

The Athenian

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Sponsored by Grafton Cares

JANUARY 2021

A Year We'll Never Forget!

I don't know about you, but I'm sure glad that the year 2020 is now in the rearview mirror! It's been a tumultuous year to say the least as we now hold our breath, cross our fingers, and hope for things to get better in 2021. But while we changed the calendar page, we haven't left behind the pandemic – the unprecedented crisis of 2020 that basically redefined all our lives much of the year. Forecasts say that we can expect things to get worse before they get better and that cautionary note informs things from continued food support for those in need, changing back to virtual meetings, and the need to remain vigilant as we are reminded below by Doug DiVello, President and CEO of Grace Cottage Hospital, “masks on faces, six-foot spaces, uncrowded places.”

- Sherry Maher



Photo Credit- Treah Pichette

Select Board Meeting Tidbits

In addition to news in other pieces below, here are a few things from the December Select Board meetings that might be of interest:

- The Board ratified a vote from November in favor of rental of the Elementary School to the school district, and to proceed with a grant application for completing the emergency management plan.
- There was a discussion about the likely need to use Australian Ballot for all Town Meeting votes including election of officers and articles due to health & safety concerns. In this case, there would also be a virtual information session prior to Town Meeting Day and the polls would be open as usual from 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM. See the article below by David Bemis. Anyone who is up for re-election, or wishing to run for an office will need to sign a consent form prior to January 25 agreeing to have their name on the ballot. Contact Darlene to sign this form. [Note - Stay tuned as the Athenian will share more details on this as we get them.]

- RT Brown from SVEDS asked that the Town consider a municipal funding request in follow up to a letter sent to the Board back in July. The Board asked that he resend the letter with the request.

- An Executive Session was called for a legal matter that lasted just under a half hour, and the meeting was adjourned following that session with no indication of any decisions or actions stemming from the executive session.

- A brief Special Board Meeting was held at 6 PM on December 29th. An engineer who evaluated

Taylor Hill Road at the request of the residents, informed the Board that his report was completed and would be shared with the residents to pass on to the Board. Discussion followed regarding what information was considered. The engineer will review additional VTrans information and compare with the data he had. The Board will review this “report then begin steps toward potential mediation”.

- Matt reported some damage to Brookline Rd and Meetinghouse Rd. from the Christmas Day storm. There was a discussion about possible grants or other emergency funds from the state to help with labor costs for the repairs.

- Sherry Maher

Update from Select Board

At the December 17, 2020 Select board meeting the board reviewed options for Town Meeting in March 2021. Because of the State of Emergency in the State of VT due to the Covid 19 pandemic, a traditional Town Meeting is not practical. The Select board voted to conduct the meeting by Australian ballot as allowed by Act 162.

People interested in seeking office simply need to file a Candidate consent form with the Town Clerk,

before January 25, 2021. No signatures are required only the signed consent form.

All articles as well as the Candidates for Office will be voted on March 2, 2021 at the Town Office. Absentee ballots are available from the Town Clerk prior to Town Meeting Day.

An online informational meeting will be held prior to March 2, 2021 for community discussion of the articles to be voted on.

If anyone has additional questions the Vermont League of Cities and Towns has produced a website which will help answer the questions.

<https://www.vlct.org/town-meeting-covid-19-faqs>

- David Bemis

Grace Cottage CEO – Coronavirus Update

December 14th, 2020 - The fact that the first COVID-19 vaccines were administered in the United States today (at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in Queens, and then elsewhere) is excellent news. However, we still have a long way to go before the vast majority of people are vaccinated and the virus is largely defeated, and we must continue to take all of the precautions that we all know so well now, including “masks on faces, six-foot spaces, uncrowded places.”

We’ve been receiving many questions at Grace Cottage, and I want to share the answers that we have, as of now, with all of you. As you know, things change rapidly these days, and we will be keeping you updated.

