

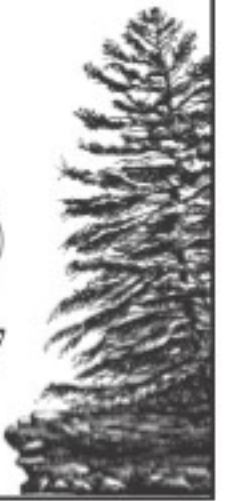


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BROADBAND UPDATE A BRIEF HISTORY, AND WHERE WE ARE (OR AREN'T) NOW

By Barry R. Shapiro

No one could be criticized at this point if, when trying to understand where our town stands in its quest for high speed internet, they threw their hands up in frustration and shouted, "I just don't get it! Why can't we get what towns around us seem to be getting? There's no question that there are good people working hard at this, but why aren't we making more progress? How much longer do I have to live with my primitive DSL, if I'm lucky enough to have it?"

The answers to these and similar questions – and there do appear to be answers – are complex. As a starting point, here is a chronology of the efforts to bring broadband to New Marlborough, including the blind alleys the Town has encountered:

2008 – MBI is formed

On August 4, 2008, Governor Deval Patrick signed into law "an Act Establishing and Funding the Massachusetts Broadband Institute," with the intention of making high-speed internet available in the state's communities that lack any access to broadband. The new law called for the expansion to be completed within the next three years (you'll see below just how well that worked out). As part of this legislation, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) was formed to invest up to \$40 million of state money for broadband-related infrastructure and improvement projects, such as, for example, the construction of a fiber optic network in New Marlborough. MBI was to work with unserved or underserved towns to design and construct "last mile" broadband services to residents and businesses, to provide construction management

services and to assist in the selection of an operator to run the networks once built. Expectations were that up to 40 percent of the cost of construction would be paid by MBI, significantly reducing the burden on the towns. MBI was also to build the so-called "Mass Broadband123" middle-mile network which would bring high-speed internet to central points in the towns. From there, the so called "Last Mile" project would bring internet to each home and business.

2011 – WiredWest is formed

After a number of years of informal meetings, WiredWest Communications Cooperative was formed to create a cooperative of forty-four towns in western Massachusetts, to provide education and outreach, and to operate the local broadband network once constructed. WiredWest asserted that a regional approach would be most efficient and cost effective and claimed to bring considerable financial, marketing, sales, legal, and enterprise management expertise to the planning process. To participate in the WiredWest network, each town needed to form a "municipal lighting plant" (MLP) which would finance the construction of telecommunications networks. An MLP is a municipal utility with its own board of directors. The participating towns' MLPs would ultimately own and control WiredWest.

2011 – New Marlborough forms its MLP

At a Special Town Meeting on March 2, 2011, followed by additional action at the Annual Town Meeting in May, New Marlborough voters acted to form an MLP, intended to work with WiredWest to undertake the capitalization, build-out, and operation of a municipal fiber optic network. It was expected that the Town will have to incur debt to accomplish this, but details were not known at this point.

2013 – Middle Mile service installed

It took five years (not the three originally contemplated) but finally, in the fall of 2013, MBI brought high speed

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Broadband, continued

service to New Marlborough as part of its MB123 Middle Mile program. The library, town hall, and fire station were connected. The next step would be to bring internet to each home and business.

2014 – MBI is given another \$50 million

The legislature granted MBI an additional \$50 million to be used in Western Massachusetts to address the lack of last-mile internet infrastructure. \$40 million was allocated toward that purpose. \$5 million was taken for administration and another \$5 million used for partially served cable towns.

2014 – MBI and WiredWest move forward

MBI initially worked closely with WiredWest on the planning, financing, and deployment of a regional network. WiredWest would own and operate the networks built by the towns, with the member towns' MLPs jointly controlling WiredWest. MBI endorsed this plan and made presentations with WiredWest, starting in November 2014, asking each town to pass debt authorizations for roughly 2/3 of the cost of their network. MBI would provide the remaining share and oversee planning and construction in consultation with WiredWest. Once built, the networks would be turned over to WiredWest to own and operate.

2014 - Towns move forward with WiredWest

Twenty-four towns passed their debt authorizations. WiredWest ran a campaign to get 40 percent or more of residents in each town to sign up for its service with a refundable \$49 deposit. WiredWest gathered data, began planning the various networks, created a financial model and business plan, and prepared an organizational agreement. In December, New Marlborough's Board of Selectmen agreed, at the request of WiredWest, to place an article on the warrant for the 2015 Annual Town Meeting to see if the Town would support the WiredWest initiative and issue a general obligation bond of between \$2.225 million and \$2.5 million. The Board did not adopt a resolution, and in fact, as reported in this paper, the selectmen indicated their reservations about the Town incurring additional debt to be borne by the taxpayers.

2015 – Warrant article to issue bond tabled

A watershed moment for the Town occurred at the Annual Town Meeting held on May 4, 2015, when the voters were presented with an article to borrow \$3.4 million (up from the previous estimate of \$2.225 to \$2.5 million) to fund the Town's share of the cost of constructing a high speed broadband network. If this motion passed, the Town would have applied for additional funding from MBI to build out the network, joining other towns which had decided to incur debt to accomplish this. However, following discussion, the meeting voted to postpone action on the article, it being the apparent consensus that

more information was needed to convince voters that incurring debt was a good idea. A two-thirds vote would have been required to pass the motion. Interestingly, as required by law, a Proposition 2 ½ debt exclusion allowing the Town to incur the debt was included on the ballot at the Town election a week later and passed but, without the affirmative vote at the Town meeting, was of no effect.

2015 – The Town continues to explore borrowing money

The Board of Selectmen continued to meet with MBI and WiredWest to explore the cost of constructing the network. The thoughts were to have a special town meeting to act on the plan and to use MBI's services to manage construction of the network. The Board also began working with residents Richard Long and Tom Stalker, who volunteered to help with the effort. WiredWest delivered an "operating agreement" to the towns which described in detail how WiredWest would be governed and, as expected, provided that WiredWest, and not the towns, would own the towns' networks. The Board of Selectmen began to raise issues with the structure of the WiredWest arrangement.

2015 – MBI torpedoed WiredWest

December 1, 2015 represents another watershed moment for the prospects of getting broadband. MBI, unhappy with the WiredWest business model and the terms of the operating agreement, made the stunning public announcement that they would not provide funding for any town that signed up with WiredWest, essentially ending the viability of WiredWest as a business partner for any unserved town. Subsequent negotiations to get MBI to reverse its position failed.

2016 (January) – New Marlborough moves forward without WiredWest

Mindful of the fact that MBI would not fund the Town's expenditures if it went with WiredWest, the Board of Selectmen issued a request for information, asking



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Broadband, continued

service providers such as Comcast and Verizon to seek information about the Town's broadband needs, with the hope that some company would ultimately be interested in building and operating the network. Four entities responded. Plans for a special town meeting to vote on the broadband bond issue in April were postponed, with the expectation that the meeting would likely take place by late June.

2016 (February) – Work continues; “The Pause” occurs

Meetings with MBI to review options for design and construction of the system continued until February 1, when everything came to a screeching halt as Governor Baker announced that no further funding from MBI would take place until he studies the situation. The Governor's office indicated that the study could “take months.”

2016 (March) – Work continues slowly

While waiting for “The Pause” to be lifted, the Board of Selectmen met with Sandisfield and Monterey (Otis and Tyringham being invited, but not attending) about the creation of a semi-regional broadband network. Tolland expressed an interest in participating.

2016 (April) – Broadband Committee established; meetings continue

The Board of Selectmen, recognizing, to quote Shalaby, that the Board members, “have neither the time nor expertise to focus on what needs to be done,” voted to establish a Broadband Committee to spearhead the project. At the urging of WiredWest, the Board also agreed to write to the Governor asking that “The Pause” be lifted. Meetings with Monterey, Tolland and Sandisfield continued.

2016 (May) – “The Pause” is lifted

Approximately four months after it started, “The Pause” came to an end. The Governor announced that MBI would now move ahead “with a fresh look, as quickly as possible.” New leadership was appointed and detailed

guidelines to receive support from MBI were spelled out. Towns were told what they needed to do to be considered “ready” for funding. The Governor's report, notably, made no mention of WiredWest. In fact, the Governor indicated that he had “broadly based reservations” about a large consortium (such as WiredWest had proposed).

