

QUABOAG CURRENT

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Looking back on 2025



Visitors to North Brookfield's inaugural First Night Out celebration received glowing wands to light the night. The event was organized by the Parks and Recreation Department in collaboration with the Cultural Council.



St. Joseph's Church Hall was the site of a St. Valentine's spaghetti dinner that was put together by Knights of Columbus Council 2381. Guests lined up and prepared to receive their meals. See more photos page 5.

Board had plowing/sanding discussions

By Ryan Drago
Staff Writer
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WEST BROOKFIELD – The Select Board met on Dec. 23 and heard from residents from Beach Drive and White Birch Drive.

The first discussion was for Beach Drive for plowing and sanding services. Several residents on Beach Drive attended the meeting and talked about a section of the road where there is a homeowner with a chain in place and a turnaround that is not accessible for the plow trucks.

Select Board Chair Roland Sickenberger said a letter was sent to the homeowner but still haven't heard a response. Also in attendance was the Highway Superintendent James Daley, who described the condition of the road and the turnaround is challenging for the truck.

The Select Board wanted to know what the rules say about plowing private roads compared to public roads. According to Daley, private roads are plowed simultaneously with public roads in West Brookfield.

"We're doing the best we can," Daley said. "No problem plowing it as long as we plow it safely."

The residents hope to come to a solution with the neighbor. The Select Board will try to reach out to the neighbor the residents were talking about on Beach Drive.

The board moved on to White Birch Drive residents' request for plowing and sanding. Residents of White Birch Drive attended the meeting with one of them acknowledging that he used to plow the road himself with his own truck. Unfortunately, the resident said his truck has worn out and is unable to plow anymore.

The resident thought it would be best to contact the town for assistance. The road is under a quarter of a mile long and the resident said there is plenty of room for a truck to plow.

The Select Board wanted to review the bylaws and see what the revised list of roads that fall under town plowing and sanding.

The board believes the list was revised several years ago but doesn't show a date on when it was revised. Some members believe the list hasn't changes since 1974. Sickenberger wondered if they do begin to add on to the list there may be more added in the future.

An outside contractor may have to do be hired

See W BROOKFIELD PAGE 8

Selectmen take back care of Little Park

By Paula Ouimette
Editor
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NORTH BROOKFIELD – Board of Selectmen Chair Jason Petraitis said the board and others involved with Little Park could have handled a recent situation differently and "a lot better."

At the board's Dec. 30 meeting, Vice-Chair Jamie Gilman read a statement on the matter.

"There has been too much division in our little town," he said. "These divisions at times seem to dictate how

See N BROOKFIELD PAGE 6

School Committee heard from grade six students

By Ryan Drago
Staff Writer
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WARREN – The Quaboag Regional School Committee met prior to holiday break and began with a presentation by grade six leadership students.

Superintendent Stephen Duff explained that grade six leadership is an opportunity for students from both Warren and West Brookfield elementary schools to present what is happening at their schools. Teams come together to present a PowerPoint to the School Committee.

Two students from Warren Community Elementary School came up for this month's meeting and began sharing updates.

Students receive classroom jobs and help

students in the younger grades, kindergarten through fourth grade. The students also talked about their helpful community programs such as recycling pickup and can tab collections. The tabs are collected and shipped to Shriner's to help them raise money to support children.

Other jobs students help with is flag patrol and some working the daily podcast. This is a student run daily podcast where students connect with their school and share what is happening at WCES. The committee members were impressed by the presentation and asked the students about their favorite jobs.

Duff said these students' contributions are being celebrated.

"Contributions you make to your community are being celebrated," Duff

said. "Selected as being leaders of the future."

Duff encouraged these students to continue to be involved in their community when they arrive at Quaboag Regional Middle High School. Duff expressed that he was incredibly proud of these students as the committee gave them a nice round of applause.

Superintendent's report

Duff came before the committee and began his report with announcing the Worcester County Superintendent Association Scholar of the Year.

Every year a Worcester County Superintendent has to select a student that represents the values of their school. This year, Duff announced the district has selected one student, who is considered a role model and volunteers a lot of her time for volun-

teer work and community service work.

The selected student is senior Olive Moulton, who got the opportunity to speak to the School Committee during their Dec. 15 meeting. Moulton believes "it is important to get involved cause it helps grow your community" and "grow as a person".

Moulton is involved in various clubs at the school including Community Service Club, involved with National Honor Society, and also helped with wrapping holiday gifts for kids during the annual toy drive. The committee congratulated Moulton on this announcement.

North Brookfield update

Duff shared an update on a potential tuition

See SCHOOL COMMITTEE PAGE 6

East Quabbin Land Trust hosted 'Space Night'

By Zacharias Fragkiadakis
Correspondent

HARDWICK – Two PhD candidates from Georgia State University visited the East Quabbin Land Trust's office at 120 Ridge Road last Friday to give a presentation about their astronomical research.

Maura Shea and Aman Kar each research outer space, including galaxies, planets, and stars.

Shea grew up in Hardwick, and graduated from Wellesley College here in Massachusetts in 2020 with a degree in astrophysics. Her research at Georgia State centers around active galactic nuclei, where she works under Professor Mike Crenshaw.

Her main research centers on a cluster of galaxies called Stephan's Quintet, because they have high rates of interaction with one another.

Kar's research centers around red stars, and he received his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Wyoming in 2019, where he studied

exoplanets and their atmospheres. He has been at Georgia State since 2022, where he studies M dwarf stars. He is part of the RECON team, where he works with Dr. Todd Henry.

The presentation started with Shea and Kar explaining the newest technologies that are being used in space observation, including the James Webb Space Telescope. According to their presentation, the JWST was launched in 2021 as a direct successor to the Hubble Space Telescope, which is still sending back photos to this day.

The JWST though, can see more than Hubble can, as it observes in the infrared light scale, which is not visible to human eyes without assistance from technology. They said that JWST can look further back in time, as when the universe expands, light starts to get more red, which is why it needs to observe in the infrared.

In addition, the JWST can see through space dust better than Hubble.

Shea and Kar also noted that the JWST is a high



Aman Kar described the construction of the James Webb Space Telescope.

risk, high reward project. It was launched to a part of the solar system where it will not be possible for NASA scientists to service it if something were to go wrong, but is more efficient than Hubble. The project cost 10 billion dollars.

They said the JWST is now sending back photos of distant dwarf galaxies, created 400 million years after the big bang, where Hubble could not see any dwarf galaxies. One other telescope they noted was the Chandra telescope, which looks in the X-ray

scale, another scale humans cannot see. This allows for viewing of supernovas, they said.

Shea presented many pictures that the JWST has sent back so far, including some Einstein Rings. In the picture, it shows an elliptical galaxy surrounded by a spiral galaxy, with the spiral galaxy appearing more red in color, signifying the spiral galaxy is older.

Einstein Rings are named after scientist Albert Einstein's theories about light bending.

She also presented a pic-

ture of Stephan's Quintet, which she is studying for her PhD. In this cluster of galaxies, their gravitational pulls are strong enough to interact with each other, and pull them apart, according to the presentation.

In the picture, there is an area of red, which is a star forming area with dust. The areas of blue are stars not surrounded by dust, and green areas are hydrocarbons.

See SPACE NIGHT PAGE 8

TURLEY STAFF PHOTO

- community -

WB&CA and Beyond enters 15th year

Staff Report

For the past 15 years, the Ware Business & Civic Association and Beyond has been a catalyst for growth, creating a hub for businesses to visit and invest in the community of Ware.

The Ware Business & Civic Association and Beyond began in 2011, with a gathering of local business and civic leaders at the Goodwill store, located at the corner of Main and North streets, currently the site of Hanna's on Main restaurant.

"Local businessman, Joel Harder, organized the meeting," said Chris Murphy, WBCA&B Board of Director and IT officer. "Joel noted the pessimistic trend with business in Ware and thought there would be strength in numbers."

Meetings were held, more people and businesses joined the group and idea developed to support the town.

From that starting point, the WB&CA and Beyond took root in Ware. Over the next few years, community and business activities such as the Holiday Stroll, Shop Local weekends and the Fall Fair were held.