When can I get a COVID vaccine? - The answer to this question depends upon what state you are in, the availability of the vaccine in that state, and where you fit in the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. Vermont is following the CDC guidelines as well. Initially, there will be limited quantities of COVID-19 vaccine available in these early stages. The first shipment of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been delivered to Vermont this week and is being disseminated throughout the state to people in the CDC’s “First Priority 1A” category, which include health care workers, long-term-care patients, Emergency Medical Service personnel with direct patient contact, and home health care clinical staff and caregivers. Since there are 44,000 health care workers in the state of Vermont, administration of the vaccine to these front-line workers will be a phased-in process over the next several weeks. Then the state will move on to Phase 1B, which will include essential workers in education, food, agriculture, utilities, transportation, and prisons. Phase 1C will be adults over 65 years old and adults with high-risk medical conditions. Vaccination sites will include Vermont hospitals and select pharmacies that are partnering with long-term care facilities and, as the vaccine becomes more widely

available, the number of distribution sites will be expanded.

Frequent updates on vaccines are given on the Vermont Department of Health’s website page “About Covid-19 Vaccines in Vermont”, found here.

When the vaccine becomes more widely available, we will post this on our website with the phase group available for vaccination. Please keep track of your eligibility for the vaccine and call your healthcare provider to make an appointment at a time that is convenient for you. And don’t hesitate to call us if you have questions.

Where can I get the vaccine? If you are an established patient at Grace Cottage Family Health primary care, you will be able to receive the vaccine here when you have met the eligibility requirements outlined by the CDC and the state of Vermont. If you are not an established patient at Grace Cottage Family Health (if you’ve only visited our Emergency Department or our Messenger Valley Pharmacy, you have not been assigned a primary care provider here), you can click here to get more information about how to become a patient. We are welcoming new patients.

[Note-There are many more questions and answers to be found in the rest of this news release. Go to <https://gracecottage.org/news/> and look for the December 14th update.]

- Doug DiVello

Budget Committee Update

The 2021 town budget is close to being final. Most of the budget figures are at or below last year's. Triple T informed the town that they will be raising their trucking rates for trash and recycling pickup to \$130/hr (a 32% increase) starting in April. There will be an article to vote on in March, asking the townspeople if you want to reduce trash pickup service to every other week — on alternate weeks to when there is recycling pickup. If the town agrees on this service reduction, our overall cost for trash pickup will go up just slightly from what it was last year to ~\$38,000. If the town votes to keep the current weekly trash service, the annual cost of trash pick-up will rise to ~\$44,000 in 2021 and ~\$46,000 in 2022. Keep an eye out for that article on your Australian ballot in March.

- Hannah Regier

School Vote Update

The Westminster withdrawal vote from the Elementary School District is coming soon.

On January 5 Westminster should be holding its vote on whether to withdraw from the WNUESD elementary school district formed by the State Board of Education. This district includes the former town school districts of Athens, Grafton, and Westminster.

Westminster will be holding an informational meeting on December 29. Further information on that meeting should be on the Westminster town website.

Should this vote be successful, the voters of the towns of Grafton and Athens will be asked to vote to approve this withdrawal.

At least for the short term, we are estimating that any tax implications of such a withdrawal may be modest but we are still finalizing our budgets for the coming year and trying to develop useful long term forecasts. There are several looming financial issues that I think Athens and Grafton voters will want to discuss before approving (or disapproving) this withdrawal.

The WNUESD Board and the Athens and Grafton town educational advisory boards will jointly host one or more informational meetings to make sure Athens and Grafton voters have that information before any vote by our communities.

Look for more updates on these issues in the coming weeks. - *Jack Bryar WNUESD BOARD CHAIR*

Notes from the School Board

In November the teachers of WNUESD had a professional development training on guided reading and on-line teaching. This course was reported as being very helpful. Over the week of on-line education following Thanksgiving the teachers reported having more time with classes and were able to set up one-on-one time with students. The attendance during that week was very high and the participation by students was reported as excellent.

