

FIREFIGHTERS

FROM PAGE A1

the municipal planning grant. The land is jointly owned by the town of Rockingham and Great River Hydro, which owns the Bellows Falls hydroelectric station.

Along with the nearly \$7,000 grant they received, an additional \$15,000 has also been raised through a GoFundMe page and a local fundraiser hosted by the local Bellows Falls business Flex Fitness. McGinnis said that another \$15,000 would likely be needed to complete the park project.

The first step was recently taken when McClure Tree Service, based in Keene, N.H., removed all but one of the overgrown linden and crabapple trees on the park site.

“The trees were taken down to prep the site and open up the view of the mountain,” said McGinnis in a recent interview. “A new town Christmas tree is also slated to be planted to replace the previous tree, which came down a few years ago.”

The Fire Department and Selectboard are currently working with designer, Jana Bryan, and the landscape architectural firm Julie Moir Messervy Design Studio of Bellows Falls in creating the new designs for the park.

The plan is to expand the park to also include sculptures of firefighter gear to honor the heroes, Brown and Fuller, as well as the planting of a

large balsam fir tree, which will become the “community Christmas tree.” The memorial park will also serve as a common gathering space for other events in the downtown area.

There is a “dedication ceremony” scheduled on the day of the annual Bellows Falls Fire Department parade, and a memorial service is also planned for Dec. 29, the 40th anniversary of the fatal fire.

“The first plans that I saw for this park go all the way back to 1984, and now it’s all finally happening,” McGinnis said. “Our plan is to have the memorial park completed for the Bellows Falls Fireman’s Parade on Oct. 10.”



STAFF PHOTO/JORDAN J. PHELAN

A stone bench dedicated to late local firefighter Terry B. Brown shines in the afternoon sun adjacent to another identical bench dedicated to late fellow firefighter Dana Fuller in downtown Bellows Falls, Vt., on Tuesday, March 30, 2021. The memorial park in honor of these two firefighters is slated for completion on Sunday, Oct. 10, according to Bellows Falls Fire Chief Shaun McGinnis.

BOARD

FROM PAGE A1

Spaulding said at one point. “And once we get it all out, then maybe we can work together. But I doubt it.”

Spaulding has a documented history of conflicts and verbal clashes with Newport school officials and the board. In 2019, for example, The Argus Champion reported an exchange between Spaulding and the board that devolved into more than an hour of “shouting, accusations, and rudeness.” Most recently, Spaulding had filed a suit against fellow board member Rhonda Callum-King in Sullivan County Superior Court to order search emails written by Callum-King. The court dismissed the case on March 13, ruling that individuals are not required to

comply with Right-to-Know requests.

On April 1, Spaulding, attending his first meeting as an elected board member, angrily left the meeting after approximately 20 minutes, after issuing a grievance over the school board ethics policy, a two-page document detailing the conduct expected of Newport School Board members, including regular attendance, working respectfully with other board members, and respecting protocol pertaining to communication, chain of command, and the board’s jurisdiction.

On Thursday, Spaulding asked the board again to review the document, which he said has multiple issues, ranging from a lack of constitutionality pertaining to

the First Amendment and a lack of language clarity. Additionally, Spaulding noted the policy does not state a date of approval, only that it was “reviewed” in 2004. The school district said it cannot find records regarding its adoption.

But in presenting his case, Spaulding immediately began publicly questioning the conduct of other board members. Spaulding revived a two-year-old allegation that board member Linda Wadensten “held a birthday party for her son in the school cafeteria” — which Wadensten denies, previously saying she had only sent pizza to school — which Spaulding claimed was unethical. Spaulding also renewed his allegation that Callum-King had lied about her email activity.

Spaulding repeatedly referred to Wadensten, the former board chair, as “the queen” and later said that Callum-King “is as nasty as they come.”

Tensions rose until the 40-minute mark when Callum-King verbally struck back at Spaulding, saying she was fed up with Spaulding’s direct attacks.

“The judge threw [your complaint] out in 10 minutes,” Callum-King said. “So you can grow up and put on your big-boy pants and stop running around doing [your business] behind everyone’s back, sit down here, stay through a whole meeting and do your job that people voted you for.”

Callum-King left the meeting immediately afterward. Prior to closing the

discussion Darling issued her remarks.

“I have no problem with open and honest discussion . . . or being uncomfortable,” Darling told Spaulding. “But attacking other board members should not be done. It shouldn’t happen toward you nor should it happen toward us.”