"The last year of the Fall Fair, over 80 businesses and organizations participated. The fair included a breakfast at the Milyard, art show in the town hall, chili contest and vendors at Veterans Park and other events at the library and Workshop13. We also hosted a decorating contest for area stores. It was a wonderful event that brought hundreds to town. One highlight was Cindi LaBombard had over 500 people sign in at the art show," said Carol Zins, member of the Fall Fair committee.

One WB&CA and Beyond program that has excelled since its inception in 2014, is the Ware in Bloom campaign.

"The Flowers in Bloom



Author Elena Palladino presented her book, "Lost Towns of the Swift River Valley", to the attendees of a Ware Business & Civic Association and Beyond workshop held at Workshop13.

Committee began in the early years of the WBCA as a way to support the Main Street Improvement Project.

Funded by local businesses and powered by hands-on volunteers who even helped water the flower baskets themselves, the initiative has always been rooted in community pride. It's inspiring to see it still flourishing today, with dozens of volunteers continuing to make downtown bloom, season after season," said Shelley Regin, Senior Vice President, Marketing, of Country Bank. Regin served on the original Ware in Bloom committee. The Ware in Bloom continues to today, as Carol Zins handed off the program to current leaders, Carol Blackmer and Janice Ouimette.

WB&CA and Beyond officially became a not-for-profit status organization. Mission statements were created, organizational bylaws set and a formal slate of officers were elected.

In 2014, the mission statement bent towards Ware's revitalization and economic development.

The WB&CA and Beyond has been active over the years with regional and local

initiatives.

Members of the WB&CA and Beyond also serve on the Town of Ware's Downtown Economic Development Committee, Community Development Authority, the Massachusetts Regional Railroad Transport Committee and the Hampshire County Transportation Committee.

The goals of the association remain rooted in membership support, networking and communication.

"Membership has grown every year, even during the COVID 19 pandemic," said WB&CA and Beyond President Dan Flynn. "We continue to evolve in some program areas, but we never lost sight of our core mission. Each month's meeting offers a quality program, each event is enjoyable, the membership fee is inexpensive, but the benefits far outweigh the cost."

For members who have joined the association, the membership benefits have been numerous.

"The networking aspect alone has been very rewarding for myself and my company," said Melissa Fales, president, QV CDC of Ware

and WB&CA and Beyond Clerk/Treasurer. "Our Association growth has been making a bigger impact even outside of the Town of Ware."

In 2022, the WB&CA and Beyond altered the approach to its program.

Monthly program meetings were held every third Wednesday of the month at E2E on Main Street. However, due to membership increases and attendance had grown to the point where the meetings had to move the Cedarbrook Village on South Street.

"We wanted to have our members promoted within and outside the association," said Flynn. "We opened up our monthly programs to include meeting at our member's locations. Members could host and get to showcase the location, product and such."

Meetings have been held at American Athletic Shoe Company, Quabbin Wire, Tombstone Trading, Palmer Motorsports Park, 13th World and the newest WB&CA and Beyond member, Align Hypnosis.

At a WBCA&B monthly program, each meeting would begin with a Town Manager/Administrator report from attending towns. Currently, the Towns of Ware, Warren, Hardwick and Palmer belong to the WB&CA and Beyond.

"I believe WB&CA and Beyond provides the town with a unique opportunity to share its latest projects, events, and future economic development opportunities within the town," said Jim Ferrara, Town Administrator, Town of Warren. "One of my roles as a Town Administrator is to market and promote the town for future economic growth and I believe WB&CA and Beyond creates a forum for this to happen."

"This report from each town improves communications about what projects and growth are moving forward, and what we should be planning together for future projects," said Stuart Beckley, Town Manager, Town of Ware. "In the Quaboag region, connection and cooperation are necessary. The



Ware Business & Civic Association and Beyond members dropped off collected school supplies to Stanley M. Koziol Elementary School administration

meetings of the WB&CA and Beyond promote the sharing of regional knowledge and resources. This information is very beneficial for each of us."

In 2023, discussion was held to open up the membership to include businesses and organizations from contiguous towns.

"The association was being approached by many non-Ware businesses," said Flynn.

In 2024, the association's bylaws were updated to include members from Palmer, Belchertown, Hardwick, Warren and West Brookfield.

A quarterly evening activity program was developed.

"We planned evening events such as bowling, pinball and pickleball. We had even rented a portable axe yard and held several axe throwing events," said Flynn. "A sponsor assists with defrayment of the cost of the facility or rental. Food is provided. It's a relaxed, fun networking outing but with a twist. A small business or sole proprietor may not be able to have an outing like this for themselves or employees, so this program is another member benefit"

In 2023, an special opportunity opened for the WB&CA and Beyond. The local state senate seat had been left open as the State Senator Anne E. Gobi took a position with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts administration and special election was then scheduled.

"We contacted both of the candidates on the ballot to offer a Candidates Forum, where both would be given time for an opening statement, each would answer questions, and then give a closing statement," said Flynn. "The forum was taped by local community access channel 15 and the tape was shared with the other town channels within the state senate district. It was a monumental event."

A second forum was held in 2024 for the candidates in the 2024 election.

One of the recent WB&CA and Beyond initiatives is new local business recognition. "The towns within the WB&CA and Beyond represents are fortunate to have state legislators who are ac-

tive and truly present in their towns," said Flynn. "We have been setting up and having ceremonial ribbon cuttings for new businesses. If the legislators are available, they or a staffer will attend with a commendation from the Massachusetts Statehouse. The event is then reported in the local newspaper and promoted on social media,"

The WB&CA and Beyond had partnered with the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce on several ribbon cuttings and support of each organization's past events.

"It's been wonderful to work with the WB&CA and Beyond," said TRCC President, Matt Lemieux. "We have even had a friendly wager, President to President, on the outcome of the annual Ware Palmer football game rivalry. Losing President had to scoop ice cream at Rondeau's Dairy Bar. This wager created a lot of interest in both of our towns."

This past summer, the WB&CA and Beyond and the TRCC collaborated on a town townwide school supply collection to support the schools in Ware, Palmer and Monson.

Members of the WB&CA and Beyond are very active with the community, supporting Main Street banners and the Ware Flair to name a few of the program, Flynn and Director Dustin Pennington serve on the Town of Ware Fireworks Committee.

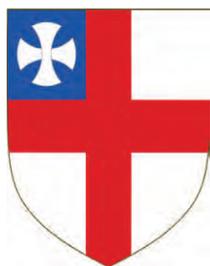
"When we saw how much the cost of the fireworks went up from the 2024 show to the 2025 show, the committee was nervous about raising the money needed. We approached the WB&CA and Beyond. They volunteered to host and support two celebrity bartender/server nights. Hanna's on Main hosted and members of the WB&CA and Beyond acted as bartenders and servers," said Pennington. "All tips collected went to support the 2025 fireworks show. We had Neil Diamond aka Charlie Lask of Nat Falk, the first night, then karaoke the second night. We raised enough funds to cover the huge fee

See WB&CA AND BEYOND PAGE 6



Ware Business & Civic Association and Beyond members thanked Parks Department staff with donuts on the town's Memorial Day weekend preparations. Pictured left to right, are Dustin Pennington, John Piechota, John Skutnik, Dennis Ouimette and Chris Murphy

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- community -

St. Aloysius Catholic School to hold annual fund drive

HARDWICK – St. Aloysius Catholic School in Gilbertville has launched its Annual Fund Drive with a pledge of \$40,000 in matching funds from an anonymous benefactor.

The fund drive runs through March 15, 2026.

Last year the fund drive raised just over \$95,000 including the match funds.

“To raise that amount of money was truly a miracle. Never in the history of our Annual Fund Drive or the Scholarship Drive that preceded it, did we ever exceed our goal to that extent,” said Roberta McQuaid, Finance Manager and Enrollment Coordinator for the school.

The School Board implemented the Annual Fund Drive in place of the Scholarship Drive in 2025 to be able to diversify the use of the money earned, and thereby keep tuition affordable for families.

