

# The Montague Reporter

YEAR 21 – NO. 15

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EDITOR@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG

THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

MARCH 2, 2023

**INQUIRY**

## It Takes... *Creating a Village*

By LEE WICKS

**MONTAGUE** – The lightbulb at the top of the stairs is flickering. The bulb needs to be changed. Not too long ago, this was an easy chore: get out the stepladder, and get going.

In my mid-70s, this is no longer true. I don't like ladders or unscrewing the light fixture overhead, nor can my husband and I get to all the smoke detector batteries. And then there's the loose doorknob – who do we call on for help with such small jobs?

When families were larger and members were not so dispersed, a network of aunts and uncles, parents and grandchildren could often step in to help an elderly relative. There are some local agencies serving elders – Councils on Aging, senior centers, and LifePath, an Area Agency on Aging – but it can still be hard to find help with home upkeep, transportation, and technology.

Without support, some elders have to leave their homes and move in with relatives, or to see **VILLAGE** page A4



GLENN STOCKTON PHOTO

Bert Fernández volunteers his services fixing a post.

**ERVING SELECTBOARD**

## Erving Pushes Grade School To Cut Costs Amid Shortfall

By KATIE NOLAN

There is a \$789,000 gap in Erving's draft budget for FY'24. Expected revenues from taxation, state aid, and free cash are lower than the projected expenditures. On Monday night, the selectboard and finance committee spent two hours considering causes of the gap in the \$14.8 million operating budget, and figuring out what to do about it.

The school committee requested \$3.9 million for Erving Elementary School, an increase of \$541,355 over this fiscal year.

"Our entire new revenue capacity for this fiscal year is absorbed by the change in the elementary school budget," said selectboard chair Jacob Smith. "Almost 100%. Which leaves nothing else able to go up, if that doesn't go down."

"It's impossible to balance without the school participating," said selectboard member Scott Bastarache. "Cuts should be town-wide," said finance committee chair Debra Smith. "You can't pit departments against departments."

The board asked school committee chair Jennifer Eichorn and member Erik Semb to consult with the full committee and Union #28 school superintendent Jennifer Culkeen, and revise the elementary school budget.

see **ERVING** page A8

**MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD**

## Tavern Liquor License Will Transfer to Shea Theater

By JEFF SINGLETON

The February 27 meeting of the Montague selectboard began with a hearing on the Shea Theater's application for the transfer of a full liquor license from Hubie's Tavern, owned by Shawn Hubert, which has recently been sold to a bookstore company that does not plan to serve alcohol.

The board had extended Hubert's ownership of the license several times in the past year to allow him to find a new owner, but selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz had expressed concerns about the transfer to the Shea, and stressed the need for a public hearing and vote.

As the hearing began, town administrator Steve Ellis noted that under the town's state quota, no other all-liquor licenses and only one beer-and-wine license are currently available.

Christopher "Monte" Belmonte, the president of the Shea Theater Arts Center (STAC), which operates

see **MONTAGUE** page A7

## New Affordable Homes Proposed On First Street



KUHN-RIDDLE ARCHITECTS IMAGE / MONTAGUE REPORTER COLLAGE

Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity answered Montague's RFP with a plan to build six single-family homes on what is now a town-owned parking lot.

By JEFF SINGLETON

**TURNERS FALLS** – The town of Montague may soon see the construction of its first new affordable housing units in over a decade, according to an announcement from new town planner Maureen Pollock. The right to build the housing on First Street was awarded by the selectboard Monday night to the Florence-based non-profit Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity (PVHH) on the recommendation of the town planning board, which directed the bidding process.

PVHH, the only builder that responded to a request for proposals (RFP) issued by the planning board in December, is proposing to construct six separate single-family homes on what is currently an un-

derutilized parking lot across from the town hall. Five of the houses will be two stories, and called "visitable," while the sixth will be only one story and fully handicapped-accessible.

"All homes will be deeded affordable, in perpetuity; and they will be required to be owner-occupied," according to the press release. The affordability would be ensured via deed restrictions.

The "anticipated time line" for the project, according to PVHH, envisions construction beginning October 2023 and first three units be completed in June 2025, if the project is awarded state funding under Mass-Housing's Neighborhood Stabilization Program. The remaining units would be completed in May 2026.

A completion date of only a see **HABITAT** page A2

## Sludge Disposal Problem Squeezes Local Budgets

By SARAH ROBERTSON

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – It is becoming significantly more difficult and expensive for western Massachusetts municipalities to dispose of sewage sludge, the by-product of wastewater treatment often referred to as "biosolids."

The Franklin County Solid Waste Management District (FCSWMD) will see the average cost of sludge disposal increase by 35% in the next fiscal year, according to execu-

tive director Jan Ameen. Nine local towns represented by the FCSWMD pay to truck their sludge to the Duck Island Wastewater Treatment Facility in Lowell, perhaps the last facility in the state that will accept the wet sludge produced by their small, aging wastewater treatment plants.

"We just have no leverage," Ameen said. "They are the only disposal outlet that we have access to, that we can get in."

Disposal options are limited in see **SLUDGE** page A4

**FOLLOW-UP**

## Area's AirBnB Sector Small, and Flourishing

By NATAN COHEN

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – Since the early 2010s, thousands of people have rented short-term lodging in our towns, almost entirely through AirBnB. The impact of the pandemic, along with rising costs and shrinking availability of housing, led us to revisit our September 2017 investigation of the local short-term rental industry.

Some things have stayed the same since then, but many more have changed.

For one, the number of active short-term rental properties in our coverage area has apparently de-

creased from 25 to 19 in searches for rentals available anytime through the following summer. This downward trend is mirrored in many Massachusetts towns and cities, including the Boston area, according to rental analytics company AirDNA, who show a mere 11 local listings active last month. Nationwide, active rentals are increasing briskly, but have yet to exceed pre-pandemic numbers.

This news may come as a surprise to those who have seen or heard of a May 2022 report by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) stating that the number of short-term rental properties across see **AIRBNB** page A5

## High School Sports Week: Tech Defends Voc Crown

By MATT ROBINSON

**TURNERS FALLS** – The Small Vocational basketball tournament concluded this week with the Franklin Tech girls winning the state championship for the second consecutive year.

In other tournament play, the Turners Falls Thunder Ladies won a PVIAC consolation game, but lost to the Renaissance Phoenix in the opening round of the MIAA Division V competition.

The Turners cheer squad, which consists of athletes from both schools, also saw their season come to an end. The Leaders came in second place last weekend down in Easthampton, just 3 points behind the first-place team.

In cheerleading only the first-place team advances to regionals, so the TFHS Cheerleaders have to hang up their pompoms until football season, but they earned another trophy for their overflowing display case.

see **SPORTS** page A6

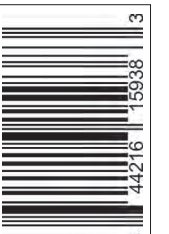


DAVID HOIT PHOTO

Franklin Tech senior Jill Crowningshield drives the lane during the MVADA Small School Vocational Tournament championship game in Turners Falls last Sunday.

**Who Dares Coordinate the Volunteer Coordinators**

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# The Montague Reporter

"The Voice of the Villages"

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**Founded by**  
Arthur Evans Harry Brandt David Detmold  
August 2002

## HABITAT from page A1

month later was assumed if the project does not receive Mass-Housing funding.

The proposed affordable units would sit in one of two special overlay zoning districts approved by Montague town meeting in May 2022 under the state law Chapter 40R. The other district is the former site of the Railroad Salvage building on Power Street, rebranded as the "Griswold Mill Subdistrict" after the original cotton mill.

The original vision presented to the 2022 town meeting for a project on First Street was for a large, multi-unit dwelling consisting of some "affordable" units, as defined under Chapter 40R, and some market-rate units. In the conceptual drawings, the project resembled the row houses that originally lined the street, similar to the surviving building on Third Street known as the Cutlery Block, built for workers of the John Russell Cutlery factory.

Under that concept, the building would have sat on two lots, one now owned by the town and the other privately owned. PVHH's proposal accepted by the planning and select boards is located only on the town-owned portion of the overlay district, and does not resemble the 19<sup>th</sup>-century row houses but instead consists of six separate homes on separate parcels, all deemed affordable under the Chapter 40R criteria.

The houses PVHH plans to sell may, in fact, be more "affordable" than some rental housing deemed as such under Chapter 40R, which takes 80% of the regional median income – for a family of four in Franklin County, \$75,300 – and calculates "affordable" rent at 30% of that, or \$1,882 per month.

According to its proposal, PVHH works with potential homebuyers whose annual income is "between \$30,000/year and 60% of the Area Median Income" – or \$56,460, for a family of four – to make a subsidized-interest USDA mortgage a "good fit." The maximum sale price for a home would be \$200,000.

Some sample calculations were included. For buyers at the low end of the income scale, assuming a \$125,000 sale price and a \$1,000 downpayment, the combined monthly payments for mortgage

and taxes, factoring in interest rate subsidies, would be only \$678.

The *Reporter* asked assistant town administrator Walter Ramsey, who advocated for the overlay districts as town planner in 2022, about the difference between the concept presented to town meeting and the proposal secured through the First Street RFP. Ramsey responded in an email:


"The 'mixed-income' approach is better suited to larger developments like the potential development at 11 Power Street. The scale of the First Street property aligns better with a small scale affordable home ownership model. While under the Smart Growth bylaw, only 25% of the units in the district are required to be affordable, the RFP requires ALL units on First Street to be affordable in order to attract a qualified vendor and to maximize the creation of affordable home ownership units at this site."

Pollock emphasized that the proposal and the process for implementing it are still in the early stages. "The plans that PVHH provided are only conceptual," she told the *Reporter*. The organization will now be required to submit a more detailed plan, which would be reviewed by the planning board in a public hearing.

For the preliminary proposal, the planning board's criteria focused on the financial capacity and experience of the applicant, and its recommendation was unanimous. "The town of Montague has a positive experience working with Habitat for Humanity on previous affordable housing projects," said Ronald Sicard, the board's chair.

At Monday's selectboard meeting no questions or concerns were raised, and the board voted unanimously to endorse the planning board's recommendation.

"It's a great project, and it's one of your first major things, so it's good to see it happening," selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz said to Pollock. "And it occurs to me that we are going to have to clean up that side of town hall just a bit so they have a nicer view."

"Oh can we please?" town administrator Steve Ellis could be heard saying in the background. 

## CORRECTION

Our February 23 article on the Montague Center branch library (*Page A1*) incorrectly identified the branch librarian as Anna Greene. Greene retired in 2020. Kate Martineau is the current librarian, and gave the presentation described in the article about authors' talks and art exhibits. Thanks to the several readers who pointed this error out to us! We should really have caught that. Apologies to our readers, and especially to Ms. Martineau.

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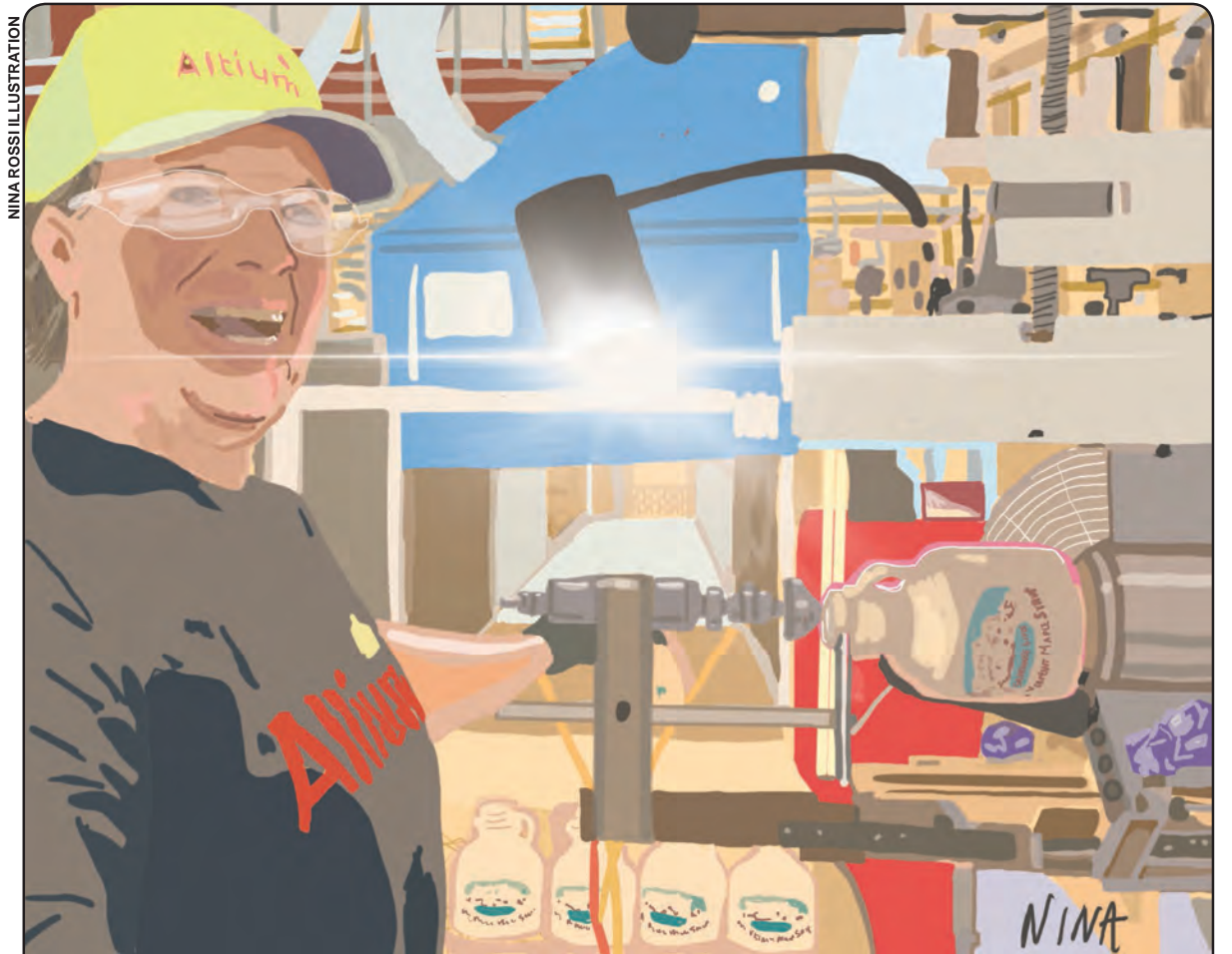
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with any questions.



Deb Fradette has worked in the printing and packing department of Altiun in Turners Falls, formerly Hillside Plastics, for 18 years now. She will use up to five colors on one label of the maple syrup containers the company makes. Each is placed by hand onto a machine for a silkscreen to roll over it and impart the ink through a stencil, and then placed onto a conveyor belt and packed into boxes for shipping.

## Letters to the Editors

### Tree 'Massacre' on Turners Falls Road

I recently traveled down Turners Falls Road and was shocked to see hundreds of trees, mature and young, cut to the ground along a four-mile stretch from Montague Center to the public safety station in Turners Falls. This includes the trees that lined the front of the Elm Grove Cemetery, trees in yards, and trees on the edge of the forest along the Montague Plains. I have since learned that similar cutting has been done along other roads in Montague.

I presume this was done to clear vegetation from the zone of the utility lines, but it was much more extreme than is typically done. Trees 50 or 100 feet away from the utility lines were cut to the ground, instead of simply trimming the branches reaching toward the lines.

Many of these trees were two or

## Montague Library Question

It has been many years since I have been in the old building and can't recall the staircase in it. But cannot a commercially rated stair-mounted lift be installed at a much lower cost than proposed elevators and manually-operated lifts?

Jerry Sears  
St. Louis, MO

four times older than I am, probably 75 to 150 years old in some cases, and have lived their entire lives in relatively peaceful coexistence with the power lines. I don't see why they should suddenly have been slashed to the ground.

I contacted various town authorities in an effort to figure out who approved this. Tree warden Mark Stevens did not respond directly to my message, but town planner Maureen Pollock was able to get in touch with Mark and called me back to explain that he reported that the tree-cutting plan was initiated by Eversource to clear vegetation from the zone of the power lines.

Stevens claims that except for in front of the cemetery, all the cutting was on private property, and landowners signed off. He claims the town's right-of-way jurisdiction only applied to the trees at the cemetery, which he authorized to be cut down because they were "basically dead anyway." I looked at those trees last summer and they seemed alive to me.

I find it hard to believe that the town has no jurisdiction over any of the other trees that were cut. If we truly don't, something should be changed so that in the future we do have a say in how roadside vegetation is maintained. If private landowners who abut the road were informed of this plan and agreed to it, then they should be ashamed. If they were not properly informed, Eversource should be held liable.

I also checked with David Det-

mold, chair of the Montague tree advisory committee. He says the committee was not informed about the plan by Eversource, and thus had no say or input in how it happened. Speaking as a citizen as opposed to the chair of the committee, David noted that the tree advisory committee is "doing what it can to plant 600 trees along Montague streets under the terms of a five-year US Forestry grant, but during the same timeframe, the utility company cuts down 6,000 more."

One way to require public hearings before any future roadside tree removal would be to designate roads as "scenic" under Chapter 40, Section 15C of MA law. I think town authorities should look into this for better protecting the trees along Montague's roads.

Trees help to mitigate climate change, provide shade, provide wildlife habitat, and enhance the beauty of our town and planet. They should not be cut away with impunity without balancing these considerations. The massacre on Turners Falls Road should not have been allowed, and every effort should be taken to make sure that utility companies use a more judicious approach to protecting their lines.

I predict the loss of trees on Turners Falls Road will outweigh gains from efforts to plant new street trees in Montague for many years to come.

Ryan Voiland  
Montague Center

**WE WELCOME  
YOUR LETTERS!**

ORIGINAL CONTENT ONLY, PLEASE  
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177 Avenue A  
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Compiled by NINA ROSSI

**Raptor rehabilitator Tom Riccardi needs help.** A large pine blew down into one of the enclosures and damaged another at Tom's raptor rehabilitation facility. A saw-whet owl and two great horned owls were killed. Donations are needed to reconstruct and expand the enclosures as soon as the tree crews can make the area safe.

