

Seven Years in the Making!

Winchendon Community HUB Celebrates its Official Grand Opening

by Inanna Arthen

After years of visioning, planning, fundraising and hard work, and several months of intensive construction, remodeling, painting and re-organizing of spaces, the shiny new CAC/Winchendon Community HUB threw its official ribbon cutting and Grand Opening Bash on Saturday, November 1. The space was packed, as town officials, state legislators, committee and board members, volunteers, clients, staff and citizens gathered to see the new spaces and share in the celebration.

From 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. there was a general bustle of conversation, activities and eating. Full dinners were on sale at the Sunshine Café counters, prepared by chef Erin Linnan, owner of Andy's on the Run food truck. There was also cake, along with snacks and beverages available. The bowling lanes were open and in use by bowlers of all ages.

Members of the Local Makers Hub had sales tables set up in a row in front of the bowling lanes, including Flynn's Sweets, TMO Laser and Miss Judy's Salsa.

The HUB was running a "scavenger hunt" similar to one run by Beals Memorial Library a few months ago. Visitors were given a page full of photos showing small details around The HUB spaces. Those who found the sources of all the images could turn in their answer sheet for a free raffle ticket at the HUB raffle table. It was a more challenging task than it seemed, especially with the rooms so full of visitors. Raffle tickets were available for sale, and prizes included arts and craft supplies, a sleeping bag, a backpack, and other donated goodies.

The HUB staff hoped to offer S'Mores-making out on the back patio, but the very windy weather conditions forced this activity to

be postponed to a future time. A large tray of chocolate chip cookies provided by local Maker Chandra Ouellette of C&C Treats and Bakery was put out for visitors to enjoy.

Gloria Wirtz and other organizers of the Winchendon Youth Art Club in the Winchendon schools had several tables of crafts set up, including a tile painting project for all ages, where visitors could paint on tiles with markers, which were then doused with alcohol to create a unique kaleidoscopic design.

There was a constant flow of motion throughout the space as visitors explored all the new rooms and set-ups. Many people were already familiar with Community Threads, the thrift store featuring gently used and donated clothing. It is now roomier with more space for clothes, but in the same room. The Food Pantry was always in the large room next to the bowling alley, but it has now been compacted

and organized into a single long area by the north wall of the room. A new handicap access ramp stretches along the west wall from a door into Community Threads, down to the end of the Food Pantry.

This leaves the rest of the large room freshly renovated into the brand new class and meeting space, with colorful murals on the walls—some of them giant posters created by Winchendon business Patriot Designs—round tables and chairs. A door opens from the space into the bowling alley, and another door leads out onto the patio, which has undergone the biggest transformation of all. Until a few months ago, there was no "patio," just a dirt-and-grass back yard covered with rubble and odd debris. Now whistle-clean and paved with a smooth concrete surface for accessibility, the patio features outside lighting, colorfully painted weather-resistant

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The brand new back patio outdoor space
Photo by Inanna Arthen



Spacious indoor meeting and classroom space, with a door opening out onto the patio
Photo by Inanna Arthen



The official ribbon cutting moment
Photo by Inanna Arthen

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This special print edition of *The Winchendon Courier*, which includes the center "Community Connector" calendar section, is made possible by a grant to the town from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). This same grant is also helping to launch Winchendon's new "microtransit system" and update the town website. But it won't keep the newspaper going forever.

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BOS Hears Presentation on the Senior Center



Judith Mizhir (left) and Miranda Jennings address the Board of Selectmen
Photo copyright Town of Winchendon

by Inanna Arthen

At their meeting on Monday, October 27, the Board of Selectmen heard the next in a series of planned presentations by department heads about important town departments, what they do and their current challenges and goals. Miranda Jennings, Director of the Old Murdock Senior Center, and Judith Mizhir, Chair of the Winchendon Council on Aging, came forward to give a presentation on the Old Murdock Senior Center. Ms. Jennings had a full PowerPoint slide deck which she put on the screen.

"The Senior Center is a place for lifelong learning, health and connection, which all feed into our overall health, of our seniors and our overall community," Ms. Jennings began. "The building is open Monday through Fridays, from 9:00 to 3:00, and then we offer transportation Monday through Saturday 8:00 to 8:00. We have 12 staff. We've had two to three Senior Work-off individuals who are fantastic and do various things from driving to cleaning to helping in the kitchen." The Senior Center volunteers log over 2,800 hours a year. The Center serves more than 2,600 individuals per year, offering 500 different programs, serving 9,000 meals and providing over 7,000 rides, Ms. Jennings said.

Ms. Jennings explained that the Senior Work-off Program allows seniors in the community to work for the town in exchange for an offset on their property tax. Seniors in the

program can work up to 73.3 hours. "We have a lot to do, so if anybody's looking for stuff to do, come see me. But we're very grateful for the people that do amazing work," Ms. Jennings said.

Under the heading of Nutritional programs, Ms Jennings explained that the Center has a congregate meal program (this is a program where seniors come to a dining room to eat together) with the majority of the food provided through the Making Opportunity Count (MOC) program, Meals on Wheels. "On Tuesdays, thanks to Robinson Broadhurst funding, we have Taste of Home, home cooked lunches, which are a hit. They're very good and delicious and open to the community," Ms. Jennings said. "All lunches are suggested donation of \$3 but nobody is turned away."

Ms. Jennings went on, "We also offer home delivery meals through Meals on Wheels, as well as pantry deliveries that we coordinate with the CAC and Meals on Wheels. This happens every day. Our driver, Art Amenta, is out there 9:00 to 3:00 every day just delivering so many meals to people that can't access the congregate meals.

"And finally, we do offer grocery store shopping to the larger grocery stores. We go to Hannaford's, Market Basket, and the shopping areas up in Rindge every Saturday. It is a nutrition related program, but it's a special program. A lot of it's a time for people to get

on the bus together, and it's a real fun time. We can also bring people to the grocery store as needed and requested, if that date on Saturdays doesn't work for you, and that is provided through our Community Connector program."

The Center has a lot of life-long learning programs, Ms. Jennings said, including art classes, music classes, a book club, various guest speakers, wreath making and other events. Ms. Mizhir added that they would love to hear from anyone in the community with a skill that they'd like to share.

The Center offers social services, including programs assisting with health care benefits. "SHINE and Integrity Medicare come in and actually set up office hours and use our space to do one on one counseling, and that's booked out every single time," Ms. Jennings said. "It's very, very popular and important. Red Cross comes in and does training. The Fire Department is doing training with our members, but also with our staff. We offer one-on-one social services and emergency assistance for seniors that might be facing homelessness, loss of heat in their homes, can't afford their rent, need help with medication." Services are offered right there in the Senior Center because the clients are there, and they may not want or be able to go to a different location (like the CAC) to get a service.

"We coordinate with aging services, and we were running a dementia support group based on feedback from the town, and we'd love to continue doing that with a local resident who has a dementia care company called Purple Hydrangea. All these are funded through grants and partnerships," Ms. Jennings said.