2016 (June) – The Broadband Committee takes action

The new committee appointed by the Board of Selectmen jumped into action, exploring two models suggested by the Governor's report. One was to go with an organization like Frontier Communications which would build, own, and operate the network. The other was to pursue a multi-town effort with neighboring towns. Richard Long, chair of the Committee, acknowledged that WiredWest is not an option, given its open issues with MBI. For its part, WiredWest, acknowledging that MBI will not allow it to be directly involved with the construction of networks and recognizing that towns will be creating their own networks, either alone or in conjunction with neighboring towns, revised its business model to focus on connecting member towns' networks – once they are built – into a regional network for efficient and cost-effective operation.

2016 (July) – Meetings continue

Meetings with Sandisfield, Monterey, Tyringham, and Tolland continued, as did meetings with Frontier. The basic outline of a transaction with Frontier Communications began to come into focus with the key element being that a bond issuance would not be needed. Instead, the Town would enter into a fifteen-year agreement with Frontier. The amounts owed by the Town to Frontier to cover construction costs would be paid by subscribers, and by MBI's construction cost contribution. Only if the money from subscribers and MBI were insufficient would the Town have to make up the difference. MBI indicated its support for a concept like the one being discussed with Frontier.

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Broadband, continued

2016 (August) – Meetings continue; “home rule petition” raised

As meetings with MBI and Frontier continued, it became apparent that the Town would need to file a “home rule petition” with the state in order to get the authority to enter into the fifteen-year agreement with Frontier. Work began on the request for proposals (RFP) which the Town would need to solicit proposals to build the network. Representative William “Smitty” Pignatelli became involved in the effort.

2016 (September and October) – RFP issued

At long last, on September 15, the Town issued its RFP, seeking a vendor to provide “a complete service solution for the provision of a state of the art, optical fiber-based communications network.” At MBI’s request, the RFP was then pulled back, modified, and reissued on October 7, delaying the response date until November 7. Anxious to move things forward, the Board of Selectmen set a tentative date of December 8 for a special town meeting to approve the transaction. Unlike the WiredWest approach of 2015, the Town would not own the network and would not be required to issue a bond (although the Town would become obligated to make significant payments to the service provider, such as Frontier, over a period of fifteen years; again, the hope was that these payments would be funded, in large part or their entirety, through payments by the subscribers and the MBI contribution).

2016 (November) – Frontier responds

Frontier was the only respondent to the RFP. The Broadband Committee found the Frontier proposal acceptable, and the Board of Selectmen appointed a negotiating committee to attempt to reach a deal with Frontier. Meanwhile, on November 18, MBI issued its own RFP seeking vendors to provide internet service to unserved towns, including New Marlborough. Responses to this RFP were due on January 11. WiredWest also let it be known that it was working on plans to connect the individual town networks, once built, into a regional one for more efficient and lower cost operation. Negotiations with Frontier began. The special town meeting tentatively set for December 8 was postponed, since the contract terms were not expected to be finalized for several months.

2016 (December) – MBI launches another torpedo

Richard Long, chair of the Broadband Committee, was informed by MBI that, due to alleged defects in the RFP issued by the Town, MBI would not fund the Town’s costs if it entered into a contract with Frontier, urged the Town to “piggyback” onto the RFP that MBI issued in November. Recognizing that it would be impossible to contract with Frontier without MBI’s financial support, the Committee voted to abandon negotiations with Frontier and join a

consortium of neighboring towns seeking to issue a joint RFP... but then reversed the decision, wishing to keep talks going with Frontier.

2017 (Early January) – The Frontier transaction dies

On January 3, the Board of Selectmen disputed whether MBI would actually refuse to fund a transaction with Frontier and directed that negotiations with Frontier continue. However, before the negotiations could be completed, the January 14 deadline (mandated by law) to complete negotiations passed, and the Frontier deal died. During the negotiation period, a list of issues was presented to Frontier, but they did not respond, and only one face-to-face meeting with Frontier occurred.

2017 (Present) – Other alternatives appear; and where we are now

With the Frontier transaction dead, the Town is left with three alternatives:

- 1) It can reissue its own RFP with any defects corrected and see if Frontier or others reply.
- 2) On January 6, an RFP from the neighboring towns of Monterey, Sandisfield and Tolland seeking broadband services was issued. Indications are that Frontier may bid on that RFP. Although New Marlborough was not one of the towns issuing the RFP, the RFP contains language allowing it to opt in and participate prior to the bids coming in. To further explore this option, which would involve using the Town’s MLP, the Board met in Lee on January 20 with MBI, Representative Pignatelli, and the neighboring towns to discuss the RFP. The Board of Selectmen was also scheduled to meet on January 24 (after this issue went to press) to decide whether to participate in this RFP. If it so decides, the Town’s participation would be non-binding and would not preclude it seeking alternatives.
3. As noted above, on November 18 of last year, MBI issued its own RFP seeking a bidder or bidders to provide service to the unserved towns, including

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Broadband, continued

New Marlborough. The RFP will identify qualified private firms willing to design, build, own, operate, manage, and maintain high-speed broadband internet networks in the forty Massachusetts towns currently unserved by broadband.

“Since May, we’ve stressed flexibility, local control, and a focus on results, in the Last Mile project,” said Peter Larkin, Board Chair of the Massachusetts Broadband Institute and Special Advisor to the Secretary of Housing and Economic Development for the Last Mile project. “This request for proposals advances those priorities, by providing unserved towns with the opportunity to partner with qualified private sector broadband firms. Communities are under no obligation to engage with private partners, but it is important to us to give unserved towns the option of reviewing competitive proposals from seasoned providers, as these providers have the potential to close local broadband gaps quickly and affordably.”

New Marlborough will be able to take advantage of this RFP if it wishes not to go with either another RFP of its own or to join in the RFP from the neighboring towns. The responses to this RFP were due on January 11 and MBI is expected to publish the responses to its RFP on its website by January 23. Additionally, MBI will hold an open meeting to hear from MBI town designees and local select board members about their thoughts regarding the results of the RFP on February 16 at a location to be determined in Western Massachusetts. After MBI posts the RFP responses, it will begin to work with each town’s designee to review the implications of the responses for the town. MBI has stated that it will carefully examine each bidder and identify those firms that are qualified to receive state funds. Towns are urged to study only proposals of vendors that are deemed qualified by MBI. MBI has promised to move as expeditiously as possible to help towns understand which firms that submitted proposals will in fact be eligible to receive state funds. Additionally, MBI will provide towns with a sample “opt out” letter in the event that a town would like to remove itself from further consideration as part of this RFP process, and MBI will work with that town to pursue the other paths it may choose.

While New Marlborough continues its efforts to find a way to bring broadband to town, other towns’ networks are moving forward. For example, MBI announced on December 6 that it will allocate \$288,775 in grant funding to Alford, and \$1,145,975 to Otis. These two municipalities will pursue their Last Mile projects independently, overseeing the design, construction, and operation of fiber-to-the-home networks. Each town’s fiber network will pass every residence and business located on a public right of way. Each town has completed MBI’s Last Mile Readiness Process, has achieved several

key milestones, including voter approval of municipal financing for the town’s share of project costs, has received the endorsement of the Massachusetts Division of Local Services on their municipal financing plan, and have begun the initial construction process. Over in Egremont, surveys are being done to determine the “make ready” costs and a number of private sector proposals to establish a high speed network have been received. MBI and Charter Communications have also executed grant agreements to provide 100 percent cable access in Hinsdale, Lanesboro, and West Stockbridge. Previously, MBI provided Last Mile support for the Town of Leverett, which launched a municipal broadband network in late 2015, and a grant to the Town of Mount Washington for a fiber-to-the-home network in June 2016. In all, according to MBI, during 2016, 35 towns were engaged in the MBI “make ready” process. Richard Long points out that while New Marlborough did file an initial Readiness Application to get into the queue for MBI review, that process has effectively been stalled for some time as the Town’s answers were dependent on finalizing an arrangement with Frontier, which now has come to naught.