“The cost of nearly everything it takes to run a school has increased, from utilities to insurance, to books and salaries. It is no small feat to make ends meet. We rely so heavily on those who support our mission; we couldn’t do the good work we do if it weren’t for our donors. While I hope and pray we will do well again this year, big gifts are not a given, and every donation, no matter the size, truly counts,” continued McQuaid. “Catholic Schools provide a foundation of faith for the students we serve, and their families benefit too. Our students work hard academically and contribute to the local community. It’s a well rounded education, and when they leave St. Aloysius for high school they are prepared to meet the challenges that lie ahead. It’s a worthwhile goal to try and keep our tuitions

prices stable so that families can continue to afford a private, Catholic education.”

Tuition assistance is also available through the Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester and from scholarships gifted by private foundations.

For more information about St. Aloysius Catholic School or to make a tax deductible donation that will be matched dollar for dollar to the Annual Fund please visit www.staloy-siuscs.com/support/. Donations can also be mailed to St. Aloysius Catholic School, P.O. Box 522, Gilbertville, MA 01031, noting “Annual Fund” on the memo line.

An Open House is planned for Monday, Jan. 26, 2026 from 3-5:30 p.m. Prospective families are encouraged to visit the school.

Country Bank hosted stuff a cruiser event



TURLEY STAFF PHOTO

Picture from left are Blair Robidoux, Country Bank, AVP, Retail Bank Operations; Officer Jeannine Bonnayer, Ware Police Department; Callia Rich, Olive Davis and Allison Sprankle. Country Bank, located on West Street, recently hosted a stuff-the-cruiser event to collect toys and donations for local children for the holiday season.

Town Clerk announces annual election information

NORTH BROOKFIELD – The North Brookfield Annual Town Election will be held on Monday, May 4.

The last day to submit nomination papers is Monday, March 16, 2026, at 5 p.m.

The following offices are up for election: Board of Selectmen – one seat, three-year term; Board of Assessors – one seat, three-year term; Board of Assessors – one seat, two-year term (to fill a vacancy); Board of Assessors – one seat, one-year term (to fill a vacancy); School Committee – two seats, three-year terms; School Committee – one seat, one-year term (to fill a vacancy); Water Commissioner – one seat, three-year term; Water Commissioner – one seat, two-year term

(to fill a vacancy); Board of Health – one seat, three-year term; Cemetery Commissioner – one seat, three-year term; Library Trustees – two seats, three-year terms; Planning Board – one seat, five-year term; Planning Board – one seat, four-year term (to fill a vacancy); Housing Authority – one seat, five-year term; and Southern Worcester County Regional Vocational School District (Bay Path) – one seat, three-year term.

It is strongly encouraged that anyone interested in serving to become familiar with the work and responsibilities of these boards, committees, and commissions.

Nomination papers are available from the Town Clerk’s Office.

Census, dog licenses and Recycling Center stickers

NORTH BROOKFIELD –The Board of Health and the Town Clerk’s Offices are partnering this year to mail the annual census together with Recycling Center and dog license renewal information in one combined mailing.

This collaboration results in significant cost savings for both departments and, ultimately, for the taxpayers.

These materials will be mailed at the beginning

of the year. If applicable, you may return multiple items in the same envelope. Multi-family properties must pay for Recycling Center stickers in person at the BOH office. Dog owners may include their dog license renewal.

Please note that payments for the Board of Health fee and the dog license fee must be submitted separately. If payments are combined, they will be returned.

Free yoga program offered

WARREN – Enjoy a slower-paced yoga practice with simple poses that are easy and work like magic with Yoga & Meditation for Vibrant Health and Peace of Mind on

Thursday, Jan. 8 from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Join Phil Milgrom at The Centered Place for this free event that is appropriate for ages 14+. This program will be held in person at The Centered Place, 286 Bridge St., or

online via Zoom. To register, contact the Warren Public Library at 413-436-7690 or warrenpubliclibrary@hotmail.com. The Zoom link will be provided after registration.

This program is sponsored by the Warren Public Library with a grant from the Warren Cultural Council, a local agency supported by the MA Cultural Council, a state agency.

COLLEGE NEWS

Rachel Myers named to the Dean’s List at Bob Jones University

GREENVILLE, SC – Rachel Myers, a sophomore music major from East Brookfield, was among over 700 Bob Jones University students named to the fall 2025 Dean’s List.

The Dean’s List recognizes students who earn a 3.00-3.74 grade point average during the semester.

Tabitha Myers on President’s List at Bob Jones University

GREENVILLE, SC – Tabitha Myers, a sophomore strategic communication major from East Brookfield, was among over 620 Bob Jones University students named to the fall 2025 President’s List.

The President’s List recognizes students who earn a 3.75 or higher grade point average for the semester.

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New Braintree Police Log

During the weeks of Nov. 24-Dec. 15, the Hardwick/New Braintree Police Department responded to 38 building/property checks, 56 directed/area patrols, 28 radar assignments, two traffic controls, 10 emergency 911 calls, seven citizen assists, three assist other agencies, one identity theft, one fraud, three complaints, three safety hazards, one disturbance, one motor vehicle investigation, eight animal calls and six motor vehicle stops in the town of New Braintree.

Monday, Nov. 24
4:06 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Hardwick Road, Written Warning

Wednesday, Nov. 26
5:27 p.m. Complaint, Hardwick Road, Services Rendered
5:45 p.m. Assist Citizen, Memorial Drive, Services Rendered

Thursday, Nov. 27
9:29 a.m. Safety Hazard, West Road, Officer Handled

Saturday, Nov. 29
4:40 a.m. Medical Emergency, Scott Road, Transported to Hospital

Sunday, Nov. 30
9:21 a.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Bernard Whitney Road, Patient Refusal

Monday, Dec. 1
9:38 a.m. 911 Trespass, Dennis Whitney Road, Services Rendered
10:30 a.m. Assist Citizen, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled
1:34 p.m. Identity Theft, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled

Tuesday, Dec. 2
4:44 p.m. Safety Hazard, Barre Cut Off Road, Dis-

patch Handled
Wednesday, Dec. 3
5:19 p.m. Assist Other Agency, Out of Town, Services Rendered
6:18 p.m. 911 Animal Call, Barre Cut Off Road, Services Rendered

Tuesday, Dec. 4
12:49 p.m. Complaint, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled

Friday, Dec. 5
9:29 a.m. Safety Hazard, Ravine Road, Referred to Other Agency
10:06 a.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Scott Road, Transported to Hospital

Saturday, Dec. 6
3:22 p.m. Motor Vehicle Investigation, Worcester Road, Officer Handled
8:27 p.m. 911 Animal Call, Barre Road, Referred to Other Agency

Monday, Dec. 8
11:03 a.m. Assist Other Agency, ACO Report, Dispatch Handled
11:06 a.m. Assist Citizen, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled

11:15 a.m. Assist Citizen, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled
1:57 p.m. Fraud, West Brookfield Road, Investigated

Tuesday, Dec. 9
9:21 a.m. Assist Citizen, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled

2:20 p.m. Assist Citizen, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled
2:47 p.m. Medical Emergency, West Brookfield Road, Services Rendered
7:15 p.m. Disturbance, Memorial Drive Peace Restored

Wednesday, Dec. 10
10:23 a.m. Suspicious Activity, Unitas Road, Spoken To

Thursday, Dec. 11
4:13 a.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Hardwick Road, Citation Issued
11:35 a.m. Utility Issues, Dennis Whitney Road, Referred to Other Agency
11:54 a.m. Complaint, West Brookfield Road, Report Taken

12:46 p.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Oakham Road, Transported to Hospital
12:54 p.m. Suspicious Activity, Gilbertville Road, Spoken To
3:35 p.m. Assist Other Agency, Pierce Road, Officer Handled

Friday, Dec. 12
9:28 a.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Sibley Road, Transported to Hospital
1:10 p.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Barre Road, Transported to Hospital
4 p.m. Assist Citizen, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled

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- opinion -



Sora
The Massachusetts Audubon Society reported a sighting of a sora on Nauset Beach in Orleans on Cape Cod between Dec. 10 and 16.