"When we did our survey a couple years ago, doing day trips was one of the biggest, most popular things people wanted to do," Ms. Jennings said. So through donations from seniors themselves, and grant funding, we've offered a lot of great trips." Excursion destinations have included Groton Hill for music events, the beach, local ice cream shops and the Winchendon Community Park amphitheatre events.

Fitness and Active Living programs include pickleball, yoga, strength training, line dancing and bowling over at the The HUB. There is exercise equipment available to use in the basement and on the second floor of the building. Ms. Mizhir said, "It's brought in a lot of the younger, older adults. That's the new word, instead of "seniors", it's active "older adults" that we are. We take care of all ages, elderly, including my age, but at the same time, we are looking to include many of the younger people to come in and start doing the healthy things to keep themselves healthy and live longer."

There are many entertainment and recreation programs within the building, as well as excursions and trips. "We've had Elvis visit, as well as other famous impersonations through our musical concerts and performances," Ms. Jennings said. "Today we had Bob Jordan, who's a wonderful musician. We have Dennis Cormier. Thank you to the Friends of Old Murdock that fund a lot of these performances. We'll do theme lunches. Our staff, Donna, does a fantastic job decorating for different themes for lunches and holidays, but then a lot of people will come in just to socialize and hang out. We do have a TV that people can sit in some comfy chairs and watch TV. We have pool tables, puzzles, a Reading Room, several different places for reading and the Senior Strikers Bowling league is very fun as well."

The Senior Center has done some intergenerational programming and wants to work more with the schools, getting the generations together. "We've had a lot of high school groups come over and do interviews with the seniors to learn about their lives," Ms. Jennings said. "They've made a bulletin board called Winchendon's Finest in the dining room. They also help to serve lunch and build that empathy and that respect. It's great for them to also see Old Murdock and see the Senior Center, so they value it as a building in town to protect it and to hopefully utilize it when they're older."

Ms. Jennings went on, "Volunteering is not often seen as a service of a senior center, but I think that's a way that a lot of seniors want to engage. A lot of seniors might not use the services, but they want to come help. So we do have quite a few older adults volunteering, but we have the students from Murdock Middle School and High School coming every week to volunteer. They prep the lunches and clean the dining room." Three different volunteers come in three days a week to help deliver Meals on Wheels. Even Town Manager Bill McKinney pitched in to deliver lunches when the Center was short on volunteers. "We need help cleaning, answering phones, teaching a class and more recently, doing volunteer driving, which one of our Senior Work-off individuals did, and that was an immense help. So we are always looking for volunteer drivers," Ms. Jennings said.

The drivers are working with the Senior Center's new transportation program, the Community Connector, which is funded through a grant from the Mass Department of Transportation, through the Montachusett Area Regional Transportation (MART) and some funding from the town. The Community Connector provides over 7,000 rides per year, about 850 per month. The program has \$650,000 in grant money to run

THE WINCHENDON COURIER
A Publication of By Light Unseen Media, LLC
325 Lakeview Drive
Winchendon, MA 01475

Publisher and Managing Editor: Inanna Arthen
Production, Design and Pre-Press: Inanna Arthen

To submit news, letters to the editor, obituaries or calendar listings:
email editor@winchendoncourier.net
or mail to 325 Lakeview Dr., Winchendon, MA 01475

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The print edition is printed by Eagle Printing in Pittsfield, MA.

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Citizen Brings Questions About Mabardy Landfill Project to BOS



Citizen Yvonne Senecal addresses the Board of Selectmen
Photo copyright Town of Winchendon

by Inanna Arthen

At the Board of Selectmen’s meeting on Monday, November 10, citizen Yvonne Senecal came forward during the public comment period to convey concerns and questions on behalf of numerous town residents about the Mabardy Landfill Capping project which has been ongoing on River Road for several years.

Reading a prepared statement, Ms. Senecal said, “Over the past week, several emails have been exchanged regarding the Mabardy Landfill capping project. This project was scheduled for completion in July, and yet, work has ended around August. Concerns regarding this project and the effect on abutters and the community in general have been expressed many times before, especially specifically regarding dust carrying contaminants that are dispersed with each truckload, uncontrolled runoff, flooding of abutters’ property, runoff of contaminants into the Millers River watershed, and lack of buffer zones and encroachment on private property.

“We are all agreed that this project needs to be completed. I want to know why is it so over any reasonable completion date. It should have been done way before last July. Now it’s postponed some more. This contract was approved by the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager, and they own it.

“Do we even know what is in COMM-97? Let me list some of the components of it: arsenic, cadmium, chromium, lead, mercury, petroleum hydrocarbons, PCBs and PFAs, which are also called ‘forever chemicals,’ meaning they get into your system and they’re there forever. All of these have adverse health effects, such as kidney disease, thyroid issues, low fertility rates and certain cancers. This is something we should all be concerned about.

“The Board of Selectmen approved this contaminated soil to be trucked in to cap a contaminated landfill which also contains batteries. And we are paid by the ton for this contamination. Many of us have asked about environmental testing. While it may be done, it is nowhere available for review. This is concerning. We have a contract with 508 River Street, and this final

information should be accessible.

“In conclusion, here are some final thoughts. First, we need to demand that this project end in a timely manner. We want it completed. Secondly, we need to demand that all trees be planted, as per our agreement. This has not happened. Number three, continued testing of soil and water should be continued and made available on the town website. And lastly, we need to vow never again to let this happen in our town. Our residents deserve better. Thank you.”

Board Chair Andrew Beauvais said that normally, he wouldn’t respond to public comment, but these were important questions. “It was asked of me, for full transparency, that this come before the Board as an agenda item. I don’t feel that’s the appropriate action, simply because we don’t have the necessary information that I think you demand and you deserve those answers. So it’s better served because these are environmental questions that more relate to a Board of Health and so...I think this would be better served in an open forum where we call in the experts that are responsible for this project and allow residents to ask direct questions and get direct answers and hold them accountable, because at the end of the day, we set policy, and this was an agreement made several years ago prior to most of us serving on this Board.”

Everyone wanted to see this project completed, Mr. Beauvais said, and the Town Manager is willing to set up public meetings. “I appreciate the residents that reached out to me through email, because it prompted me to look at the town website and see where are those reports and they don’t exist,” he affirmed. “So that is something that I have asked the Town Manager’s office to ensure that they make it all of them for this year and prior. I think prior years are there up to 2024 but I haven’t seen anything for 2025 and I do believe those should be posted as they come through. And as a Board of Selectmen, we should be made aware when any changes to the schedule occur. We should be kept in the loop. That way, we’re well informed as well.”

Ms. Senecal responded, “First of all, the Board of Health didn’t approve or disapprove this. This was done by the Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager of the time. So I don’t think it’s fair to throw this on the Board of Health...All that has been on the town website has been tonnage. There’s been nothing regarding any of the heavy metals, nothing that’s of the health issues. The only thing that was posted was the enterococci, which is a coliform bacteria that you can get from runoff from a rainstorm, from duck poop into swimming areas. That’s not helpful. That’s not going to give you cancer. These are the things that will give you cancer.”