When asked about the progress that other towns are making, Nat Yohalem, Chair of the Board of Selectmen, said, “Those towns are building the network at their taxpayers’ expense. We’re looking for a cheaper way to do it. I think we are ahead of or on a par with other towns. The timing has worked out well for us and we now have a number of options to bring broadband to town. The Frontier RFP negotiation period has expired but we have other options. We expect that our path will be decided in the next few months.”

More on this saga next month, and, until then, stay tuned. □

Important Update

Two late-breaking developments: On January 23, MBI published a list of those bidders who responded to its RFP. Six bidders responded but only three, Crocker, Fiber Connect, and Whip City Fiber, were interested in providing services to New Marlborough. (Charter, Comcast and Mid-Hudson were not). MBI is now reviewing these bids. Also, on January 24 the Board of Selectmen voted to join the neighboring towns and participate in their RFP. So the two possible avenues forward envisioned by Selectman Yohalem appear to be in play.



Town Business Is Your Business



BOARD OF SELECTMEN

December 19: With Selectmen Tara White and Michele Shalaby present, and Chairman Nat Yohalem conferencing in by phone, the Board renewed liquor licenses for Gedney Farm, the Old Inn on the Green, the Southfield Store, and Cantina 229, as well as a package store license for the Mill River General Store, all subject to the Town receiving their \$500 license fees, which have been held up because of a paperwork snafu at the state's Alcohol Beverages Control Commission, or ABCC.

As Town Administrator Mari Enoch explained, the required inspections have all been performed by the building inspector and the fire department, but the ABCC license renewal forms have not yet been issued by the state. So, the ABCC advised the selectmen to go ahead and issue the renewals anyway, since it's the last opportunity the Board will have to do so before the end of the year when the licenses are due to expire.

Three of the four members of the newly formed Agricultural Commission were to appear before the Board to discuss their proposal for creating a farmers' market on the Village Green. However, before discussion could begin, the Board, on the recommendation of the State Ethics Commission, adopted a series of resolutions allowing the commission members, all of whom are farmers, to be involved in creating a market for the Town that would also benefit their farming businesses. As part of the process, **commission members who intended to participate as vendors at the market had to provide the Board with disclosure forms stating**

The Board... adopted a series of resolutions allowing the [Agriculture] Commission members, all of whom are farmers, to be involved in creating a market for the Town that would also benefit their farming businesses.

they have a financial interest in the market.

With that out of the way, Commission member John Miller, who stated for the record that he was not going to be vendor at the market, asked the Board for its approval of the idea, saying the market would operate on Wednesdays from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. starting in the spring of 2017 and continuing into the fall. He said they're also considering keeping the market open during the winter months and using the Town Hall. The Board indicated

it fully supported the idea, with Mr. Yohalem saying, "I think we all feel very positive about it."

The Board granted Solid Waste Coordinator Freddie Friedman permission to hire Gary Miller, a Hartsville resident, as a "substitute employee" at the transfer station to fill in for Bobby Litchfield while he's out for medical reasons. As

Mr. Friedman noted, Mr. Miller is familiar with transfer station operations, having worked there under the auspices of the senior property-tax-exemption program but has reached the maximum number of hours permitted under that program, which is why Mr. Friedman requested Board permission to bring him on board as a substitute employee who can fill in as needed.

December 21: The Board held a special Wednesday morning session to consider a recommendation from the Broadband Committee to discontinue negotiations with Frontier and to enter into a non-binding commitment to join Monterey, Sandisfield and Tolland in a multi-town broadband procurement and to pay the legal fees associated with the procurement, not to exceed \$2,000 per town. Present for the meeting, convened at 11:00 a.m., were Selectmen White and Shalaby, with Chairman Yohalem conferencing in by phone. Also in attendance were Broadband Committee Chair Richard Long and Sandisfield Board of Selectmen Chairman Alice Boyd, representing the other three towns.

The meeting was turned over to Mr. Long, who, to the surprise of some, said that, based on a phone conversation he'd had earlier that morning with Frontier's Director of Government Relations Michael Cicchetti, he was withdrawing the resolution to discontinue negotiations with Frontier, but was still pushing for the Town to join with the neighboring towns in what is known as a Municipal Lighting Plant

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(MLP) procurement in which the four towns would issue a joint Request For Proposal (RFP) seeking a broadband provider. (An MLP is a legal entity, approved by the voters, allowing a town to provide broadband services to its residents; New Marlborough's MLP was formed in 2011.)

The neighboring towns had previously made it clear that they would like New Marlborough to join them in the RFP but had set a deadline of December 23 for the Town to commit to doing so, and according to Ms. Boyd, they are prepared to go ahead and issue the RFP on January 6, as planned, whether or not New Marlborough decides to join them.

However, with the deadline only 48 hours away and with no one on the Board having even seen the proposed RFP, Mr. Yohalem said the Board simply didn't have enough time to schedule a vote on whether to join the multi-town MLP group in their RFP. He also wanted to know from Ms. Boyd if the three other towns had any indication of whether MBI would issue a broadband construction grant to an MLP, because he had heard that MBI had indicated in the past that it wouldn't do so.

Ms. Boyd responded that a meeting "orchestrated" by state Sen. William "Smitty" Pignatelli with MBI has been scheduled for January 20, "to discuss that very question and to make sure that MBI understands our concerns about securing the grant, both the planning funds and the construction funds." She said she has not encountered "any reticence about this from them yet."

In the end, the Board agreed to meet on January 3 to consider joining the multi-town group, assuming the three towns agree to extend their December 23 deadline. Mr. Yohalem also asked whether the RFP could be delayed to the week after the January 14

date, when the Frontier proposal is due to expire, and Ms. Boyd said she would bring that up with the other towns but tended to doubt it.

January 3: The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m., with all three selectmen present. There were also twenty or so people in the audience, apparently concerned about the Town's broadband direction, looking to the Board for an

update. And the Board didn't disappoint. After the selectmen approved the minutes from the December 12 meeting, Chairman Yohalem took the floor, saying, "The next item on the agenda is a broadband report," adding, "and it's a good one."

He started with a brief summary of the Town's broadband developments going back to last fall when it became

apparent that the Wired West effort had, in his words, "bogged down," and the Town decided to issue its own request for proposal. As Mr. Yohalem noted, a number of companies indicated their interest, but only one, Frontier Communications, submitted a formal bid, which the Town accepted. Under state law the Town has forty-five days, or until January 14, "roughly ten days from now," as he put it, to reach an agreement. "And if we don't have an agreement by then, the negotiations will cease, and the Town is free to do whatever it wants to do next."

In the meantime, he continued, MBI, which issued its own RFP last fall on behalf of forty underserved Western Massachusetts towns, including New Marlborough, is expecting responses back at about the same time. "So there will either be a deal with Frontier on January 14, or we'll know at about the same time whether there are other companies interested in serving the Town," based on the responses to MBI's RFP.

"The third pathway open to the Town," he continued, involves the three neighboring towns of Monterey,

[Mr. Long] was still pushing for the Town to join with the neighboring towns in what is known as a Municipal Lighting Plant (MLP) procurement in which the four towns would issue a joint Request For Proposal (RFP) seeking a broadband provider.

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Sandisfield, and Tolland, which are mounting their own broadband procurement effort and will be issuing an RFP on January 6. As previously reported, the towns want New Marlborough to join them in the RFP but were insisting on a response by December 23. However, as Mr. Yohalem noted, they have since indicated December 23 is not a drop dead-date and in fact – and this is new, he said – **they have agreed to add language to their RFP stipulating that they can amend the RFP to add another town at any time, right up to the date on which responses to the RFP are due, “which is great news,” he added, “because it puts us in the enviable position of knowing in the next two weeks which course of action we’re going to take.”**

So, in summing up, Mr. Yohalem said, “By January 14, there will be a deal or no deal with Frontier. We’ll also know the outcome of the MBI RFP, and we can then decide whether we should join the other three towns in their MLP RFP.” He noted that one of the big advantages of the MLP route is that it avoids the necessity of getting a home rule petition through the state legislature. **In answer to a question from the audience, he was emphatic that whatever deal the Town ultimately makes, it will be put before the voters for their approval.**

January 9: With all three members present, the Board met with the two remaining members of the ladder sign committee, Owen Hoberman and Tina Parton. They were there, they said, to **propose to the Board that the Town take over responsibility for the ladder signs.** By way of background, Ms. Parton said that the original ladder signs were installed and maintained by the Town starting in the 1960s, but that by 2011 the signs, or what was left of them, were in disrepair, which is when the committee came into being

and raised enough money through private donations and by selling advertising on the signs’ slats to install nine new signs at a cost \$2,000 each. The advertising was priced at \$60 for one side of a slat and \$100 for both sides. As Mr. Hoberman explained, “Tina and I are not going to be here forever, and it’s our thought that the Town should assume repair and maintenance responsibility for the signs,” which he emphasized was minimal.

