendum, agreed to change

the town charter and hire a professional town administrator to take over those duties.

In June 2017, Joseph Higgins was hired for the position. Since then, the board "has been extremely difficult and not a pleasure to work with," Burbank said.

Burbank said selectmen should do more of their own homework and not show up at meetings and request "nitpicky" information from the town administrator.

"They should be going in [to Town Hall] and getting information," he said. "Don't come to meetings and say 'We want this, we want that.'"

He said the town has not been run that way in the past.

Burbank also accused "certain members" of the board of not working for the benefit of the town, and instead serving their own interests, adding, "And that frustrates me."

"You should do what the majority of the town wants," he said.

As an example, Burbank mentioned the \$40 fee for stickers to go use the town dump, which the board enacted last year. Last month, the board agreed to continue the charge for a second year. Burbank was opposed and said the board should give voters the chance to consider the fees, instead of making the decision themselves.

"This should be up to the taxpayers," he reiterated in the phone call.

* * *

The Board of Finance results also triggered a recount, Lee said. In that race, three of the candidates were within one or two votes of each other.

Democrat Dennis Williams took in 285 votes, Democrat Louise Goodwin received 284 and Republican Diane Choquette got 283. Of the

other three candidates, Republican Linda Fish won 346, Republican Curtis Dowling received 318 and Democrat Marc Brinker tallied 244 votes.

Of the six who ran for the board, four will be seated, so the initial numbers give the win to Williams, Goodwin, Fish and Dowling.

All four of the Board of Education candidates who ran will be seated. Of the four current members whose terms were up, only Democrat Shannon Loudon, the current chairman, sought re-election. She will be joined by newcomers Democrat Daniel Foran and Republicans Steven Fuss and Amy Knox.

The terms for current board members Gerard Creme, Lisa Hewett and Cynthia Murray don't expire until 2021.

Of the three candidates that ran for the RHAM Board of Education, Democrat Stephanie Bancroft and Republican David Gostanian will be seated. Democrat Edmund Smith lost the election.

Also winning election Tuesday were: for Planning and Zoning Commission, Democrats Eric Anderson and Scott Person, and Republican W. Jed Larson; for Planning and Zoning Commission Alternate, Democrat Anne Peterson Creme and Republican George Knox; for Zoning Board of Appeals, Democrat Dennis Williams and Republicans William Desrosiers and Kathleen Skorka; for Zoning Board of Appeals Alternate, Democrat Gerard Creme; for Board of Assessment Appeals, Democrat Linda Armstrong and Republicans Penny Auer and Georgette Conrad; for Board of Fire Commissioners, Democrat Mark Williams and Republicans Wallace Barton Jr. and Curtis Dowling; and for Town Clerk, Carol Lee, who is unaffiliated.

Corrections to Election Previews in Andover

Several incorrect names were included in the story in last week's *Rivereast* previewing the Andover municipal elections ("It's Time to Vote in Andover," page 19).

The names were taken from the January story about the endorsed Republican and Democratic candidates. However, several of the candidates had changed since the January endorsements, and, due to an oversight, the story didn't reflect the names that were currently on the ballot.

The correct candidates were: **Board of Finance:** Democrats: Marc Jason Brinker, Louise H. Goodwin, Dennis Scott Williams; Republicans: Curtis Dowling, Diane P. Choquette, Linda Fish.

Board of Assessment Appeals: This was erroneously listed as a contested race. In reality, the candidates were Democrat Linda L. Armstrong and Republicans Penny Auer and Georgette M. Conrad.

Zoning Board of Appeals: Democrats: Dennis Scott Williams, Catherine A. Magaldi-

Lewis; Republicans: William Desrosiers, Kathleen D. Skorka.

Also in last week's *Rivereast*, a story profiling the Board of Education candidates ("Three Newbies to Join School Board," page 18) had incorrect party affiliations listed for three candidates. Daniel James Foran is a Democrat, and Steven D. Fuss and Amy L. Knox are Republicans.

Lastly, the letters to the editor last week broke with *Rivereast* policy by including two negative letters to the editor, which were attacking other candidates. Regular *Rivereast* readers know the paper customarily does not publish attack letters the week before an election, as that does not give candidates time to defend themselves. Due to an editorial oversight, the two letters were published.

"These were very embarrassing mistakes, and I feel they are highly uncharacteristic of the *Rivereast*," editor Mike Thompson said. "I deeply apologize to all of the candidates that were affected by them."