Mr. Beauvais said he appreciated her points, but he himself wouldn’t know how to interpret the reports, and a public meeting with experts present who could explain the data would be helpful. “We are listening. We’re just trying to find the best channel to do this,” he said.

Board member Erika Eitland said that state Representative Jon Zlotnik had offered to bring in someone from the state DEP to assist with an information session for residents, and she would follow up on that. “From my understanding, when I looked at the initial part, I didn’t see anything that was of immediate health concern. That’s why I’ve been more neutral on this. But I do think it’s helpful, like finances, for us to be able to know what the heck we’re looking at.”

The Mabardy Landfill reports are listed under the Zoning Board of Appeals page on the new town website and may be found, through 2024, at <https://www.townofwinchendon.com/418/Mabardy-2021-to-2024-Reports>.

A complete, albeit highly technical, document about the state’s policies on COMM-97 fill may be found on the state website at www.mass.gov/doc/comm-97-001-reuse-disposal-of-contaminated-soil-at-massachusetts-landfills/download

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tables and benches, an area for backyard cooking, murals and decorations. It will serve as an outdoor classroom, meeting, recreation and activity space when the seasons and weather permit.

At 5:00 p.m., visitors were called together into the classroom space for the opening ceremonies and ribbon cutting. Associate Director Shaina Cunningham welcomed everyone, and introduced Winchendon’s state Representative Jon Zlotnik as the first speaker.

“You know, I remember a few years ago when Miranda took me around, showing me the space and what she wanted to do with it, and I didn’t want to be discouraging,” Rep. Zlotnik began. “I thought to myself, wow, that’s a lot in front of you. But she had a vision. With a lot of help, the community came together, the town, the donors, everybody, to make this a reality. It really is something cool. I’d seen parts of it before, but I’m walking through and I see the patio out back, which is just fantastic and a really creative and imaginative use of all that space out there. So I couldn’t be more proud of this community, the town of Winchendon, and the CAC and [Executive Director Miranda Jennings] in particular.”

He then brought out a citation, saying, “I love to give these things out. I have a citation here from the House of Representatives congratulating The HUB. It’s a really cool thing for the town to have, and not only that, but also to save this building and this location. I came here when I was in high school and bowled, and I’m sure a lot of those people did too. So it’s really exciting to save a place like this and really give it a new purpose and something that the community clearly needs and supports. So congratulations, and really, best of luck.” He presented the citation to Ms. Jennings as the room applauded.

Ms. Cunningham then introduced Glenn Hunt, vice president of the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation board, and Cindy Landanno, member of the RBF board. Generous funding from Robinson Broadhurst has been crucial to the growth and development of The HUB. “As you all know, they have touched almost every amazing thing in this community, and have been longtime supporters of

The HUB and Winchendon CAC, so we thank you,” she said.

“So as Shaina just said, we’ve been longtime supporters of the CAC and the town of Winchendon, we’re very proud to be a sponsor of the CAC,” Mr. Hunt said. “Our missions are very, very similarly aligned, where we try to do as much as we can across all sectors of the population. And that’s what’s happening here. The HUB and CAC serve all sectors of the population.” He said he remembered viewing the space when the project was first proposed and thinking, “A bowling alley...kind of a far fetched idea, but it’s just amazing as to what they’ve done here. We’re very proud to be sponsors of this, hopefully looking forward to working with you in the future.”

Ms. Landanno said, “It’s actually a pleasure to work with both Shaina and Miranda around the projects that they try to bring to our community, and to watch a project that we’ve been a part of, funding requests from the very beginning, to see it come to fruition is amazing.” Sometimes Miranda’s visions seemed too lofty, but “she brings those visions alive, and we’re so lucky as a community to have that. And Robinson Broadhurst is proud and happy to be a part of these kinds of projects. And it’s a pleasure to be here today to celebrate this building and your work, both the work that you ladies do, it’s amazing. So thank you.”

The next speakers were Youth Changemakers Kaiya and Nick—Nick is the Director of the Youth Changemakers while Kaiya has been working with the Changemakers since she was 14 and is now on her way to college. Nick began, saying, “In Winchendon, we don’t really have a lot of spaces for youth to feel included, and The HUB is the place for that. We host Teen Nights for youth to have a place to be and feel comfortable within our community. It’s a place for anyone to feel that they belong. I remember when I started here, I was also 14 or so. I was nervous out of my mind. But over the years, I’ve grown my network of people. I’ve met amazing people all over and my leadership skills have grown from the projects we do, such as managing meetings, deliberating who’s doing what, working on projects that actually matter to our town.” He mentioned

the banner project with youth-created artwork that are displayed all around town. “Another thing is, is that we have a youth workforce program here for youth to learn valuable life lessons” including work skills from changing the oil in a car to cooking pancakes.

Kaiya said, “I remember back when I started as a teen, I was shy and awkward. Now I’m less of them, but I want to thank everyone for making the community as it is to expand more.” They also help people in need through working with the Food Pantry, she said.

Shaina then called Ms. Jennings to the lectern. “I had to write this down because I’ve been crying all day long,” Ms. Jennings said with a smile. “Good afternoon, everybody. Before anything else, I want to thank you so much for being here today. I’m looking out in the crowd, and it’s just like a whole big family reunion here. And I am the luckiest person in the world. I have the best job in the whole world. This is the best thing ever.”

She went on to thank Rep. Zlotnik, Robinson Broadhurst and the Winchendon Board of Selectmen. “The backing we received from the town and the state has been absolutely essential in bringing this big dream, which is kind of a pipe dream, to life,” she said. She asked the CAC Board, Advisory Board, volunteers and staff present to all stand or wave. “This space literally exists because of your dedication, creativity and sheer hard work and manual labor...running the services, running the pantry, our new thrift store, Community Threads, cleaning the bathrooms, fixing gutters, reminding me to get the car inspected, building tables and patios, every single contribution that you do matters and has literally built this building.” She also thanked all their funders, including the White Family Foundation, Robinson Broadhurst, the Community Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, the HEAL Collaborative and the T-Mobile Foundation which helped fund the back patio.

She went on, “So seven years ago, we actually stood in this very building. We did a tour of this building back when it was still an abandoned bowling alley, and we dreamed about what the space could be. At the time, the idea of

turning it into a grocery store or a community space felt impossible. It was just a pipe dream. We left thinking, we can’t do this. This is too big. We don’t have any money. But here we are. We knew the bowling alley had been a part of the fabric of this community. For decades, it was a place where people had gathered, laughed and connected, and today it is, once again, a place for connection, a place that serves the community.