Following Thanksgiving, during the on-line week of schooling, there were 5 cases of COVID-19 reported in the WNUESD communities. Fortunately, these cases were in the communities not inside the school buildings. The district's school buildings have continued to remain clear of COVID-19 cases since that time.

At the December Supervisory Union meeting there was a discussion on Act 173. This act will be restructuring how the state determines the Special Ed reimbursements to the SU's from the current weighted system to a block grant system. The block grant system favors the size of the communities rather than the number of Special Ed students. This will greatly lower our refunds, consequently raising our Special Ed costs. WNESU has signed onto a statewide motion that address the ills of Act 173. This act does not go into effect until 2022. On a brighter note, this year's Special Ed costs are going down 13% from last year's cost due to the percent of refund given by the state to the SU as of 12/16/2020 for the 2020-2021 School year.

I encourage anyone with questions, concerns or suggestions to please contact me at 869-2227 or by email at lynn.morgan@wnesu.com. - *Lynn Morgan*

SEVCA Heating Fuel Programs

SEVCA (Southeastern Vermont Community Action) offers and can connect you to a variety of fuel assistance programs described below. SEVCA's coordinator can help with these programs by explaining in more detail when you call. This contact information is provided at the end of this article. SEVCA urges you to call when you are at ¼ tank level as they do not pay for a special trip or other start up charges.

Seasonal or supplemental fuel is an entitlement program from the state of Vermont that says, all Vermont residents that have a fuel liability and have income at or below 185% of the federal poverty level can apply for and receive a fuel benefit.

Crisis Fuel is an emergency program for Vermont residents that have exhausted their state benefits and are not able to purchase fuel. They must have applied for state benefits. This is a onetime assistance of 125 gallons if they qualify.

Warmth Assistance is based on the same as crisis fuel 200% of the federal poverty level. It is a heating fund that is capped at \$300 per household, per heating season.

Windham County Heat Fund is a private fund for Windham County residents. SEVCA can screen clients and help them apply, which is the preferred method.

After Hours Service. After Hours Crisis Fuel Assistance Hotline is open on weekends and holidays ONLY from 8:30am to 4 pm. Applicants are screened by the call center based on the following criteria: Out of Fuel/No Heat Emergency and at least one household member is over 60, or under 6, or in receipt of federal disability

After Hours Furnace Assistance is open daily from 5 pm to 7 am and also on weekends and holidays 8:30 am to 4 pm. This program does not accept out of fuel calls.

Do not hesitate to call SEVCA to help with any of the above programs. Call Ellen Paquette, Crisis Fuel/Family Services Coordinator at 802-722-4575 extension 1402. -*Dennis Hunt*

Emergency Committee Update

The Athens Weather Emergency Committee is fortunate to welcome two wonderful people to our volunteer ranks: Tina White and Wichie Artu. Tina is of course the daughter of Tom and Linda Taylor, and a life-long resident of Athens; Wichie, on the other hand, recently moved to town having bought Carol Bingham's former home on Brookline Road.

Fortunately, we have not had a weather emergency to deal with during 2020. However, the Committee has met several times to review and update our protocols and tend to other business. This includes updating the Zones of Responsibility assigned to each member of the committee. See who covers your area below should

you or a neighbor need assistance during a weather emergency.

Don Capponcelli (869.2590): Reed Road

Cheree Alsvig (802.428.3016): Ernst, McCusker, Walker & Herring Roads

Tim Stevenson & Sherry Maher (802.2141): Rte 35 from Townshend town line to junction of Brookline & Rte35; upper Mill Hill & Meetinghouse Rd.

Tina White (869.3478): Rte 35 from junction of Rte 35 & Brookline Rd. to Cambridgeport town line; Taylor Hill, Ober Hill, Grout & Miller Rds., and lower Mill Hill

Wichie Artu (8769.3669): from junction of Rte 35/Brookline Rds to Valley Cemetery Rd. and Valley Cemetery Rd.