Soras are small, chubby, chicken like birds with long toes and between eight to ten inches tall. Their stubby bill distinguished them from other rails in the United States and Canada, which have longer bills. They also frequently hold their short tail cocked up showing their white patch under the tail.

Soras are mottled gray and brown with white-edged feathers, but the feature that stands out the most is their yellow candy-corn bill. Other field marks include a black mask, throat patch and vertical white lines on the sides. Females tend to be less brightly colored than males and have less black on the face and throat. Juveniles also lack the black mask.

Soras have a distinct walk pushing their head forward with every step while nervously flicking the tail upward, exposing the white under tail feathers. They tend to forage in dense vegetation, but also venture into open areas from time to time. Their long toes help them walk on top of floating mats of vegetation. Soras make their homes in freshwater wetlands with emergent vegetation such as cattails, sedges and rushes. During migration and winter, they also use brackish marshes, flooded fields and wet pastures.

The Sora makes its presence known with plaintive whistles and whinnies rising from the marshes all across North America. Despite its abundance, it is not often seen: As with other rails, it spends most of its time hidden in dense marshy growth or wet meadows. Occasionally it will walk about in full view at the edge of a pond, delighting any birders, who happen to be nearby. Although Soras might seem like weak fliers when seen fluttering over the marsh, they regularly migrate long distances, many going to South America for the winter.

Cape Cod bird sightings
Besides the sora, the following sightings were reported between Dec. 10 and Dec.16. A western tanager was found at Mass Audubon's Wellfleet Bay sanctuary. The male painted bunting continued at a feeder in Brewster. Other bird sightings included a clapper rail and six western willets in

South Chatham, two common terns in North Chatham, a blue-headed vireo and a yellow-breasted chat in South Orleans, a common yellowthroat and for northern shovellers in Harwich and a short-eared owl.

Birds seen at Race Point in Provincetown were a black guillemot, 200 razorbills, 13 dovebies, three common murrelets, 45 black-legged kittiwakes, six Iceland gulls, a red-necked grebe and 75 northern gannets.

Other sightings around the Cape included two continuing Eurasian wigeon in Yarmouth Port, two Barrow's goldeneyes at Loop Beach in Cotuit, a great egret at Mass Audubon's Skunknet River sanctuary in Barnstable, a Nashville warbler reported at a house in Yarmouth, continuing unseasonably large numbers of tree swallows in various places including over 50 in Falmouth, two western willets in Chatham and an American golden plover in North Truro.

Christmas bird count
From Dec. 15 to Jan. 5, the Christmas Bird Count will commence in the U.S., Canada and 18 other countries in the Western Hemisphere. Countries are divided into geographical regions with 35 in Massachusetts and each region will pick a single 24-hour period to count birds. Data from the CBC can be utilized in many ways, including to monitor trends in bird populations, document range shifts over time and examine how climate change may impact the winter distributions of birds.

CBC data has been used in hundreds of analyses, peer-reviewed publications and government reports over the decades.

Birds likely seen in Massachusetts are chickadees, titmice, many species of woodpeckers, bluebirds, Carolina wren and many raptors. Migrants from the north include kinglets, some raptors, snow bunting and some sparrows. Waterfowl seen mostly along the coast are dabbling and diving ducks. Irruptive

species that are only present in some years are evening grosbeak, red crossbill, white-winged crossbill, redpoll, pine grosbeak and red-breasted nuthatch.

Helping birds
People may help birds by participating in the Christmas Bird Count. It is an important source of data on birds.

People may report a bird sighting or bird related experience by calling me at 413-967-3505, leaving a message at extension 100, emailing my-backyard88@aol.com or edowner@turley.com or mailing to Barre Gazette, P.O. Box 448, Barre, MA 01005.

Testing and taking inventory of seed is a good practice to start the new gardening season off right

I don't know about you, but I have been caught up in spirit of the holidays. It's been fun to indulge in family time and try and get caught up on much-needed rest.

I have given myself this last week of the year to continue to take it easy before I hit the "to do" list.

One of the big things I have been procrastinating on at work is taking inventory of all the seeds I have left from the last couple of years. The box holds a hundred or so different varieties of seeds, mostly heirloom, open-pollinated types.

There is something refreshing about accomplishing this task soon into the new year; a seasonal habit I've had for the last four decades give or take. To me, it means spring is not far behind.

I begin by organizing the seeds first by category: vegetable, flower or herb, then alphabetically. After those piles have been made, I go back and decide which packets are no good or no longer of use.

No matter how well they are stored, some seeds won't germinate well past the year in which they are sold for. Based on my experience these include hybrid onions and parsnips. Carrots can be iffy.

In the herb category dill, caraway, parsley, angelica and chives come to mind. Year old garden heliotrope, feverfew and bellflowers can be stubborn germinators as far as flowers go.

As a general rule I keep seed that is less than three years old, unless the variety in question is rare. Even spotty germination is better than nothing when it comes to seed that is hard to find.



You can save yourself disappointment at planting time by performing a simple germination test on questionable seed.

Place a few seeds in a moist paper towel. Roll it up and seal it in a plastic bag in a warm location.

Instructions in the seed catalog or on the packet should tell you how long it takes for germination to occur, as well as inform you of the initial germination percentage. Once the necessary amount of time has elapsed unroll the paper towel and determine how viable your seeds are by observing the sprouting that has occurred.

Based on the results you may decide to sow the seed more thickly or just start over with a fresh batch.

Last year I did my own version of a germination test by sowing few seeds of questionable varieties in pots, and placing them on a shelf near my wood stove. I learned which seeds were worth the effort of sowing in the garden and which I needed to discard and order new.

Although viability decreases as seeds age, proper storage can insure that you will get at least three years worth of sprouting out of many of your favorites. It is important to fold over used seed packets and seal them with tape after use, and if you are just getting to it now, it's better late than never. Put them in a location that is cool and dry.

Since temperatures around 37-41 degrees are ideal, many people

assume that storage in the refrigerator is preferred. It is, as long as the seeds are first placed in an airtight container along with a desiccant to absorb moisture. Desiccants such as silica gel are available in the floral section of craft shops, or you can reuse the pouches of silica that come in vitamin bottles or shoe boxes.

If you'd rather not take up space in your fridge, storing the container of seeds in a cabinet in a dry part of the house will also work.

Whatever you do, don't put them in a hot attic or damp basement! It is also not a good idea to purchase seeds from stores that have their seed displays in greenhouses. Temperature and moisture extremes can affect viability even if the seeds are brand new!

Some seed companies sell their seed in foil-lined packets. These are very good at keeping them fresh for the longest amount of time – especially if they are unopened.

Now that you have inventoried your seeds, it will be a whole lot of fun to order exactly what you need. That's what I will be doing after one more family game night and that last Christmas movie!

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 33 years she has held the position of staff horticulturist at Old Sturbridge Village. She enjoys growing food as well as flowers. Have a question for her? Email it to pouimette@turley.com with "Gardening Question" in the subject line.

See SOCIAL SECURITY PAGE 8

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Send opinions to:
Letters to the Editor, 80 Main Street, Ware, MA 01082 OR e-mail to pouimette@turley.com. Deadline for submission is Monday at noon for the following week's edition.

About tax filing status and Medicare

Dear Rusty:

I'm trying to figure out if I should change my IRS filing status to "Married - Filing Jointly" prior to getting reviewed for my Medicare Part B and Part D.

My current IRS status is "Married - Filing Single" and I noticed this filing status is more stringent. I will be turning 62 this year (2025) and I've read that Medicare will review my income two years prior to turning 65. Any input would be appreciated.