Those interested in donating can send a check or money order to the Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Center, PO Box 26, Conway, MA 01341. The facility is a nonprofit, and contributions are tax-deductible.

**Looking for free tax return assistance?** The Gill Montague Senior Center still has appointments available with AARP volunteer tax preparers who provide in-person tax assistance to anyone, free of charge, with a focus on taxpayers who are over 50 and have low to moderate income. There is no AARP membership requirement. Volunteers are trained and IRS-certified every year to make sure they know about and understand the latest changes and additions to the tax code. Call (413) 863-9357 for an appointment.

Due to the ice and cold last Saturday, the Erving Conservation Commission postponed their **winter tracking hike with David Brown** to this Saturday, March 4 at 9 a.m. Wear warm clothing, cleats, yaktrax, snowshoes with cleats; trekking poles are also necessary. Meet in the parking lot on Old State Road, Erving at the Poplar Mountain conservation area.

Head to the **monthly book sale** at the Carnegie Library in Turners Falls from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. this Saturday, March 4 and peruse the hundreds of recent donations of fiction, paperbacks and kids' books, DVDs, CDs, and audio books. Call (413) 863-3214 for more information.

Would you like to immerse your senses in Spring? Head down to the Lyman greenhouses at Smith College to wallow in the perfume of **8,000 flowering bulbs**, including daffodils, hyacinths, tulips, freesia, fritillaria, and muscari. The show runs from this Saturday to Sunday, March 19. Hours are Sundays through Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Entry is free, with donations appreciated.

Dr. Margaret Bruchac of the Nulhegan Abenaki will give a free talk this Saturday, March 4 from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls titled "Native Memories: **Recovering Pocumtuck Histories in Franklin County.**"

The UPenn associate professor of anthropology will explore how "local Native histories are better understood by critically analyzing colonial documents, revisiting Indigenous landscapes, and dismantling myths and stereotypes that push Native people into the vanished past," and answer questions from the audience. Presented by New England Public Media and the Nolumbeka Project.

The Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association is sponsoring a **free painting workshop** this Sunday, March 5 from 1 to 3 p.m. at 10 Memorial Street, Deerfield. Learn how to create landscapes with the River Gallery School sequencing approach. All materials are provided; the class is suitable for both teens and adults. Register at [www.tinyurl.com/PVMApaint](http://www.tinyurl.com/PVMApaint).

Join **Música Franklin at a community concert** on Monday, March 6, from 6 to 6:45 p.m. at the Sheffield Elementary School in Turners Falls. This staff and student performance is held in honor of Women's History Month and will feature music by Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Natalie Cole, Ruth Schontal, and Camila Cabello. This con-

cert is free and open to the public.

The next **Writers Read event** at the LAVA Center in Greenfield features Paul Richmond, Thomas Ratte, and Vanessa Query next Wednesday, March 8 at 7 p.m. Richmond's work has been described as political, deadpan, and wryly humorous. Ratte is a wordsmith who studied with Will Roberts, and Query is the manager at the Center and a director, writer, organizer, and performer.

The Gill-Montague Senior Center in Turners Falls is offering a one-day workshop on **creating Ukrainian pysanky eggs** on Thursday, March 9 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The workshop will be presented by pysanky artist Carol Kostecki and is free and open to the senior public.

All supplies and equipment will be provided to create these intricately decorated eggs with dye-resistant techniques, and attendance is limited. Call the Center at (413) 863-9357 to sign up. The snow date will be Thursday, March 16.

Looking to stretch those legs in a **5K for a good cause?** The Treehouse Foundation is having a fundraising 5K at the Northampton Airport on April 23. Treehouse is an intergenerational community in Easthampton where those who have experienced foster care, foster-adoption families, and older adults form a community of care. If you sign up for the race by March 10 you will get a free beanie. Find out details and sign up at [www.treehousefoundation.net](http://www.treehousefoundation.net).

Next Saturday, March 11 at 5 p.m., local historian and *West Along the River* columnist David Brule will deliver a presentation on **Northfield's role in King Philip's War** in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

"King Philip's War in Your Backyard: from Sokoki to Peskeompskut, 1675-1676" centers on events that occurred during King Philip's War in Northfield and the region of the Peskeompskut falls, which is now the towns of Greenfield, Gill, Montague, and Deerfield. Brule will review the context of the war, revisit local events that marked the history of our region, and share findings from studies of the massacre and counter-attack that occurred at the Peskeompskut falls (now known as Turners Falls) on May 19, 1676.

The talk will be held at the Trin-

itarian Church at 147 Main Street in Northfield, and is free and open to the public. For more information about this presentation and a complete list of Northfield's 350th Anniversary activities, visit [www.northfield350.org](http://www.northfield350.org).

Also on Saturday, March 11, the **Montague Common Hall Open Mic** series continues, featuring special guests singer Beth Raffeld, pianist Molly Flannery, and bassist Michael Dunning as well as a full evening of musicians and other performers.

Raffeld is an accomplished singer of jazz, folk, and blues, and Flannery is a major player on the highly competitive Boston jazz scene. The Open Mic welcomes and appreciates both emerging musicians and seasoned performers, and performers sign up for slots by 6:15 p.m. Time slots will be determined at random. Come prepared to perform for 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the turnout, and bring your own food and drink. Donations are welcome.

On Sunday, March 12 there will be a **vaccine and booster clinic at the Erving Public Library** from noon to 3 p.m. You can receive a \$75 gift card, while supplies last, for getting vaccinated or boosted for COVID. Flu vaccines are also available. Sign up at [home.color.com](http://home.color.com).

A series of writing workshops called "**Unproductive Behaviors: a queer writing circle**" begins March 19 at Looky Here, a community art space in Greenfield. The focus is on generating new work in 100-word vignettes, a method popularized by feminist scholars like Lauren Berlant and Dr. Kim Tall Bear. This is a three-Sunday series from 3 to 5 p.m. on March 19, 26, and April 2, and there is a fee of \$30. Find out more at [lookyheregreenfield@gmail.com](mailto:lookyheregreenfield@gmail.com)

The **Rainbow Elders are looking for a Group Facilitator.** This is an eight-hour-a-week position at \$22 an hour for someone who will plan, promote, and facilitate LGBTQIA+ older adult gatherings and training with input from participants and a steering committee. A full job description is available at [www.lifeathma.org](http://www.lifeathma.org).

Send your local briefs to [editor@montaguereporter.org](mailto:editor@montaguereporter.org).

**PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**

# Spring Youth Baseball Registration Now Open

**TURNERS FALLS** – Calling all sluggers! The 2023 Newt Guilbault youth baseball league in Turners Falls is open for Spring Season registration now until Saturday, March 11. Registrations can be completed online or can be printed and mailed in according to instructions on the League website.

Practice begins in April, with games running through May and June. All players aged 5 to 12 are welcome to join regardless of skill level. Note that 12-year-olds may register as long as they turn 13 after May 1.

The League includes the beginner coach-pitch Rookies, with Saturday morning games played at home at 27 Crocker Avenue in Turners Falls, or away in the nearby towns of Winchester and Hinsdale, New Hampshire; Vernon, Vermont; and Northfield.

Rookies typically practice Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Crocker Avenue fields from 5 to 8 p.m. Parents are asked to stay for practices, and are encouraged to volunteer as able to help with coaching or other needs.

The League is entirely volunteer-run, and is

supported by local businesses, concession sales, and player fundraisers. No child will be turned away for lack of funds.

The more advanced Majors level is kid-pitch. They play against other Newt League Majors teams at the League fields at 27 Crocker Avenue. Practices and games are generally held Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 5 to 8 p.m. in Turners Falls. The Majors also play a few Saturday morning scrimmages in Hinsdale.

Dates and times are subject to change due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances.

For information and regular updates, and to sign on to the League mailing list, visit [www.newtguilbaultleague.org](http://www.newtguilbaultleague.org) or the Facebook page. For further questions, contact League Secretary Lesley Cogswell at (413) 522-1508. The mailing address is PO Box 189, Turners Falls, MA 01376.

Hot and cold concessions are sold at most Majors games, with proceeds going to the League's financial aid fund. Parents are encouraged to volunteer to help.

Newt Guilbault invites youth to join in healthy, small-town fun this spring where kids

can meet new friends, build confidence, and develop new skills. All players are expected to sell calendar raffles, which feature gift certificates to local businesses and cash prizes, and to participate in the opening day celebration, to be held this year on Sunday, April 23.

The purpose of the Newt Guilbault Community League is to shape youth into fine adult citizens by holding up the highest ideals of sportsmanship and fellowship. League coaches and officials promote the development of loyalty, honesty, and courage first and foremost.

In the spirit of community welfare and student development, each year the Newt Guilbault Community Baseball League offers the Frederick S. Lego Scholarship in the amount of \$500 to a graduating senior from Turners Falls High School or Franklin County Technical School who played on the League for at least four years. Application information is posted on the League website.

If your spring calendar is already full, stay tuned for Fall Ball sign-ups this summer.

Newt Guilbault is affiliated with the Cal Ripken Division of the Babe Ruth League, Inc.

**44th ANNUAL Artspace Market**  
 Saturday, March 4th  
 10am- 3pm Greenfield High School  
 21 Barr Ave, Greenfield, MA 01301  
 Local artisans, family activities, youth music performances, & door prizes  
**FREE ADMISSION!**

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC TREE HEARING**  
 Gill-Montague Senior Center,  
 62 5th Street, Turners Falls  
**Date:** March 15, 2023  
**Time:** 6 p.m.  
**Location of Trees:** 201 Ave. A  
 28" Cherry, 34" Oak, 26" Maple  
 Tree Warden Mark Stevens

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## SLUDGE from page A1

Massachusetts, where most nearby landfills and incinerators are at capacity, and legislators are considering a ban on the land application of biosolids over fears it could be linked to chemical contamination of groundwater.

The FCSWMD's costs could increase again this summer after the Lowell facility renews its sludge hauling contract, which is currently out to bid. The cost of running the Duck Island plant has increased by about 53% over the last three years, according to Ameen.

"I do ask them to moderate increases, but there just comes a point where there isn't anything we can do," Ameen said. "They need to cover their costs, too." Sludge from Greenfield, Erving, Orange, Sunderland, Deerfield, Hadley, Hatfield, and Ashfield is shipped to Lowell.

Lowell dewateres the sludge and, in turn, contracts with Casella Waste Management to haul the resulting "cake" to landfills in Maine, New Hampshire, Canada, and elsewhere.

## VILLAGE from page A1

assisted living facilities. Yes, there are handymen and neighbors who would willingly help, but can a community band together to offer the support once available through extended family?

This is where the "Villages" enter the picture. Some of our surrounding towns have created a network of volunteers who field requests and match people in need with those who have the skills and desire to help.

Village Neighbors, serving Leverett, Shutesbury, Wendell, and New Salem, belongs to the national Village to Village Network, and works with LifePath and local Councils on Aging.

According to the Village Neighbors website, the vast majority of older people in Western Mass want to "age in place," or continue living in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Village Neighbors helps provide transportation, technical support, home repair and maintenance, companionship, social opportunities, and grocery shopping to help keep elderly people in their homes.

In our area, some of the Villages are free to users, thanks to annual fundraising and grants. All rely on the hard work of their founders, board members, and volunteers.

Starting a "village" and maintaining all of its daily organizational details is not easy. Don Stone, who lives in Leverett and serves as the treasurer of Village Neighbors, says the group met for two years to define its goals, set up bylaws, incorporate as a non-profit, secure insurance, and more. A \$15,000 grant from LifePath helped with the Village Neighbors startup.

A Village needs someone to field the calls and match each request with a volunteer, and those volunteers must be vetted and insured before they walk into someone's home or drive a person to an appointment.

Even with the best of intentions, accidents can happen. It is nearly impossible to hang a picture in my house without cracking the plaster walls. Most automobile accidents happen close to home. Insurance is necessary, says Stone, and represents a good piece of the group's annual budget.

Now in operation since 2018,

Casella also uses some biosolids to make fertilizer and soil products.

In July 2021 Casella ended a contract with Erving Industries, which operates the town's POTW #2 treatment plant, over concerns that chemicals from the paper recycling plant could be contaminating the company's fertilizer products. For years, farms in Greenfield, Hatfield, Sunderland, Northfield, Westfield and elsewhere throughout the state spread fertilizer made using biosolids from the paper mill.

The chemicals of concern are per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, a class of thousands of toxic synthetic materials used widely in commercial goods. PFAS contamination of drinking water and farmland has been linked to biosolid-based fertilizers in Maine, Vermont, Michigan, and Westminster, Massachusetts. Last year, Maine became the first state in the country to completely ban the land application of biosolids.

Last month members of the Massachusetts Water Environment

Association (MAWEA), a nonprofit representing wastewater treatment industry professionals, met with the state Department of Environmental Protection to discuss the issue.

"If land application is banned, then there needs to be new outlets for it," MAWEA executive director Mickey Nowak told the Reporter. "They need a master plan for biosolids so that things can be done in a controlled manner, and not chaos. And it looks like we're heading towards chaos, where towns will not be able to get rid of biosolids."

About 40% of all sludge produced in Massachusetts is land applied, Nowak said, though most is also shipped out of state.

"In the future we're going to have to ship things farther and farther," he said. "If we don't accept [land application], then how is it moral to then ship it off to Ohio or Alabama?"

## Squeezing Out Costs

Greenfield mayor Roxanne Wedegartner mentioned the rising cost of sludge disposal during her annual

"state of the city" address this week. Greenfield's city council recently approved spending \$3.6 million on a new dewatering press and other upgrades to the municipal wastewater facility on Deerfield Street.

"This project will go a long way toward meeting the costly annual challenge of removing and handling sludge from our wastewater," Wedegartner said.

It is hoped that the machine, by squeezing more water out of the plant's residual sludge, will save the city about \$350,000 per year in hauling costs, according to city hall. Greenfield spent less than \$170,000 disposing of its sludge in 2016. This expense increased to \$510,000 in the FY'22 budget, and \$622,000 in FY'23.

"For Greenfield, it's a no-brainer to put in dewatering equipment," Nowak told the Reporter. "They should have done that ten years ago.... Shipping liquid is by far the most inefficient way to handle sludge." Nowack estimated that the

see **SLUDGE** next page

Village Neighbors has about 180 members and 105 volunteers. Membership has been increasing by about 20% per year, according to Stone.

There are six members on the board, and Mary-Ann Palmieri, a board member who lives in New Salem, says they are looking for more. She said volunteers from each of the four towns often help members in towns they don't live in. She has not personally needed to use the services very often, she says, and mostly serves on the administrative level as a call manager, the person who puts members needing services together with volunteers.

I ask if there's been a time when a request could not be filled. "We almost always have tried to find someone to fill a request," she replies. "Once we got a request for a ride to New York, and decided that was too far. Generally, we let volunteers be the judge of what they will do. If no one offers, then a request is not filled."

People requesting help need to enroll as members. Some Villages charge a membership fee, while others fundraise to cover program costs. Village residents can be both members and volunteers, depending on their abilities and needs – for example, someone may no longer be able to clean gutters, but can cook or provide companionship. With the help of the Village, this person can give and receive valuable services that help them to age in place while remaining active, enjoying socializing and meeting new people.

"Volunteering is like therapy for me," says Russ Greco, master carpenter and head of the group's Small Repair team. "I hope to get as much from it as the people I'm trying to help. We all struggle to maintain our relevancy at this age, and doing this work is the only way I know how outside of my family."

Creating a structure for what might in other times have been a natural exchange comes with a cost. Don Stone says last year's operating budget was \$22,000, with a surplus of \$3,800. "This past year, 2022," he adds, "we raised about \$7,000 from grants and \$15,000 from donations. We stopped charging membership fees in 2020."

Village Neighbors sends mail to households in its four-town coverage area to build awareness, recruit



*Volunteer Don Stone serves as treasurer for the Village Neighbors association serving four local towns.*

new members and volunteers, and seek contributions. In addition to these appeals, a membership renewal mailing in April brings in some voluntary donations.

"We consider these mailings as major fundraising efforts," says Stone. "This coming year we are hoping to hire a half-time administrative assistant, which will add \$25,000 to \$30,000 to our budget, so we have increased our effort and strategies." The group seeks to locate state resources through contact with representatives and senators, and they are seeking more substantial donations and pledges from the

local community and businesses, and applying for grants. Several members and volunteers have stepped up to help in this effort.

It seems like a lot of work for small but essential services – until one looks at the alternative. Most of my friends are as old as I am. I can't call them to change a light bulb. I am lucky to have a nearby grandchild, but he'll be off to college soon. The contractor who helped us maintain our home for more than 30 years retired and moved to Florida. I bet he's living near the plumber and electrician who also retired, along with my former primary care physician and dentist.

Montague is a close community with many intergenerational families, but I suspect there are still plenty of people who would benefit from a Village, if we had one. In case you are wondering, I checked, and Montague can't simply join the four towns in Village Neighbors. They have all that they can handle. Too bad, since starting up is the most labor-intensive time.

At present, there is no Montague organization like Village Neighbors – but that could change, if enough people are interested in creating one. Montague is surrounded by towns that have Villages and people experienced in forming one, and the people involved are happy to share what they have learned.



## FURTHER RESOURCES

To learn more about the national **Village to Village Network**, go to [www.vtvnetwork.org](http://www.vtvnetwork.org).

**Village Neighbors** has a comprehensive newsletter outlining many available options and activities. Membership is free. [www.VillageNeighbors.org](http://www.VillageNeighbors.org) or (413) 345-6894.

**Valley Neighbors**, serving Whately, Deerfield, and Sunderland, offers transportation, tech help, companionship, social opportunities, grocery shopping, light home and garden chores, and small repairs, for free. [www.ValleyNeighbors.org](http://www.ValleyNeighbors.org) or (413) 453-9057.

**Northfield Neighbors at Home** serves Northfield and offers help around the house or yard, transportation, tech help, companionship, and social opportunities. There's a membership fee of \$60/individual, or \$90/household. [www.NeighborsAtHome.org](http://www.NeighborsAtHome.org) or (413) 200-8183.