Obituaries

Marlborough

John Charles Duchon

John Charles Duchon, 75, of Marlborough, beloved husband of Marilyn (Meyer) Duchon, died Tuesday, April 30, at Middlesex Hospital. Born May 24, 1943, in Shamokin, Pa., he was the son of the late John and Loise (Lantz) Duchon.



John had worked as a physical education teacher for the Hartford School System until his retirement in 2007. John was an active member of the Bethlehem Lutheran Church in East Hampton and was active in the Marlborough Youth Athletic League for many years.

Besides his wife, John is survived by his son, Scott Duchon (Heather) of Marlborough; four daughters, Jennifer D'Alessandro (Ron) of Florida, Kerrie Totten (Shane) of Washington, Nicole Swerzewski (Robert) of Beacon Falls, Michelle Duchon of Danbury; a son-in-law, Josh Parmalee of Marlborough; a brother, David Duchon and his wife Jennifer Comer of Maryland; nine grandchildren, Zack, Martin, Nathan, Kale, John, Kayla, Dylan, J.J., and Jacob.

He was predeceased by his sister, Jackie.

Friends called at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Tuesday, May 7. A memorial service was held Wednesday, May 8, in the Bethlehem Lutheran Church in East Hampton.

In lieu of flowers memorial donations may be made to ALGSA in honor of John's grandson warrior Dylan Totten, who suffers from Alagille Syndrome. To make a donation, go to alagille.org or send to Alagille Syndrome Alliance, P.O. Box 22, Collierville, TN 38027.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Hebron

Christine Andrulitis

Christine Markwell Andrulitis, 56, of Hebron, beloved wife of David Andrulitis, passed away unexpectedly in his arms at home Wednesday, May 1. She was recovering from a recent surgery. Born Feb. 5, 1963, in Hartford, Christine now joins her father, Leon Keith Markwell, in eternal peace.



A wonderful and caring person, Christine touched everyone's lives. She leaves behind her husband, David, of 24 years; their daughter, Abigail Rose Andrulitis, who she loved immensely and was so proud of; her mother, Carole Markwell "Nonni"; her two sisters, Lynne Markwell and Kim Markwell; her nephew, Daniel Markwell; her aunt, Mary Lothrop; her uncle, Ron Kwiatkowski; her aunt, Judy Davies; and cousins. She also leaves close family friends, John Hurley and Raluca Opris. Christine also leaves behind some very special friends that were dear to her life: Shelley Neubauer and her family; Tracy and Jeff Standish, along with their son Sammy, who was her "little cutie patootie"; Suffield High School friends, including the "Soul Sisters"; Kelly Cunningham and Molly Cunningham (her "second daughter"); as well as Pat, Dave and Lauren Morency.

Christine loved the family dogs, Kona and Darla, and enjoyed walking them every day while meeting many people in the neighborhood along the way. She loved animals, especially llamas, vacationing in St. Maarten, the Denver Broncos, gardening, and participating in the annual bat colony monitoring count of the bat houses at home.

Christine had been working at Big Y in Marlborough since their opening in January and was looking forward to going back to work with her fellow co-workers in the Bakery Department. She was also very involved in volunteer work with the Friends of the Douglas Library in Hebron, the Suffield Auxiliary of the Village, the Suffield Community Aid, and several other local organizations.

Funeral services were held last week. Nicholson & Carmon Funeral Home had care of arrangements.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to: Friends of Douglas Library, 22 Main St., Hebron, CT 06248 or Suffield Auxiliary of The Village, 116 Mountain Rd., Suffield CT 06078.

To leave an online message of condolence for her family, visit carmonfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Patricia D. Brown

Patricia D. Brown, 84, of Colchester, passed away Monday, May 6, in Colchester. She was born in Middletown on Nov. 17, 1934, a daughter of the late Walter and Ruth (Dudek) Dawson.



Pat grew up in Colchester and graduated from Bacon Academy with the Class of 1952. She married her high school sweetheart, Frederick Brown, on Oct. 16, 1954. The couple raised their family in Colchester and became an intricate part of the community there. She was a member of the Colchester Bible Baptist Church.

Pat had a varied career, working as a reporter for the *Norwich Bulletin*, selling insurance for Gerhardt Insurance, and she also drove a school bus. Fondly known as the Clock Lady, she had a creative, artistic talent for sign lettering, clock design and painting. Most importantly, Pat will be remembered by her family as a devoted and loving wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother.

She will be sadly missed but always remembered with love by her husband Fred of 64 years; children and their spouses, Robert and wife Donna, Jonathan and wife Heidi, Kevin and wife Christina, all of Colchester, Karen and husband Thomas Hutchins of Salem, Deborah and husband David Hockman of Hanover, Pa.; a daughter-in-law, Heidi Brown of Colchester; two sisters, Judith Wozniak of Willimantic, Sharon and husband Gary Baack of Arizona; a sister-in-law, Geraldine Dawson of Colchester; 10 grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren and numerous extended family and friends.