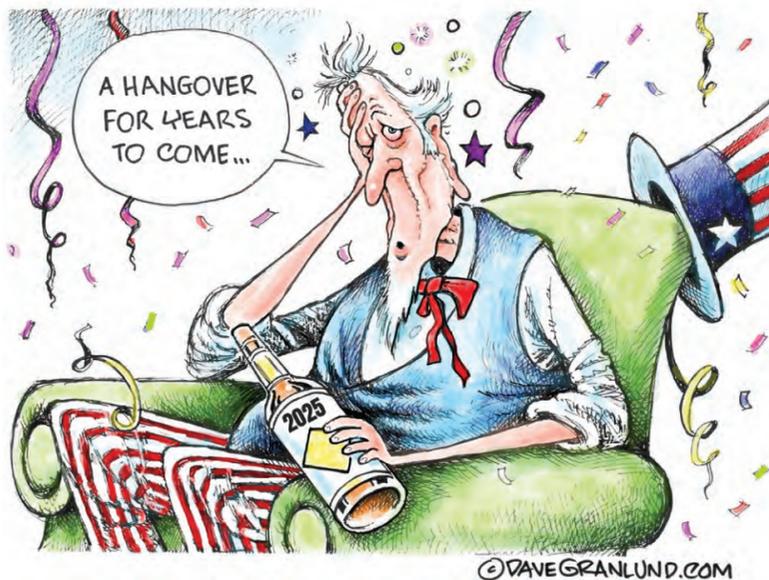
Signed: Uncertain Senior

Dear Uncertain: Your IRS tax filing status has no bearing on your eligibility for Medicare Part B (coverage for outpatient healthcare services) or Medicare Part D (insurance coverage for prescription drugs). Medicare is an individual

healthcare program, so enrolling in Medicare provides coverage for you only, not your spouse, your spouse's Medicare eligibility will be individually evaluated.

What your IRS filing status may affect is the amount of your Medicare Part B and Part D premiums. There is a Medicare provision called Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amount,

See SOCIAL SECURITY PAGE 8



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Looking back on 2025



The Theatre Guild of North Brookfield performed "Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors". Dracula, played by Jay Valencourt, arrived to the Westfeldt household for a party and is greeted by Dr. Westfeldt played by Derek Ingalls, right, and Mina Westfeldt, played by Shelley Ingalls.



STEAM family night took place on March 25 at North Brookfield High School.



Veterans march through downtown North Brookfield to commemorate Memorial Day.



Valedictorian Dayton Ford is shown holding his diploma alongside his mother, father and grandfather.



Members of the nonprofit organization, Tyler's Heart, attended the 5th annual Band Together for Mental Health event held at Hardwick Winery.



Senior Center Director Courtenay Rivera greeted seniors as they grabbed meals during the outreach event held this past summer at the North Brookfield Sportsmen's Club.



Members of VFW Post 3439 are shown with craftsman Samuel Bonneau, who recently restored an over 150 year old table linked back to North Brookfield's Grand Army of the Republic Chapter.



Bruce Arnold is shown alongside his Infrared Obsessions photography display at the Friends of the North Brookfield Town House's Fall Family Fun Fest.



Volunteers from the North Brookfield Community Food Collaborative distributed 210 turkeys and bags of food to make Thanksgiving meals.



Santa Claus made his way downtown to the Little Park in North Brookfield, where he heard children's Christmas wishes and visited with residents.



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- community -

\$33.5M awarded for housing, economic development

GREAT BARRINGTON – The Healey-Driscoll Administration announced nearly \$33.5 million in federal Community Development Block Grant awards to support housing, infrastructure, social services and economic development projects in 52 communities across Massachusetts.

At the same time, the administration is updating its Housing Choice Initiative to launch a new Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community designation, giving smaller and more rural communities a clearer path to state recognition and resources for pro-housing policies.

Together, these initiatives reflect the administration's commitment to listening to communities of all sizes and working alongside local leaders to deliver the tools, funding and policy support they need to expand housing options and strengthen their downtowns and neighborhoods.

"From our smallest hill towns to our Gateway Cities and regional hubs, we are listening to local leaders and making sure they have the resources they need to deliver for their residents," said Governor Maura Healey. "These Community Development Block Grants will support housing and economic devel-

opment in cities and towns across the state, and the new Rural and Small Town designation will make sure that no community is left behind. Together, these initiatives are about giving communities the tools they need to grow their economies, build more housing to lower costs, and deliver the high-quality services their people deserve."

"As a former mayor, I know how powerful it is when the state not only sends funding but also recognizes and supports the local policies that make new housing possible," said Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll. "CDBG is one of the most flexible tools that cities and towns have to respond to local needs. By pairing those dollars with a refreshed Housing Choice program - including a Rural and Small Town designation - we are making sure communities of every size can access state support, unlock new housing and strengthen their downtowns and neighborhoods."

"This year's CDBG awards will fund housing rehabilitation, street and sidewalk upgrades, planning work and vital social services in dozens of communities," said Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities Secretary Ed Augustus. "At the same time, our new Ru-

ral and Small Town Housing Choice designation recognizes that smaller communities face different realities but are just as committed to creating housing options for their residents. These changes grew out of hundreds of conversations my team and I have had with local leaders over the past three years, and they will help more communities qualify for Housing Choice recognition and grant programs that support long term housing and community development."

The federal fiscal 2025 CDBG awards, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and administered by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, will help small cities and towns undertake projects that benefit low- and moderate-income residents. Eligible municipalities applied individually or as part of a regional application.

This year, HLC is issuing 27 competitive Community Development Fund awards totaling \$25.7 million, along with \$7.75 million for nine Mini-Entitlement communities, for a combined \$33.47 million in funding.

Communities will use CDBG funds for a wide range of eligible activities, including housing rehabilita-

tion, sidewalk and road improvements, planning studies, public facility upgrades and social services such as food pantries, youth programming and homelessness prevention.

Awardees include communities on the Cape and Islands, in the Berkshires, in Gateway Cities and in rural Western and Central Massachusetts, underscoring the geographic reach and flexibility of the program.

In addition to these investments, HLC will launch a new Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community designation in the 2026 round. Municipalities with 7,000 or less year-round population or under 500 persons per square mile qualify as "Rural and Small Towns."

The Housing Choice Initiative, first created in 2018 and updated in 2025, recognizes municipalities that are producing housing and adopting local policies that support housing growth, such as pro-housing zoning, affordability programs and streamlined permitting. As part of the 2026 update, both the standard Housing Choice Community designation and the new RST-HCC designation will maintain existing housing production thresholds over the previous five years while slightly reducing the number of required "best

practices" in response to feedback from communities and regional planning agencies. The updated designation criteria will make it easier for both rural and non-rural communities to qualify for Housing Choice status and

The Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community designation requires one of four housing production thresholds, with lower best practice requirements than larger or more urban communities. For example, rural and small towns that have increased their year-round housing stock by at least 3% in the past five years would qualify with 8 best practice requirements.

Communities that have grown more slowly can qualify by combining housing growth with a specified number of best practices, including actions to expand affordable housing options. The lowest rate of housing unit growth for RST-HCC designation is 1.5 percent over the last 5 years and 9 best practices.

Since the relaunch of Housing Choice in 2025, HLC has gathered extensive feedback from rural and small municipalities, regional planning agencies and other partners. The new RST-HCC designation and adjusted criteria are a direct response to

that feedback and are expected to increase the number of communities able to participate in Housing Choice from 77 in 2025 to an estimated 90 to 96 communities after the 2026 designation round.

The 2026 Housing Choice and Rural and Small Town Housing Choice designation application round is expected to open in January 2026, in time for newly designated communities to participate in the Community One Stop for Growth.

Community Development Block Grant awards

Community Development Fund awards: Barre, Fir Street Improvement Project and planning for South Barre slum and blight inventory – \$691,000; East Brookfield, Planning for ADA self-evaluation and transition plan, facilities assessment study and Off-Main infrastructure plan – \$458,000; Palmer, Front, Park and Kelly Streets Improvement Project and social services – \$850,000; Ware, Cottage Street Infrastructure Improvement Project, Phase One, and social services – \$850,000; Warren (joint with Millbury), Design for senior center parking and neighborhood infrastructure improvements – \$1,050,000.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE FROM PAGE 1

agreement with the town of North Brookfield, which has been on the committee's agenda for a while. Duff attended a meeting with the North Brookfield Superintendent, the Special Education Director of North Brookfield, and the Finance Director of West Brookfield to discuss a potential tuition agreement.

North Brookfield has collected information from both Quaboag and Quabbin school districts and will have a vote at their next committee meeting. As for this continued discussion, Duff said they won't have any further information on North Brookfield until April or May. Therefore, North Brookfield won't be included in the school budget.