**Petersham Partners** offers transportation, home repair and maintenance, companionship, grocery shopping, and assistance with opening, reading, and sorting mail. (978) 724-0078.

**Amherst and Northampton** also have neighbor-to-neighbor associations: [www.amherstneighbors.org](http://www.amherstneighbors.org) and [www.northamptonneighbors.org](http://www.northamptonneighbors.org).

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**SLUDGE** from previous page  
 machine could reduce the 250 truck-loads per year of sludge Greenfield ships to Lowell to 75.

Montague's wastewater plant acquired a new dewatering press in 2021. According to superintendent Chelsey Little, the town anticipates spending \$318,000 on sludge disposal in FY'24. The town has recently restarted its practice of accepting sludge from neighboring communities for a fee.

"It started a few weeks back, so there's no guarantee that this will be something that will continue into next fiscal year, but Chelsey and I are hopeful that it will," Ameen said. "Having Montague as at least a backup facility would be extremely helpful."

Montague is also studying the feasibility of starting its own biosolids composting facility, a project with the potential to reduce disposal costs for neighboring towns. The town is working with an engineering firm on a trial composting project, with a final report expected in June 2024.

"The thing about composting is they have to find a place to put it," Nowak said. "There has to be land application, and it looks like the

state of Massachusetts in the next year or two is going to ban the land application of biosolids."

However, Little said, the facility may still be valuable even if the compost is not used as fertilizer. "Even though there have been national concerns with PFAS, the composted biosolids could see a reduction in volume of up to 80%," she explained. "We would reduce the amount that is hauled, which will ultimately reduce the cost for disposal."

**Turning Off the Tap**

State officials are waiting on the US Environmental Protection Agency to release new drinking water standards for PFAS, expected later this month, before drafting proposed biosolids regulations.

Little told the *Reporter* that in her view, banning the land application of biosolids is not the right solution, as it will mean removing beneficial organic material from the planet's nutrient cycle.

"The biosolids are not the problem," she said. "The unregulated companies making a profit off of producing environmentally harmful chemicals are where our efforts should go.... I am worried that once the companies and consumers stop

making and using 'forever chemical' products, the damage will be done in turning biosolid re-use into a 'forever fear.'"

Last legislative session, state senator Jo Comerford introduced a bill that attempted to "turn off the tap" by banning the sale of consumer goods manufactured with PFAS in the state, but it stalled in the senate's Ways and Means committee.

This session she introduced another bill, SD.311, "An Act protecting our soil and farms from PFAS contamination." The bill would limit the amount of PFAS allowed in biosolids-based soil or fertilizer, and require products with detectable levels of PFAS to come with a warning label. It would also absolve farmers of liability caused by PFAS in soil, water, or agricultural products as a result of standard practices, and establish a relief fund for those affected by contamination.

"While it isn't an outright ban on land application, it could be a *de facto* ban, if the limits are so strict or the warning labels discourage anyone from using it," Nowak said of the proposed law.

With dim prospects for land application becoming a more viable sludge disposal option, communi-

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ties are struggling to find alternatives. Environmental groups are organizing against a proposed sludge landfill in Gardner and a proposed incineration facility in Taunton.

Ameen, the FCSWMD director, said that if more facilities in western Massachusetts were as capable of dewatering sludge as the Montague plant, it would go a long way

towards solving the sludge disposal crisis.

"If there was an opportunity to have three local – or regional, or at least west of I-495 – disposal facilities, that would be a game-changer," Ameen said. "We have all our eggs in one basket, and that basket keeps getting more expensive."



**AIRBNB** from page A1

Franklin County had increased by 42% since 2019. The report illustrates the increasing number of properties that have been registered with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Revenue as short-term rental entities. However, this number does not necessarily take into account properties that have since stopped being rented, only rent a few days a year, or have never rented at all.

"We asked how many reported zero income for the year, but they couldn't give us that," said Andrea Donlon, senior land use and natural resources planner at FRCOG, who co-authored the report.

The existence of this data is itself another major change in Massachusetts. In July 2019 the state Department of Revenue began registering short-term rentals and taxing them at a rate of 5.7%.

"Signing up for the tax was easy," said Deborah Frenkel of Lake Pleasant, who has been renting rooms in her house on and off since 2010. "AirBnB just sends you a link, and you fill out your information." The tax is then collected from the guest and delivered to the state by AirBnB itself.

The 15 towns that are a part of FRCOG's Cooperative Public Health Service, which includes Gill, require each AirBnB host to register for a permit and have their property inspected by the service. Three properties are currently permitted in Gill.

Randy Crochier, FRCOG health district program manager and a Gill selectboard member, highlighted the importance of this process. "You're in the business of selling safe housing," he said. "Many properties around here are on private wells; some have pools and hot tubs available to the consumer that would count as a semi-public pool, subject to additional regulation."

Most hosts have been understanding of the process, according to Crochier: "It protects them as well." However, a few applicants across the service area have been unable to receive permits due to housing code violations.

Calls to town officials in Leverett, Montague, Erving, and Wendell confirm they currently have no process for registering or inspecting short-term rental properties.

About half the towns in Franklin County have opted in to an additional 6% tax to lodging transactions. These include Gill, which has had the tax since 2010, and Leverett, which implemented it in 2019, but not Montague, Erving, or Wendell. In 2022 Gill collected \$4,021 in room taxes, while Leverett raised \$701.

According to AirDNA, average daily rental

rates for a full unit have increased gradually across Franklin County since January 2018, from around \$200 per night to around \$280. These increases surpass Hampshire County's more modest prices and the national average, due to a move from interest in small apartments to larger, more rural houses, which can bring higher rates.

**Pandemic Changes**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about changes for everyone hosting on the platform. Many people we spoke with who were renting single rooms stopped entirely until the spring of 2021 when vaccines became widely available.

"There was a period when no one wanted to make \$80 a night to have a random X-factor come in and cough all over your kitchen," said Adam Bauer, who offers rooms occasionally in Leverett.

Some were able to receive pandemic relief for their small business. Others found themselves renting their space long-term to a friend or relative who needed a place to stay, such as Judith Lorei, whose mother-in-law now lives upstairs.

"When lockdown happened, a cousin who was in law school in New York City needed to get out, and moved in with me," Frenkel shared. "Later, when I started renting again, someone who asked to stay for a month ended up becoming a tenant for a while."

Edite Cunha, who rents out rooms in downtown Turners Falls, said she only started renting again in 2022. Even then she turned off the automatic booking feature AirBnB encourages hosts to use.

"Now people would have to send me a message saying what they needed," Cunha said, "and I have the opportunity of asking them about their COVID vaccination and things like that."

James and Lisa Mussoni of Turners Falls, who were among the first in the area to rent out a whole apartment, had a different experience. "Actually, the pandemic made us busier than ever," James Mussoni said. "Partly because other people were closing, and also there was a lot of pent up isolation. People just wanted to get out, but they wanted to go someplace safe. We were COVID-certified through AirBnB, which means we followed the cleaning protocol they put down."

The Mussonis' unit is almost constantly rented. They continue their commitment to keeping their rental affordable and boosting local businesses as much as possible, including distributing gift cards offered by the Ren-

dezvous restaurant. "We've barely raised our prices over the years," said James Mussoni, "It's my own little stand against inflation."

**Financial and Social Benefits**

AirBnB continues to be both a financial and a cultural boon to many local residents who rent single rooms in their houses.

Several people interviewed by the *Montague Reporter* were aging in homes they had owned for decades and wanted to keep but could not afford on their own. "I've always had housemates, because I own my house but I can't really afford to live alone," said Frenkel. "I started doing AirBnB intermittently. It was a great way to meet interesting people."

Bauer had similar thoughts. "It seemed like a good idea," he said, "both for opening up the window of kismet for possible new connections, and of course an extra revenue stream never hurts."

Some hosts who rent single rooms only have people stay for occasional weekends. Others prefer stays of several weeks or even months, filling a niche formerly held by boarding homes and hostels. This approach guarantees some amount of income while carrying less risk and complication than renting long-term. And, like in Frenkel's case, favorite guests sometimes become official tenants after a getting-to-know-you period.

According to the hosts we spoke with, people choose to stay in local AirBnBs for all kinds of reasons. Most are here for mundane purposes like graduations, weddings, music festivals, visiting family, skiing and hiking, scientific research, or jumping out of airplanes. Some are stopping over on road trips from major cities to far-flung locations west and north.

A rare few have more exotic plans. "One time we had a really fascinating group of visitors," Bauer recounted. A group messaged on a Thursday asking to rent the whole house for the weekend, which Bauer reluctantly agreed to, minus his own room. "They were barely here," he said. "Finally, on Sunday, I learned a bunch of them were C-suite executives at a big New York City crypto firm. They had come up to do a series of ayahuasca ceremonies nearby."

*Montague Reporter* features editor Nina Rossi, who stopped listing her extra bedroom in Turners Falls on AirBnB after her partner moved in during the pandemic, once had a less-hallucinatory guest, if only barely.

"This guy from China who was an Emily Dickinson scholar was here for a 24-hour marathon reading of her poetry that happens once a year," Rossi said. "He traveled around

on an electric unicycle. He had this huge pack with all his supplies, and a bluetooth setup for GPS directions." The man rode his unicycle all the way to Amherst at 4 a.m., making sure to first ask Rossi whether there were any bears he needed to watch out for along Route 63.

**The Crunch, and the Criticism**

Each host we spoke with acknowledged the crisis of available and affordable housing.

"It's the shadow side of living in a social system which is capital-driven and profit-driven," opined Bauer, "Sometimes it helps make some people a lot of money, but at the expense of other people's well-being or the social health of the community at large. I think we all pay for that."

Frenkel expressed some mixed feelings about using the service. "I see the housing crisis that we have in the state and in our area," she said. "People who have apartment units that they exclusively AirBnB contribute to this problem. I understand why people do it financially – it can be lucrative, and lower maintenance than longer-term tenants – but I also think it's a big problem. Especially in the eastern part of the state, but also here."

In November 2022 *Time* magazine published an article, titled "Too Many Rich People Bought Airbnbs. Now They're Sitting Empty," that echoed a growing chorus of concern that the service has led to too many properties sitting empty while many people cannot find or afford permanent housing.

"This is affecting the entry-level apartments," Crochier offered. "I saw a situation where a group sold several apartments, and almost 50% were turned into AirBnBs. That's a trickle-down effect that just keeps going. The housing crisis does not get easier when you take these units off to get an AirBnB."

Of the eight hosts we reached out to who offer entire apartments for rent on AirBnB, only the community-minded James Mussoni would speak with us this time, either on or off the record. This is another change from 2017, when most hosts were happy to share their experiences.

"I see a lot of greed as far as profiteering [off AirBnBs], especially after COVID," said Mussoni. "I think in this area in particular there is more demand than supply. There's no really good hotels, unless you want to stay down by the rotary, or up on the Mohawk Trail. I think that's one of the issues with Franklin County that we need to look at, as far as economic development goes: getting more places for people to stay and come visit."



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## NOTES FROM THE GILL SELECTBOARD

## Gill Debates Stricter 'Stretch Code'

By JERRI HIGGINS

A hearing about a proposal to make Gill's building code require greater energy efficiency took up over half of the town selectboard meeting Monday evening.

Energy commissioner Claire Chang said her commission recommended the adoption of a new "specialized stretch code." The town has operated under "stretch codes" since joining the statewide Green Communities program in 2012, which means it goes beyond Massachusetts's "base" building codes in energy-efficient requirements in order to help the state meet its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050.

Chang introduced Chris Mason, the Green Communities representative for Western Massachusetts, and Nate Connors, a licensed Home Energy Rating System (HERS) rater under MassSave's residential construction program.

Using a slide presentation from the state Department of Energy Resources, Mason gave an overview of separate stretch code updates for low-rise residential buildings effective since January 1, as well as new rules for commercial and multi-family units beginning July 2023 and residential units by July 2024.

The energy commission recommends Gill adopt the "Municipal Opt-in Specialized Stretch Code" for mixed-use and all-electric residential units. Mason's presentation touched on what this would mean for new commercial construction, as well as what kind of additions or alterations would trigger the new codes.

"The specialized code is trying to aim for thermal demand reduction, electrification preparation, and solar," he said.

Mason said homes built in the 1800s and 1900s might have a 140 HERS rating, and homes built in the early 2000s are typically around 100 HERS. "The lower the number, the tighter the building is," he explained. "If you get down to zero, it is what they call a zero-energy home – you're not using any more energy than you produce on site."

Mason said the average home built since 2018 has a HERS rating of 51. The specialized stretch code had required a HERS rating of under 55; in January that changed to 52, and by 2024 it will be reduced to 42, though higher ratings are allowed based on the source of fuel. The new rules also require ventilation for energy recovery and electrical wiring capable of supporting electric vehicle charging.

This would all be required of any new residential building under three stories, any additions or alterations of over 1,000 square feet or half the existing floorspace, or a changed use from residential to commercial.

"What do you call commercial?" asked selectboard member Randy Crochier. "If I take my house and I put it as an AirBnB, that is a commercial use."

"It will probably go by the meter configuration," replied Connors, who said he would ask for clarification.

"That's not for the entire house – that is for the addition?" asked board member Greg Snedeker.

"Technically speaking," said Connors, "there is no such thing as a rating on just an addition.... That

is the main question that everybody has. The Department of Energy Resources will get back to us once it has been clarified."

Crochier said he did not agree with "most of" the proposed specialized code, and criticized the program for making residential building more expensive and dependent on state rebates. "Buildings are meant to breathe," he added. "Somebody pops a window open, and we just changed the entire HERS rating."

"Once you tighten up a house enough, you control the air coming in, the same way we do with water now, with pipes," said Mason. "That allows you to make it an incredibly comfortable house – you no longer have any drafts."

Mason also argued that energy-efficient building was a sound investment. As most homeowners take out mortgages, he said, "the ongoing constant cost for owning a home is the mortgage cost and the energy cost," and because energy prices fluctuate more than mortgage payments, investing in a more energy-efficient building shell is "putting your money in a less risky place." Energy savings, he added, should make it easier to pay off a mortgage of a house built to the new code.

"I am going to call bullshit," Crochier said. "Twenty years ago, when I built a house, I did not know what my income was going to be today. But I also couldn't have afforded to put in my energy savings for the next 20 years by building it then."

Mason said tax rebates and other incentives will make it less expensive for builders to build all-electric homes. Crochier responded that these costs are "upfronted," with builders receiving the rebates later, and called the system a "shell game."

Snedeker said that while he understood Crochier's position, he was aligned with the state's efforts to "get our energy use down." He noted that recent jumps in electricity rates have thinned already-stretched budgets.

"We are small, and we are not a wealthy town, and our tax base is what it is," Snedeker said, adding that he would like "bigger towns to lead the way."

No vote was taken. Chang said she would like to figure out a timeline of when the specialized code would be enacted, and the requirements of a warrant article for either the annual town meeting or a special town meeting.

**Fire Department**

Deputy fire chief William Kimball told the board he has revamped the fire department's fee schedule to reflect the newest National Fire Protection Association regulations. He said several categories were separated out under the new schedule, and that the new fees will go into effect July 1.

Crochier asked that the department make sure the fees reflect the costs of the work involved in inspecting businesses, conducting tests, and issuing permits. He made a motion to adopt the new fee schedule, "with the caveat that they are just reviewed somewhere in the first year." This was unanimously approved.

The department applied for a \$35,350 fire prevention grant, which would be used to purchase two thermal imaging cameras, replace gas meters and all of the nozzles on the

engines, and buy two electric vent fans. These would replace one engine's gas-powered fan and add a fan to the tanker engine, which Kimball said does not have one.

If awarded, the town's share would be \$1,683.33.

A second regional grant application in conjunction with the Greenfield fire department would mean \$212,089.50 for repeaters and radios: six sets for Greenfield, and three for Gill. Kimball said the cost to the town of Gill would be \$3,366.50 – "about \$1,100 a vehicle, as opposed to \$40,000 if we were to buy them outright," he said.

A request to create a fire prevention revolving fund, beginning in FY'24, was also discussed.

**Appointment or Election?**

The board discussed changing the town treasurer and tax collector from elected to appointed positions. Many towns seem to be moving toward more appointed positions, but the configuration that works best seems to remain a question.

Crochier said the town clerk's workload could become much greater if the positions were appointed, but that anyone can now be elected to the positions, which runs the risk of financial ruin for the town if unqualified people are elected. "We do not think about all the different moving parts," he said, "and just how much the tax collector and the treasurer are responsible for."

Snedeker said he believed the conversation was important to keep the issue "on the radar" for residents, and that alerting the public to this issue "gives you a groundswell of people to start reaching out to find somebody who would be a good candidate to run."

"Ultimately," he added, "the town will vote on it."

**Other Business**

With much cheering, the selectboard unanimously approved a recommendation by Purington for the position of administrative clerk: Tim Batchelder, a resident on the Northfield Mount Hermon campus.

Purington described Batchelder's service in the Massachusetts Army and Air National Guards, his former work as a police sergeant and as temporary acting police chief in Leverett, and college coursework in law and policing as making him a good fit for the assistance he needs.

Purington was unanimously approved to sign the town's FY'24 heating oil contract with Sprague Operating Resources, with two one-year renewal options. The motion also approved locking in up to 2,500 gallons of heating oil. The delivery markup is \$0.3718 per gallon for the daily spot price, and \$0.4718 per gallon for the fixed price.

Purington said that the town is part of a group bid process managed by the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative (LPVEC), which "has worked out well for us in the last 10 years or so." Crochier disclosed that his son works for the LPVEC, but said he does not have anything to do with fuel contracts.

Gill's recycling rate between July 2021 and June 2022 was calculated at 43.5%, Purington reported, "the second highest among the roughly 20 towns of the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District."



DAVID HOITT PHOTO

Left to right: Hannah Gilbert, Lea Chapman, and Kendra Campbell celebrate Franklin Tech's 67-25 Small School Vocational championship win over the Blue Hills Regional Tech School Warriors on Sunday.