In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by a son, Jeff Brown and a brother, Michael Dawson.

A memorial service will be held Saturday, June 8, at the Colchester Bible Baptist Church, 38 Chestnut Hill Rd., Colchester, beginning at 12:30 p.m. with visitation, followed by a memorial service at 1 p.m.

Donations in her memory may be made to the Colchester Bible Baptist Church, or to the Colchester Hayward Volunteer Fire Dept., 54 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, CT 06415.

The Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester has been entrusted with care of arrangements. For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Kimberly M. Pelletier

Kimberly M. Pelletier, 56, of Colchester, passed away suddenly Sunday, May 5, at Middlesex Hospital. Born in Middletown June 29, 1963, she was the daughter of the late Phillip and Mary (Reisinger) Merritt.



Kimberly married her beloved husband Michael Pelletier Oct. 30, 1981. The couple lived in Manchester for a time where she volunteered as a Brownie Girl Scout leader for her daughters when they were young. The family moved to Colchester in 1995. She was a member of the Westchester Congregational Church.

Kimberly had a long and successful career of nearly 30 years with the USPS. Most recently she was serving as clerk in the Storrs Post Office. She was a devoted wife and mother and an adoring grandmother. She will be remembered most fondly as a woman who was filled with love, never hesitating to reach out with a helping hand to anyone in need.

She will be remembered with love by her husband of 37 years, Michael; her children, Heather and her husband Michael Festa of Colchester, Erin Pelletier of Taftville; four grandchildren, Michael, Kaelyn, Anthony, Alenah; three siblings, Tyler and wife Ann Merritt of Wethersfield, Jayson Merritt of Middletown, Colin and wife Katrina Merritt of Cleveland, Ohio; and numerous extended family and friends.

A memorial service and celebration of her life will be held at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, today, May 10, from 5-7 p.m., with a funeral home service at 6:30 p.m.

Donations in her memory may be made to the American Heart Association at heart.org.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Marlborough

Theodore J. May Jr.

Theodore "Ted" J. May Jr. of Marlborough, beloved husband and best friend of Dolores M. (Vincenzo) May of Marlborough, passed away peacefully Tuesday, April 30, after a battle with ALS. He was born in New Britain and grew up in Newington. He was the son of Theodore May Sr., and the late Jean (Jones) May of Newington. He was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army as a medic with the 9th Infantry in Vietnam, and then stationed at Valley Forge General Hospital upon his return.



Ted was a resident of Marlborough most of his life and was active in the community, serving: The Marlborough Youth Athletic League, American Legion Post 0197, as a charter member of VFW Post 1344, various boards and commissions as well as 12 years as a town selectman. He was also a member of the Polish American Club, a lifetime member of the Disabled American Veterans and a leader in the state's Democratic Party.

Ted had a distinguished 40-year career in banking as a vice president of Connecticut Bank & Trust and Fleet Bank; as well as a senior VP of Citizens Bank, TD Bank and Farmington Bank. He was also an active member of: The Government Finance Officers of CT, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and the Council of Small Towns.

Ted is also survived by his sons - Theodore John (T.J.) May III of Reno, Nev., his wife Brooke and their children Cooper, Wylder, Rawlins, Ebbett and Jones; and Jason John May of Hope Valley, R.I., his wife Jenifer Strimaitis and their children Violette, Lucie, Albert and Bruce; Theodosia Logue of St. Louis, Mo., and her daughter Madeleine Brown. He also leaves behind his in-laws: Christine Vincenzo Walz and her husband Dan of Amston, Peter Vincenzo and Stephen Vincenzo of East Hartford; siblings, Linda Johnson and husband Gary of Dunedin, Fla., Thomas May of Newington, Richard May and wife Kim of Coventry and Laura Santomenno and husband Dan of New Port Richey, Fla.; as well as dozens of nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws and friends.

Ted was an amazing husband, father, grandfather and friend. He will be forever missed. Thank you to everyone who supported Ted and our family through this difficult time and horrible disease.

Services for Ted will be Saturday, June 15, at 9 a.m., at the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown, followed by a memorial Mass at St. Sebastian Church in Middletown. There will be a celebration of life at Ted and Dee's home following the Mass.