“On a deeper level, our vision is to create a beacon of hope and possibility, a space where, when you walk in this building, no matter who you are or how your day has been going, you feel seen, you feel valued and cared for, because often, the people who come through our doors are experiencing some of the hardest moments in their lives,” she said. She gave a special shout-out to the HEAL Collaborative, saying that The HUB is not “a solo CAC endeavor.” The HEAL Collaborative also includes the town, The Winchendon School, Winchendon Public Schools, Growing Places, The Health Equity Partnership, Mount Wachusett Community College and Heywood Hospital.

“Without HEAL, we really wouldn’t be what we are today, and not just in terms of funding, but in terms of what the vision is,” Ms. Jennings said. “When I started at the CAC seven years ago, we were focused on essential services, so the food pantry and emergency services for people who are experiencing homelessness or didn’t have heat in their homes, etc. I am very proud to say that we have not only maintained those vital services, but also expanded them to meet the growing need. Just this year, our food pantry status actually was elevated because of the increased demand and output that we are providing with our food pantry, and we are now a higher level category of food pantry.

“But along the way, we realized something really important. Hunger and homelessness cannot be solved by pantries and emergency services alone. When we listened to our partners and to our members, many of whom are here today, and we asked, what else should we be doing to not just help stop the bleeding on these cuts and these wounds and these problems,

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Director Miranda Jennings accepts a citation from State Rep. Jon Zlotnik
Photo by Inanna Arthen



Youth Changemakers Nick and Kaiya
Photo by Inanna Arthen



Robinson Broadhurst vice president Glenn Hunt and Robinson Broadhurst board member Cyndy Landanno
Photo by Inanna Arthen

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but prevent them from happening in the first place? We heard things like, the food is great, but we could also use an after school program for our kids. I'd really love some job help or some budgeting help. I really want to start my own business, but I can't afford the permits or the use of a commercial kitchen.

"So we built a place that would do all of that and more. Through our partnerships, we've created a very innovative model where you can come to The HUB for whatever you need, whether that's food, whether that's clothing, whether it's a job, a connection, a training, a youth program, some leadership skills, learning how to change the oil, a family event, or even just bowling.

"But the truth is, it's never, ever just about the food or the clothing or the bowling or the job skills. It's about something even more essential and something that's becoming even more and more rare in today's world. It's about community, because when our food pantries run low or when SNAP benefits are cut, it is our community, it is all of you, all of us, who come together to make sure that nobody goes hungry or nobody is forgotten, or no child doesn't have enough, has an after

school program, and that is what will always save us: each other."

Ms. Jennings invited everyone in the room to raise one finger on one hand if they had been to The HUB for bowling; for an event; to use or donate to the Food Pantry; to find clothes; to volunteer or connect with others. She then asked people, "if you're brave," to raise their hands. Many hands with four and five raised fingers were held up, and Ms. Jennings told everyone to "high five" the person next to them. "I hope you see how much this place can connect you to all the different pieces of the web of our happiness in our community, and you are all part of that," she said.

CAC Advisory Board member Jane LaPointe said The HUB is "really a reflection of who we are, and as it moves forward, a reflection of, I'll say, who we choose to be, and how the opportunity we have to work together to make that happen. And I think that's so essential, because we live in a time with so much isolation, and the thing that really allows people like me and I'm sure others to really be healthy and feel good about who we are is the connection that we're able to have and the ability that we have to do things that bring us joy, do things that connect us to other people. When I moved back home ten years ago, I

didn't know that many people, but by coming to things like this and being able to participate, I've really gotten to so know so many more people in our community."

Board of Selectmen member Erika Eitland said she had been a "doubter" about the project, given the state of the building at the very beginning. "I think one thing that is so special about this, though, is that you have created a group with this community, with this space, and it is something that, I echo what Jane said, there's this ripple effect, but that ripple effect takes work. It takes a lot of hard work and a lot of long nights. I remember as we were painting this mural at 11 o'clock at night the day of the election, I thought, this is my community, it doesn't matter what happens. We are in this together, and this space matters more than anything else going on in the greater scheme, and we respond to those things. We show up for people, we give them food. But the work that happens here is something that you've unlocked, something so special in this space, that we are all equal, that we all show up as our fullest selves."

Ms. Jennings asked the speakers to form a line in front of the west wall of murals, along with members of the CAC boards and volunteers, to perform the official ribbon

cutting. The giant scissors were wielded by one of the CAC's youngest volunteers and Ms. Jennings, to cheers and applause.

That by no means ended the night's festivities, as a local band was just setting up, and the finals in the Battle of the Businesses Bowling Tournament were about to commence. The raffle prizes were drawn, and there was still food being served. The following day, The HUB was hosting a New England Patriots Watch Party, free to all. The "official opening" barely slowed down The HUB's busy schedule of activities.

For detailed information about The HUB, see its website at www.the-hub.org. For updates and announcements of current schedules and events, follow The HUB Facebook page at www.facebook.com/groups/1289883745410172 and the CAC Facebook page at www.facebook.com/winchendoncac.

The HUB is located at 5 Summer Drive, Winchendon. It incorporates the Winchendon CAC and its services, community bowling, the Youth Changemakers' Sunshine Café and the Local Makers Hub. The HUB is closed on Monday and Tuesday, and open only for bowling on Sundays. The phone number is 978-297-1667.

Interim Superintendent King Discusses Busing Concerns with School Committee

by Inanna Arthen

At their meeting on Thursday, October 16, the School Committee and Interim Superintendent Charlotte King discussed some issues with busing that had arisen that week. Letters of explanation had been sent to parents about glitches in the service.

"We did have some bus issues this week," Ms. King said. "We have a meeting with the bus company regularly, providing our concerns and then getting feedback, the next time, giving them feedback and getting feedback from them. And we had seen some very positive things moving forward. But this week was very challenging. Yesterday and today we had combined buses. Yesterday, missed stops, students waiting for a long period of time, which obviously is not acceptable. So we have voiced all of those concerns to the bus company, and asked for a different plan going forward. Obviously, student safety comes first, and communication is just so essential, and so we've asked for a lot of revisions in the communication that we've been getting."

Committee member Greg Vine asked if the company was still having trouble finding and keeping drivers, as they had complained about in the past.

"Actually, this year, they have been more staffed," Ms. King said. "They're almost fully staffed. So that's a positive with being fully staffed. They have a lot of new staff, so that brings some challenges.

That is the piece with the communication that people are being trained. They have someone on a leave, so someone's covering, so that person has to do dual roles. So they have some challenges too, but obviously, they need to improve their communication with us, and they need to, if they're going to combine buses, that's fine. We just need to know about it. We need to have a plan for the kids, they can't be out waiting at bus stops. They can't be waiting at the YMCA. So, we've communicated that that's unacceptable."

Committee member Karen Kast asked about the negotiation for credit that the company should be giving the district for glitches in service that involve combined buses, buses arriving late and so on. Ms. King said that the credits are being processed, "and obviously that's important, but more important is the students being picked up and not left at stops."