**SPORTS from page A1**

TFHS 51 – Mount Greylock 40

Renaissance 44 – TFHS 22

Last Thursday, the visiting Turners Falls Thunder defeated the Mount Everett Mounties 51-40 in the PVIAC Western Mass consolation round.

Blue rebounded from a 15-11 first quarter deficit with a strong defensive effort in the second, holding the Mounties to just 3 points in the period while putting up 12 of their own. After an even third quarter, Blue finished strong and won the game going away, 51-40.

Taylor Greene led the attack with 23 points, with Steph Peterson and Madi Liimatainen (8 each), Raygan Pendriss (6), Morgan Dobias (4) and Keira Richardson-Meattey (2) scoring points in the victory.

On Monday, the Thunder Ladies lost to the Renaissance Phoenix 44-22 in the preliminary round of the MIAA state tournament. I did not attend this game, but was getting live updates via Twitter.

Powertown was down by five after one period, and at halftime it was 17-13, still anybody's game. But Turners imploded in the second half eventually losing 44-22.

After the game, Coach Jim Cadran explained what happened. "We were right in it halfway through the third quarter," he said. "Then Madi [Liimatainen] got banged up, and we with low numbers, they pressed us and we ran out of gas."

Monday's game was a team effort for Blue. Only four points separated the six scorers: Greene (6), Liimatainen (5), Dobias (4), Peterson (3), and Richardson-Meattey and Abbi Holloway (2 each).

The loss does not diminish the feats the team accomplished this season. Despite losing bodies to sickness, injuries, and bad grades, the Thunder finished with a winning record, qualified for two tournaments, and rebounded from a loss in the PVIAC.

FCTS 46 – South Shore 27

FCTS 67 – Blue Hills 25

Last Friday, meanwhile, Franklin Tech advanced to the Small Vocational state finals with a 46-27 win over the South Shore Green Vikings of Hanover.

It took a while for Tech to outmatch the Vikings. After an even first period, Franklin led 11-9. Then the Birds took over. In the second quarter the Eagles played ball-control for the entire eight minutes, holding the

visitors to zero points. Green had difficulty inbound and then moving the ball out of their own back court. As a result, they gave up possession on several three-second and ten-second violations.

The Vikes scored 10 hard-fought points in the third while holding Tech to 7, but in the fourth the Lady Birds put it away, opening up a 25-point lead before settling for the 46-27 victory. Surprisingly, only five Eagles scored. Hannah Gilbert (23) hit the long shots, sinking three 3-pointers, and also led the team with five assists. Lea Chapman scored 10 points, grabbed 15 rebounds, made 11 steals, and blocked five shots. Franklin's other point-scorers were Kendra Campbell (9), Kaitlin Trudeau (3), and Lilianna Inman (1).

On Sunday the Eagles successfully defended their championship title with a 42-point win over the Blue Hills Warriors of Canton.

It was a rough game. Six seconds after tip-off, Tech committed a foul and the Blue Hills went ahead 1-0. Twelve seconds later the Hills committed one of their own. Brute force seemed to be the Warriors' game plan, as they simply did not have an answer for Tech's playbook. But as they blocked and bumped, they accrued more and more fouls. By the first buzzer, the Hills had nine team fouls, and Tech was comfortably on top 24-5.

In the second quarter, Coach Joe Gamache was able to rest his starters, and began sending in wave after wave of relief players. At the half, Tech led 35-13 and most of the Warriors were in foul trouble. The relief players held their own, implementing the same rabid defense the starters had. When most of the starters re-entered in the fourth, they began hitting 3-pointers. The rest of the game was gravy, and Tech went on to win the Small School Vocational State Title for the second consecutive year.

This was a total team effort by the Eagles. Eleven players grabbed rebounds, with Chapman leading the flock with 12, and nine scored points in the win: Chapman (16), Campbell (15), Gilbert (13), Kyra Goodell (7), Cordelia Guerin (6), Jillian Crowningshield (4), Inman (3), Kitana Rodriguez (2), and Trinity Doane (1).

And the playoffs are not over yet. The Eagles travel to Fitchburg this Thursday to challenge the Saint Bernard Bernardians in the second round of the MIAA state tournament.



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## MONTAGUE from page A1

the town-owned theater, was identified as “manager” on the transfer application. He said the Shea sought to help Hubert recoup some of his losses caused by the pandemic, and wanted to add another “line item” to its refreshment offerings during public events.

“We would not be a bar,” Belmonte said, explaining that the plan is to add “either a pre-batched cocktail, or a higher-ABV cocktail at a higher price point” to the current offerings of beer and wine in the theater lobby. He noted that as attendance grew “coming out of the pandemic,” the Shea had decided to hire a bar manager with bartending experience.

“Sounds straightforward to me,” said board member Chris Boutwell, later noting that he generally did not vote on liquor licenses to avoid the perception of having any conflict of interest as a salesman for the product.

Board member Matt Lord said the Shea already had a track record of alcohol service, and that he was comfortable with the transfer.

Kuklewicz expressed strong reservations about the transfer, arguing that the Hubie’s license was the only full-liquor option in town, and might be needed by someone wanting to start a restaurant which would require a full bar. “I think the license has more value to the community in a more traditional establishment,” he said.

He also said he had a “philosophical concern” with an all-alcohol license at a publicly owned facility.

Belmonte replied that while the Shea was a public facility, STAC has been financing significant renovations using its own money, and the added alcohol options would be a way to increase that revenue.

As it became clear that Kuklewicz would vote against the transfer and Lord in favor, the decision of the three-member board fell to Boutwell. Kuklewicz, despite opposing the transfer, urged Boutwell to vote. “I think that it is important [that] the community hear the entire board on this one,” he said.

The board then approved the transfer by a two-to-one vote.

## Regional Detective

Police chief Chris Williams came before the board to ask that it endorse a request to the Northwest District Attorney’s office that Montague detective Jacob Lapean be moved from a part-time to a full-time position at the DA’s anti-crime task force.

Williams said the town would get a higher reimbursement for sharing an officer with the task force full-time, which is defined as three eight-hour shifts a week, and that Montague would also receive a higher percentage of revenue generated by “seizures.”

Lapean would continue to work for the Montague department two days a week and would “still be on call,” according to Williams. “Having him on full-time, he would have influence on how many investigations happen in Montague,” the chief added.

Kuklewicz said that he had read a “synopsis” of the task force’s activities. “These sorts of things really cross the borders of communities,” he said, “so by assisting a neighboring community, there’s really a positive effect on our community.”

Lord asked whether the work on the task force might leave the Montague department short-handed

in the future. Williams responded that the arrangement with the DA’s office was flexible, and that under the memorandum of understanding the town must approve, Montague could easily withdraw from the task force if there was “a problem.”

The board voted to endorse Williams’s request to the regional DA to assign Lapean to the task force for three eight-hour days a week.

According to Williams, the name of the force was changed from the Anti-Drug Task Force to the Anti-Crime Task Force in 2013. The unit still focuses on drug trafficking, but “it’s also guns, human trafficking, and other major felonies,” he told the *Reporter*.

**Chief Williams said Montague would get a higher reimbursement for sharing a ‘full-time’ officer with the DA’s anti-crime task force, and would receive a higher percentage of the revenue generated by ‘seizures.’**

The website of the regional DA describes the task force as helping “local law enforcement agencies identify, investigate and prosecute illegal narcotics offenses, unlawful firearms offenses, gang-related crimes, major crimes, human trafficking and other organized criminal activities.”

Though the website says the task force, which includes state police officers, is comprised of “law enforcement officials in the 47 communities of Hampshire and Franklin counties and the town of Athol,” a spokesperson for the DA’s office said the number of departments contributing officers is significantly smaller, varying from year to year.

## Federal Money Pumps

Perhaps the longest discussion at the selectboard meeting was prompted by an agenda item, inherited from the board’s previous meeting, to review a long list of potential uses of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. Discussion of the list, which had been created by assistant town administrator Walter Ramsey, was delayed for another week after the board became immersed in the complexities of using ARPA money to finance new screw pumps at the Clean Water Facility (CWF).

Ellis introduced Ramsey’s list by recalling that the board had provisionally allocated \$800,000 in ARPA funds for the screw pumps, which are estimated to cost \$2.5 million. At the same time, a special town meeting this Thursday will vote on whether to approve \$2.5 million in borrowing for the pumps, required as part of an application to the federal Department of Agriculture (USDA) for a loan and grant that would cover the entire cost.

The grant is expected to reduce the federal loan amount by 30% to 70%, but the town will not know the percentage until after the application is submitted.

Ellis said he had recently been warned by a USDA official that allocating \$800,000 in ARPA funds to the project would effectively reduce the funding request to the USDA to \$1.7 million, and thus reduce the “grant amount,” a per-

centage of that request. Allocating the ARPA funds now would therefore make Montague eligible for less grant money, but also mean a smaller loan to pay back.

Montague would not be allowed to use the ARPA funding at that point in the process, since it cannot be used to pay off debt.

Kuklewicz suggested redirecting \$300,000 to finance a “septage receiving station,” another item on Ramsey’s list, and one that could generate revenue. This would leave the screw pumps with \$500,000 in ARPA funding.

Lord questioned why any ARPA funding should be spent on the screw pumps at all, since doing so would reduce the grant portion of the USDA funding.

Though Kuklewicz then declared support for Lord’s position, the board did not vote on the issue, deciding to bring in CWF superintendent Chelsey Little for further discussion.

## Planning Department

The board granted a request from town planner Maureen Pollock to award the RFP for new affordable housing on First Street to Habitat for Humanity, as recommended by the planning board. (See article, Page A1.)

Pollock also requested that the board place an article on the May 4 annual town meeting appropriating \$13,100 to match a state grant to update Montague’s Comprehensive Plan to address “climate resiliency.”

The board did not take a vote on that issue but, after a public hearing, voted to transfer \$4,000 from the town’s “community development unallocated fund” to cover the match for the current fiscal year, with the expectation that the fund will be “replenished,” in Pollock’s words, by the town meeting article.

## Other Business

The selectboard, in their role as the personnel board, was scheduled to vote on a job description for the new “collection systems lead operator” position overseeing the town’s sewers, but delayed the vote until the concerns of the appropriate union, the United Electrical Workers, had been resolved.

The board then briefly discussed a “split” between the department of public works (DPW) and the CWF to fund the position, which is in the DPW. It voted to fund the job from the general fund public works budget for the first year, and monitor the number of hours the employee dedicates to each department during that year.

Ellis reviewed the status of the leading candidate for town health director, who as a citizen of the Turks and Caicos Islands will need a special H-1B visa, which the employer must apply for. Ellis said he had contacted the legal firm Curran, Berger & Kludt of Northampton, which specializes in immigration law, to assist with the process, which involves an initial lottery.

The board approved a payment of \$2,051 to the Berkshire Design Group for design work on the Hillcrest School neighborhood playground project.

It also approved a series of Monday dates from May through July for rehearsals and performances by the Montague Community Band.

The next selectboard meeting will be held Monday, March 6.



## LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

*Here’s the way it was on February 28, 2013: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.*

### Montague Center Residents Pack Zoning Hearing

A planning board hearing Tuesday night turned contentious as residents of Montague Center opposed to an apartment project slated for the former Center School building accused town officials of “auspicious timing” in proposing changes to the town’s zoning bylaws.

The current bylaw requires all dwellings to be at least 700 square feet. Last October the zoning board of appeals granted developer Mark Zaccheo a variance on that requirement, which is now facing a potential court challenge.

The focus of the hearing was Section 5.4.7 of the zoning bylaws, which may need to change to comply with a state statute prohibiting zoning law from regulating the interior of single-family buildings.

Citing a growing demand for single-bedroom apartments, town planner Walter Ramsey and building inspector David Jensen suggested striking the bylaw or modifying it, either by reducing the figure to something like 500 square feet or allowing exceptions to be made by special permit, and specifying it applies to multiple-family buildings.

Ten Montague Center residents in attendance made it clear that for them, the 22-unit condo project was the main issue. Roy Rosenblatt of Center Street challenged the timing of the proposed changes, arguing that they would create “if not a legal, a moral defect” in the request-for-proposal process for the school building.

Sam Lovejoy of Main Street called for the planners to focus on reforming the zoning map rather than the bylaws, and to “not shove down the throats of a more rural community the tendencies of what goes on in downtown Turners Falls or Millers.”

## 20 YEARS AGO

*Here’s the way it was on February 27, 2003: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.*

### Growing Pains on Farley Road

Vincent Senetore, CEO of Lake Grove at Maple Valley, Inc., told the Wendell board of health on Monday that his school will appeal an emergency order requiring a reduction in population, but that he is committed to working with the town to address its concerns.

Officials from the treatment center for sexually deviant youth met briefly with the board prior to an executive session to discuss potential litigation with town counsel.

The recent growth in the school’s population has been an ongoing concern for the board, who say 91 current residents represent an excess of 30 students beyond

the septic system permit limitation. The order was issued after the septic system at the Deerfield Dormitory failed last year. Lake Grove has since discontinued use of that leach field and installed a tight-tank system at the Deerfield dorm that must be pumped every few days, and will submit a plan by March 1 to replace all the septic systems.

The school broached plans at an October 2002 meeting to expand operations by acquiring land on both sides of Wendell Depot Road, and claims it is exempt from local zoning regulations and any action that limits the scope of the expansion.

“There is a growing concern among the good citizens of Wendell that the Lake Grove School is going to very slowly, like an octopus, reach out and take over the town,” Selectwoman Katherine Bentley said at that meeting.

## 150 YEARS AGO

*Here’s the way it was on March 5, 1873: News from the Turners Falls Reporter’s archive.*

### Local Matters

Scarlet fever is very prevalent. Another arrival of snow this week. This time it is the kind a fellow generally misses.

The big machine at the Montague Mill turns out about four tons of paper a day.

Mr. Charles Whittemore, of Montague, will open a first-class grocery store in Mr. Horton’s new building, on Fourth street, about the first of April. He will have something to say for himself, shortly.

R.L. Goss, Esq., has been making some very very material improvements in the post office here, and now it has a very neat appearance. The old boxes are moved

back some four or five feet, and 162 new open, and 30 lock, boxes, are put up at right-angles with the old ones, with two places for delivery. There are now, altogether, 300 “open-faced” and 42 lock boxes.

Timothy Kelly, while at work at one of the machines in the Montague Mill on Monday morning, got his right hand caught in the callendars, and had the flesh completely stripped off the arm from the elbow to the wrist, although no bones were broken. Dr. Coy took charge of the patient, and performed the most skilful operation that has been witnessed in this part of the country for some time. The flesh was carefully brought back on the arm in its proper place and properly treated, and now it is thought that the arm will heal without being disabled.

Mr. Schuler has put up a billiard table on his premises.



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## NOTES FROM THE MONTAGUE TOWN CLERK

### Town Meeting Vacancies in the May 16 Annual Town Election

**MONTAGUE** – Every year, seven seats are open for election in each of Montague's six precincts for a three-year term on town meeting.

Town meeting members make up the legislative body that votes on town business; Montague has a total of 126 elected members, 21 from each precinct. Members vote to set salaries, approve or amend bylaws, and appropriate monies to run the town.

Montague's annual town meeting is always held on the first Saturday of May. If needed, special town meetings are held in the fall or spring.

To become a town meeting member, one must be a registered voter, take out nomination papers, and obtain 10 signatures from other voters that live in one's home precinct. It is always best to gather a few extra signatures, as there could be circumstances in which some signatures may be invalid and not qualify.

Besides the seven 3-year seats up for election in each precinct annually, this year there are some vacancies to fill out shorter terms, due to resignations, people moving out of town, etc.:

- Precinct 3 (the eastern section of the Hill) has three open 2-year seats and two open 1-year seats;
- Precinct 5 (downtown Turners Falls) has one open 1-year seat.

If you would like more information, please call the Town Clerk's Office at 863-3200 ext. 203 or email [townclerk@montague-ma.gov](mailto:townclerk@montague-ma.gov).

## ERVING from page A1

Bastarache noted that the draft budget did not include cost-of-living adjustments for town employees, and said there would need to be cuts to department requests, "as ugly as that can be."

A memo from town administrator Bryan Smith pointed out other costs in the budget, including a deposit of \$273,000 into the stabilization account, "promised as a condition" of funding the new library construction from that fund, holding onto \$150,000 in free cash to cover out-of-district school transportation, and putting \$150,000 into capital stabilization. Bastarache said it was important to continue funding capital improvement stabilization.

"I took a peek at the capital list," said Debra Smith. "There's nothing here that could come off."

Capital planning committee chair Benjamin Fellows agreed that there was "not a lot you can drop lower." He asked what FY'24 expenses would look like if all department budgets were "flat, except for the price of oil and electricity."

Jacob Smith asked Bryan Smith to check on the estimated electricity costs to see if they were consistent with the recent rate hikes.

Selectboard member William Bembury asked whether the assessors' overlay account, which funds real estate tax exemptions and abatements could be reduced. Bastarache replied that there are several contested tax assessments, and the town might need the full overlay of \$200,000.

Fin com member Daniel Hammock suggested that the town "slow down on OPEB a little bit." Erving has banked \$300,000 in the "other post-employment benefits" (OPEB) trust fund, which funds retiree healthcare and other non-pension benefits, in each of the last three fiscal years.

Jacob Smith suggested reducing the amount going to OPEB to \$100,000. Eichorn, who is also

town treasurer, said Erving's OPEB was currently well-funded.

The board asked Bryan Smith to ask department heads to submit revised budgets, and the board will consider them on March 13. The FY'24 budget must be finalized by March 27, when the annual town meeting warrant is closed.

### Former IP Mill

Town planner Mariah Kurtz presented "opinions of probable costs" (OPCs) prepared by consultant Tighe & Bond for the demolition of the former International Paper Mill buildings.

The OPCs for four different scenarios ranged from \$2.1 million – for demolishing all but Building 2, described in the report as "one of the most historic portions of the entire mill complex," and the pump-house, Building 8 – to \$4 million, for demolishing every building.

The report warned that it is reasonable to assume that the roofs contain asbestos, and recommended spending \$6,000 on testing. Demolition and disposal of asbestos-containing demolition material is more strictly regulated.