“So that’s our suggestion, and we’re hoping the Board goes along with it.” After a brief discussion, the Board voted unanimously to accept responsibility for the signs.

In other business, Town Administrator Enoch said the state Department of Transportation is coming out on Wednesday, January 11, to scope out the work involved in replacing the next two bridges on state’s Transportation Infrastructure Program (better known as the TIPs) list: the steel bridge at the north end of the Norfolk Road in Southfield and the Campbell Falls Road bridge. **According to the state, both are scheduled for replacement under the TIPs program in 2020.** However, as Mr. Yohalem cautioned, the priority order of the list can and does change over time. So, it’s by no means certain that the bridges will actually be done by then.

In broadband developments, Ms. Enoch mentioned that Rick Sullivan, president and chief executive of the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts, will be meeting with the Board on Wednesday, January 18, to discuss how the EDC can help the Town with its broadband efforts. Then two days later, on Friday, January 20, the Board will be meeting with MBI along with the towns of Monterey, Sandisfield and Tolland to discuss broadband construction funding and other matters regarding the multi-town MLP procurement process.

Mr. Yohalem said, “By January 14, there will be a deal or no deal with Frontier. We’ll also know the outcome of the MBI RFP, and we can then decide whether we should join the other three towns in their MLP RFP.”



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January 18: With all three selectmen present, the Board convened a special session at 12:30 p.m. to give the Town an update on the broadband negotiations with Frontier. As Chairman Yohalem reminded the meeting, the deadline for reaching an agreement was midnight Saturday, January 14, and that date having now passed, the Town can now move on to other options.

One of these would be to join the three neighboring towns of Monterey, Sandisfield and Tolland in their Municipal Lighting Plant, or MLP, request for proposal that they issued last week. He said the Board will meet next Tuesday, January 24, to consider it.

A second option, he continued, is to consider the responses to MBI's RFP that was made on behalf of 40 unserved towns, including New Marlborough, in the western part of the state. He said the responses were due back last week, and while they haven't been made public yet, he said he'd heard that two or three of the responses included New Marlborough. He said the names of the bidders and which towns they're proposing to serve will be released on Monday, January 23, which, he pointed out, is another reason the Board wanted to wait until Tuesday to make a decision. In response to a question from the floor, Mr. Yohalem said it's the town's intention to pursue both options.

In the meantime, he said, he and Broadband Committee Chairman Richard Long will be attending a meeting tonight of the three neighboring towns to prepare for a meeting with MBI set for Friday, January 20, at which the towns will press MBI on whether it intends to make broadband grants available to the multi-town group. **As previously reported, there seems to be a question as to whether MBI is willing to fund MLP-based broadband efforts.**

Under town administrator updates, Ms. Enoch said the Planning Board has prepared and submitted for the Board's approval an application to the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission for a District Local Technical Assistance, or DTLA, grant to help it prepare a solar bylaw for the town. The Board voted to approve

– and Mr. Yohalem signed – the grant application.

The Board then met with Rick Sullivan, president and CEO of the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts, who was there to see if the EDC can help the Town with its broadband efforts. According to the agenda, the meeting was to have been held in executive session, but Mr. Sullivan indicated he was comfortable having the discussion in open meeting.

He started by outlining the EDC's mission and its interest promoting broadband in the western part of the state. As he said, "I think it's one of the drivers of the western Massachusetts economy, particularly in the smaller communities." Then it was Mr. Yohalem's turn, who said the Town's major concern at this point is getting broadband grants from MBI. He explained the Town has several broadband options open to it, "but to go along with any of them, we need MBI funding and we need to know how much that funding is going to be so we know how much of the cost, if any, is going to be borne by the taxpayers and how much by the people who subscribe. And month after month goes by and we don't get an answer from MBI."

While emphasizing the EDC has no power to deliver funding, Mr. Sullivan said it can perform an advocacy role on behalf of the town. He believes he has a good relationship with MBI head Peter Larkin and has met with him in the past on behalf of other communities. "So I think we can have conversations directly with MBI and with state legislators and others, if necessary, to help in moving this along." He said that for the meeting with MBI on Friday he would try to "plug in as much as I can tomorrow and see if I can get you some straight answers so your meeting will be productive." He said he will also see if either he or Paul Nicolai, an attorney and EDC member, who has provided broadband legal counsel to the Town in the past, can attend. And with that the meeting was adjourned. □

Peter Schuyten

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THE VIEW FROM THE BOARD

Happy New Year The new calendar year and the transitions in federal and state government mark a time for reflection. In his farewell speech, President Obama directed us to get involved – to organize or run for office. He also referred to the very important role of “citizen.” The broadband effort, in particular, has brought many individuals forward to become more active and aware. At the same time, we on the Board have become more aware of our communication with interested citizens.

The main way we communicate is through our meeting process. Most of this process is determined by Massachusetts General Law (MGL). Agendas and minutes are posted in prescribed ways and most meetings are held in open session. Some questions have arisen regarding website use for communication of agendas and minutes, as well as on the use of closed (executive) session meetings.

Let’s clarify the two: The Town website is used for posting agendas and minutes, along with the “News & Notices” feature. We recognize that it is convenient for many to gather information via the website and electronic notices, but, at this time, we do not have the resources in Town Hall to ensure absolute consistency. Additionally, internet and computers are not yet used by everyone in Town. Therefore, our paper copies must remain the official version of notices. The paper agendas are posted 48 hours in advance on our notice board outside Town Hall. This board is accessible around the clock, every day. Approved minutes are available at meetings and by request from Town Clerk Kathy Chretien.

As for executive session meetings, these are reserved for two specific purposes: 1.) to protect the character and reputation of Town employees, and 2.) to protect the interests of New Marlborough by shielding information from outside parties with whom we are negotiating or litigating. In all meetings, we strive to meet the best interests of New Marlborough, abiding by MGL and providing true transparency in our deliberations and decisions.

Soon, the Town will publish its annual report for the fiscal year 2016. Free copies will be made available at Town Hall, the Library, and the Mill River General Store. Please pick up a copy to get a view of what has happened throughout all Town departments.

It is probably rather obvious as you’re reading this that I use this column to talk about some aspects of the Board’s work that are not conveyed in meeting minutes or in *The New Marlborough 5 Village News* reports of our meetings. Questions have arisen recently as to who writes the rest of the *NM5VN*. It is not a newsletter of the Town government. The 5


Village News is a truly independent press that reports on the news of Town. Its reports about our meetings are written by a highly qualified journalist who attends our meetings and asks questions. We embrace this as a vital part of our democratic process.

Occasionally, you will see Board members quoted or interviewed in the press that reaches beyond New Marlborough. It is a generally accepted process to use the wider press to comment on topics that reach beyond New Marlborough, such as the regional school or broadband. Usually, the chairman of any board is the spokesperson for that board. Communications with press are referred to the chairman, who engages or (as in the case of this column) delegates to another board member.

Another, highly appreciated method of communication within New Marlborough is the Google group, Maggie’s List. While it is a wonderful neighbor-to-neighbor forum, the Town does not use Maggie’s List to send or receive information. We do not have the resources to ensure seeing and responding to all postings. In some instances, it proves not to be a forum that is conducive to the type of discussion that is most beneficial to Town efforts.

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is direct conversation. We welcome anyone with ideas, disagreements, or questions to contact us directly. The Board, Town Administrator Mari Enoch, and Administrative Secretary Sharon Fleck are all willing to have a conversation. Board members are all listed in the phone book and welcome phone calls. Our email addresses are available and Sharon and Mari can be contacted at Town Hall. If you have a particular issue to discuss with the full Board,

please contact Town Hall to request being put on the agenda of a regular selectmen's meeting.