Ms. Kast said, "I'm also very concerned [about] coming home, because if a bus is late or whatever, or if they miss a stop or forget a stop somewhere, and we're getting calls. I know that the central office closes at 4:00. I know that we had the plan. And I just want to reiterate, we still have this plan in place that somebody's at each building to field those calls, where a parent is like, my kid didn't get off the bus. I don't know where the bus is."

Ms. King assured the Committee that such a plan is in place. "We also have a plan, it was in place the last two years, that the bus company

notify us when all the buses have cleared, so that the administrators and/or secretaries can go home. And that wasn't happening at the very beginning of the year. Once we had our first meeting, I can say that's been happening consistently. So we also have a backup plan if one of the administrators has to leave, particularly the little ones, because they're not safe to get off the bus with no parent or guardian at home, we have a backup plan where one of us covers that building."

Ms. Kast said, "I appreciate that, because that's always going to be my number one concern. Half the time they don't necessarily email us, you see it on Winchendon Residents or somewhere else, or somebody texts me and says, Did you see this? And then I'm scrambling to find out what's going on."

Committee member Tara Teixeira said, "So actually, it's happened with me, with my youngest, Allie. It was the first day of school in kindergarten, and she ended up on the bus. And I will say it was actually a pretty pleasurable experience. The staff waited with her at the school. Everyone was very communicative with me. I was able to find out where she was, and so I've been able to use the procedure. It wasn't awful. It really wasn't. And Allie loves riding the bus, so I'm glad that there is something in place. But like you said, also we need a reliable bus company, and it's their job to be reliable."

Ms. King agreed, "We did have an issue similar to that with a

younger student at the beginning of the year where [the bus company] did not follow protocol. And so we immediately met with the bus company, reviewed the protocol, made sure that the protocol was reviewed with that particular driver and the person in the office at the time, because, again, it was that communication piece where things were happening, but if we don't know about it, it's our responsibility to communicate with the parents and the guardian."

Mr. Vine asked if family members besides parents could be added to the message loop with emails or ParentSquare messages, because sometimes a grandparent or whomever might be waiting to meet the child at the bus, and if a notification has gone out only to parents about the bus being late or combined, that person wouldn't know what's going on.

Ms. Kast agreed, "I think that's something we need to look at adding because, you know, unfortunately or fortunately, more often than not, a lot of our families are working families, and they do have alternatives...let's say a parent's in a meeting or something, and they're not checking their phone, so poor grandpa standing on the side of the road or sitting in his car, whatever, waiting for the bus, and the bus is half an hour late, and he's going, where's my kid?" She asked Ms. King how often meetings take place with the bus company, and Ms. King said they are monthly, unless there is a specific issue to address.

Winchendon News

SENIOR CENTER
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it. It has 11 staff and drivers (an increase from 3 in 2024), operates for 12 hours per day Monday through Saturday, and transports riders in a 40-mile radius around Winchendon. Rides are free of charge.

"We're doing a lot of innovative stuff," Ms. Jennings said. "What we're doing with our transportation is a model for this region of Massachusetts. It's happened in Western Massachusetts. We know that Eastern Massachusetts is all over transportation, but there's a lot happening in our region, and we are at the epicenter of doing, I think, some of the most innovative transportation work, and people are recognizing that." The number of riders is growing continuously, both new riders and those who rely on the service and use it regularly.

"I think the transportation is the glue that fits everything together," Ms. Jennings said, "because we can have the meals at the Senior Center, but a lot of people can't get there. We can have the recreation and the socialization or have the day trips, but people can't get there. So it's no surprise that transportation is a huge part of what we're doing, and it will only continue to grow as we want to do more. So from grocery store shopping to getting to the food pantry to getting to social services, to get into lunch or to a concert, you need that transportation." A large number of riders use the system to get to medical appointments of all different kinds, including recurring appointments for treatments.

Among the challenges facing the Center is, first and foremost, the building itself, which is old (built in the 1880s) and needs a lot of upkeep. Anyone who would like to learn how to set and maintain the clock in the clock tower should talk to Ms. Jennings. "This past year, we did receive a grant from the state, as well as matched from Robinson Broadhurst, to install heat efficient heat pumps in the dining room, the auditorium, in a community room and in an office," Ms. Jennings said. "So that has enabled us to have year-round programming, whereas it would get very, very hot in the auditorium where the pickleball is played, for example. So we really couldn't use the auditorium in the summer months and same in the dining room, it would get very, very hot. It would also get very, very cold [in winter]. The building has one heating system. So now we can in heat in-zone, so it's much more efficient, better use of people's money and resources, and it's also just a comfortable and safe temperature for people." Rebates from Mass Save helped pay for the heat pumps.

Ms. Mizhir said, "Robinson Broadhurst has been totally gracious to us in this community, and this is one special thing that they recommended. When I became chairman, I met with the previous director, with the Council, and with Robinson Broadhurst, and we were very shyly asking for another van, because we had one van that was falling apart. And they said, Don't you want a senior center? And then they backed us throughout the whole process of getting the Old Murdock building. And then backed us with financial support and also support to getting multiple grants to be able to bring that building

back so it could be usable, because at that point it was going to fall apart. So they have been totally amazing in so many things, but for us, they're so special for that."

Ms. Jennings said that in order to help keep the building maintained, the Center is looking at expanding building rentals in the evenings and weekends when it's not in use as a Senior Center. It could be rented for weddings and reunions, or conferences. It has a kitchen, dining room, large auditorium and many small rooms that could be used for meeting rooms. There are also possibilities for the area around the building, to be made into walking paths or a memory garden, or a similar project so the lawn would be fully usable by the community.

A challenge with social services, Ms. Jennings went on, is meeting the demand. There isn't anyone in the Center who can provide on-the-spot social services, and the CAC has a two-month waiting list for appointments. The demand for rides is exceeding the capacity of the Community Connector, as well. The Center is looking to expand its partnership with MART and increase the pool of drivers. The program started with one MART bus and now has two, and is seeking funding for a third one. MART helps pay for the drivers and gas.

The final challenge is growth, keeping the programs expanding. "We just want to continue growing our programs and offerings to get more more people in and more diverse groups of seniors and older adults in, so being more creative with our partnerships, doing fundraisers and really adapting the scope and the focus of the programs," Ms. Jennings said. Ms. Mizhir added, "Finding out what people want and go in their direction, and also keeping them healthy and more participating in the community."

Ms. Jennings said that the former state Office of Elder Affairs is now called the Office of Aging Independence. Ms. Mizhir said "They don't want to be called seniors. They don't like to be called elders. They did surveys, and they found out people don't want to be called seniors. They want to be called older adults. So right now, we're working on the concept of signage that will reflect that and try to educate the community that we are here, and we offer these wonderful services for people to take advantage of, and most of them are either free or low cost, and we want the community to enjoy them and to enjoy that wonderful building. That's what this is all about."

Board Chair Andrew Beauvais asked what percentage of the Senior Center's funding comes from outside sources—grants, funds, sponsorships and gifts.