Student engagement coordinator

The district has hired a student engagement coordinator through title one funds. The coordinator is there to help with guidance and administration and reports to the building principal.

Zoom phone system

The Zoom phone system

was brought up, and Duff feels the district needs to get a system that is more complete for the entire school district. Zoom allows staff to communicate between the buildings through only dialing extensions, rather than the entire number.

The plan is to get this done for the next school year, but the problem with some of the school buildings is wiring. Duff wants to get all three buildings done at once for this project.

Student assessment update

The School Committee reviewed packets detailing the student assessment update and wondered what the current requirements are for passing. The requirements are set by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and are okay as long as it's supported by the legislative body.

PD and parent teacher conferences

Professional development and parent Teacher conferences have been held, and one professional development was about Universal Design for Learning.

Duff wanted to share the success of the fire academy training that was held as

students practiced search and rescue. A total of 20 kids were there including graduates of Quaboag who are now working as EMTs and firefighters in the local towns.

State Sen. Jake Oliveira came to witness this training and was impressed and thought of the idea of the school presenting this at the state house.

"This speaks volumes to the programming we offer," Duff said.

The wellness committee met last month, and Duff said they're crafting a policy that has to be in line with what's going on with federal guidelines.

Duff also announced that the lighting project was voted on at the Warren Special Town Meeting.

Warren voters voted in favor of approving \$60,000 for the project. The \$60,000 is Warren's portion for the stadium field lighting and the tennis court lighting at Quaboag. Duff reminded the school committee that the tennis courts and the track are not only used by students, but also by the public, indicating the importance of the lighting project being done.

N BROOKFIELD FROM PAGE 1

many of us feel about the efforts of those working their own way to make North Brookfield a better place to live, and unfortunately it has taken a heavy toll...we have lost too many volunteers who have made an effort to contribute."

Gilman said the recent issue related to Little Park are about "more than a memorial table."

Gilman said two men he has "long admired" for their contributions to the town are feeling "unappreciated and disrespected."

"This is regrettable to say the least and I'd like to start the process of correcting that tonight," Gilman said.

Gilman said former Selectmen John Tripp was taking care of Little Park, but due to health issues, this was taken over by Brandon Avery, who is the chair of the Parks & Recreation Committee.

"It seemed an obvious choice to place the Little Park under the purview of said committee," Gilman said.

Gilman said the Parks & Recreation Committee has communicated well with the Board of Selectmen, and worked to improve the town's parks with very little funding.

Gilman said Avery and the committee have faced criticism from citizens about the care of Little Park.

"When it's all you hear, it's demoralizing," he said of the criticism.

Gilman said Avery came to him regarding concerns of the chain connecting the children's picnic table to the larger table, posing a tripping hazard and limiting access to the handicapped accessible table.

Gilman said he agreed with Avery, and the table was disconnected and stored until a permanent solution to the concern could be found.

"At the time, not understanding what the table represented," Gilman said. "Looking back it's clear to me that some of the actions taken by the parties involved could have/should have been made differently."

After the table was removed from Little Park, the board received a letter from Tripp about the table's significance. Gilman said Tripp could have "better communicated his concerns" by first talking with Avery and the committee.

Gilman said he understands Tripp was hurt by the removal of the table, and he also said the Selectmen could have handled the situation better by asking more questions of residents and donors.

"It has become apparent that these folks feel the park is a memorial park and should be treated as such," he said. "The removal of the table was taken as a sign of possible future desecration of the memory of a lost family member or a valued community member. The board did not understand this and our response did not take this into consideration."

Gilman said the park is not officially named or classified as a memorial park and it did not have a budget to support what is expected from residents.

"Donations are not a sustainable or reliable revenue source when maintaining a town property of this nature," he said.

Gilman recommended that Little Park be removed from the care of the Parks & Recreation Committee and go back to being overseen by the Selectmen; establish a policy for work done to the park; ask Tripp if he would return the table to the park and affix a memorial plaque to it; file a list of donors with the Board of Selectmen; and work to establish a committee to provide proper stewardship of the park.

"My hope here is to not only provide an avenue to make the understanding of what the Little Park is by all, thus allowing the stewardship and respect due, but to also attempt to keep it from becoming another thing that divides the people of North Brookfield," Gilman said. "I don't believe that's what any of us wants our Little Park memorializing."

The board discussed Gilman's recommendations and invited members of the public to provide their feedback.

Nancy Waldron of the Parks & Recreation Committee said she agreed the care of the park should be returned to the Selectmen. She said it has been challenging for the committee to care for the park with limited resources and volunteers.

Jim Caldwell also agreed that the park should be under the care of the Selectmen as a memorial park. He said it could be possible to ask landscape companies to donate their services in exchange for

advertising to help care for the park.

The board voted in favor of returning the care of Little Park to the Selectmen, along with Gilman's other recommendations.

Tripp said he and his wife, Mindy, would love to return the table, and he said he has ordered memorial plaques for both of Little Park's tables. He also offered to affix the table to the paver bricks permanently, so that a chain is no longer necessary.

Tripp also volunteered to serve on the committee to provide stewardship for Little Park. The board members voted to appoint him to the committee which will be named the North Brookfield Memorial Park Committee.

Resignation

The board read a letter of resignation received from Avery for his position on the Parks & Recreation Committee, effective Jan. 1. The board tabled the acceptance of the letter, to see if Avery will reconsider his resignation, given the changes that just occurred regarding Little Park.

Spending requests

The board approved spending requests from the Fire Department in the amount of \$350 to replace a door latch for Engine 1; and \$4,500 to inspect and rebuild several discharge valves and perform annual preventative maintenance on Rescue 1.

Petratis said when Rescue 1's batteries shorted out, it had to be removed from the building due to it being a hazard, and the residual water in the tank and pump caused damage in the freezing conditions.

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The board also approved spending request from the Highway Department in the amount of \$5,167.26 to repair the rear-end of the 2006 International; and \$2,500 to replace rear leaf-springs on a 2004 truck.

WB&CA AND BEYOND FROM PAGE 2

increase of the 2025 fire-works show. Both nights were a huge success."

To become a member of the Ware Business & Civic

Association and Beyond, go online to <http://www.ware-bca.com/>, email warebca@gmail.com, on Facebook under Ware Business and Civic and Beyond, contact any board of director, or Flynn at 413-297-5886

Interested businesses and organizations are welcomed to attend the monthly meetings, held every third Wednesday, 8:30-9:30 a.m. at Cedarbrook Village, 73 South St., Ware, MA.

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SPORTS

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Warriors score win over Cougars

WARREN – Prior to the Christmas holiday, Quaboag girls basketball faced neighbor rival Tantasqua Regional. The Warriors came in to Quaboag and played excellent defense and came away with a 43-29 win. Quaboag fell to a disappointing 0-5 on the season and next plays on Wednesday, Jan. 7 at Palmer High School at 7 p.m. The Warriors improved to 3-0 on the season with the win. The Warriors played a couple of games during the holiday break and are back in action on Friday, Jan. 2 at 3 p.m. at Fitchburg High School. They will host Belchertown on Tuesday, Jan. 6 at 6:30 p.m.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI



Sophie Ezzo heads down the court on a breakaway.



Isabelle Manzano heads for the hoop.



Ellie Barnes fights to get around a defender.



Maddie Potvin heads around the perimeter.



Milayna Bousquet takes a shot.



Maddie Dufresne attempts to secure the rebound.



Maya Lewis eyes a shot



Leah Phaneuf takes the jump shot ahead of a block.

Panthers suffer loss to Hudson



TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI
Brady Patchen makes a pass.

BARRE – On Friday, Dec. 19, Quabbin Regional High School boys basketball was defeated at home against Hudson High School 62-45. The loss made it 0-3 on the season for the Panthers. Quabbin would follow that with a defeat against Maynard High School on Tuesday, Dec. 23. Quabbin was scheduled to participate in the Gardner Holiday Tournament last weekend, with a matchup against South Lancaster to open the event. Coming up, the Panthers will host Oxford High School on Friday, Jan. 2 at 2 p.m.