If there is anything we have not communicated effectively, please let us know. We are citizens who undertake this service alongside our other obligations. We are not professional communicators but strive to be professional, thoughtful, and neighborly while serving the best interests of New Marlborough. □

Michele Shalaby

TAKING ACTION

If you are interested in contacting one of your officials from our town and district, we've listed the contact information below. A few suggestions on successful interactions:

- Write a draft of what you want to say to your elected official; let it sit for a day or two, and then review and refine your thoughts.
- If you choose to call the official rather than write, use your letter to keep yourself on track; follow up your call with an email to get your comments on record.
- Request that the official follow up with you by phone or email with updates on actions over your concerns.

CONTACT LIST

NEW MARLBOROUGH

Board of Selectman: 413-229-8116

Michele Shalaby: 413-229-9050 mshalaby@newmarlboroughma.gov

Tara White: 413-229-7754 twhite@newmarlboroughma.gov

Nat Yohalem: 413-528-1409 nyohalem@newmarlboroughma.gov

Town Clerk (Records Access Officer)

Kathy Chretien: 413-229-8278 kchretien@newmarlboroughma.gov

Finance Committee - Elected

Mark Carson, Chair: carsonauto4380@gmail.com

Broadband Committee - Appointed

Richard Long: Richardlong7491@gmail.com

Visit http://www.newmarlboroughma.gov/Pages/NewMarlboroughMA_Bcomm/index for more Committee information

MASSACHUSETTS

Governor Charlie Baker: 617-725-4005

www.mass.gov/governor/constituent-services/contact-governor-office/

Representative Smitty Pignatelli: 413-637-0631 rep.smitty@mahouse.gov

Senator Adam Hinds: 617-722-1625 adam.hinds@masenate.gov

CONGRESS

Representative Richard Neal: www.neal.house.gov/contact/email

(202) 225-5601 Washington, DC Office (413) 442-0946 Pittsfield Office

Senator Edward Markey: www.markey.senate.gov/contact

(202) 224-2742 Washington, DC Office (413) 785-4610 Springfield Office

Senator Elizabeth Warren: www.warren.senate.gov/index.cfm?p=email_senator

(202) 224-4543 Washington, DC Office (413) 788-2690 Springfield Office

PRESIDENT

Donald Trump www.whitehouse.gov/contact/

Call or write: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/write-or-call>

If you'd like to reach a Congressional member from another state, visit www.usa.gov/elected-officials.

Compiled by Sandra Walker



LAND TRUST NEWS

SUCCESS FOR THE LAND TRUST'S FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

On December 29, the New Marlborough Land Trust under the leadership of President Ian Devine and Executive Director Martha Bryan acquired 114 acres of property formerly owned by the Kolburne School and the Weinstein family. The acquisition is referred to as the New Marlboro Preserve and abuts the eastern side of the Southfield New Marlborough Road from approximately the home of Paul Hess and Sylvia Eggenberger to the former American Legion post, now the offices of contractor Michael White. It includes the house once known as Rooney House, which was a dormitory/residence for Kolburne students, and its adjacent greenhouse.

The price for the acquired property was \$260,000 and was raised in a lightning-quick six weeks from more than 200 contributors both large and small.

Plans for future use of the property have not yet been worked out, but Ms. Bryan and Mr. Devine each talked of maintaining the property's natural resources, creating opportunities for hiking paths and recreation, and the possibility of marrying land use with agriculture. □

David Lowman



NEW MARLBOROUGH SHADE TREES

by Claudette Callahan

Sometime before the holidays, I received a phone call from Byron A. "Gus" Allen, Jr., who asked if the Historical Society would be interested in a donation of a New Marlborough designated shade tree plaque. I accepted the donation and began to wonder about the shade tree plaques.

I learned online that the Town of Sutton, Massachusetts had information about the Shade Tree Law, which was enacted in 1899 in Massachusetts. It said, "All trees within a public way or on the boundaries thereof shall be public shade trees. Each public way consists of the paved surface you see and between five and twenty feet to either side of the pavement that is owned and controlled by the Town."

The Tree Warden is in charge of these trees, and anyone removing these trees without permission of the Tree Warden could be fined up to \$500. Gus Allen had told me that the plaque came from a tree on the corner of Adsit Crosby Road and Hartsville Mill River Road, where Alexandra Eidenschenk now lives. His family had once lived there.

When I contacted the Department of Conservation, I was not able to obtain information about shade trees. However, they do have information entitled, "Massachusetts Urban and Community Forest Program – Protecting our Community Trees." Again, the Tree Warden oversees the protection of the trees along the



photo by Erik Callahan

public roads. This is detailed under Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 87.

Somehow, in the middle of winter, I was comforted to realize that New Marlborough participated in the Shade Tree Act and that this is a reminder to all of us to appreciate the nature we are privileged to observe first hand. □



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New Marlborough Winter House CONCERTS 2017

Baroque cellists, Christine Gummere and Lucy Bardo, will offer a duo program on Presidents' Weekend, performing music of Bach, Telemann and Boismortier. The date for this program is Sunday, February 19, at 4:00 p.m.

This intimate concert is in the private home of

a Berkshire resident, and is sponsored by the New Marlborough Village Association. The concert lasts an hour, with wine and hors d'oeuvres served afterward. Admission is \$20 for NMVA members and \$25 for non-members. Seating is limited so please make reservations in advance at 413-229-2785 or www.newmarlborough.org.

UPCOMING: *Events Calendar for February and March*

February 4: Bring Your Child to the Library Day

Join Minstrel/Storyteller Mary Jo Maichack at 11:00 a.m. for a "make & take!" Make your own fairy house and learn about fairy lore. All supplies provided and admission is free. This program is supported in part by a grant from the New Marlborough Cultural Council. Please RSVP if you plan to attend, (413) 229-6668 or newmarlborough@gmail.com

February 11: Homemade Sweets for Your Sweet: A Chocolate Celebration. Stop in at the New Marlborough Library from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., just in time for Valentine's Day! Homemade confections, chocolate fountain, children's activity table, and free hot chocolate

February 14: Here Come the Videofreex, the second in the New Marlborough Town Library's 2017 film series, about a group of renegade journalists who pioneered the use of video in the 1960s and '70s; 7:00 p.m. and free, but save a space with a call to the library (413) 229-6668

February 19: The baroque cello duets of J.S. Bach, Telemann, and Boismortier, with cellists Christine Gummere and Lucy Bardo, in a Berkshire home at 4:00 p.m.; reservations, \$25, \$20 for members of the New Marlborough Village Association, can be made at (413) 229-2785 or at www.newmarlborough.org.

March 14: 20 Feet from Stardom, a revealing documentary about backup singers in the pop music industry and the third offering in this year's film series at the New Marlborough Library; 7:00 p.m. and free, but save a space with a call to the library at (413) 229-6668

March 28: Town caucus, for elective officers to Town boards and committees; top two vote-getters for each office go on the ballot; 6:30 p.m. downstairs at the Town Hall Offices

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Illustration by Ann Getsinger

Ann Getsinger has drawn a wintery scene in which the trees are bare, but the presence of those lawn chairs offers hope for the summer to come!

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NEIGHBORS



One of the strongest supporters of *The New Marlborough 5 Village News* from its beginning has been **Pam Stebbins** of New Marlborough village. She was appointed to the original Board of Directors in 2001, and has served as its president since 2003. During that time, she has helped the paper grow from an iffy start-up to an established organ of communication in New Marlborough. At the Board's annual meeting in June, 2016, Pam announced her desire to resign from both the Board and its presidency. The Board decided to take action on her resignation and replacement at a special winter meeting in January. At that meeting,

Larry Burke was elected to succeed Pam.

Pam's contributions to the *5 Village News* go far beyond the Board of Directors, however. Since the paper began publishing in May, 2000, Pam has contributed more than two dozen articles on a wide variety of topics, and she plans to continue those activities.

The staff of the *5 Village News* is grateful to Pam for her steadfast support of the paper, and looks forward to continued collaboration with her in the future. Thank you, Pam, from all of us at the NM5VN, and our readers as well. □

Neighbors compiled by Barbara Lowman: deeuell@yahoo.com



photo by Larry Burke

Pam Stebbins



photo by Erik Callahan

Of this photograph he took on January 12, Erik Callahan said, "There was a brief reprieve in the rain today just after 2 p.m., and I caught this scene on Adsit Crosby Road on my way back from town. The mist was just sweeping the valley so majestically!" New Marlborough may have its very own Ansel Adams.