Donations may be made in Ted's name to: Roy Pettengill Volunteer Ambulance, P.O. Box 308, Marlborough, CT 06447; Marlborough Volunteer Fire Dept. P.O. Box 237, Marlborough, CT 06447; or ALS Association CT Chapter, 4 Oxford Rd. Unit E4, Milford, CT 06460 or alsct.org.

Newington Memorial Funeral Home, 20 Bonair Ave., Newington, is assisting the family. To share a memory with his family, visit newingtonmemorial.com.

Portland

Joseph P. Janowski

Joseph P. Janowski, 51, of Portland, son of Joseph C. Janowski and the late Jan Janowski, passed away Tuesday, April 30, in New York City. He was born May 6, 1967, in Middletown.

He leaves a son, Ryan Janowski of New York; a sister, Lori Janowski of New York; dogs Brody and Cody; and many aunts, uncles, cousins and friends.

He was manager of JJ Portland News for six years and a member of the Local 611 Laborers Union for over 10 years. Joe, as he was called by many, was known for his gregarious character and his ability to make people laugh. He was an avid Red Sox, Dallas Cowboys and UConn Huskies fan, a loyal friend and supportive father. He was especially proud of his son and best friend, Ryan. Joe will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

Relatives and friends called at the Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, Thursday, May 9. A memorial Mass will be held today, May 10, at 10 a.m., in St. Mary Church, Portland. Burial will be at a later date.

East Hampton

Kathleen Ellen Hansen

Kathleen Ellen (Minori) Hansen, 70, of East Hampton, beloved wife of Carl Hansen, died Monday, May 6, at Middlesex Hospital. Born June 5, 1948, in New York City, she had lived in East Hampton for many years. Kathleen had worked as a hospital I.V. technician until her retirement.

Besides her husband Carl, she is survived by her two daughters, Amy Hansen of Unionville, Jillellen Veazey and husband Chris of South Carolina; her three grandchildren, Allison, R.J., Ashley; and great-grandson, Dawson.

Friends may call at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, today, May 10, from 5-7 p.m. A funeral liturgy will be celebrated Saturday, May 11, at 2 p.m., in St. Patrick Church, 47 West High St., East Hampton, with burial to follow in Union Hill Cemetery in Middle Haddam.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Hebron

David Wilson

On Saturday, April 6, David Wilson of Hebron passed away peacefully at home. Dave was the son of Edward and Eleanor of Manchester. David was born and raised in Manchester and lived for most of his life in Hebron.

David is survived by brothers Alan and Donald Wilson; niece Samantha and nephew Daniel Wilson; and many friends.

Davis was a machine tool repairman at Design Resource & Services, Inc., in Middletown. David enjoyed four-wheeling, saltwater fishing and NASCAR.

The family will hold a celebration of his life at Three J's Café, 124 Boston Tpke., Bolton, on Saturday, May 18, from 2-6 p.m.

East Hampton

John William Bliss

John William Bliss, 87, of East Hampton, formerly of West Hartford and Tariffville, died peacefully at home with his family Sunday, May 5. Born June 21, 1931, in Hartford, he was the son of the late William and Ethel (Bowron) Bliss.

John proudly served his country in the U.S. Air Force, cherishing his time stationed in Germany. John attended Hillyer College and University of Connecticut, working as a chemist for the State of Connecticut until his retirement in 1986. He was a member of the Hartford Saengerbund and the Hartford Gun Club, and a collector of all things.

John is survived by his loving daughter, Victoria DeVeau and her husband Douglas of East Hampton, and his three beloved grandchildren, Iris, Elise and Devin.

He was predeceased by his two sisters, Ruth Bliss and Virginia Williamson.

A graveside service with military honors will be held Monday, May 13, at 2 p.m., in the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery on Bow Lane in Middletown. A funeral service will follow at 6 p.m. at Hope Church in East Hampton.

John's family extends eternal gratitude to Alisa, Cathy and Ruth for their compassion, patience, and humor — without them John could not have remained with his family.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Some very interesting data released last week by the state Department of Public Health (DPH) shows that, when it comes to vaccinating their kids, some *Rivereast* towns are a little lacking.

The state news website *CT News Junkie* last week reported that DPH, at the behest of the website as well as some state legislators, released data from the 2017-18 school year that showed immunization levels of kids at the state's public and parochial elementary and middle schools. According to *CT News Junkie*, some 116 public schools reported immunization rates for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) that were below 95% last year.

That percentage is important because, as *CT News Junkie* reported, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has determined herd immunity to be 95%. Herd immunity is described as a vaccination rate high enough to protect unvaccinated children.