Jacob Dilling yells out a play.



Aiden Crane winds up to make a bounce pass



Isaac Patchen starts a run up the court.



Jake Doty fights to get to the hoop.

Pioneers fall to 0-2 with loss



TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI
Hannah Mellor fights to keep the ball.

SPRINGFIELD – On Thursday, Dec. 18, Pathfinder girls basketball was defeated at Bay State Academy Charter 43-17. Pathfinder's offense struggled in the defeat, though Addison Doktor managed double digits with 11 points. Pathfinder will next travel to Duggan on Jan. 2 at 7 p.m.



Taylor Allen surveys the offensive end.



Megan Clark fakes a pass.



Ciara Green comes up with the rebound.



Joshua Feldman goes for the puck during a faceoff.

Tough start continues for Brownies

AMHERST – On Monday, Dec. 22, Agawam High School ice hockey continued to have a tough time defending goals against the opposition in a 5-1 loss against host Amherst Regional at Orr Rink.

Amherst, which co-ops with Pathfinder Tech, got off to a slower start, but exploded for four goals in the third period to secure the win. Graham Arguin had two goals, Ethan Mooney and Joshau Feldman had a single goal each.

Anthony Barbarini had Agawam's lone goal. Amherst is now 2-2-1 while Agawam fell to 0-5.



Silas Villegas makes a backhand pass.



Goalie Jason Kim tries to control the puck.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI

- public notices -

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – HIGHWAY DIVISION NOTICE OF A DESIGN PUBLIC HEARING
Spencer - East Brookfield - Intersection Improvements at Route 9 and Route 49
Project File No. 613097

A Design Public Hearing will be hosted on the MassDOT website below to present the design for the proposed project in Spencer - East Brookfield, MA.

WHERE: Town of Spencer, Town Hall, Great Room
 157 Main Street
 Spencer MA, 01852

WHEN: Thursday, January 8, 2026 at 6:30PM

PURPOSE: The purpose of this hearing is to provide the public with the opportunity to become fully acquainted with the proposed project. All views and comments submitted in response to the hearing will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.

PROPOSAL: The proposed project consists of improvements along Route 9 and at the intersection of Route 9 and Route 49 in the Towns of East Brookfield and Spencer. The work involves construction of a cement concrete roundabout, improved bike and pedestrian accommodations, lighting, and upgrades to pavement, drainage, pavement markings, and signage. The proposed pedestrian accommodations consist of 5-foot wide sidewalks along Route 9 and a shared use path at the roundabout. The proposed bicycle accommodations consist of 5-foot buffered bicycle lanes along Route 9 and a shared use path at the roundabout. Pedestrian and bicycle accommodations have been provided in accordance with applicable de-

sign guides.

A secure right-of-way is necessary for this project. Acquisitions in fee and permanent or temporary easements may be required. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is responsible for acquiring all needed rights in private or public lands. MassDOT's policy concerning land acquisitions will be presented in the hearing.

Project inquiries, written statements and other exhibits regarding the proposed undertaking may be submitted to Carrie E. Lavallee, P.E., Chief Engineer, via e-mail to MassDOTProjectManagement@dot.state.ma.us or via US Mail to Suite 7550, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116, Attention: Project Management, Project File No. 613097. Statements and exhibits intended for inclusion in the public hearing transcript must be emailed or postmarked no later than ten (10) business days (14 calendar days) after the hearing is hosted on the MassDOT website listed below.

This hearing is accessible to people with disabilities. MassDOT provides reasonable accommodations and/or language assistance free of charge upon request (e.g interpreters in American Sign Language and languages other than English, live captioning, videos, assistive listening devices and alternate material formats), as available. For accommodation or language assistance, please contact MassDOT's Chief Diversity and Civil Rights Officer by phone (857-368-8580), TTD/TTY at (857) 266-0603, fax (857) 368-0602 or by email (MassDOT.CivilRights@dot.state.ma.us). Requests should be made as soon as possible and prior to the hearing, and for more difficult to arrange services including sign-language, CART or language translation or interpretation, requests should be made at least ten business days

before the hearing.

In case of inclement weather, a cancellation announcement will be posted on the internet at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/highway-division/events>.

JONATHAN GULLIVER
 HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR

CARRIE E. LAVALLEE, P.E.
 CHIEF ENGINEER
 12/26/2025, 01/02/2026

TOWN OF NORTH BROOKFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS PUBLIC FORUM NOTICE

The Town of North Brookfield hereby gives notice that the Water & Sewer Departments, in coordination with the Collector's Office, will conduct an informational session regarding the implementation of a new water and sewer billing process, scheduled to commence in February 2026.

The informational session will be held on **Wednesday, January 7, 2026, at 6:00 PM** in the North Brookfield Elementary School Auditorium, 10 New School Drive.

The proposed billing process will combine water and sewer charges into a single quarterly bill. The session will include a presentation explaining the new billing system, followed by a question-and-answer period to address questions and concerns from water and sewer users.

All water and sewer users are encouraged to attend.
 01/02/2026



W BROOKFIELD FROM PAGE 1

to plow the road due to the town's financial limitations. Though White Birch Drive seems to meet all the criteria, the town is in a hiring and a spending freeze right now for the rest of the fiscal year.

"It's a very bleak financial situation," said Select Board Clerk Brad Merkel.

Adding to another expense would seem to not be okay at the moment for the town. The resident asked if the board could revisit this possibly next year. The board said they will as they made motion to not add White Birch Drive to a list of private roads to be plowed by the town; the motion passed.

MOU for CDL reim-

bursement

The board discussed the changes made to the memorandum of understanding for a Commercial Driver's License certification reimbursement. This is a program where a trucking company pays back all or part of a CDL training costs after someone's been hired, typically given in monthly installments over time, in exchange for a commitment to work for them for a set period.

The board was going over some of the changes but didn't feel comfortable voting on the MOU yet. The Select Board wants to run this by town counsel first and make sure the process of drafting this MOU is done correctly.

Daley said this is for an operator/mechanic worker

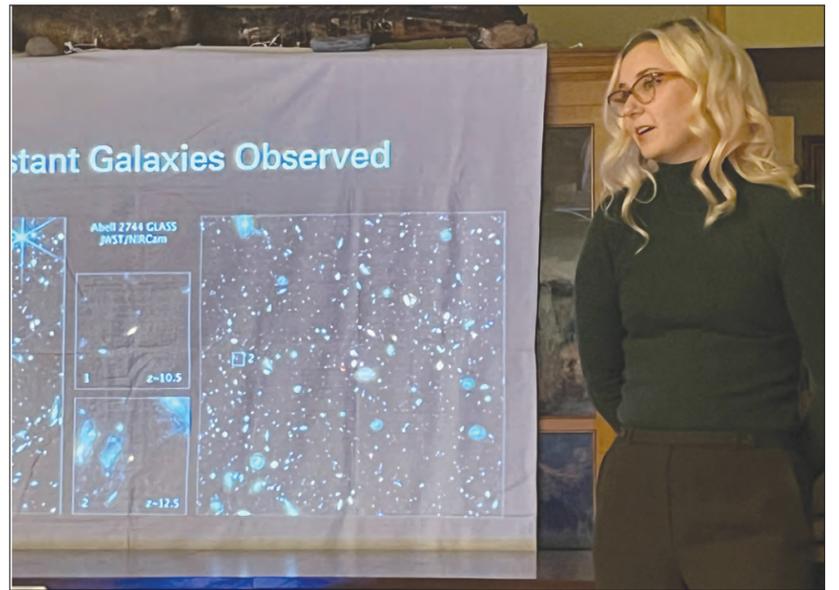
who is determined to learn and ready to start. He is qualified to operate other trucks but is working to receive a CDL. The board voted to table the MOU for the CDL reimbursement changes until their next meeting.

Woo Sox Town Take-over 2026

The town will participate in the Woo Sox Town Take-over in 2026. This event features a series of special themed nights at Polar Park where the Worcester Red Sox celebrate specific Central Massachusetts towns.

The Select Board wanted to pick dates for next year and dates that will work for people. The board is aiming for dates sometime in the summer.