Lynn Morgan (869.2227): Brookline Rd. from Valley Cemetery Rd to Brookline town line; Sam Farr and Whitney Rds.

We are also pleased to announce we have reaffirmed our relationship with the American Red Cross. Specifically, while we will open the Athens Community Church as an emergency shelter if needed, providing food, cots, and blankets for folks who need such care, the Red Cross will take over and run the shelter when they can get to us.

In a weather-related emergency, we will use the town office as our base of operations. We have emergency radio equipment that can connect us to the town road crew and the outside world if necessary.

- Tim Stevenson

Food News You Can Use

Below is a list of local sites where food assistance is available at no or little cost to you. Please get the word out to your friends and neighbors about these programs as we go through these uncertain times.

Grafton Community Church Food Pantry. The Grafton Community Church is sponsoring free food for pickup at the Church during the week. Staples such as pasta, tomato sauce, jam, oatmeal, and sometimes even frozen meat are available. Give Mary Feder a call at the church at 843-2346 and leave your name and phone number or email graftonchurch@gmail.com to arrange a pickup time. Food can be brought to your car and “social distancing” will be maintained along with wearing a mask. Delivery can also be arranged.

The day after the monthly Veggie Van Go event the Grafton Community Church runs a drive up food pantry with the remaining food from the event the day before plus other shelf stable items. The time is from 12-1 at the Church. The date this month is Thursday, January 14th,

Veggie van Go Leland & Gray Lower Parking Lot Free food is available each month at the high school. The date this month is Wednesday, January 13th from 12-1. Just drive to the lower parking lot, stay in your car, and

a box will be brought out and put into your trunk. The purpose of the program is to help people obtain fresh fruits and vegetables to sustain a healthy lifestyle. All are welcome and no proof of eligibility is required. Sometimes a second food distribution in a month is organized with little advance notice, so check the Grace Cottage website or call 802-365-9109 for information. This is hosted by Grace Cottage Hospital and sponsored by the Vermont Food Bank.

Townshend Community Food Shelf. The long-time food shelf is open and providing food to those who need it. They have limited fruit, vegetables, milk, frozen meat, and fresh bread. They also have canned food, pasta, rice, and shelf stable proteins.

They are located in the Townshend Church and are open every Monday from 6pm to 7pm. Line up with your car and you will be given a number and let into the pantry as a group and out a separate exit. Be sure to wear your mask. If you have questions please call 365-4348. Their mailing address is P.O. Box 542, Townshend, VT 05353.

Meals On Wheels. Senior Solutions in Springfield, VT sponsors a Meals on Wheels program for seniors and those with disabilities. Grafton Cares provides pickup and delivery three times a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. The meals are prepared in the kitchen of Valley Cares Assisted Living in Townshend. Sign up is straight forward. Call Senior Solutions Senior Help Line at 1-800-642-5119 for all the particulars and enjoy having meals delivered to your door in Athens and Grafton.

Quadruple Your EBT Benefits at the Brattleboro Winter Farmers Market – Do you have 3SquaresVT/SNAP benefits? Now through January, when you use 3SquaresVT/ SNAP or P/EBT benefits for a curbside pickup order at the Brattleboro Winter Farmers Market, you'll get up to \$30 extra in Crop Cash and Food Boost to purchase fruits, veggies and more. That means \$10 in EBT buys \$40 of local food! Orders can be made online from 9AM Monday morning to 9 AM Thursday morning for pick up the following Saturday. Call Sherry at 869-2141 to find out more or go to www.brattleborowinterfarmersmarket.org.