OUR WILDLIFE NEIGHBORS

photo by John Schrieber



Moose on the loose



photo by Sandra Walker

Barred owl

John Schrieber, who may be New Marlborough's leading moose-spotter, wrote on January 3, "On Route 57 near the Sandisfield-Tolland town line last month, there were two moose, but we only caught a picture of this one that would not move out of the way. Thank God it was daylight! This moose was gigantic, and if we had hit it with the car... who knows!"

On January 6, **Sandra Walker** spotted a beautiful **barred owl** on her way to the Mill River Post Office, just around sunset.

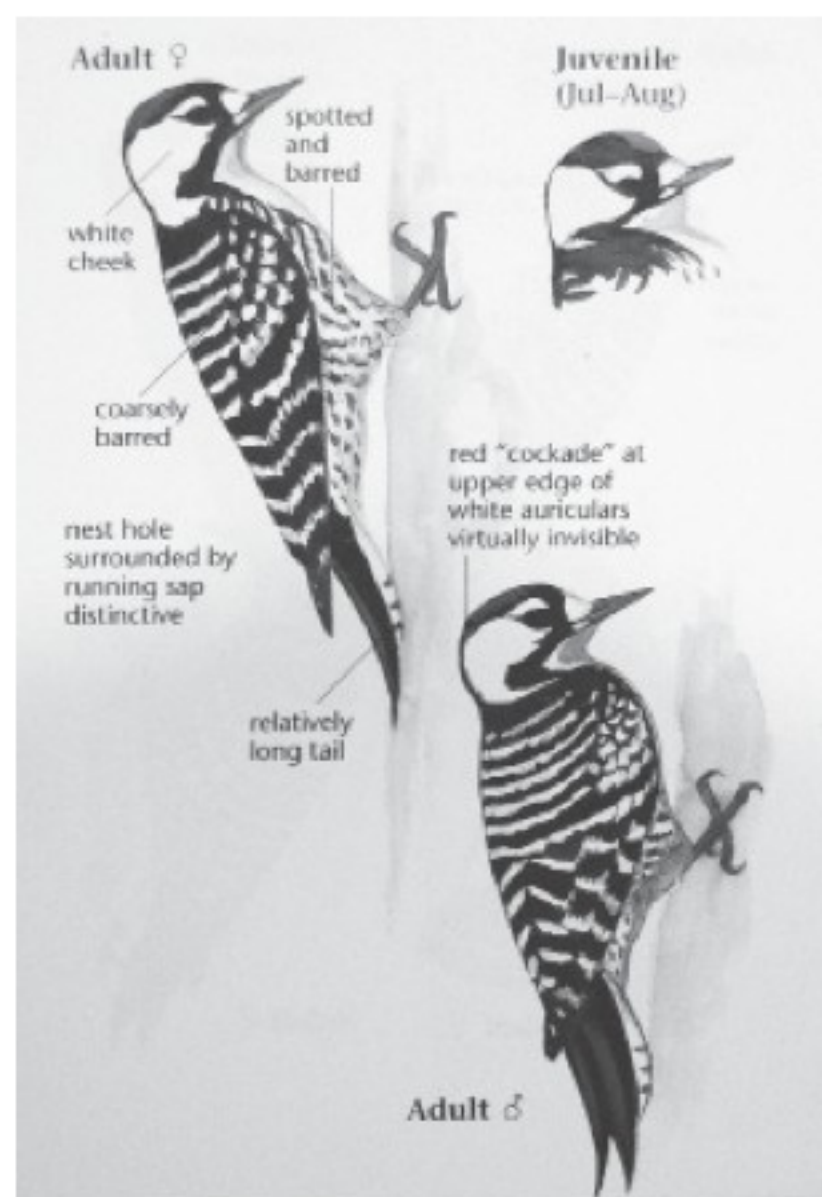


Illustration of the red-cockaded woodpecker from the Sibley Guide to Birds.

and Clayton Mill River Road. It seems to be a pair always. Nearer to my house, there has been quite a bunch of **bluebirds** around their house, not to mention a male **red-bellied woodpecker** on the suet, and a female **yellow-bellied sapsucker**. On January 11, there was a visit by **house finches** and **evening grosbeaks**. A bunch of **starlings** have been hanging around, as well." On January 22, Don wrote, "This morning I had three dozen, plus or minus, **cedar waxwings**, and I'm pretty sure there were about six **evening grosbeaks** with them, and all flew off at the same time. In Thom Smith's column in last week's *Berkshire Eagle*, he pointed out that evening grosbeaks were listed in the winter bird count because there are so few, but I've seen them twice in the past two weeks." □

Charlie Parton checked in on January 8 with the following rare sighting: "For the past two weeks there has been a **red-cockaded woodpecker** at our suet feeder. In Roger Tory Peterson's 1947 edition of *A Field Guide to the Birds*, its range was listed as below Kentucky; in *The National Geographic Field Guide*, 1983, he had moved up to Washington, D.C.; and in *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, 2003, he had reached New York. He is a ladder-backed woodpecker (that is, black and white striping climbing up the back), but with the distinguishing mark of a large white cheek and only a tiny red feather peeking under the black forehead stripe above the cheek. In my case, I cannot see this from twelve feet away. Sibley describes a red forehead cap during breeding season in the spring. So, at a glance, he's about the size and general look of a hairy woodpecker, with no easily visible red cap, but with a large white cheek. And he loves our suet cake! I wish I could get a photo of him, but I would need a camera with a long lens, and he rarely is visible long enough to get a good sighting. He usually flies directly to the far side of the feeder and then ducks under the edge to eat upside down and facing away, hiding his head and back. I might only get a quick look every two to four days. But the book photos or paintings leave no doubt as to his identity. You can't confuse him."

On January 13, **Don Beauchamp** reported in with a number of sightings: "I've been hearing and seeing **pileated woodpeckers** in several places – downtown Clayton, the Keyes Hill intersection, the western end of Lumbert Cross Road, and the intersection of Brewer Hill Branch Road

Compiled by Larry Burke, lburke2@me.com

THE LOG

POLICE DEPARTMENT (SELECTED ENTRIES)

- Dec. 4 3:05 a.m. South Sandisfield Road resident reports being awakened by the sound of someone outside his window and then seeing the shadow of a figure with a ladder; following the call, he hears a car driving off.
- Dec. 7 2:12 p.m. Visitor to a residence on Adsit Crosby Road reports that she felt it necessary to seek refuge at a neighboring house the previous night because of an altercation.
- Dec. 9 9:47 p.m. Caller complains of "harassment" by means of incessant texting from a New Marlborough Hill Road resident.
- Dec. 12 6:20 p.m. Highway Department alerted after caller reports ice on South Sandisfield Road.
- Dec. 13 12:41 p.m. Police chief secures payment in full for Christmas tree stolen from the holiday fair at New Marlborough Central School after video camera evidence reveals the identity of the thieves.
- 1:23 p.m. Campbell Falls Road resident reports seeing a white pickup truck driving in and out a nearby field the previous night.
- 5:08 p.m. Driver reports that he struck a deer at the intersection of Adsit Crosby and New Marlborough Hartsville Roads.
- 8:45 p.m. Rhoades and Bailey Road resident complains of noise from a snowmobile or ATV being operated nearby the previous hour.
- Dec. 16 2:21 p.m. A truck and trailer unit from Canada is stuck on South Sandisfield Road near the entrance to York Lake.
- Dec. 18 6:59 a.m. A Clayton Mill River Road resident complains of a pickup truck and trailer blocking his driveway.
- Dec. 19 3:41 p.m. Caller reports a coyote walking down the middle of Knight Road.
- 4:10 p.m. School bus driver reports a pickup truck crossing a solid double yellow line to pass her bus on Canaan Southfield Road.
- Dec. 20 2:45 p.m. Gray sedan, speeding toward New Marlborough Hartsville Road on Adsit Crosby Road, eludes police cruiser, which had to reverse direction before giving chase.
- Dec. 23 5:22 p.m. Unlicensed driver from Great Barrington, driving an unregistered, uninsured, uninspected vehicle in which there is an open container of an alcoholic beverage, is arrested on Underwood Road.
- Dec. 24 12:06 p.m. Two-car collision on Hartsville New Marlborough Road.
- Dec. 25 1:07 p.m. Visitor to the Mill River Cemetery calls for assistance when her vehicle gets stuck on a cemetery roadway.
- Dec. 28 10:40 a.m. Mill River resident reports that firearms previously reported missing have been found beneath blankets in a chest.
- 3:47 p.m. East Hill Road resident complains of gunshots.
- Dec. 31 7:41 a.m. Canaan Valley Road resident reports five hunters with shotguns entering the woods near his property without his permission or that of his neighbor and that, at any rate, shot-gun season is over.
- 11:49 Vehicle roll-over at the transfer station on South Sandisfield Road.