Each OPC included a 20% line item for engineering. Kurtz suggested that the town "push back" on this, questioning that engineering for partial demolition would cost \$420,000 and full demolition \$800,000. "Although full demo is more expensive overall," Kurtz wrote in a memo to the board, "I'm wondering... if that cost would come down if less engineering was actually required."

The board and fin com discussed potential ways to pay for the demolition. Bryan Smith said that the town has a \$600,000 brownfields grant from MassDevelopment that could be used to cover some of the cost. He said the town could borrow money to pay for the rest of the work, or borrow from the \$12 million stabilization fund as was done for the new library.

Board members expressed sup-

port for preparing the property enough to entice developers to buy it and return it to the tax roll. They asked Kurtz to bring a cost comparison of the different funding options to a future meeting.

### Wastewater Consulting

Clearly feeling cost-conscious after discussing the FY'24 budget gap, and possibly tired of a meeting that had already lasted three and a half hours, board members were critical of two proposals from Tighe & Bond for wastewater department work.

The consultants submitted a \$12,800 proposal for answering state Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) questions about the previously submitted Erving Sewer System Evaluation Survey (ESSES) and for helping the town fill out its Capacity, Management, Operations and Maintenance (CMOM) plan. Both are due March 31.

Wastewater superintendent Peter Sanders said the department had \$4,000 in its budget for the work, and expected to request a reserve fund transfer to meet the full cost.

Bastarache said he felt Tighe & Bond should have filled out the ESSES completely the first time, and should not be charging additional money for answering questions. He observed that while there were three tasks listed in the proposal, the third task was simply a compilation of the first and second tasks, "charging us twice for the same work," according to Bastarache.

He asked Sanders what would happen if the answers were not submitted by March 31. Sanders replied that MassDEP would issue a notice of non-compliance, and could fine the town.

Jacob Smith complained that there was limited time to answer questions about the scope or to challenge the content of the proposal, with the response and CMOM due by March 31.

The board asked Bryan Smith and Sanders to discuss the proposal

with Tighe & Bond and have answers and/or a revised proposal by March 6.

In the second proposal – \$5,500 for 284 manhole inspections, carried out by a subcontractor – Tighe & Bond said the subcontractor would not be able to inspect all of the town's manholes for that price and would need additional funding. Because there is no deadline for the manhole inspections, the board decided not to take any action on this proposal.

### Trash-Hauling Contract

The contract between Erving and trash hauler Casella Waste Management ends June 30. Although the town has the option to renew the current contract for one year with a 5% increase in cost, Casella asked the board to consider a new three-year contract with a greater increase, and a fuel adjustment surcharge if the cost of diesel exceeds \$5 per gallon.

Bastarache and Bembury said they favored the three-year agreement, but disagreed with the idea of a fuel surcharge.

Jacob Smith commented that in his experience at work, haulers are often receiving fuel surcharges.

The board asked Bastarache and Bryan Smith to negotiate with Casella.

### Other Business

The board accepted a bid from Sprague Operating Resources of Portsmouth, New Hampshire for providing #2 heating oil. Sprague has provided the town's oil for the past three years.

The board approved extending the professional services agreement with Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Agency for one year. The current contract ends on March 11, and FCRHRA had asked for the extension while it negotiates with the town for a new ten-year contract.

The board approved a new personnel policy on remote work.



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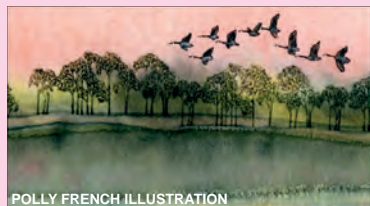
MAGGIE SADOWSKY PHOTO

# Rocco

FEATURES@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG

OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER

MARCH 2, 2023



WEST ALONG THE RIVER

## REDWINGS IN THE SNOW

*A host of redwings, better than bishops, returning and wanting to be fed it seems and large enough to fill the coming Spring universe with religious needs somewhat satisfied...*

By DAVID BRULE

**THE FLAT, ERVINGSIDE** – February 21 found us on the morning of Mardi Gras sitting on the edge of the yard in the snow. Birds suddenly quiet, then resuming calling. Chorus of redwings with their spring song *oak-a-lee*. The rest of the family including dog still asleep upstairs, but we're busy taking notes out here nice and peaceful until the murderous Cooper's hawk knifes through the feathered crowds, scaring but missing everybody.

Strangely, after the air-raid, birds are back within a minute. Usually they stay quiet and frozen in place like their mothers taught them, unless someone has been killed. They would know if the hawk has captured his struggling victim and is devouring his breakfast as we speak. They would go on about their business if that were the case, the danger passed while one of their brethren is giving up the ghost, being plucked alive and contributing protein to the next generation of hawks.

But there's no sign of murder, no equivalent of chalk design on the sidewalk, or in this case, no blue jay feathers or blood in outline on the snow. The hawk may have continued on its way to Cousin Annabelle's feeders the next street over.

Bad weather coming, they say. I worry about the crazy wee woodcock who drifted through the yard on Saturday at dusk. The unseasonably warm weather must have coaxed him north, a month ahead

of his annual schedule. I was sitting out at the campfire in the near dark, watching over a sizzling Brazilian beef cut of *picanha*, when the little creature winnowed over the rhododendrons and down to the half-frozen frog pond.

Usually the first woodcock calls from the brushy flats along the river no earlier than Saint Patrick's Day. He needs boggy ground to find his earthworm meals. Has he been betrayed by the fickle weather, or does he know something we don't?

The Full Worm Moon is weeks away. I hope I won't find him later on, half frozen, weak and most of his inner fires out. It has since kept me awake, worrying for the little fellow. I always figured I was somehow related to birds in migration. But his race has been here for 10,000 years, so I guess he'll come through this alright.

*... songs and families of future songs, suddenly this company arrived shaking the dormant branches of the bare cherry tree outside the kitchen window. There is still snow and there is much grayness And so these well feathered Sometimes flighty constituents of good hope Give color to our March snowscape...*

In the snowy yard the only thing moving, according to Wallace Stevens, was the eye of the blackbird.

In fact, there were forty eyes of redwings, each of the birds possessing a pair of them of course, and they were all moving, croaking and singing. Or at least uttering something that passes for redwing song.

Just when we were giving up on a snowless winter and getting our see **WEST ALONG** page B3



Red-winged blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*.

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON ILLUSTRATION

Above: Rocco, and the news. (Send your caption ideas to editor@montaguereporter.org.)

## INTERVIEW

# Sci-Fi Squirrels... of Destiny!

By GEORGE BRACE

**ORANGE** – Hans Rickheit and Krissy Dorn's new graphic novel, *Delia*, is the first collaboration between the husband-and-wife artistic team from Orange. Published by Fantagraphics, *Delia* is a "sci-fi adventure romp" set in "an atmospheric '50s-era city in a parallel universe occupied by anthropomorphic squirrels," and tells the story of an intrepid young scientist squirrel taking part in a mysterious project which begins innocently, but ends up threatening to destroy the Earth.

Rickheit has been an artist and cartoonist for over 25 years, having previously published *The Squirrel Machine* and *Folly* through Fantagraphics, along with many other works in comics and other media. He wrote and did the penciling for *Delia*.

Dorn has a bachelor's degree in fine arts and has worked in a variety of two-dimensional media, as well as metal sculpture and fiber arts. She inked the work, and provided texturing, shading, and some of the background art.

Rickheit and Dorn were kind enough to sit down with me and provide a glimpse into their work.

**MR:** How did you guys meet?

**KD:** I've obsessively collected squirrel-related items for years, and stumbled across Hans' *Squirrel Machine* while trolling for squirrel stuff on eBay in 2010, and was immediately taken with his highly detailed, esoteric style.

After stalking him online and discovering an adorable video of him made by a friend, I sent him a love letter with a self portrait, an homage to *The Squirrel Machine*, suggesting we meet, and he responded favorably. For-



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

A panel from the graphic novel *Delia* shows two characters with their stylized fluffy tails.

tunately, he'd recently moved to Hawley, Mass. from Philadelphia after a break-up, so he was local and available! When he complains how making comics has not made him rich, I like to remind him that he at least got a wife out of it, and free help with the inking.

**HR:** One of my first graphic novels was *The Squirrel Machine*. It was a peculiar and inscrutable book with surrealistic imagery, and was published by Fantagraphics in 2009. Although the book never made me see **DELIA** page B8

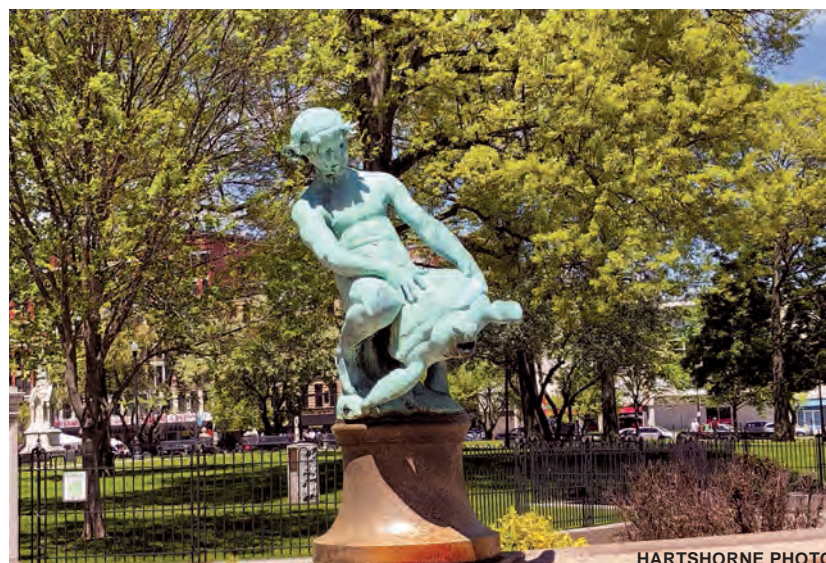


## 'Get me back to Worcester, man!'

**SOUTH DEERFIELD** – Worcester, like the sauce, is mispronounced and disrespected. Remember the somewhat famous song by Roger Salloom, "(Gotta Get) Outta Worcester"? No, no, really – nearby Worcester has a whole lot for a traveler! I've been wanting to get back to Worcester ever since I spent a weekend there a few years ago and found marvelousness around every corner.

There are many good reasons for the city's surging population – it's grown a whopping 28% percent over the past ten years. Compare that with Franklin County, where we have the same population as we did in 1990, around 71,000 souls.

Worcester has so much to explore: the famous Turtle Boy statue, the infamous seven-way intersection from hell called Kelley Square, and the Table Talk Pie company.



HARTSHORNE PHOTO

The Burnside Fountain, more commonly known as "Turtleboy," has become an avatar for Worcester.

Plus, Worcester has dozens of really good ethnic restaurants, a Minor League Baseball team affiliated with the Boston Red Sox called the

Woo Sox, and a top comedy club, the WooHaHa, filled with comics making jokes every night.

see **TRAVEL** page B5

# Pet of the Week



## “PROVOLONE & BLEU”

Meet Provolone and his best friend, Bleu. These are talkative, active boys that get along really well together. They are currently hanging out in a foster home where there are dogs and cats, and they are unphased by them.

They're good at being picked up, but have a short wriggle-free span for lap time. Bleu likes getting scratches on his shoulders.

Both of them sing for their supper! Wouldn't you like to give these charming boys a forever home?

Interested in adopting? Animals at Dakin are currently available only in Springfield. Contact adoption staff at [springfield@dakinhumane.org](mailto:springfield@dakinhumane.org) and include your name and phone number. For more information, call (413) 781-4000 or visit [www.dakinhumane.org](http://www.dakinhumane.org).

## Senior Center Activities MARCH 6 THROUGH 10

### LEVERETT

Chair Yoga classes are held on Zoom on Wednesdays. Foot care clinic is held monthly. For more information, contact the Leverett COA at (413) 548-1022 x 2, or [coa@leverett.ma.us](mailto:coa@leverett.ma.us).

### WENDELL

Foot care clinic is the first Wednesday of each month. Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for information or appointments. Senior Health Rides are available. Contact Jonathan von Ranson (978) 544-3758.

### GILL and MONTAGUE

The Gill Montague Senior Center, 62 Fifth Street, Turners Falls, is open Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The AARP Circuit Breaker Tax Aide is available March through April. For more information please call 863-9357.

#### Monday 3/6

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
1 p.m. Kitchen Club

#### Tuesday 3/7

9:30 a.m. Tuesday Knitters  
3 p.m. Tai Chi

#### Wednesday 3/8

9 a.m. Foot Clinic

4 p.m. Mat Yoga

#### Thursday 3/9

9 a.m. Chair Yoga  
1 p.m. Cards & Games

#### Friday 3/10

All day: AARP Tax Prep by Appointment  
2 p.m. By The Seat of Your Pants

### ERVING

Open 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. Open for cards, coffee, and snacks daily. Brown Bag lunch is the first Thursday of each month. Veterans' Services are the first Wednesday of each month. For more information, please call (413) 423-3649.

#### Monday 3/6

9 a.m. Interval  
10:15 a.m. Seated Workout

#### Tuesday 3/7

9 a.m. Good For U  
10 a.m. Line Dancing

#### Wednesday 3/8

9 a.m. Cardio Low Impact  
10:15 a.m. Chair Aerobics

#### Thursday 3/9

11:30 a.m. Bingo  
9 a.m. Core & Balance  
10 a.m. Barre Fusion

#### Friday 3/10

9 a.m. Quilting & Open Sew

## MARCH LIBRARY LISTING

### Montague Public Libraries

Turners Falls: Carnegie (413) 863-3214  
Montague Center (413) 367-2852  
Millers Falls (413) 659-3801

Erving Public Library (413) 423-3348

Gill: Slate Library (413) 863-2591  
Leverett Public Library (413) 548-9220  
Northfield: Dickinson Library (413) 498-2455  
Wendell Free Library (978) 544-3559

### MONTAGUE

**Multiple days: Art Exhibit.** Paintings by Caroline Wampole, March 6 through April 12. Montague Center.

**Multiple days: Crossroads: Changes in Rural America.** Collaborative nationwide project led by the Smithsonian Institute. Calendar of local events at [greatfallsdiscoverycenter.org/crossroads](http://greatfallsdiscoverycenter.org/crossroads)

**Multiple days: Grab & Go Bags.** Science: Parachute person. Craft: Rainbow windsock. Free kits at all branch locations while supplies last.

**Every Wednesday: Story Time.** Join for stories, songs. Montague Center, 10 a.m.

**Every Thursday: Playgroup.** Guided and free play for preschoolers; older siblings welcome. Montague Center, 10 a.m.

**1st Saturday: Used Book Sale.** Fiction, paperbacks, kids' books, DVDs, CDs, audiobooks. Hundreds of donations. Carnegie, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**2nd Thursday: Hot Chocolate Social.** Millers Falls, 3 to 4 p.m.

**2nd Monday: Friends of MPL Meeting.** All welcome. Email [vgatvalley@gmail.com](mailto:vgatvalley@gmail.com) for more info. Carnegie, 5:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, March 15: Author Series.** Caroline Wampole, *How to Become a Rock Star in Paris*. Refreshments provided. Montague Center, 6 p.m.

**Saturday, March 18: Life-Size Candyland.** Game for children of all ages and their caregivers. Montague Center, 10 a.m. to noon.

### ERVING

**Every Wednesday: After-School Activities.** Ages 2 to 10 in the Children's Room, ages 11 to 19 in the Teen Room. 1:30 to 3 p.m.

**Wednesday, March 5: Family Movie: Raya and the Last Dragon.** Community Room, 1 p.m.

**Sunday, March 12: Vaccine Clinic.** All COVID vaccines/boosters, no cost. Advance registration at [frcog.org/covid](http://frcog.org/covid) recommended. 12 to 3 p.m.

**Sunday, March 12: Puzzle Swap.** Bring a jigsaw puzzle to exchange, or we'll give you one to get you started. 1 to 3 p.m.

**Wednesday, March 15: Robot Camp.** Multi-part series to learn about tech and coding, for ages 8 to 12. Free, limited to 12 spots, registration required. 1:30 to 3 p.m.

**Thursday, March 16: EPL Building Anniversary Party.**

Join us to celebrate our building's third birthday. 5:30 p.m.

**Sunday, March 19: Craft Day.** Make a seasonal craft. Materials provided, RSVP required. 1 p.m.

**Sunday, March 19: Board of Library Trustees.** Monthly meeting, open to the public. 3 p.m.

**Monday, March 27: Teen Movie Monday.** Join the youth services librarian for crafts, snacks, and a movie. 3:30 p.m.

**Thursday, March 30: Film Noir: Possessed,** with refreshments, 4:30 p.m.; **Book Challenge Coffee Hour,** see [massbook.org/readingchallenge](http://massbook.org/readingchallenge) for more info, 5:30 p.m.

### LEVERETT

**All March: Art Exhibit: Words of Inspiration,** paintings by Jane Gruber; **Story Walks,** new story on the trail behind the library every Thursday.

**Every Monday and Wednesday: Online Qigong.** Free, all welcome. See [leverettlibrary.org](http://leverettlibrary.org) or email [CommunityQigong@gmail.com](mailto:CommunityQigong@gmail.com) for info. 10:30 a.m.

**Every Wednesday: Playgroup** for children ages 0 to 5 and their caregivers, email [budine@erving.org](mailto:budine@erving.org) to RSVP, 10:30 a.m.; **Board & Table Games,** drop-in gaming for ages 7 to 107, 1 to 3 p.m.

**Every Thursday: Play Mah-jongg.** Beginners welcome. 1:45 to 4 p.m.

**Every Saturday: Tai Chi.** Free classes, all welcome. Space limited, masks required. Call Dennis at (413) 367-9760 for info. Intermediate to advanced 10 a.m., beginners 11 a.m.

**Thursdays, March 9 and 30: Families in Nature.** RSVP required, [budine@erving.com](mailto:budine@erving.com). 10 a.m.

**Saturday, March 18: Seed Swap.** Bring your extra garden seeds, go home with new ones to plant. 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.