"So the budget from the town we get, we budget \$2,000 for programs, for example, and we are spending about \$20,000 on programs and events," Ms. Jennings said. "So that just gives you an idea of that part of it. I don't have the total number. The transportation piece is \$500,000 versus we probably have budgeted, I think, \$60,000 from the town. So the town budget really covers the building, the utilities and the core staff, the infrastructure."

Board member Erika Eitland said, "One thing that the Senior Center does extremely well is the

food security piece. Not only just the nutrition part, but the socialization and what that means. And I'm very mindful with November 1 coming what that means for SNAP, and that it might not coming through and just recognizing the federal cuts that are coming to Medicaid and SNAP, recognizing those shifts. They've eliminated that work exemption for homeless and veterans, and they've shifted who's eligible that the employment now goes all the way to 64-65 now. So some of those older adults who are not technically seniors or aging adults now are hit with the same work requirement. There's going to be a shift of who is looking for food in our town very soon. Are there ways that we as a town can chip in to support that food security? What does that look like meaningfully? Is it that we need to have people donating food? Is it to go into the month of Thanksgiving and know that certain families aren't going to eat?"

"We're all kind of scrambling, I think, to figure out what to do," Ms. Jennings said. "I've gotten contacted from the schools, from different people in town to do food drives. It's just kind of an emergency response that we might need to pull together to anticipate ways of increased demand that's going to be coming. I'm hopeful that MOC will be able to keep up with the demand in terms of the Meals on Wheels, and I know their budget is a lot tighter now too. So hopefully we can follow through with that."

"The Robinson Broadhurst funding is huge to be able to provide that lunch once a week. But even donating to help prepare those meals, or come and help serve them would be great. But then it's very compounding. So when someone can't afford food, they're choosing between rent or food or heat or food. So that's where the social services comes back in. And it's not just a one-off, I'm going to talk to you for five minutes. It's, I'm going to sit with you for an hour, get to know you and then talk. We have to meet again and again...working with some of our seniors to find secure housing takes months and months."

"We're a small community. We should wrap our arms around each other," Ms. Mizhir said.

Ms. Jennings said, "If anybody out there, if you have a need that I didn't address, or you're just wondering about something, just call us and we'll figure out how to connect. We have people that say, I need to get my will notarized. And we've called the Town Hall and figured that out, and people just step up to help out. We'll do our best to to figure it out."

The Old Murdock Senior Center is located at 52 Murdock Avenue, next to G.A.R. Park, and is open Monday through Thursday 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. You can follow their Facebook page, www.facebook.com/oldmurdock for updates on programs and schedules. Call 978-297-3155 if you have questions, or email them at winchendon-coa@gmail.com. Along with programs and services for older adults (age 55+), the Senior Center hosts art classes and exhibitions by GALA, events like Taste of Winchendon, the monthly Growing Places Mobile Market, and other activities open to all. Community Connector rides are available to persons of all ages. Contact the Center for more information.



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Community Connector

Welcome to The Community Connector! In this pull-out section of the printed *Winchendon Courier*, you'll find a complete calendar of local events, a page of events and activities by category, and where to find more details about the organizations and groups that help make Winchendon a great place to live. The Community Connector is funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT).

Celebrate the Holidays with Parks & Recreation Special Family Events!

FESTIVAL Of LIGHTS

**TREE LIGHTING - DECEMBER 5TH
GROUT PARK 6PM**

421 SPRING ST WINCHENDON MA
Sing Carols with Mr.
and Mrs. Claus!
Reindeer Rides with Hot Cocoa

Free Community Event! Join us for a magical evening as we light up Grout Park for the holidays! Bring your family and friends to celebrate the season together with: Caroling with Mr. & Mrs. Claus
Holiday cheer and community fun
Reindeer Rides
The big lighting at 6:00 PM!
Let's make Winchendon shine bright this season — don't miss this joyful tradition!

BREAKFAST with SANTA

DECEMBER 6TH

COOKIE CRAWL: 8:30-12:00
LETTERS TO SANTA: 8:30-12:00
GINGERBREAD DECORATING: 8:30-12:00
crafts: 10:30-12:00
+ FACE PAINTING! & FARMERS MARKET

**52 MURDOCK AVE
WINCHENDON MA**

Get ready for a magical morning of fun, food, and holiday cheer! Join us on Saturday, December 6th at 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon, MA for a festive day the whole family will love!
Cookie Crawl: 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Letters to Santa: 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Gingerbread Decorating: 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Crafts: 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Come enjoy breakfast, meet Santa, and make some sweet memories this holiday season! Bring your family, friends, and holiday spirit — we can't wait to celebrate with you!
Tickets prices and links:
Breakfast \$8: <https://link.clover.com/urlshortener/3NbdrR>
Cookie crawl \$10: <https://www.clover.com/pay-widgets/28cd6f4a-b3a1-44ca-8e5d-281db4a8c678>
Letters to Santa \$10: <https://www.clover.com/pay-widgets/2e531bf9-f4d8-4344-bd45-c64f34c4e9a8>



Holiday Storefront Decorating Competition

Attention Winchendon Business Owners

We're teaming up with Fidelity Bank to light up Winchendon and we want your store front to shine like a Christmas tree!

It's your time to show off your Christmas spirit.
Scan QR code for more details:

Or Contact us to join-
Scunningham@winchendon-ma.gov

Winchendon Parks & Recreation is teaming up with Fidelity Bank to light up Winchendon—and we want your storefront to shine like a Christmas tree! We're hosting a Holiday Storefront Decorating Competition, and it's your time to show off your Christmas spirit! Here's how to join the fun:

Email us at scunningham@winchendon-ma.gov to let us know you'd like to participate
Deck out your storefront in your most festive holiday style.
Tag us on social media so we can see your display and include you in the competition!
The Prize:
Not only will you earn major bragging rights and tons of social media exposure...BUT the winner will also receive an exclusive interview and feature with our marketing team! So don't wait—spread the holiday cheer! Email us saying "We're in!" along with your business name, and our team will reach out with next steps.
Let's make Winchendon merry and bright together!

Letter to Santa Kits

\$10

Quantities limited Christmas Mug, Letter template, envelope, pencil and postage.

From now until they are sold out Available at Parks & Rec office 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon

Have your kids fill them out and drop them in the mailbox at: The Parks and Recreation Office 52 Murdock Ave

DON'T MISS OUR NEXT BIG EVENT!

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@WINCHENDONAMPHITHEATER
@WINCHPARKSANDREC

Sponsorship Opportunities

Building Community, Creating Memories, Together.
2026 Winchendon Parks & Recreation

- PARTNER WITH WINCHENDON PARKS AND RECREATION FOR COMMUNITY SUCCESS.**
- YOUR PARTNERSHIP TRANSFORMS WINCHENDON PARKS AND RECREATION EVENTS.**
- ENHANCE COMMUNITY BY SPONSORING EVENTS AT THE WINCHENDON AMPHITHEATER.**

Join Us – Scan Here to See Our Events!