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THE LOG: FIRE AND RESCUE

Dec. 1	11:24 p.m.	Sisson Hill Road CO Alarm	Dec. 26	6:03 p.m.	Clayton Mill River Road Medical Call
Dec. 4	10:03 a.m.	Hayes Hill Road Medical Call	Dec. 29	8:27 p.m.	New Marlborough Monterey Road Medical Call
Dec. 6	6:12 p.m.	Hartsville New Marlborough Road Medical Call	Dec. 29	10:18 a.m.	Idle Hour Road Oven Fire
Dec. 7	8:41 p.m.	Hartsville New Marlborough Road Medical Call	Dec. 29	12:50 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Norfolk Structure Fire
Dec. 10	3:32 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington Fire Stand By	Dec. 31	2:49 a.m.	Hartsville New Marlborough Road Medical Call
Dec. 18	11:53 a.m.	Hadsell Street Medical Call	Dec. 31	11:48 a.m.	New Marlborough South Sandisfield Road MVA
Dec. 19	2:23 a.m.	Clayton Mill River Road Medical Call	Dec. 31	5:22 p.m.	New Marlborough Monterey Road Medical Call
Dec. 20	6:15 p.m.	Hadsell Street Fire Alarm			
Dec. 24	12:10 p.m.	Hartsville New Marlborough Road MVA			
Dec. 25	11:00 p.m.	Clayton Mill River Road Medical Call			

*MVA = Motor Vehicle Accident

2017 Burning Season and Online Burning Permits: This year, New Marlborough Fire & Rescue is converting to an online application for burn permits. Burning is permitted from January 15 and through April 30, and permits will be available from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. daily, as conditions allow for open burning.

Permits may be obtained at www.bcburnpermits.com/ or via a link on the Fire Department page of the Town website: www.newmarlboroughma.gov/pages/index. Those who cannot access the permits online may still obtain a permit at the Mill River General Store and call (413) 229-0246 to determine if burning is permitted that day.

Reminders:

- Burn only brush; no leaves, grass, hay, stumps, building debris, or other material.
- Burning is allowed between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.
All fires must be extinguished by 4:00 p.m.
- Avoid burning on days with high winds.
- Keep fires at least seventy-five feet from structures.
- When possible, have a garden hose or other water supply available, as well as a rake and/or shovel.
- Do not leave fires unattended.
- Burn the fire down to coals and drown with water to extinguish.
- Call 911 to report any emergencies. □

DENNIS J. DOWNING

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FLYING CLOUD: A CHANGE AT THE HELM

by Joe Poindexter

The original Flying Cloud was a clipper ship that in 1854 sailed from New York to San Francisco in 89 days and 8 hours, a speed record that stood for 135 years. New Marlborough's Flying Cloud, which has distinguished itself not by speed but innovation, last month sailed into a significant new latitude, passing the mantle of leadership from its founder to a new executive director — and to a new chapter in the creative teaching of science and art through the formulation of a symbiotic relationship between the two.

On February 1, the command of Flying Cloud Institute passes from founder Jane Burke to Maria Rundle, 38, who until now has been development director at Gould Farm in Monterey. She lives there with her husband, Nathaniel, Gould Farm's residential director, and their three children, ages, ten, eight, and five. In choosing her, the Flying Cloud board was particularly impressed with her communications skills, not to mention that all-important talent for non-profit organizations, the writing of effective grant proposals. "Flying Cloud has created an amazing program that has become the gold standard for STEM [science, technology, engineering, math] education," says Ms. Rundle, who herself has a Master's Degree in education.

For Flying Cloud, it has been a long journey. In 1948, retired U.S. Navy officer Harry Ritgers and his wife Louise bought a colonial-era farmhouse on a South Sandisfield Road hilltop and turned it into an inn for tennis enthusiasts. (To him, the building, gleaming in the sun, looked like a 19th-century clipper cresting the horizon, hence: Flying Cloud Inn.)

In 1970, the inn was bought by David Schwarz, who operated it for a decade and then turned over the management to his daughter Jane and her husband, Larry Burke. Despite their earning accolades from *New York Magazine* as operating one of the best inns in New England, the couple knew in less than a year that they were not cut out to be innkeepers, and the focus of Flying Cloud shifted from leisure to innovation. In 1981, the Burkes, together with Jane's father, established an educational center for environmental issues. Two years later, David Schwarz deeded the buildings on the property and 100 acres (of the original 200) over to the young couple.

Free to set their own compass, the Burkes moved Flying Cloud toward Jane's lifelong interests: science (she was a chemistry major in college), dance, and pottery. They installed a wood kiln and invited in students, both children and adults, for classes in pottery. Then they began conducting summer programs — two weeks of performing arts, two of visual arts, and two of science. Flying Cloud Institute was underway.



Maria Rundle and Jane Burke

photo by Larry Burke

In 1988, Jane persuaded local school administrators that she could enrich their science teaching and began to volunteer in classrooms at New Marlborough Central School and the lower schools in Sheffield. Sticking only to classrooms to which she was invited, she instructed teachers as well as students and developed ways of illuminating scientific principles with the arts. By 2000 she was the Creative Schools Coordinator, bringing art and science into classrooms kindergarten through grade twelve. She did a stint as the Mount Everett chemistry teacher, where she teamed with a dancer to teach chemical reactions. "The interaction between molecules in chemistry is like dance," she says by way of illustration. "They are both all about energy." During MCAS test-taking, she says, these grade 10 students could close their eyes and recall the dance that replicated molecular energy. This approach, employing the concept of "multiple intelligences" pioneered by Harvard University psychologist Howard Gardner, now informs Flying Cloud's work in five Berkshire County school districts. Along the way, Jane started Young Women in Science so that the eleven-year-old Lindy Marcel of Mill River and a dozen other girls could learn from real scientists in a real laboratory. That program now reaches 250 girls each year. The original summer program still serves local kids and is the inspiration for much of what the Institute brings into schools.

"Founders are famous for sticking around too long," says Jane, "and I'm getting out [of day-to-day administration] because it got bigger than I had planned." She will remain to assist Ms. Rundle in learning the Flying Cloud approach and then work in its various programs as a teacher. She also plans to consult and to explore the teaching of education students. Although Flying Cloud's administrative offices moved to St. James Place in Great

Barrington, the Burkes' hilltop property will continue to host summer programs. "My retirement," says Jane, "does not look like golf."

Ms. Rundle, meanwhile, is eager to pick up the challenge: not only to maintain Flying Cloud's high educational

standards but, through increased fund-raising, to expand its access throughout Berkshire County. "Flying Cloud," she says, "has tapped into something fundamental about how young people learn: it sees the whole child — creative, wondering, innovative." □

SBRSD: SURVIVING DECLINING ENROLLMENT

by Jane Burke

There is cause for concern about the future of education in Berkshire County and the viability of Southern Berkshire Regional School District in particular. The recently published University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute's report, *Berkshire County Educational Task Force Planning Study*, painted a bleak picture of the current situation, and projections for ten years hence suggest it will get worse. The results confirmed what educators and public officials already knew: enrollment is falling in every district, costs continue to rise, and available revenues are shrinking. The researchers also gathered data on trends in student teacher ratios, teacher salaries, administrative costs, school choice, numbers of honors and advanced placement courses for every district in the county to provide information needed to identify the current threats to the quality of education.