And while the seventh grades at the middle schools in Colchester, East Hampton, Portland and the RHAM school district all exceeded that 95% threshold, it's a different story for area kindergarteners.

In Colchester, 92.9% of kindergarteners were reported immunized against MMR for the 2017-18 year. In East Hampton, the number was better but, at 94.3%, just below the herd immunity level. Hebron saw an identical 94.3% rate.

However, Portland, at 95.5%, saw its kindergarteners exceed the herd immunity threshold, and Marlborough scored a perfect 100%. (Because there were fewer than 30 kindergarteners reporting results in Andover, that school wasn't counted in the DPH list.)

While the immunity rates were certainly better than a lot of other towns in the state – some elementary schools in Hartford, East Hartford, Stamford and Bridgeport, for example, didn't even hit 80% – it would be nice if all *Rivereast* towns were at or above 95%. Heck, it would be nice if all towns in the state were.

For, as *CT News Junkie* reported, there have been legitimate measles outbreaks in five different states. Measles is a serious, potentially fatal disease – and there's no reason for it to be making a comeback.

Yes, we've all heard rumors of vaccines causing autism – but that's all that they are: rumors. Study after study – done both in the U.S. and abroad, by reputable agencies like the CDC – has determined this. And yet, thanks to the internet and celebrity anti-vaxxers like Jenny McCarthy, the myth continues to have an insidious amount of life.

Vaccines don't cause autism. That's been proven; it's a fact. And yet by not immunizing your children, you're putting them, and other children, at very real risk for diseases like the measles that were thought to be long since wiped out. What's next in the world of disease comebacks? Polio? Actually, that may not be so far-fetched; the DPH study showed that, a lot of the time, parents who hadn't vaccinated their kindergarteners against MMR hadn't gotten them the polio vaccine yet either.

In many of the cases where students had not been vaccinated, DPH listed religious exemption as the primary reason why. For example, in Colchester, 5.8% of students had a religious exemption excusing them from their vaccine, while just 1.3% had a medical exemption.

That led me to wonder: how many religions are there that are against vaccinations? The

answer is: not very many. According to historyofvaccines.org, a resource put forth by The College of Physicians of Philadelphia, of the major religions practiced in the United States, only two – the Church of Christ, Scientist (not to be confused with Scientology) and the Dutch Reformed Church – openly discourage vaccination.

The website did report that in Thailand and Indonesia, some Muslim religious leaders have come out against vaccines since, the leaders say, vaccines contain pork-derived products. (In Islam, consuming pork is forbidden.) But the site also said, "Islam in the United States, for the most part, has not opposed vaccination under the principle of necessity, meaning that vaccines are necessary for health, so they cannot be prohibited by religious law."

CT News Junkie said currently preschool- or school-aged children can present a statement saying they are not immunized because it would be contrary to the religious beliefs of the child or his/her parents or guardians.

But state lawmakers are making some serious noise about doing away with the religious exemption – and while I'm certainly not opposed to anyone expressing their religion, in this case it's a matter of public health.

Attorney General William Tong issued a written opinion Monday stating that "There is no serious or reasonable dispute as to the state's broad authority to require and regulate immunizations for children: the law is clear that the State of Connecticut may create, eliminate or suspend the religious exemption ... in accordance with its well-settled power to protect public health and safety."

Tong's written opinion was in response to a request by House Majority Leader Matthew Ritter, who was wondering about the constitutionality of removing the religious exemption for required immunizations. *CT News Junkie* reported Monday that Ritter said he plans to talk with the House Speaker, the House Minority Leader and the Senate President "about whether there's an appetite to get rid of the religious exemption this year."

Last month, a group of 44 lawmakers – 41 Republicans and three Democrats – publicly expressed their opposition to doing away with the religious exemption. In a letter to Tong, the group – which included *Rivereast* state Reps. Irene Haines (R-34) and Robin Green (R-55) – wrote that they felt eliminating the exemption would violate not just the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, but various provisions of the state constitution and state statutes as well.

It's worth noting that the letter was sent to Tong before the DPH data was released, which showed an alarming number of schools not reaching the CDC's herd immunity threshold. Hopefully that data has changed some of the lawmakers' minds.

Because, frankly, it should. I have serious doubts as to whether all of the "religious exemptions" truly have to do with religion – how many members of the Dutch Reformed Church are there in Connecticut anyway? – and instead are due to parents buying into the anti-vaxxers. But even giving them the benefit of the doubt, sometimes the well-being of the majority has to prevail. The potential reemergence of thought-vanquished diseases is a public health issue. It needs to be treated as such.

Please, parents: vaccinate your children.

* * *

See you next week.