Darling said such conduct distracts from the board’s purpose and casts a “disappointing” image.

“I am not going to turn another meeting into a reality TV show episode,” Darling said. “There is a way to do this appropriately. But tonight was not it.”

Darling did decide to send the ethics policy to the board’s policy committee for review, primarily to address

the lack of an adoption date. Darling invited Spaulding to submit any recommendations of changes to the document.

The next policy meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 15. Any changes to the policy would then return to the school board for adoption.

Regarding the policy content, board members defended the appropriateness and legality of the policy expectations, saying that many New Hampshire school districts have similar board conduct policies.

“They all follow similar policies to this,” said board member Rhonda Callum-King. “Some of them go even deeper.”

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UPDATES

FROM PAGE A4

allowed for newborn/infant appointments.

The center said for births, two adult support people are permitted during the entire stay: before, during and after the birth. Two adult support people may spend the night during labor and delivery, and one adult support person may stay overnight before and after the birth. These designated people cannot change.

The center also will resume COVID-19 testing for any patient being admitted to the hospital, regardless of vaccination status, and prior to surgical procedures in select circumstances.

Health care provider funds: U.S. Sens. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire and Susan Collins of Maine are leading a group of senators in urging the distribution of remaining money in the federal Provider Relief Fund and other health care relief programs to assist with COVID-19 expenses.

The funding distribution process for hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living providers, and other health care providers “has been uneven,” their letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said Thursday.

“Shifting guidance, difficulties in reconciling tax information, the absence of a formal appeals process, and other technical problems have plagued the program,” it said.

Congress appropriated \$178 billion for the fund, and \$8.5 billion for rural providers. The senators said they agreed with a Government Accountability Office assessment that about 25% of fund

appropriations — about \$44 billion — and all of the rural provider funding remained uncommitted.

Shaheen, a Democrat, and Collins, a Republican, led a bipartisan list of 43 senators that included fellow senators Maggie Hassan, a Democrat from New Hampshire, and Angus King, an independent from Maine.

Border: New Hampshire’s congressional delegation is pressing the Biden administration to reopen the U.S.-Canada border to vaccinated Canadians, saying businesses in the state are hurting from a ban on non-essential travel.

The U.S. government recently extended the ban to slow the spread of COVID-19, until at least Sept. 21. Canada opened its side of the border to vaccinated U.S. travelers Aug. 9.

U.S. Sens. Jeanne Shaheen and Maggie Hassan and U.S. Reps. Annie Kuster and Chris Pappas met Thursday with representatives from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Canadian Consul in Boston, and state business leaders to discuss the effects of the ban.

“Our businesses and tourism sector are feeling the economic impact, which they already can’t afford as they fight to get their feet back on the ground following the financial fallout from the pandemic,” Shaheen said in a statement. “I understand the serious challenges posed by the rapid spread of the Delta variant and the urgent need to keep people safe, but we also know this is vastly due to an epidemic spurred by the unvaccinated. These are difficult decisions, but I

believe there is a responsible way to get this done.”

Hassan said she does not see the reason for extending the border closure even longer, when Canadian vaccination rates “exceed our own, and while Canada is willing and able to admit U.S. visitors.”

The travel restrictions have been in place since early in the pandemic in March 2020 and repeatedly extended while allowing commercial traffic and essential crossings to continue.

Unemployment benefits lawsuit: Four New Hampshire residents filed a lawsuit Friday challenging a decision by Gov. Chris Sununu’s administration to end unemployment benefits under the federal CARES Act nearly three months earlier than they were scheduled to run out Sept. 6.

The lawsuit filed in Hillsborough Superior Court in Nashua against the state of New Hampshire and New Hampshire Employment Security and its commissioner asks a judge to reinstate the benefits dating back to June 19, when they were ended. Similar lawsuits have been filed in other states where the benefits were ended early.

New Hampshire was among the first to expand eligibility for unemployment benefits when the pandemic first struck. Thousands of people were collecting unemployment benefits, including \$300 per week supplemental payments either from the state or a federal program created during the pandemic. The state decided to end the extra payments June 19 because the unemployment rate had dropped and given the abundance of available jobs, Sununu had said.

Mike Perez, an attorney representing the four residents, said neither state nor federal law gives New Hampshire Employment Security the authority to abandon a program known as Pandemic Unemployment Assistance before it expires.