The study's findings gave numbers to the changes between 2000 and 2015. Berkshire County schools experienced a 22.3 percent decline in enrollment compared to 1.7 percent statewide. To put this in perspective for Southern Berkshire, the student population was 1,072 in 2000 and dropped to 740 in 2015, a 31 percent decrease. Mount Greylock in Williamstown decreased 34 percent. Although our decline in numbers are not extreme compared to other districts, our student population has always been smaller. Some question if, with current numbers, we can continue to provide a quality education. (Berkshire Hills and Lenox have avoided the same decreases through positive "school choice" into their districts, so the net decreases in Berkshire Hills and Lenox were only 18 percent and 16.3 percent respectively.)

Data collected from all districts showed that the average increase in expenditures over the past ten years was 27 percent. In the Southern Berkshire district, the expenditures increased 37 percent. With fixed overhead on our buildings and state mandates for the number of administrators, school nurses, retirement packages, and special education services, there are few cost savings as the number of students declines.

One interesting option regarding the revenue challenges that have arisen during this period was recently introduced by the Mike Buoniconti, founder of the new Massachusetts Rural Schools Coalition. This group of rural school leaders is bringing legislative attention to

the need for additional state funding for rural districts. They are proposing the creation of Rural School Aid within the Massachusetts Chapter 70 Education Aid Program. The coalition states, "the program is purposely intended to enable rural communities to deliver quality education at an affordable rate to the local taxpayers. No public school district can achieve financial stability in an environment in which revenues are persistently stagnant while operating costs gradually rise."

The aid would be calculated on four criteria: percent change in enrollment since 2001, square miles of the district compared to enrollment in 2013, percent change in Chapter 70 since 2001, and per capita income in 2013. Using these measures, Southern Berkshire Regional School District is among the most challenged. Enrollment has decreased by 31 percent, there are only 4.9 students per square mile, Chapter 70 aid decreased by 0.5 percent, and the per capita income in 2013 was \$37,440. If the Rural School Aid is adopted, the district would receive \$1,000 per student or \$740,000. This amount of subsidy would go far to alleviate our high costs, such as bus transportation, which last year cost our district \$1,172,000.

Increased aid would lessen some of our fiscal concerns, but the question that still remains is how to ensure that the small student population receives a top notch 21st century education. New approaches were put forward in the study: district consolidations, shared personnel and services with other districts, closing schools, increasing technology, saving energy, and combining positions.

Every candidate interviewed during the superintendent interviews at Southern Berkshire during January has been asked to talk about the merit of various solutions. The district will definitely have to make some changes in how it operates, while not compromising the quality of education for the students. Our new superintendent will need the ideas, talents, and support of our whole community to take on this challenge. □

Editor's Note: This article is based on findings contained in the Berkshire County Education Task Force Planning Study. If you care to read the report in its entirety, you can download a PDF at www.donahue.umassp.edu/documents/UMass_Berkshire_County_Ed_Task_Force_Phase_1_Final_Report_10.31.16.pdf.

NEW ACQUISITIONS AT THE LIBRARY

Adult Fiction

The Second Mrs. Hockaday, by Susan Rivers
Transit, by Rachel Cusk
Victoria, by Daisy Goodwin
The Before Girl, by J.P. Delaney

Adult Nonfiction

Fresh from The Garden: An Organic Guide to Growing Vegetables, Berries, and Herbs in Cold Climates, by John Whitman
Hidden Figures, by Margot Lee Shetterly

Children's Fiction

Island of Dragons, by Lisa McMann
The Secret Horses, by Briar Hill
Samson in the Snow, by Philip C. Stead
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Audio CDs

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This Book Will Save Your Life, by A.M. Homes
The Obituary Writer, by Ann Hood

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<i>Passage to Mars</i>	<i>Queen of Katwe</i>
<i>The Light Between Oceans</i>	

► Book Discussion Group

Please Join us February 18 at 10 a.m. for bagels and a lively discussion of the book, *Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, by Isabel Wilkerson



The New Marlborough Library Film Series

Here Come the Videofreex will screen on February 14 at 7:30 p.m. Feel free to show up at 7:00 p.m. to nab a seat, popcorn, and cider.

Here Come the Videofreex tells the enthralling story of a pioneering collective of video journalists known as the Videofreex who in the '60s and '70s became the forerunners of public access television and the modern internet news era, as they deployed the first handheld video cameras to report and observe the world around them. 79 minutes.

HOMEMADE SWEETS FOR YOUR SWEET: A CHOCOLATE CELEBRATION

Stop in at the New Marlborough Library February 11 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., just in time for Valentine's Day! Homemade confections, chocolate fountain, children's activity table, and free hot chocolate!

Library Winter Hours

November 1 - March 31
 Mon. Wed. Sat. 10:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
 Tues. & Thurs. 1:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
 Fri. 1:30 - 7:30 p.m.

BRING YOUR CHILD TO THE LIBRARY DAY

FEBRUARY 4 at 11:00 a.m.

Join Minstrel/Storyteller Mary Jo Maichack for a "make & take!" Make your own fairy house and learn about fairy lore. All supplies provided and admission is free. This program is supported by a grant from the New Marlborough Cultural Council. Please RSVP if you plan to attend, 229-6668 or newmarlborough@gmail.com



(413) 229-2544

Free Estimates



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Please fill in the form and send with your contribution to:

New Marlborough 5 Village News, P.O. Box 243, Southfield, MA 01259

YES, I WANT THE *New Marlborough 5 Village News* TO CONTINUE!

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Town Times

Board of Selectmen: Every Monday at 6:00 p.m.

Town Administrator: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Planning Board: Second and fourth Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.

Board of Health: First Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m.

Conservation Commission: Last Saturday of the month at 9:00 a.m.

Board of Assessors: Monday through Thursday, 9:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Fire Department training: Every Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. at the fire station

Building Inspector: Monday 5 - 7 p.m., Wednesday 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.

First Responders: meeting/training: First and third Wednesday
at 7:00 p.m. at the fire station

Cultural Council: Second Thursday at 4:15 p.m. at the library

Post Office: Mill River Window: Monday - Friday 11:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Southfield Window: Monday - Friday 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

(The Southfield Post Office lobby is open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.)

Town Treasurer: Monday & Tuesday 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Tax Collector: Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Selectmen's Administrative Secretary: Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Dog and Animal Control Officer: John Springstube 413-232-7038

Town Clerk: 229-8278; 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. weekdays; Saturday by appointment

Town Hall: 229-8116

Police: Business office: 229-8161

Transfer Station Hours:

Wednesday: 9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.

Saturday: 9:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.

Sunday: 9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.

PERMITS WERE DUE JULY 1

The fee of \$150
can be paid by mail.

Please enclose a self-addressed,
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Emergency calls:

Police, Fire, Medical
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New Marlborough Highway Department

Located on Mill River-Southfield Rd.

Hours:

Monday - Friday 7:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

PO Box 99, Mill River, MA 01244

(413) 229-8165

We welcome advertisements from businesses owned by New Marlborough residents.

Other businesses can be listed in the Service Sector (see back page). Questions, rates? Call Barbara Lowman: 229-2369

NM5VN Editorial Team

Larry Burke, issue editor; Diane Barth, designer;

Martha Bryan, Jane Burke, Barbara Lowman,

David Lowman, Joe Poindexter, Jodi Rothe,

Peter Schuyten, Barry Shapiro, Pam Stebbins,

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Mary Richie Smith, Tara White. Index: Donna Weaver

New Marlborough 5 Village News

appears monthly,

also online at our new website! www.NM5VN.org

The next issue will be dated March 2017.

All copy must be submitted no later than February 17.

For advertising, contact Barbara Lowman, tel: 229-2369

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- ♦ **Susan M. Smith:** Attorney At Law; Concentrating in the areas of Estate Planning, Estate Administration, Elder Law, Real Estate and Zoning Matters. ssmithlaw@hughes.net or 229-7080
- ♦ **Reiner White:** General Contractor; 413-229-8450
- ♦ **Ter Mar Triangle Farm:** 106 Sandy Brook Turnpike (Rte 183), Sandisfield; 413-258-2898; fruits and vegetables in season; pork; jam; eggs; honey; sawmill; kiln milling; firewood
- ♦ **Woodruff Mountain Landscaping:** Excavation and landscape contracting, all forms of stone work and masonry, and outdoor services, including lawn mowing and yard work. 413-229-2919 woodruffmountain@aol.com

To list your business here, contact Barbara Lowman 229-2369