### NORTHFIELD

**Every Tuesday: Drop-in Knitting.** Join fellow knitters and crocheters to chat and share projects. 6 to 8 p.m.

**Every Wednesday: Stories and Playtime** with Deb Wood, for ages 0 to 5, 10 a.m.; **Open Tech Hours:** Pop in for help on anything library-related, bring your device, 1 to 3 p.m.

**1st Wednesday: Readers' Choice.** March 1: David McCullough, *The Pioneers*. Pick up a copy at the library. 10 a.m.

**1st Thursday: Spice Club pickup starts.** Stop in for a

Weather, etc. sometimes causes changes in library events; you may want to call ahead to confirm events.

sample and suggested recipes while supplies last. Look for a new spice every month.

**1st Saturday: Puzzle Swap.** Dozens of new-to-you puzzles for kids and adults. For more info email [friendsofdml01360@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofdml01360@gmail.com). 10 to 11:30 a.m.

**2nd Wednesday: Readings Group.** March 8: Two plays by Edward Albee: *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream*. Pick up a copy at the library. 3 p.m.

**2nd Thursday: Environmental Awareness Group.** February 9: Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Pick up a copy at the library. 6:30 p.m.

**Saturday, March 11: King Philip's War in Your Backyard: From Sokwakik to Peskeompskut, 1675-1676.** Northfield Trinitarian Church, 5 p.m.

**Thursday, March 23: Library Trivia Night.** Four Star Farms Brewery, 6 p.m.

### WENDELL

**Every Wednesday: Playgroup.** 10 a.m.

**Every Friday: LEGO club.** Drop-in program for ages 5 and up with adult. 4 p.m.

**Every Saturday: StoryCraft,** picture book read-aloud and connected craft, 10:30 a.m.; **AA Group,** 7 p.m.

**Every Sunday: Yoga.** All levels, sliding donation. 10 a.m.

**Monday, March 6: Nature's Bible: Insects in European Art, Science, and Religion.** 6 p.m.

**Every Tuesday: Art Group.** 5 to 6:30 p.m.

**Tuesday, March 7: Rep. Aaron Saunders office hours.** 2 p.m.

**Tuesdays, March 7 and 28: Tech Help** by appointment, 6 and 6:30 p.m.

**2nd and 4th Thursdays: Fiber Arts / Mending Circle.** 6:30 p.m.

**Friday, March 10: Art Exhibit Opening.** Photography by Stephen Dallmus. 6 to 8 p.m.

**2nd and 4th Saturdays: Wendell Youth Group.** 1 p.m.

**Sundays, March 12 and 19: Local Wildlife and Ecology.** Presentation at library on March 12, follow-up tracking walk in state forest on March 19. Noon.

**Sunday, March 12: Poetry, Stories, & Spoken Word.** Open mic, 5-minute slots. 2 p.m.

**Sunday, March 26: The Natural Sugar Economy,** talk by Bill Stubblefield. First of three-part series on pollinators. 7 p.m.

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**WEST ALONG** from page B1  
attitudes adjusted to the idea of an early spring, along comes the snow just a few weeks before the calendar turns to spring equinox.

The seasons are all askew, Madam.

But the Carolina wren has been singing for weeks now, atop the towering maple in the neighbor's yard. That should be telling us something!

Soon the song sparrow will tune up his pipes over on the oxbow marsh, signaling the official opening of the territory and love-making season in the bird world.

The next morning at 7 a.m. the winds, having traversed the Montague Plains like a hell-bound freight train, begin to roar high up on the ridge overlooking the bowl of my little valley. Menacing clouds skud by, as predicted, from the northwest.

Hard ice covers the earth, and now with a coating of light snow, too, with more to come.

Snow is insistent, just when we don't want it around anymore. Visiting like the soaking wet dog in a Billy Collins poem in a pub somewhere in Ireland. Snow, like dog in the poem, brushes up against the drinkers, soaking legs and getting pushed away without even a gentle pat.

Snow, like dog, persists and we can't convince either to just go away. So is this how we'll leave February and enter March, rolling snowstorms every few days?

Better keep the snow shovel handy. Just when the skis and snowshoes expected to miss the season, gathering dust in the front hall near the door, they'll be called upon for duty.

I can't figure out if I'm happy about that, or if I'm actually reluctant to turn my mind back to winter thoughts again.

Tonight, snowstorm clouds and winter weather warnings. Saint David's Day, snow will once again bury all. But before that, there's time to replenish the dwindling wood pile. Down we'll go to the lower pasture, cutting brush to clear a dancing place for the March woodcock. Bring all the feeders back out, bears will just turn over in their sleep and not come galumphing in a bad mood through the fence looking for sunflower snacks.

Across the page of my notebook they follow my pen, redwings.

*Poem inspired by and adapted from John Tagliabue, "Redbreasts and Panoply Aplenty."*



# OUT OF THE PARK MARCH 2023

By JON DOBOSZ

**UNITY PARK** – Hello again, everyone! We hope you are doing well in these last few weeks of winter. It hasn't been too bad up to this point, so let's hope Mother Nature is kind to us for the rest of the season. It's that time of year at which we're planning for the spring, but we would also like to announce that our spring brochure is already published! Nonetheless, allow me to give you a sneak preview.

One of the first signs of spring is our **Annual Peter Cottontail's EGGstravaganza**. This year's event will be held on Saturday, April 8, rain or shine, at Unity Park. Peter Cottontail and his friends will place 5,000 candy-filled eggs throughout the park.

It usually doesn't take very long for the kids to grab up all the eggs, so be sure to get to the park a few minutes before 1 p.m., before the horn goes off. The hunt is geared towards children ages 4 to 12 due to the small candy. We would like to thank the Montague Elks and Greenfield Savings Bank for



co-sponsoring the event.

A couple of our other traditional spring programs, **Tee Ball and Rookie Baseball**, will begin Saturday, April 22 and conclude in early June. Tee Ball is available for kids in grades K through 2, with Rookie Ball for kids in grades 3 and 4. Rookie ball is a coach-pitch program, and has proven to be a solid stepping-stone for those wishing to play little league.

MPRD also hopes to bring back the **Adult Co-ed Softball League** to Montague. This league has been dormant the last couple of years, so we're trying to reinvigorate interest amongst players in the area. The Montague league provides umpires and operates from May through

August, with games held Monday and Thursday evenings at Unity Park. Those interested in putting a team together, or getting on the individual player list, should contact MPRD ASAP!

Please also note that we still have a few sessions of **Open Swim** remaining at the Turners Falls high school pool. Open Swim is held Tuesday and Friday evenings from now until March 10. Family Swim is held from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., with Adult Lap Swim from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

That's about it from here. If you want to stay on top of our programs and services, be sure to log onto [montagueparks-rec.com](http://montagueparks-rec.com) or view our Facebook page. You can also pick up copies of our spring brochure at the Unity Park Fieldhouse, the Montague Libraries, and the Montague Town Hall. Other than that, stay warm, stay active, and enjoy the remainder of your winter!

*Jon Dobosz, CPRP, is parks and recreation director for the town of Montague.*

## Montague Community Television News

### Artist Reception Documented

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

**TURNERS FALLS** – Nina Rossi spoke about her art show, *Illustrations from The Montague Reporter 2019-2023*, in an MCTV video of the same name. If you missed Nina's reception, you can catch her digital illustrations at the Rendezvous, or catch a glimpse of some of them on our Vimeo page where she discusses the project. There you will also find the most recent Montague select-board and finance committee meetings.

All community members are welcome to submit

their videos to be aired on Channel 17 and featured on the MCTV Vimeo page, so think of what you would like to make and come see how we can help!

MCTV is always available to assist in local video production. Cameras, tripods, and lighting equipment are available for checkout, and filming and editing assistance can be provided.

Or is there something going on you think others would like to see? If you get in touch, we can show you how easy it is to use a camera and capture the moment. Contact us at (413) 863-9200 or [infomontaguestv@gmail.com](mailto:infomontaguestv@gmail.com).

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

### Drag Performers; Skull Mask; Ding-Dong-Ditch; Abandoned Gas Station; Student Driver; Curly Fries

**Monday, 2/20**

1:43 p.m. Walk-in looking to speak with an officer regarding issues with a roommate; reports of some stolen magazines. Advised of options.

4:53 p.m. 911 caller from Walgreens states he's being threatened physically and does not feel safe at this time. Stepped into store to feel safe. Male party outside on a bench. Parties separated; advised of options.

5:19 p.m. Shelburne Control looking for assistance checking Turners Falls-Gill Bridge for a party who has made suicidal statements and has a history with the French King Bridge. Officer advises no one on bridge. Other bridges in town checked; unable to locate.

5:50 p.m. Multiple calls about loud noises from Federal Street; parties are building drag race cars and testing them on the road. Officer advises male party is done for the night;

requests he do his building earlier in the day.

6:44 p.m. 911 abandoned call. Upon callback, caller states he saw a car at the stop sign on Turners Falls Road and heard a twelve-year-old boy scream for help. Area checked; no vehicle matching description.

8:45 p.m. Caller from I Street requesting an officer drive through the Patch as he saw a group of kids walking through the alleyways earlier and just wants to make sure everyone is safe. Area checked; no one in area at this time.

10:30 p.m. 911 caller from K Street requesting officers as she and her fiance are being physically assaulted by a friend who is intoxicated. States male party needs to be removed immediately. *[Redacted.]*

**Tuesday, 2/21**

7:09 a.m. Caller states they just saw a large Ford truck run a red light and force multiple cars to back off the General Pierce Bridge for them to come through. Caller states the driver was honking his horn aggressively towards other cars. Caller states truck came close to going through barrels, and he has guys working on the bridge. Possible plate number provided. Referred to an officer.

**Wednesday, 2/22**

9:32 a.m. Caller states he believes he lost the license plate for his trailer late last night somewhere around the General Pierce Bridge. Unsure what the plate number is. He is contacting the RMV as well. Officer checked area; no license plate located.

1:48 p.m. Caller states she is moving her daughter into a new apartment and two young boys opened the apartment door like they were going to walk in, saw someone, and ran away. States she knows who one of the boys was; name of grandmother provided. Unsure who the other boy was; had a skull mask over his face. Landlord made aware. Advised caller of options. Speaking with grandmother now. Grandmother will speak to juveniles.

7:32 p.m. Multiple 911 calls from a second-floor apartment on Avenue A reporting water coming through the ceiling; believed to be coming from the third floor. Officer advises there is no active water dripping; this is a previous issue that has been resolved.

10:01 p.m. 911 caller from Hillside Road states kids are playing ding-dong-ditch again. Officer spoke with group of children. They acknowledged their behavior and apologized; they will not continue.

**Thursday, 2/23**

12:18 a.m. FD captain states he received a report

of the smell of antifreeze coming from an apartment across the hall from the caller on Fourth Street; caller believes they might be cooking drugs. FD requesting PD response as well. FD unable to detect any odor.

12:32 a.m. 911 caller states she was trying to avoid a deer and ended up going off the road on Main Street; she is now stuck. She is trying to get the car back onto the road but can't move. Rau's request for tow. Car was pulled from the ditch and able to be driven away.

4:52 a.m. Caller states that FL Roberts is locked; all the lights are on inside; papers were left outside. Caller states she has been there for about 20 minutes. Attempted to call business, 800 number for company, and possible manager; no answer. Officer states door will open a few inches and the lights are on. Plow guy states he was there around 2 a.m. and saw the employee get in a vehicle and take off. Attempted to call other possible manager; no answer; message left. Received call from one manager who states she had multiple messages from the overnight employee that he left the store. Building is secured.

6:28 a.m. 911 caller states she slid into a pole on Federal Street. No airbag deployment; no wires down. Caller states she hit her head but is OK. MCFD on scene. Rau's *en route*. Pole undamaged. Courtesy transport provided. Report taken.

9:39 a.m. 911 caller reporting vehicle fire in the Cutlery Block alley. Fire extinguished prior to arrival.

7:04 p.m. 911 caller states he was almost hit by a car speeding in a parking lot on Avenue A; states he had to jump out of the way and the vehicle is still there. Requesting to speak with an officer. Vehicle gone upon officer's arrival. Officer will be on lookout in area.

11:25 p.m. 911 caller from Turners Falls Road requesting police to location for a verbal dispute between family members. Officer advises situation mediated at this time.

**Friday, 2/24**

8:12 a.m. Employee from Responsive Classroom requesting DPW to sand and salt their parking lot. DPW notified.

9:31 a.m. Employee would like to report an incident that happened at a veterinary clinic yesterday. Officer will drop off statement form to caller; she would like the incident put on record.

11:23 a.m. FL Roberts employee has video footage of a shoplifter to give to an of-

ficer. Investigated.

2:58 p.m. Employee reporting that a student driver clipped the mirror of a parked car on K Street. They left contact info on the parked car. Info for both vehicles put in call.

4:47 p.m. Multiple 911 calls about a two-car accident at King Avenue and Bridge Street. One party injured. Rau's *en route*. Report taken.

5:10 p.m. Report from Turner Street of an unlicensed operator driving a silver SUV with a temporary Vermont tag. Officers will attempt to locate the vehicle.

8:06 p.m. 911 open line; can hear two males talking about curly fries. No answer on callback.

9:50 p.m. 911 caller states female is verbally abusing him again. Could hear female in background yelling at male. Caller stated "Thank you, don't come here, I just needed her to have a warning," and hung up. Both parties spoken to and advised to stay away from each other for the evening.

**Saturday, 2/25**

11:39 a.m. Caller reporting that a five-ton box truck was trying to turn onto Grand Avenue and got hung up; is now blocking traffic, and vehicles are having to go all the way around it. Three more calls received reporting same. Officer advises truck is stuck on curb; tires are not making contact with road; requests Rose Ledge be contacted. Rose Ledge *en route*. Officer advises vehicle has been pulled out and roadway is cleared; standing by while payment is made. Report taken.

**Sunday, 2/26**

7:18 a.m. Officer checking on a disabled farm vehicle at Sunderland and Gunn Roads. Workers can't get truck moving. Officer requesting Rau's with a flatbed to tow the vehicle. Rau's responding.

6:27 p.m. 911 caller from Keith Apartments states her neighbor is making a lot of noise; sounds like she's banging on the walls. Wants her to be quiet. Officer advises tenant made aware of complaint.

6:32 p.m. 911 caller from East Main Street states a male outside her apartment building who has been sleeping in his car over the weekend is now in the middle of the road screaming. Second caller states male party ran out in front of her car asking for money and demanding she call the police or the FBI to have them help him. Caller states he's parked in front of Carroll's Market; car is a rental from Avis in Orlando, FL. Officer advises male party moved along.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Night Suite: Latest Poems by Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno**

By RICHARD ANDERSEN

**MONTAGUE CENTER** – Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno's *Night Suite* contains some of the best poems he's ever written. None of his previous collections contain such an extensive degree of contextual and aesthetic challenges, all the while focusing on a narrow subject that speaks to the universal human condition. He not only breaks new ground within his own work – he confirms again his deserved place in the canon of great Modernist poets.

*Night Suite* is dedicated to Christopher's late wife, Patricia Pruitt. A poet of international renown herself, she continues to be his muse. When she died from ALS-related complications on Shakespeare's birthday in 2018, many of her admirers interpreted the coincidence as a measurement of Patricia's dry sense of humor.

Though he had been preparing for Patricia's death for more than two years, the end, as so often happens, came as a shock. Christopher was devastated by the loss, and has said that Patricia's absence became the most powerful presence he has ever known.

In an attempt to find some kind of emotional balance between the past and the past that wasn't past, Christopher, a musicologist with two opera *libretti* to his credit, turned to Handel, Schoenberg, and Bach. All failed to provide him with the solace he sought in that special place of the mind and heart that can be approached by words, but never fully appreciated by words alone.

It was then that Christopher knew he had to embark on a different kind of journey. One that would take him deeper inside himself than he had ever gone. A pilgrimage to the dark, lonely, isolated core of his very existence, a place where language rarely dares to tread.

Taking notes that he will later turn into poems, Christopher "wanders along not counting footsteps / not measuring the distance between here and there" with "no need to question / why the river flows south and not north."

It isn't long before the inner life that characterizes his journey distances itself from the outside world even as it remains connected to it. "Somewhere," Christopher discovers, "a there lurks." That "there" is the place where art is created, and because it is art, the act of creation takes precedence over everything else.

For Christopher, the art of creation starts with "Letting go / and letting in / and letting out / and waiting for blossoms / to form on the twigs."

These metaphorical blossoms may vary from one branch to another in form, color, texture, and content, but they don't "inveigh against" the poet's "own private voice." The "methodological journey" that results is no less ambitious than those of our language's greatest voyager into the deep, dark, places of human existence: Samuel Beckett. If Beckett wrote poems, he would have written a work comparable to *Night Suite*.

The challenge for both Beckett and Christopher, of course, is how to express what is felt when the "old reliable means of expression" are "as extinct as dodos." New "ways /



Submitted photo  
*Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno with his late wife and muse, Patricia Pruitt, to whom he has dedicated his latest volume of poems, Night Suite.*

of saying what must be said" have to be created for the new now to resist being reduced to the kinds of simple statements that so often masquerade in today's popular culture as serious critical thinking.

Christopher found this kind of resistance through the music he listened to after Patricia's death. While it may have failed to bring him the comfort he sought, he found new techniques for expressing what he felt as he made his way into his interior. Hence, the title of his book.

*Night Suite* is divided into the various movements of a musical suite. They aren't clearly marked as they might appear in the program notes to a concert or the pauses that exist between movements in a musical performance, but the seamless feel of them – prelude, intermezzo, gigue, etc. – becomes sensuously apparent as the poems unfold in an arc from the beginning to the end of Christopher's book.

While reading the collection of ninety poems in ninety pages, I kept waiting for a certain kind of epiphany to shine its light on Christopher and, through him, to his readers. I expected to encounter something like the image expressed in the words of the 14th-century Persian poet Hafiz of Shiraz: "I wish I could show when you are lonely or in darkness the astounding light of your own being." Those words are written on the vertical parts of a staircase leading toward a room in the Shakespeare and Company bookstore in Paris. Christopher must surely have seen them countless times when he served as the store's Writer in Residence.