- community -



Maura Shea, a doctoral student at Georgia State University and Hardwick native, presented a "Space Night" at the East Quabbin Land Trust last Friday night.

SPACE NIGHT FROM PAGE 1

In addition to galaxies, Shea presented star forming regions, including the Pillars of Creation region. It is called this because it resembles a hand and fingers.

Another star forming region is called Rho Ophiuchi, and it is the closest star forming region to Earth, but is also relatively small, she said. In addition to stars forming, they highlighted stars dying, including the Red Spider nebula. These happen when giant red stars die, and it will be the same thing that hap-

pens when the sun dies.

Another type of star they presented are called Wolf-Rayet stars, which are even more impressive than the Sun, as they are 20 times the size of it. Since they are so large though, they are relatively short lived in terms of chances to observe it.

Kar talked about some of the missions that are happening or in planning, including a plan to drop a lander on Titan, one of Saturn's moons, to observe whether there are any life forms on the moon. He said there are observed oceans, lakes, and other

bodies of water, but they are all made of liquid methane.

Kar said life can form wherever it sees fit, so researchers want to know if anything can live in that liquid methane. He also said that the JWST has just seen Neptune's rings for the first time in decades, and it is being used to determine what is in the atmosphere of a planet.

All of the images featured in the presentation, and more, can be found on the NASA website (<https://science.nasa.gov/mission/webb/multimedia/images/>).

SOCIAL SECURITY FROM PAGE 4

which sets the income thresholds on which your Medicare premiums are based and those thresholds are different if you file your income tax as a single or as "married/filing jointly."

The IRMAA thresholds can change annually and there's no way to yet determine what they will be when you are able to enroll in Medicare at age 65. They are currently \$106,000 if you file as a single, and \$212,000 if you file your taxes as "married/jointly." If your "provisional income," your combined income from all sources, exceeds the threshold for your filing status, you will pay higher than standard Medicare Part B and Part D premiums. If your income is lower than the threshold, you will pay only whatever the standard Medicare Part B premium is for the year you start Medicare and there will be no supplemental premium for your Part D coverage.

For information, the IRMAA supplements are progressive that is, the more you exceed the threshold by, the higher your IRMAA premium supplement will be. To see the current IRMAA thresholds and supplements again, these will likely change when you

are eligible for Medicare visit www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/2025-medicare-parts-b-premiums-and-deductibles.

You are correct that your Medicare premium, when you enroll, will be determined by your total income from two years prior. So, if you plan to enroll in Medicare at age 65, sometime in 2028, it is your 2026 income which will determine your Part B and Part D premiums, and that income will be defined by your 2026 income tax return. Note, too, that Medicare premiums are reevaluated each year, based upon your IRS income tax return from two years prior.

FYI, there are advantages to filing your income tax as "married/jointly" vs. married/filing separately and those are best evaluated by your tax advisor. We are not tax advisors here at the AMAC Foundation. And while it's true that the IRMAA thresholds are higher when you file as "married/jointly," it's also true that your total income as a married couple will be used when determining your IRMAA premiums for Medicare. So, once again, it is probably best to consult with a qualified income tax advisor for guidance on whether it is best, financially, for you to change how you file your income tax in 2026, con-

sidering that you will be enrolling in Medicare in 2028.

One final thing: If you are still working and have "creditable" healthcare coverage from your employer, "creditable" is a group plan with at least 20 participants, then you can delay enrolling in Medicare until your employer coverage ends thus temporarily avoiding the Medicare premiums. In other words, if you have creditable healthcare coverage from an employer, you don't have to enroll in Medicare immediately at age 65.

The Association Mature Citizens Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. This article is intended for information purposes and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the Association Mature Citizens Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association. To submit a question, visit amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.

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- community -

Brookfields Lions Club announces 37th Annual Ice Fishing Derby

BROOKFIELD – The Brookfields Lions Club will host its 37th Annual Ice Fishing Derby on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, at Quaboag Pond in Brookfield.

The event remains the largest single-day ice fishing derby in Massachusetts, attracting anglers and families from across the region.

A \$20 entry ticket qualifies participants for more than \$15,000 in cash prizes, including the \$5,000 Grand Prize, \$5,640 in “every five minutes” cash drawings, and \$4,375 in fish categories. Every ticket holder is automatically entered into the major cash drawings whether they choose to fish or not.

“This derby is one of the Lions’ most import-

ant fundraisers - a major undertaking that requires hundreds of volunteer hours and a significant financial commitment each year - and every dollar raised directly supports the Brookfields Lions Club’s charitable work and community initiatives throughout the region,” according to club president Bill Cass.

Derby headquarters will be located at the Quaboag Pond boat ramp in Brookfield. Weigh-ins will take place from 7 a.m. until the derby closes at 3:30 p.m., with the children’s division ending at 2 p.m. and youth prizes awarded at 2:30 p.m. The \$5,000 cash drawing for all ticket holders will take place at 4 p.m., and a complete announcement of

all derby winners will air on The Valley’s Classic Hits 97.7 FM and 1250 AM (WARE Radio) at 5 p.m.

In the event that no safe ice exists by Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026, the derby itself will be cancelled, and all drawings will be held at the North Brookfield Legion Post 41, located below Subway in North Brookfield. No fish prizes will be awarded, but all tickets will still be valid for the five-minute cash drawings and the \$5,000 Grand Prize drawing.

As is customary for this derby, there is a “one fish per category per ticket” rule that helps ensure broader distribution of prizes and encourages a fair, community-minded competition.

All qualifying fish must be caught within the Central Wildlife District.

Children up to age 12 compete separately using



state minimum lengths, while young anglers who meet the adult minimum lengths may also qualify for the main leaderboard.

Tickets for the derby are available from any Brookfields Lions Club member, and at many long-

time partner locations including: K&S Bait Shop (Barre), Central Package (Brookfield), R&R Sport Shop (Belchertown), 308 Lakeside Restaurant (East Brookfield), Fred’s Variety & Package Store (Fiskdale), Granby Bait Shop (Granby), Ben’s Bait & Tackle (Ludlow), Still Hart’s (North Brookfield), Nick’s Sport Shop (Palmer), Glenda’s and River Town Bait Shop (Warren), Mathieson Bait Shop (West Brookfield).

Following the derby, all winners will be posted at www.brookfieldslionsclub.org, and at all ticket vendor locations.

For additional information, please contact the

Brookfields Lions Club at brookfieldslionsclub@gmail.com, or visit the Club’s Facebook page at facebook.com/BrookfieldsLionsClub.

As the world’s largest, youngest and most active service organization, the mission of Lions Clubs International is to empower volunteers to serve their communities, meet humanitarian needs, encourage peace, and promote international understanding. Members of the Brookfields Lions Club are dedicated to service and support in the communities of Brookfield, East Brookfield, North Brookfield, West Brookfield and New Braintree.

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NO ENTRANCE FEE
 Mobile Home located in Waterwheel Village at 31 Edward Lane, Barre, MA 01005. This is a 55 and better community. This home includes a wonderful floor plan with very spacious rooms. Master bedroom includes a walk-in closet. Two full bathrooms. A four-season sunroom is off the kitchen. Includes two large woodsheds and a metal garage you can park under to fend off winter weather. Asking \$288,000. See listing on MLS # 73433198

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 Brand New Mobile Home located in Waterwheel Village at 37 Gauthier Rd., Barre. This is a 55 and better community. This home features an open kitchen/living room concept, perfect for family gatherings. Two large bedrooms on opposite ends of the home. Master bedroom has a walk-in closet and large attached bathroom. Just off the kitchen is a laundry area with door leading to back deck and yard. There is a monthly HOA fee which includes water, sewage, rubbish removal, and taxes. All exterior and interior doorways are 36" wide. Asking \$189,000. See listing on MLS # 73397436

NO ENTRANCE FEE
 Mobile Home located in Waterwheel Village at 32 Edward Lane, Barre, MA 01005. This is a 55 and better community. Includes large carport and two large garden sheds. Approx. living area 1,000 SqFt. Asking \$139,900. See listing on MLS # 73398863.