George Copadis, the employment security director, deferred to the state attorney general’s office to comment. Messages seeking comment were left with that office and with a spokesperson for Sununu.

The numbers: More than 106,000 people have tested positive for the virus in New Hampshire, including 356 cases announced Friday. Five new deaths were announced, bringing the total to 1,415.

The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in New Hampshire has risen over the past two weeks from 165 new cases a day on Aug. 11 to 277 new cases a day on Wednesday.

Vermont

The Vermont Department of Corrections has reinstated its mandatory mask directive for staff and inmates at all facilities.

On Friday, the department reported that three inmates at the Northern State Correctional Facility in Newport had tested positive for COVID-19, meaning there are now four cases among inmates and six in prison staff.

The four infected inmates have been in isolation since Wednesday, and the rest of the unit is in quarantine, the department said. The entire facility, which is in full lockdown, was being tested Friday, the department said.

There are also two infected inmates and one infected employee at Northwest State Correctional Facility in St.

Albans, the department said.

A staff member at Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility in Rutland also tested positive this week.

The department said it stopped outside visitation at facilities with positive cases.

The department provides updates on the status in the state’s correctional facilities on a COVID-19 information page its website.

Health Department employees: Gov. Phil Scott and Health Commissioner Dr. Mark Levine have been transparent about the state’s response to the coronavirus, the data and analysis that goes into those decisions and when adjustments are needed, Jason Malucci, the governor’s press secretary said, in response to the urging from more than 90 Vermont Health Department employees that the state do more to fight the surge in COVID-19 cases caused by the delta variant.

The Health Department employees signed an emailed letter sent to Levine, Deputy Health Commissioner Kelly Dougherty, state Epidemiologist Patsy Kelso and others Thursday saying the current guidance “is not doing all that it should to protect Vermonters and save lives.”

Vermont’s current public guidance encourages unvaccinated individuals to wear a mask in public spaces and does not mention the risk of COVID-19 to unmasked individuals, the letter said.

Malucci said in a written statement that the governor values the input of the state’s public health professionals and other Health Department employees and his “decision-making process does — and will always — include the input and perspectives of the employees in the letter.”

Levine thanked the employees for sharing their thoughts.

“As a department, we have to recognize that in a pandemic, public health recommendations are a significant factor, but not the sole factor in the state’s policy decisions. Our recommendations are weighed alongside many other aspects that have statewide implications,

including areas such as mental health, substance misuse, economic security, overall public confidence, and commitment to mitigation measures and more,” Levine said in message to department staff.

He said the decisions often aren’t easy and there will be areas of disagreement.

University of Vermont: University of Vermont freshmen are arriving on campus this week and must be fully vaccinated.

The school’s largest freshmen class is moving in on Thursday and Friday, with returning students arriving on Saturday. The semester starts on Monday.

Nearly 100% of undergraduate students are vaccinated, according to university officials, with a little over 1% qualifying for an exemption. Those unvaccinated students will be required to get tested for COVID-19 weekly and all students must wear masks indoors.

“We’re excited about the students’ response to the vaccination requirement,” said Gary Derr, vice president of operations and public safety. “This year it’s just indoors. Classrooms, residence halls, dining halls and other spaces like that.”

Students are expected to get tested before arriving for the fall semester and will get tested again once they’re on campus.

“I feel safer on campus this year,” said junior Megan Zalanskas.

The numbers: Vermont reported 144 new COVID-19 cases Friday, bringing the statewide total since the pandemic began to more than 27,640 cases.

A total of 30 people were hospitalized with the virus with four in intensive care.

The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in Vermont has risen over the past two weeks from 94.86 new cases a day on Aug. 11 to 120.14 new cases a day on Wednesday.

The Associated Press is using data collected by Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering to measure outbreak caseloads and deaths across the United States.

VT & NH Lotteries

The Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. — These New Hampshire lotteries were drawn Thursday:

Gimme 5

02-24-32-34-39
(two, twenty-four, thirty-two, thirty-four, thirty-nine)

Lucky For Life

09-12-31-36-45, Lucky Ball: 14
(nine, twelve, thirty-one, thirty-six, forty-five; Lucky Ball: fourteen)

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$288 million

Pick 3 Day

4-1-8
(four, one, eight)

Pick 3 Evening

8-6-3
(eight, six, three)

Pick 4 Day

7-8-8-4
(seven, eight, eight, four)

Pick 4 Evening

0-1-8-2
(zero, one, eight, two)

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$322 million

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