In the poem in which Hafiz's words appear, the narrator is speaking to someone like Christopher, someone lost in the despairing darkness of their soul. I kept expecting the astounding light of Patricia's being to show up in *Night Suite* with a similar message.

But it never happened. And that, I think, is the point. The loss of someone as beloved as Patricia is inconsolable, because there is no more Patricia. The darkness Christopher speaks of will never go away; it will only become increasingly dark as Patricia's absence becomes increasingly more present. No number of the kind of clichés found in popular sympathy cards, no platitudes of celebrating such a life in death, no rationalizations about keeping the dead alive by carrying their spirits within us and displaying them in our behavior, no number of words – even when put to musical sounds, as Christopher does in *Night Suite* – can suffice.

What can? Again, we turn to Beckett, this time as he expresses his form of the darkness in *Waiting for Godot*. Godot, who can represent anything from God to meaning in life and fails to appear in the course of the play, is never going to shine his or its light on its two main characters. For Gogo and Didi as well as for Christopher and us, the best we can do in the darkness that is life and the most positive, life-affirming action we can engage in is to come to acceptance. It is our fate and our gift to lose, to suffer, and – for those who have the courage to experience it – to accept.

*Night Suite* may be purchased through Small Press Distribution, a nonprofit literary book distributor, at [www.tinyurl.com/nightsuite](http://www.tinyurl.com/nightsuite).

Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno is this newspaper's poetry editor.

## EXHIBITS

**Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls:** *Crossroads: Change in Rural America*, Smithsonian on Main Street exhibit. Through March 18.

**Rendezvous, Turners Falls:** *Montague at Work and Play: Illustrations from the Montague Reporter, 2019-2023*, fifty-two full-color illustrations by Nina Rossi of people at work and play in the villages of Montague. Through March 29.

**Montague Center Library:** *Carolyn Wampole*. Paintings. March 6 through April 12.

**Looky Here, Greenfield:** *Mystra Art Show!* Artwork by Dawn Cook, J. Burkett, Nora Charters, Shannon Ketch, Erica Pinto, Troy Curry, Andi Magenheimer, Phineas Roy, Ariel Kotker, and more. Reception next Friday, March 10 at 6 p.m. with music from Junk Orbit, Wednesday Knudsen, Arkm Foam, Allysen Gallery, Dusty Miller, and Tarp Big Band.

**LAVA Center, Greenfield:** *No Somos Maquinas (We Are Not Machines)*. Words and portraits of farmworkers in Western Mass; bilingual. *Joseph Ackerman*, photographs. Through March. Reception this Saturday, March 4, from 12 to 3 p.m.

**Geissler Gallery, Stoneleigh-Burnham School, Greenfield:** *Another Way to Experience Winter*, mixed-media work by Malai Ross. Through March 17.

**Wendell Free Library:** *Stephen Dalmass*. Photography. Through March.

**Shelburne Arts Coop Gallery, Shelburne Falls:** *Through a*

*Window*, group show by members. Through March.

**Fiddleheads Gallery, Northfield:** *Figuratively Speaking*, art featuring the human figure. Weekends through March 19. Reception this Sunday, March 5, from 1 to 4 p.m.

**Augusta Savage Gallery, UMass Amherst:** *Portraits in Red: Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls*, paintings by Nayana LaFond. Through May 12.

**Gallery A3, Amherst:** *Sculptures in Wood*, three-dimensional carvings by GK Khalsa. Reception this Thursday, March 2, from 5 to 7 p.m. Through March.

**Anchor House of Artists, Northampton:** *Order and Chaos*. Nan Salky, Helen Murphy, mother and daughter with contrasting works on paper and wood. *Absence and Fondness*. Mary Dunn's poetry and art. *Sanctuary*. Leilah Cohen's life work. *Glass Factory*. Yanning Xing, multimedia work with social relevance. Reception next Friday, March 10, at 5 p.m.

**Oxbow Gallery, Easthampton:** *Kate Spencer and Stephanie Vignone*, paintings of Mount Toby. Reception next Thursday, March 9 from 5 to 7 p.m. during Art Walk. Artist discussion from 1 to 4 p.m. on March 26 with Spencer and ecologist Peter Grima.

**Battleboro Museum and Art Center:** *Keith Haring: Subway Drawings*. Eighteen works from NYC subway stations. Through April 16. Four new exhibits open March 10: Daniel Callahan, *En-MassQ*; Mitsuko Brooks, *Letters Mingle Souls*; Juan Hinojosa, *Paradise City*; and Cathy Cone, *Portals and Portraits*.

## EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT

## Recovering Pocumtuck Histories



Wôbanaki Lifeways, illustration by Francis Beck. Used with permission from the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association.

**TURNERS FALLS** – New England Public Media and the Nolumbeka Project present "Native Memories: Recovering Pocumtuck Histories in Franklin County" this Saturday, March 4 from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls.

This free talk with UPenn associate professor of anthropology Dr. Margaret M. Bruchac, Nulhegan Abenaki, will explore how local Native histories are better understood by critically analyzing colonial documents, revisiting Indigenous landscapes, and dismantling myths and stereotypes that push Native people into the vanished past. The talk will be followed by a Q&A.

"Native American memories and histories in the valley of the Kwinitekw (Connecticut River) are long and deep, tracing back to glacial times and marked by many, many generations," Dr. Bruchac writes. "Native communities in the territories called Nonotuck (now Northampton and Hadley) and Pocumtuck (now Deerfield and Greenfield) were supported by reciprocal trade and di-

plomacy with their Native neighbors, including Abenaki to the north and Nipmuc to the east, among others. During the mid-1600s, the English colonists who came here survived by relying on Native ecological knowledge – maize horticulture, maple sugaring, seasonal fish runs, etc. – that became part of regional Yankee culture. Native leaders negotiated written documents that, they hoped, would preserve rights to hunt, fish, gather, plant, and live here in perpetuity. Yet, the increase in colonial settlement and colonial warfare forced the Native communities along the Kwinitekw to relocate."

"Native Memories" is a companion event to the Smithsonian Institution's *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* exhibition at the Great Falls Discovery Center through March 18. *Crossroads* was brought through a collaboration between the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street and Mass Humanities. For more information about the exhibition and companion events, visit [greatfallsdiscoverycenter.org](http://greatfallsdiscoverycenter.org).

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**TRAVELS** from page B1

Worcester also has its own commuter rail station, with trains that run to Boston every hour from 4:15 a.m. until 10:25 p.m. The station itself is grand, and is used for events in addition to the frequent commuter train service. With state plans in the works to expand east-west rail across Massachusetts, it's likely that trains will be running from Springfield to Worcester in the years to come.

Our Worcester sojourn began on a warm June day. We started in the Blackstone Canal District, the city's downtown crown jewel. We met at Crompton Place, 138 Green Street, which in 1860 was a loom textile mill. Now, thanks to hard work and a tasteful renovation by owner Dino Lorusso, the building hums with activity at BirchTree Bread, a restaurant and brewery; Bedlam Books Cafe; Seed to Stem, "a lifestyle and plant boutique"; and Crompton Collective, with its antiques and gifts. It's a pleasure to stroll through this high-ceilinged, light-filled collection of things that both smell and taste good.

Worcester has about 206,000 residents as of the 2020 census. Twenty-two percent of the people in Worcester were not born in the US, making the city one of the

most diverse in the state, with large populations of Vietnamese, Brazilians, Albanians, Dominicans, and Ghanaians. The city has successfully resettled over 2,000 refugees coming from over 24 countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia, Bhutan, Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. That's how you create real diversity in a New England city!

In Worcester, you can find three different African restaurants, seven places for sushi, and countless other small family places – like our brunch spot, Livia's Dish, owned by a local woman Oriola Koci and her husband, Anton Mehillaj, whom we met. She runs another restaurant, also named after one of her daughters. Originally from Albania, she told us she loves the energy and diversity she finds in her adopted home city.

The city's famous three-deckers were built back when the city was a major manufacturing center of textiles, shoes, and clothing using waterpower from the Blackstone River. Today its hospitals and the UMass Medical School are the largest employers, as the city's former mills were repurposed over the decades. Worcester is truly a modern day melting pot, one without the glitz, glamor, and high rents of Boston.

**Walking Worcester**

The Canal District is a walker's delight. Our local guide Stephanie brought us next into the must-see: Mechanics Hall, at 321 Main Street, a stunning concert hall. They don't make buildings like this anymore. And we learned that the acoustics are world-class – so much so that famous singers like Enrico Caruso, Ella Fitzgerald, and even author Mark Twain have performed here.

Next door to Mechanics Hall we met Joe Demers, owner of Joe's Albums. In a neat and tidy store with high tin ceilings, Joe sells record albums. Remember those? Joe has 30,000 of them here, he told me. "How did you get into this business?" I asked. Joe said, "I went into my basement one day and pulled out all my old albums, and fell in love with them again." He said about half his albums are used, half new.

Don't laugh. The man who runs the record store in downtown Greenfield, John Doe Jr., says that every day he's open, people arrive having driven long distances to come browse his vinyl collection. Record collectors travel, and they bring business for everyone when they come to town. That's one of the reasons why record and book stores are great for any downtown.

While Worcester is home to a throwback record store, it's looking far into the future with another big renovation project taking place across town. The Worcester Auditorium, a grand, columned 86-year-old building that's been vacant for two decades, is currently undergoing a lengthy process that could eventually see the 100,000-square-foot building be renovated into an esports arena and IMAX-style theater.

A Boston-based historical preservation firm has agreed to buy the Worcester Memorial Auditorium and do the renovation work, which includes creating a cutting-edge center for interactive media, technology, and visual arts. Hundreds of college students at nearby Clarke University are majoring in video game design and VR, which is why this is being built.



HARTSHORNE PHOTOS

WooHaHa! Comedy Club brings big-name comedians to the stage in downtown Worcester.

**Worms, Lions, and Fleas**

Josh Suprenant, assistant tap room manager, supplied us with a sampling of some of the many beers in Wormtown Brewery's downtown open-air beer garden. This is one of six craft breweries in the city, and one of the largest and oldest.

In recent years the city has developed something that every city should have and will have in the years to come – a public market. The Worcester Public Market on Kelley Square (the confusing seven-way intersection downtown) was built in 2021, and brought a lot of new life to the city with funky shops, artisanal ethnic foods, and live music in a wide-open setting with communal tables for all.

Wachusett Brewing is the biggest tenant, and the market's anchor.

EcoTarium, at 222 Harrington Way, is a science and nature museum. We enjoyed the EcoTarium for its relative peace and tranquility. Forty-five acres of nature trails complement the live animal habitats and digital planetarium.

You will want to meet Salton and Freyja, two mountain lion siblings orphaned and rescued from a wildfire at Half Moon Bay, California.

And if your visit is timed with their buying and selling season, any visit to Worcester should include the fabulous Brimfield Flea Markets. In 2023 the dates are May 9 to 14, July 11 to 16, and September 5 to 10. If you want a chance to spend hours and hours looking through the world's most diverse assortment of junk and treasure, you've gotta hit Brimfield at least once in your life.



The gorgeous Mechanic's Hall performance venue.

**MOVIE REVIEW**

**Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania (2023)**

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

**GREENFIELD** – The last Marvel comic book film I liked was *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021), and I liked *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (2018). The newest, titled *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*, nicely kept up my good track record of liking Ant-Man films.

This film still has the offbeat nature that goes with an Ant-Man film. But this one deals with the fallout from *Avengers: Endgame*, which is Scott (the Ant-Man, played by Paul Rudd) not being around for a long time for his daughter Cassie, played by Kathryn Newton.

Despite that, and despite Scott being a bit rudderless at the moment, his family is still somewhat intact. At one point he, Hank, Janet, Hope, and Cassie all gather for a meal. Unfortunately, an experiment of Hank's and Cassie's brings them into trouble – and back to the Quantum Realm.

That trouble comes in the form of Kang the Conqueror, the new



ruler of the Quantum Realm, played by Jonathan Majors. I am a little bit familiar with who Kang is, but it turns out that Janet, who was in this realm for a long time, has had quite a lot of dealings with him, and had a whole other adventure of her own after opening Pandora's Box when they first met.

Let's just say Kang wasn't lost

in the realm, like she was – though he does point out there is something worse coming than him. When you see the film, you'll see he wasn't lying.

The comic book universe likes to have multiple versions of characters, but Hope has Scott's back just like she did in the last *Ant-Man* film, with her father and Janet right behind her throughout the journey.

A few things come in handy when the group tries to prevent Kang from opening Paradox's Box in an even greater way than Janet initially did – something she had managed to stop once before. Cassie getting her own Ant-Man suit, like she wanted to happen during the last film, is one. She always wanted to be at her father's side like this.

There are a few other surprises. One is Bill Murray in a cameo appearance, a character they hadn't seen since the first film appearing in a new form. Also, let's just say that at one point, Ant-Man really lives up to his name. This film was not a disappointment!

**PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Recycling Events for Styrofoam Blocks: "Hold The Foam!"**

**MONTAGUE AND NORTHFIELD** – Special recycling collections for Styrofoam blocks will be held on the last four Saturdays in April, from 9 a.m. to noon on April 8, 15, 22, and 29. Materials will not be accepted outside the hours of 9 a.m. to noon on those dates.

These free collections are only open to residents of Montague and Northfield, and pre-registration is not required.

This special recycling event will only accept white blocks made of "Styrofoam," or expanded polystyrene foam – EPS or PS #6. Please note: these events no longer accept #4 LDPE foam packaging sheets, or foam insulation board (XPS).

These collections will *not* accept "Styrofoam" items such as cups, plates, bowls, trays, clamshells, egg cartons, packing peanuts, or wet/dirty materials. There are no recycling options for these foam materials, and they must go in the trash. The UPS store in Greenfield accepts clean, dry packing peanuts

for reuse. The Northfield collection site, for residents of Northfield only, will be at Northfield Transfer Station, 31 Caldwell Road. Note the new drop-off location.

The Montague collection site will be at Montague Transfer Station, 11 Sandy Lane, Turners Falls. This is only open to residents of all villages in Montague, including Turners Falls, Lake Pleasant, Millers Falls, Montague Center, and Montague City.

Please note that regular household recycling programs do not accept Styrofoam (EPS or PS #6) in any form. The foam blocks collected at these events will be recycled at Gold Circuit E-Cycling in Agawam.

For more information, contact the District office at [info@franklincountywastedistrict.org](mailto:info@franklincountywastedistrict.org) or (413)772-2438. MA Relay for the hearing impaired: 711 or 1-800-439-2370 (TTY/TDD).

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## MEDICINE

## Aging With Quality

By CATHERINE DODDS, MD

**TURNERS FALLS** – As the Dr. Seuss book for obsolete children says, *You're Only Old Once*. As I approach another birthday later this month, my mind turns to aging. What is normal for aging? What diseases become more common with age? How long can I expect to live? And how can I get the best quality from my later years?

Average life expectancy in America is currently around 78 years. During those decades of living, we will all age. However, aging is a variable process. The individual parts of my body age at different rates, and my body ages differently from anyone else's, even my close relatives. How quickly we age depends on many things – genetics and family history, lifestyle choices, and environmental exposures.

As humans age, some changes are nearly universal. For instance, sleep tends to be earlier and lighter, with more overnight awakenings and less ability to tolerate sleep deprivation, leading to the common occurrence of midday napping in older adults. This is related to changes in many of the hormone signaling systems that drive our daily circadian rhythms.

Most parts of the body decrease or change in function naturally over time. The bone marrow produces blood cells differently, which can lead to anemia, weakened immune function, and increased risk of both bleeding and blood clots. The kidneys filter blood more slowly, leading to higher rates of chronic kidney disease in older people. Incontinence (leakage) of both urine and stool happens more often in older people. Sexual interest (libido), fertility, and erectile function in both the penis and clitoris all decrease with age. Skin can become more thin, dry, and show signs of sun damage and easy bruising. Muscle mass and bone strength decline.

Eyesight and hearing are often worse in old age than in our younger years. Tooth decay, loss of teeth, and dry mouth become more common. Chewing and swallowing become more difficult, leading to higher rates of choking and aspiration. Reduced absorption of nutrients and increased rates of constipation occur as we age. Brain size and connectivity decline, leading to slower thinking and worsened memory.

We humans become more vulnerable to disease and injury in general as we age, less able to bounce back. This is true of infections, but also other conditions like heart disease and cancer, which are seen at much higher rates in those over age

50. Some conditions such as dementia, frailty, cataracts, and macular degeneration are almost exclusively diagnosed in older adults.

The condition of *frailty* is suspected when any of the following are present:

- Significant weight loss: over 5% within one year, or 7.5 lbs for a 150-lb person.
- Exhaustion, fatigue, or increased effort needed to do routine activities.
- Weakness: decreased grip strength, difficulty climbing stairs.
- Slow walking speed: requiring over six seconds to walk 15 feet; difficulty walking one block.
- Decreased physical activity: using much less energy than baseline.

- Multiple (three or more) chronic illnesses, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic lung disease, prior heart attack, congestive heart failure, osteoarthritis, stroke, or kidney disease.

Frailty can be seen in young people, but it is much more common as we age. Frailty develops when the body's reserves are pushed to the maximum just to maintain our usual state of health. Even a small challenge to the body crosses the threshold into illness or injury for a frail individual.

The term "successful aging" refers to older individuals who are free from chronic disease and continue to function well into old age, both in body and mind. Some exceptionally healthy older adults take no medications, have no chronic diseases, and have normal blood pressure and body weight. Our genes, lifestyle choices, and socioeconomic status all impact both the quality and the quantity of our lives.