Make an impact - Scan to unlock our sponsorship magazine!

Ready to sponsor or donate? We'd love to hear from you!
Contact:
Shaina Cunningham
Email: scunningham@winchendon-ma.gov
Phone: (978) 297-3155
Address: 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon, MA 01475
www.townofwinchendon.com

December Crafternoon Make a Wooden Sign!

Saturday, December 6, 10:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. \$20 per person. Kick off your weekend with some creative fun at our Wood Sign Making Crafternoon! Bring your imagination and craft a festive piece to brighten your home for the holidays. All materials are provided—just come ready to paint, create, and enjoy a relaxing morning with friends and neighbors! Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation, in collaboration with Local Makers Hub. Spots are limited—register today!
Register at <https://www.clover.com/pay-widgets/4e64aeb1-e65c-4562-8538-66b90659a266>.

**Old Murdock Senior Center
52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon**

Need a Ride?

Book a ride with the Community Connector app, or call 978-297-3155. All rides are FREE! Please book your ride at least one week in advance.

Want to Add YOUR Event to the Town Calendar?

Contact
winchendonparksandrec@gmail.com



DECEMBER

MONDAY DECEMBER 1

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

7:00 p.m. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. Voters are strongly encouraged to arrive as early as possible to check in, as a high attendance is expected. View or download the Warrant from the town website at www.townofwinchendon.com/DocumentCenter/View/1571/Special-Town-Meeting-Warrant-December-1-2025. At Murdock Middle High School Gymnasium, 3 Memorial Dr, Winchendon.

TUESDAY DECEMBER 2

Integrity Medicare Appointments

10:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Have questions about insurance? Call the Senior Center and make an appointment with Margaret from Integrity Medicare! She is here the first and third Wednesday of the month. (time/day subject to change) At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Teen Dungeons & Dragons

3:30-5:00 p.m. A tabletop roleplaying club for teens! Membership is limited, contact the library to sign up. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 3

Ukelele Class

10:00 a.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Teen Gender & Sexuality Alliance

3:30-5:00 p.m. BML's GSA is a safe space for teens to meet, exchange information, receive support, socialize, build a community, and talk about issues and concerns related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

Thriller & Mystery Book Club at the Beals

6:30 p.m. Join us if you love the thrills and chills of a thriller, or mysterious whodunnit? To find out what the book is for the book clubs contact or visit the library. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 4

Bill O'Connor Life Care: Brain Games at the Senior Center

10:30-11:30 a.m. Come in to learn and have fun at the same time! Bill from Lifecare will be here to educate and entertain! At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Fitchburg Art Museum Trip - Free Admission!

12:00-4:00 p.m. Featured this month, MOC Head Start Student Work Showcase at the Community Gallery. Departs from the Senior Center at 12:00 p.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Our Neighbor's Kitchen Dinner

5:15 p.m. at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. Served in the Parish Hall. This week the menu is Chicken Dinner. Free-will donation \$2 per person, \$5 per family; no one turned away. 52 Spruce Street, Winchendon.

FRIDAY DECEMBER 5

Festival of Lights Community Tree-Lighting

6:00 p.m. Join us for a magical evening as we light up Grout Park for the holidays! Bring your family and friends to celebrate the season together with: Caroling with Mr. & Mrs. Claus; Holiday cheer and community fun; The big lighting at 6:00 p.m.! At Grout Park, 421 Spring St, Winchendon (corner of Spring and Glenallen Streets). Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation.

SATURDAY DECEMBER 6

Festival of Lights: Breakfast with Santa

8:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Get ready for a magical morning of fun, food, and holiday cheer! Come enjoy breakfast, meet Santa, and make some sweet memories this holiday season!

Cookie Crawl: 8:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.
Letters to Santa: 8:30 .m.- 12:00 p.m.
Gingerbread Decorating: 8:30 .m.- 12:00 p.m.
Crafts: 10:30 .m.- 12:00 p.m.
At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon. Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation.

Winchendon Farmers Market Winter Market

10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. First Saturday of each month. At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Crafternoon: Wood Sign

10:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. \$20 per person. Bring your imagination and craft a festive piece to brighten your home for the holidays. All materials are provided—just come ready to paint, create, and enjoy a relaxing morning with friends and neighbors! Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation with the Local Makers Hub. Spots are limited—register today! Register at <https://www.clover.com/pay-widgets/4e64aeb1-e65c-4562-8538-66b90659a266>. At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Latin Dance Social

7:00-9:00 p.m. Come on out to The HUB for some Latin dance lessons! free dancing will be happening as well so come and join us whether you're a seasoned dancer or you're trying it out for the first time. First Saturday of each month. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon..

SUNDAY DECEMBER 7

Vendor Sale at the Legion

10:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. Get your last minute gifts and stocking stuffers! Local vendors including Refined Rebel Emporium, Cabin Sweets, Moon Maven Jewelry, C&K Crafters, Dawn's Creative Crafts, Catherine's Custom Crafting, The Pretty Duckling, The Crafty Duo and more! Sponsored by the Winchendon American Legion Auxilliary Unit 193. At Winchendon American Legion Post #193. 295 School St.

TUESDAY DECEMBER 9

Vet to Vet Cafe

10:00-11:00 a.m. Are you a Veteran looking to connect with fellow vets and share experiences from your time in service? Join us for coffee, refreshments, and meaningful discussions with others who have served. Open to all Veterans in the local community. 2nd Tuesday of each month. At Broadview Assisted Living, 547 Central St, Winchendon.

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 10

Lunch At the Park Theatre with Virtual Art Gallery Tour

11:30 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Ride departs from the Senior Center at 11:30 a.m. Purchase lunch in Jaffrey and enjoy the Park Theatre's "Exhibition on Screen Series." Featured artist for December: Edouard Manet. Call 978-297-3155 or visit the Senior Center for more information. Rides leave from the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon.

Teen Cooking Class

3:00-5:00 p.m. Calling all Youth Change-Makers! We have an opportunity for you to receive free cooking lessons at The HUB. Come on out and join us for a wonderful time of learning and growing. Meets every other Wednesday. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

CAC Kids' Holiday Party

5:00-7:00 p.m. All CAC Kid Members, Come on out to celebrate the holidays with us! All registered CAC Kid members are welcome. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 11

Denis Cormier Concert

10:45 a.m.- 12:15 p.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Beals Book Club

3:00-4:00 p.m. Join a discussion group that allows avid readers to discuss the themes, plots, and characters of selected books. To find out what the book is for the book clubs contact or visit the library. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

Our Neighbor's Kitchen Dinner

5:30 p.m. at UU Church of Winchendon. Dinner will be served in the Parish Hall; take-out available after indoor diners are served. This week's menu a Christmas baked ham dinner with sides and dessert. Free-will donation \$2 per person, \$5 per family; no one turned away. 126 Central Street.