-Dennis Hunt

Grafton Cares Update

For us, December was a month with just a couple of bright spots to relieve our frustration at running at half speed. The brightest by far was the pleasure we felt in being privileged to work with the Grafton Community Church in assembling and delivering Christmas baskets to the “over 80” residents of Grafton and Athens. Working with so many friends to complete this delightful project, I was reminded of a short sentence from Herman Hesse’s stories: The joy of the Lord flows from hands working together.” (My rough translation)

The baskets were beautiful, stuffed with tasty treats, and surely bringing pleasure to our elders while being a reminder of how much we value them.

Concerning our other activities, we provided two rides to medical appointments, as well as \$225 in gas cards. Five “Sunshine Fruit Baskets” were given out. One hospital bed was returned to us, and we loaned out and delivered yet another such bed. We also loaned out a shower chair and two raised toilet seats.

Our best wishes to everyone for a safe and happier New Year!
-Bill Toomey

January Library Corner

Smiles and Gratitude

We are honored to announce the following special donations to the Grafton Public Library 2020 Annual Appeal: in memory of Marge Prouty, Barbara Williams, Catherine Wright and Marilyn Veltri.

I’d like to thank library volunteers David Ross and Pat Mack for their ongoing assistance repairing and shelving books. In addition, Pat Mack refurbished a WWI Victory Bonds poster for the library, donating the cost. It’s a stunner. I will put a photo up on Facebook, if you aren’t able to stop by the library in person to see it. Several people were a great help decorating the library for the holidays, including Denise Martin (orbs, lights and a timer), Becky Clark (tree donation), trustee Sue Allen (tree decorating) and Pat Mack (interior decorating).

In fact, Pat Mack provided the decorated mantel we used for the backdrop for Bill Toomey’s Holiday Stories on Zoom. Which brings me to the final thank you of 2020—but I’ll have more in 2021, never fear! Bill Toomey charmed a Zoom crowd of nearly 80 people with his own holiday stories on December 18, in what I think might have been one of our most memorable programs, in so many ways. □ Not only were Bill’s stories exactly what we needed to hear at year’s end, in what has been a uniquely rough time, but it was extremely touching and heartwarming to have a shared experience with so many folks connected to both Bill and Grafton. Whether an attendee was in Vermont, Colorado, Florida, Maine, Texas or California, for 90 minutes we were all one community; some new faces and many very familiar faces. It was a special time and very good to see you all. Thank you to everyone who brings so much, in so many ways, to the Grafton Public Library and to our extended community.

Upcoming Programs

Start the New Year with a library program! Focus on nature and books, in virtual community with others, as we discuss some great titles. Nature Museum president Laurie Danforth and I have selected a variety of genres to entertain and enlighten during the winter months to come. Or join us for our weekly Spanish sessions—language learning is food for the brain and fun.

January Programs:

Spanish Conversation on Zoom, Tuesdays 11am, intermediate level

Nature & Books Winter Series on Zoom: Wednesday, January 27, 6-7:30pm, Underland by Robert Macfarlane,

Wednesday, February 24, 6-7:30pm, Jimmy Bluefeather by Kim Heacox, Wednesday, March 24, 6-7:30pm,

Vesper Flights by Helen MacDonald. Contact the library to register and for more information. – Michelle Dufort

The Last Butternut Tree

Right behind our barn grows a once beautiful Butternut tree that has been slowly declining in health for a number of years. The tree has a disease known as Butternut Canker and probably became infected from beetles which can carry the spores from tree to tree.



Butternut Canker was first observed in southwest Wisconsin in 1979 and has infected most of the Butternut trees throughout their natural range in the United States, from New England to Minnesota and as far south as Georgia.

Butternuts are little known because they usually don’t grow well together in pure stands like other northern hardwoods. When you do have the good fortune to see one, it is usually a single tree standing alone in the forest. The wood is rot-resistant and was



used for fence posts and trim boards. It was also tapped for syrup by native Americans and the bark was used for dye. The nuts are also an important food source for wildlife.