There is a reality check to be faced when thinking about aging, but it's not all doom and gloom. It is part of our human existence to keep aging, but as we get older, we can maintain our bodies in their best possible shape by:

- Avoiding overeating, maintaining a healthy weight, and primarily eating unprocessed foods, such as fruits, vegetables, fish, poultry, and nuts.
- Avoiding tobacco, alcohol, and drug use.
- Moving our bodies each day, focusing on maintaining strength, flexibility, balance, and fitness throughout our lives.
- Having a good stretching and stress reduction routine.
- Protecting adequate time for sleep, and having a consistent wind-down routine before bed.
- Staying socially involved with friends, family, and community.
- Working our brains actively,

## FRONTIERS

## Biochar: What Is It Good For?

By SPENCER SHORKEY

**MILLERS FALLS** – Biochar, which goes by many names including microporous graphite, hard carbon, and Amazonian black earth, is mostly known for its usefulness for enhancing soil quality and thus agricultural productivity. It is also an emerging industrial material, used for example as an anode material in sodium ion batteries and as an additive in concrete.

The microscopic structure of biochar is full of voids and channels, giving it absorption properties similar to a sponge. This helps with water retention, especially in sandy soils. Other molecules are absorbed and retained by biochar as well.

During times of high plant productivity, such as summer months, plants release a variety of organic molecules into the surrounding soils, supporting the microbes and fungi that help the plants thrive in various ways. Excess organic molecules are absorbed into the biochar during productive months, and are steadily released from the biochar back into the surrounding soil during non-productive winter months.

By helping to hold organic molecules and moisture in the soil, biochar helps soil microbes survive in times when those nutrients and water might otherwise be depleted. A strong soil microbiome is helpful for plant growth, as plants obtain many nutrients through friendly communal exchanges with microbes.

Studies have shown that crop yields are increased when topsoil is supplemented with a one-time addition of 2% to 8% biochar by volume. Depending on the soil conditions, it can take up to three years to see the full benefit. Biochar's benefits are most obvious in drier, sandier soils and soils with low nutrient availability. Applying biochar together with other additives shows additional benefit, as evidenced in the accompanying figure detailing

for instance by studying a language or by taking classes to learn a new skill.

- Planning for the future, including possibly needing help with daily activities, needing someone to help with decision-making and money management in the setting of cognitive decline, needing to adapt our home environments to promote "aging in place," needing to move to another type of housing arrangement, and needing to stop driving if no longer safe.

- Following up with routine medical care (including vaccinations and cancer screening), and keeping chronic medical conditions well-controlled.



An electron microscopy image of biochar's sponge-like structure.

the synergistic effects of biochar and urine on pumpkin yields.

Historically, biochar has not been widely known or used in Western agriculture, likely due to the difficulty in reliably producing the substance. However, indigenous people living in the Amazon thousands of years ago apparently produced a lot of it. Amazonian black earth, also known as *terra preta*, contains up to 9% biochar. *Terra preta* is so valuable that this product of ancient Amazonian farmers is still being mined and sold for agricultural use.

Biochar production requires that biomass be heated to between 450° and 700° C in the absence of oxygen. This results in *pyrolysis*, which is the reorganization of bio-carbon into high-stability "aromatized" carbon structures. If oxygen is present, the bio-carbon will simply burn into CO<sub>2</sub>. If the temperature is not high enough, pyrolysis will be inefficient, and lower-stability charcoal will be produced instead; if the temperature gets too high, carbon molecules break apart and vaporize, lowering the yield.

Carbon-based soil additives such as biochar, charcoal, and compost all have a similar property in that they contain microporous sponge-like structures. However, while charcoals and composts will break down in only a few years, biochar will be stable for hundreds, maybe thousands. This makes biochar relevant as a long-term storage medium for carbon that would otherwise decompose and return to the atmosphere as CO<sub>2</sub>.

Some recent articles on the topic of biochar have suggested that it can be deployed as a carbon sequestration medium, potentially on a scale large enough to counteract human CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This is a flawed concept, however, since there is not nearly enough biomass available for pyrolysis at this scale.

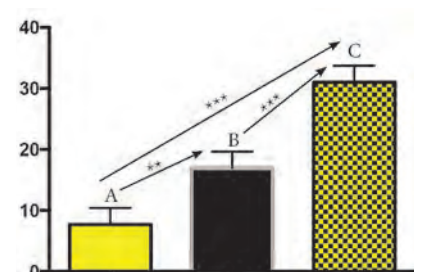
Consider this: wood is the most

practical source of biomass for industrial biochar production, and there are roughly 10 billion acres of forested land on earth. High-performing forests in the southern US yield around 80 tons of wood per acre over a 40-year growth cycle, which averages to 2 tons per acre per year.

Wood contains no more than 50% carbon, and a reasonably efficient pyrolysis can fix half of that carbon into biochar. Thus the yield could be, optimistically, half a ton of fixed carbon, equivalent to 1.8 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions avoided per acre per year.

In a ridiculous theoretical scenario where all of Earth's forests were managed for biochar, the yield could be 18 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions avoided annually. But in 2021, humans produced around 37 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> from burning fossil fuels. In other words, using *every forest on Earth* for this purpose would only offset half of human CO<sub>2</sub> emissions!

Other approaches, for example using algae farms, could serve as a meaningfully large biomass feedstock for biochar/pyrolysis-based carbon sequestration. Some algae strains have been engineered to be hundreds of times faster at sequestering carbon than trees, so this may be a more realistic approach to offsetting human CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Such algae farms would still have to be industrialized and prove feasible at enormous scales.



A 2015 study in the scientific journal *Agriculture* showed increases in pumpkin yield, in kilograms per plant, after urine alone (left), biochar alone (center), and a combination of the two (right) were applied to a fertile tropical soil. (Image by Schmidt et al.)

This is not to take anything away from biochar. The practice of converting agricultural waste, such as dried manure, rice husks, or corn stalks, into biochar makes a lot of sense, given that this waste would otherwise rapidly decompose completely into CO<sub>2</sub>.

Biochar is a useful material which will likely play a role in the future of agriculture and industry. But for now, the idea of using biochar for meaningfully large-scale sequestration of carbon from biomass is lacking in practicality, at least compared with the scale of human emissions.

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# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



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**THURSDAY, MARCH 2**

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Rooster. Free. 9 p.m.

**FRIDAY-SUNDAY, MARCH 3-5**

Northampton, eight venues: Back Porch Fest feat. Watchhouse, Molly Tuttle, Cedric Burnside, Sunny War, more. \$. See [backporchfest.com](http://backporchfest.com).

**FRIDAY, MARCH 3**

Deja Brew, Wendell: Eric Love. Free. 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: Tony Vacca. \$. 8 p.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: Community Rave Network with DJs Scotia, SVB, villi manilli, Dolores, Pinky Promise. \$. 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: The Give. Free. 9:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 4**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: Talk, Recovering Indigenous Histories Along the Kwinitekw with Margaret Bruchac. Free. 4 p.m.

Pioneer Brewery, Turners Falls: Groove Prophet. Free. 7 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: Richard Chase. Free. 7:30 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: No Lens, The Upstairs District, The Baxbys, The Agonizers, Slob Drop, Jake Tuvek. \$. 8 p.m.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 5**

Element Brewing, Millers Falls: A Day Without Love, Lesbiana. Free. 5 p.m.

Belltower Records, North Adams: Constant Smiles, Jeanines, Sunday Compost. \$. 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: Chris Goudreau, Aaron Noble & the Clones, The Frost Heaves & Hales, Orange & Amber. \$. 7:30 p.m.

**MONDAY, MARCH 6**

Sheffield Elementary, Turners Falls: Música Franklin Community Concert. Staff and student performance in honor of Women's History Month. Free. 6 p.m.

Tree House Theater, South Deerfield: Josh Ritter. \$. 8 p.m.

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8**

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Falltown String Band. Free. 8 p.m.

**THURSDAY, MARCH 9**

Epsilon Spire, Brattleboro: Suzanne Ciani, Jesse Beaman. \$. 8 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: Consider the Source. \$. 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: Goldsetter, Topsy and Co. \$. 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, MARCH 10**

Looky Here, Greenfield: Mystra Art Show reception with music by Junk Orbit, Wednesday Knudsen, Arkm Foam, Allysen Callery, Dusty Miller, Tarp.

Free. 6 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: Don LaCoy, Rich Stratton. Free. 7 p.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: Y2K Dance Party feat. DJ Both Hands, DJ Poptart, DJ Corixa. \$. 7 p.m.

Bombyx Center, Florence: Rani Arbo & daisy mayhem. \$. 7 p.m.

Pushkin Gallery, Greenfield: Ruth Garbus, Nick Bisceglia, Blue Dish. \$. 7:30 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: Thank You Scientist, Hot Dirt, Clock Serum. \$. 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Bliss 42. Free. 9:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 11**

Montague Common Hall, Montague Center: Open Mic. By donation. 6:30 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: Enter the Haggis. \$. 8 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: Big Takeover, Lush Honey. \$. 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Shenanigans. Free. 9:30 p.m.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 12**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: Deepening the Power of Place, with Erica Wheeler, Andre Strongbearheart Gaines, more. Free. 4 p.m.

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: The Young Dubliners. \$. 8 p.m.

**THURSDAY, MARCH 16**

10 Forward, Greenfield: Padded Waltz, Screensavor, St. Intel. \$. 8 p.m.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 18**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: Mud Season with The Love Crumbs, Dave Bulley Band, the barnRocket Imagineers, Jenny Burtis Band, more. \$. 11 a.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: Electric Flower Ball with Pleasure Coffin, Nurse Joy, OrangePeelMystic, Agua Viva, DJ Robbie Dean Rhodes. \$. 7 p.m.

Mount Toby Meetinghouse, Leverett: Court Dorsey. \$. 7 p.m.

Stone Church, Adams: Luci Dead Limb, Faucet, Dysnomia. \$. 7 p.m.

Parlor Room, Northampton: Lucy Wainwright Roche. \$. 7:30 p.m.

**THURSDAY, MARCH 23**

10 Forward, Greenfield: Done, Death Defier, Sink, Bricklayer, Valley Gals. \$. 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, MARCH 24**

Nova Arts, Keene, NH: Jeopardy, Kurtosis, Vale End. \$. 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: Bella's Bartok, Dr. Bacon. \$. 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: Heavy Blanket (feat. J. Mascis), Willie Lane, DJ Matt Krefting. \$. 8 p.m.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 25**

Stone Church, Brattleboro: King Tuff, Tchotchke. \$. 8 p.m.

looking forward...

**SUNDAY, APRIL 2**

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: Deerhoof, Sound of Ceres, Zannie. \$. 8 p.m.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 16**

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: Non Phixion, Subtex. \$. 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 21**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: Iain Matthews, Pairedown, Allysen Callery. \$. 7:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 22**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: Tiffany. \$. 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: The Feelies. \$. 8 p.m.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 23**

Bombyx Center, Florence: George Winston. \$. 7 p.m.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 29**

Daily Op, Easthampton: Large Professor. \$. 8 p.m.

**THURSDAY, MAY 4**

Bombyx Center, Florence: Rufus Wainwright. \$. 7 p.m.

**SATURDAY, MAY 13**

Palladium, Worcester: Sepultura, Kreator, Death Angel, Spirit World. \$. 6 p.m.

**FRIDAY-SUNDAY, MAY 19-21**

Nova Arts, Keene, NH: The Thing in Spring feat. Bill Callahan, Marisa Anderson, Guerrilla Toss, Thus Love, Editrix, Landowner, more. \$. See [novaarts.org/thething](http://novaarts.org/thething).



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**DELIA** from page B1

much money, it did attract the attention of the woman who would become my wife, so I am all the richer for it.

**MR:** What is it like working as a couple?

**KD:** Hans hands me pencils with notes about what he'd like to see, and I pull out my pens and have at it. It's pretty convenient – we both have our own space to work in, and like listening to various media while working, but he's right down the hall if I have any questions or need to know if it's done to his satisfaction.

**HR:** I've been drawing these strange comics for decades and the pace of my drawings has always been glacial in speed. I've often wished I could clone myself and increase my output. Having been fortunate enough to marry a talented and

willing artist, more comics pages can be produced every week! Hooray!

**MR:** What was the inspiration for Delia?

**KD:** Honestly, I think Hans wanted to include me on a project, and knew that anything with squirrels in it would be a sure lure to keep me interested... not to mention Delia being a strong and capable female scientist.

**HR:** Who knows where inspiration comes from? Ideas are churning in my brain. There are no original ideas in this book; I stole them all from things I was absorbing at the time: old underground comix, classic science fiction, and whatever was happening around me. Krissy's input and ideas also helped a lot in the formation of the book.

I know one of my original inspirations was the story of John Murray Spear, an early-19th-century ab-



Collaborators and husband-and-wife team Rickheit and Dorn with their recent title, Delia, published by Fantagraphics.

olitionist who later formed his own spiritualist cult in Lynn, Massachusetts. He tried to build an "electric messiah" built of copper and magnets. Like a scene from an old hor-

ror movie, the local townspeople torched the wooden shed where the machine was kept.

I'd also been reading a lot of science books by Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking, and nudged the story in the direction of alien contact instead.

The name Delia is from Delia Derbyshire, a pioneer in early electronic music, who is most well-known for creating the iconic original Doctor Who theme music. Because of the sexism of the day, she wasn't given credit or recognition for the music until many years later.

**MR:** The art is rich and impressive. How long did it take to write and draw?

**KD:** Some pages took longer than others, depending on the level of detail: anywhere from a couple of hours for simpler pages to 10 or 12 hours for really dense pages, with a lot of stippling or cross-hatching.

Hans would sometimes want a certain effect or style, and would show me an example from something in his massive comics collection. Other times, I'd just go with whatever seemed to work. My strongest influences range from woodcuts and engravings to R. Crumb.

Occasionally, Hans would accompany the pencil with printouts

of reference photos he'd used, street scenes, etc., which I found helpful because I could find a lot of information about light sources and textures.

At some point, he started using a 3D modeling program for things like the helicopters, and I didn't like those as much, because the images were flatter and didn't have other details to inform the inking.

**MR:** What's next for you guys? I have to ask: sequel?

**KD:** Yes! The first page of the sequel is on my drawing board as we speak! Of course, Delia took five years, at about a page a week... so it will take a little while!

**HR:** Yeah, don't rush us!

I liked the story and characters in Delia, and was super-impressed by the art. It's a PG comic, but melds different styles of original, distinctive, and gorgeous black-and-white artwork which resonate with the best of independent and underground comix.

Hans and Krissy said the sequel may take a bit of a "left turn," with funny, excited grins on their faces. I couldn't imagine what they meant, but I'm looking forward to finding out.

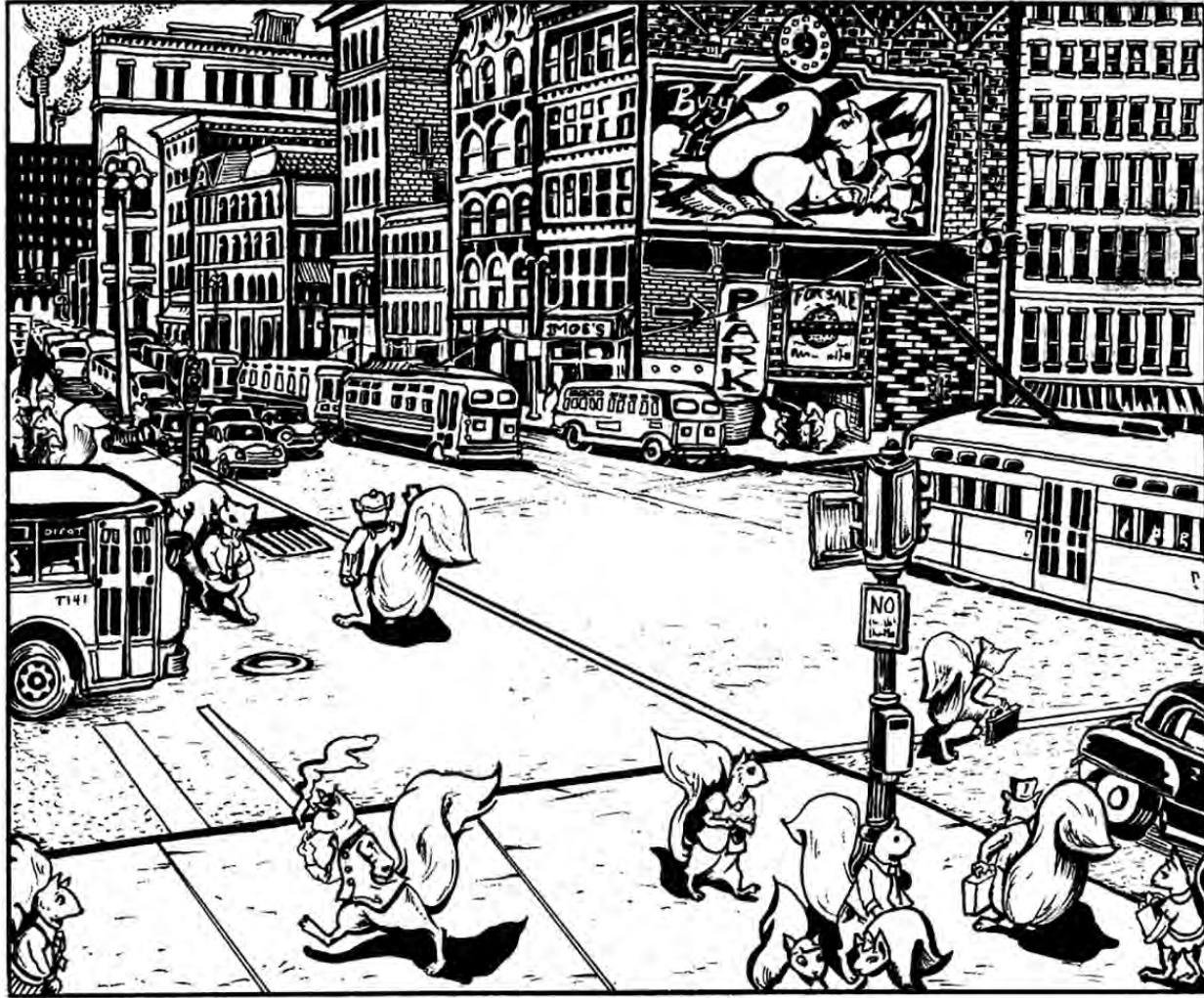


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Amanda Gorman, *The Hill We Climb*

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