It is estimated that the Butternut Canker has killed more than 85% of all Butternut trees. There is no known treatment for

the disease so conservation efforts have been on finding and protecting resistant trees. Although Butternuts have been proposed for listing as a Threatened or Endangered

Species, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has taken no action.

I have been so accustomed to living with this tree and have found no other Butternut trees on our property, so I plan to watch it fade away like an old soldier that it is.

– Jay Maciejowski

Free Fraud Webinars

AARP Vermont is starting up a free bi-weekly series of fraud webinars to the public, beginning Jan. 12, 2021.

Prior to the pandemic, AARP offered in-person presentations. AARP has suspended these activities because of the coronavirus pandemic, but given the barrage of scams that has gained new life, organizers say the delivery of the message has taken on a higher level of importance.

The webinars will be delivered via Zoom as either meetings or webinars depending on the number of persons interested in attending. The dates and topics are as follows: January 12: A New Pandemic — How Scammers Exploit Vulnerabilities Created by the COVID-19 Crisis. Con-artists take advantage of people by playing on emotional themes.

The current pandemic has created “the perfect storm” for these criminals. Learn the ABC’s of Novel Coronavirus scams, how to spot and avoid them, and how to report them. Resources will be provided and there will be ample opportunity to ask questions.

January 26: Weapons of Fraud — an overview of the leading scams, techniques of con artists, and discussion of the steps to take to avoid victimization. This is AARP’s “Flagship” presentation as it is the organization’s oldest program and has been presented most frequently. While addressing a range of issues, it does not cover computer/cyber scams.

Additional dates and sessions:

February 10: Fraud, Scams, and Con Artists — Coming to a Computer Near You.

February 24: Identity Theft.

March 10: Operation Protect Veterans

March 24: Medicare Fraud and Investment Fraud — Recognizing the Scams Before You Become a Victim.

For more information contact Elliott Greenblott, Vermont Coordinator of the AARP Fraud Watch Network, at egreenblott@aarp.org. - Author

[Excerpted from the Brattleboro Reformer](#), Dec 26 issue.

– Elliott Greenblott



Photo Credit - Sandi Capponcelli

It’s hard to predict the weather during the winter. We think of winter as loaded with cold and snow. But sometimes that just doesn’t happen.

Take 2007. The “Additional Discussion” page at the end of January says it all: “No snowstorm the entire winter so far. Extremely warm early in the season. Missed every snowstorm but got every rainstorm. Now its too cold to snow. Have about 2” on the ground.”

Then it happened. On February 14th Valentine’s Day.

“A huge snowstorm is under way. Very large totals expected. Temps: 17.5 to 0.9.” The next day. “It’s beautiful! About 2’ of snow yesterday. ‘Blizzards Warning’ with it. Very windy. Today is sunny, blue sky, very cold. Temps: 15.8 to 2.7.”

This winter? Anybody’s guess.

- Dennis Hunt

Thoughts To Ponder

It’s New Year’s Resolution time. Besides wishing the pandemic away, here are a few thoughts’

- (1) “An optimist stays up until midnight to see the New Year in. A pessimist stays up to make sure the old one leaves.” -Bill Vaughn
- (2) “The bad news is time flies. The good news is you’re the pilot.” -Michael Altsheuler
- (3) “I would quit all my bad habits for the new year, but then I remembered that nobody likes a quitter.” -Unknown

-All quotes selected by Dennis Hunt

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Select Board Meetings: 3rd Thursday 7:00 PM

Budget Committee: 2nd & 4th Tuesday 7:00 PM

Meeting House Committee: 2nd Monday 10 AM

School Board: 2nd Thursday 6:30 Grafton School

Do you have a news story for The Athenian or a favorite family tale to share? Would you like to be on our email list and get the newsletter in your inbox?

CONTACT US at theathenianvt@gmail.com.



UPCOMING RECYCLING DATES:

JAN 4 & 18, FEB 1

Entries from A Weather Journal