FRIDAY DECEMBER 12

Sound Bites Community Jam & Food Drive

6:30 p.m. An event to support the Winchendon Community Action Committee's Food Pantry. Bring a non-perishable food item and receive a raffle ticket for swag and other fun prizes. Sponsored by The HUB and Sound Bites Events. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

SATURDAY DECEMBER 13

Christmas in Toy Town - Holiday Open House and Table Settings

10:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. Come check out the Murdock-Whitney mansion all decorated in its finest! As usual, we will have it over the top decorated!!! After visiting the Murdock-Whitney, you can then see the decorations at the Isaac Morse House Toy Museum. Finally, you can head up to the Old Center Church and check out the many gorgeous decorated holiday tables, as well as the lovely decorations in the main church. This will be an event you dont want to miss!! Admission is a \$20 donation, children under 15 are FREE!! Tickets available at <https://www.winchendonhistory.com/get-tickets/holiday-house-tour>. (Starts at) Winchendon History & Cultural Center, 151 Front St. Continues on Sunday, December 14.

Holiday Bazaar and Cookie Sale

10:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. Two floors of vendors! Crafts, retail items, foods, plenty of gift ideas and stocking stuffers! Stop in and enjoy our decorated sanctuary. Annual cookie sale (pickup of pre-orders, sales as long as supplies last). Pre-order your cookies at uucw.ncmuuc.org/order-your-cookies-here/. At UU Church of Winchendon, 126 Central St.

Sensory Friendly Santa Visit

11:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m. Santa is coming to the Library! He will be meeting individuals (regardless of age) who are neurodivergent, on the autism spectrum, or have other special needs, and their families. Families get to enjoy 10 minutes with Santa in a separate sensory friendly room to share their wishes and snap festive photos. Participants are also invited to participate in a holiday craft, listen to stories, and receive a winter themed book. Enjoy delicious baked goods provided by the Friends of the Beals Memorial Library. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

SUNDAY DECEMBER 14

Christmas in Toy Town - Holiday Open House and Table Settings

10:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. Continued from Saturday, December 13, see above.

A Classic Christmas - Concert with Cassie Swartz

5:00-6:30 p.m. Experience the wonder of the holiday season as we transport you to Christmases of the past! The evening begins with a festive reception featuring charcuterie eats and holiday refreshments, followed by a heartwarming concert in the grand living room.

Featuring:
Cassie Swartz, Vocals
Dave Twiss, Piano
Special Guest Performers
Expect beloved classics, sing-alongs, and a few surprises. Benefits the Wonderfund of Massachusetts. Tickets \$28.52, purchase at www.eventbrite.com/e/a-classic-christmas-tickets-1839952520519. At Winchendon History & Culture Center, Murdock-Whitney Mansion, 151 Front St.

MONDAY DECEMBER 15

Walking Beside You: Caregiver Support Group

6:00-7:30 p.m. We invite all parents, grandparents, and caregivers raising individuals who are neurodivergent, on the autism spectrum, or have other special needs. We aim to create a safe space to come together, support each other, and share the joys and challenges of raising individuals with unique needs. For more information visit the library or see bealslibrary.org. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

TUESDAY DECEMBER 16

Integrity Medicare Appointments

10:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Have questions about insurance? Call the Senior Center and make an appointment with Margaret from Integrity Medicare! She is here the first and third Wednesday of the month. (time/day subject to change) At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Growing Places Mobile Market

10:30-11:30 a.m. Join us at Growing Places for a once a month Farmer's Market that comes to the Senior Center. Fresh vegetables available for purchase using cash, debit/credit or SNAP! HIP benefits accepted! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Teen Dungeons & Dragons

3:30-5:00 p.m. A tabletop roleplaying club for teens! Membership is limited, contact the library to sign up. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 17

Classic Movie Night at the Beals

3:00-5:30 p.m. Screening this month: *It's a Wonderful Life*. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

4th and 5th Grade Band Concert

5:00-6:00 p.m. The 4th and 5th Graders will be hosting their band concert in the Toy Town Elementary Auditorium. At Toy Town Elementary, 175 Grove St, Winchendon.

5:30-7:00 p.m. Join us for a meal, message and worship. NCC is a collective of likeminded churches who purpose to establish a Gospel presence that leads to Gospel proclamation in our region. At The Chapel Downtown, 286 Central St, Winchendon.

Town Events

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

December 1, 7:00 p.m. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. Voters are strongly encouraged to arrive as early as possible to check in, as a high attendance is expected. View or download the Warrant from the town website at www.townofwinchendon.com/DocumentCenter/View/1571/Special-Town-Meeting-Warrant-December-1-2025. Murdock High School Gymnasium, 3 Memorial Dr, Winchendon.

Special Holiday Events

Festival of Lights Community Tree-Lighting

December 5, 6:00 p.m. Join us for a magical evening as we light up Grout Park for the holidays! Bring your family and friends to celebrate the season together with: Caroling with Mr. & Mrs. Claus; Holiday cheer and community fun; The big lighting at 6:00 p.m.! At Grout Park, 421 Spring St, Winchendon (corner of Spring and Glenallen Streets). Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation.

Festival of Lights: Breakfast with Santa

December 6, 8:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Get ready for a magical morning of fun, food, and holiday cheer! Come enjoy breakfast, meet Santa, and make some sweet memories this holiday season!
Cookie Crawl: 8:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.
Letters to Santa: 8:30 .m.- 12:00 p.m.
Gingerbread Decorating: 8:30 .m.- 12:00 p.m.
Crafts: 10:30 .m.- 12:00 p.m.
At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon. Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation

Christmas in Toy Town - Holiday Open House and Table Settings

December 13-14, 10:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. Come check out the Murdock-Whitney mansion all decorated in its finest! As usual, we will have it over the top decorated!!! After visiting the Murdock-Whitney, you can then see the decorations at the Isaac Morse House Toy Museum. Finally, you can head up to the Old Center Church and check out the many gorgeous decorated holiday tables, as well as the lovely decorations in the main church. This will be an event you dont want to miss!! Admission is a \$20 donation, children under 15 are FREE!! Tickets available at <https://www.winchendonhistory.com/get-tickets/holiday-house-tour>. (Starts at) Winchendon History & Cultural Center, 151 Front St. Continues on Sunday, December 14.

Holiday Bazaar and Cookie Sale

December 13, 10:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. Two floors of vendors! Crafts, retail items, foods, plenty of gift ideas and stocking stuffers! Stop in and enjoy our decorated sanctuary. Annual cookie sale (pickup of pre-orders, sales as long as supplies last). Pre-order your cookies at uucw.ncmuuc.org/order-your-cookies-here/. At UU Church of Winchendon, 126 Central St.

Sensory Friendly Santa Visit

December 13, 11:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m. Santa is coming to the Library! He will be meeting individuals (regardless of age) who are neurodivergent, on the autism spectrum, or have other special needs, and their families. Families get to enjoy 10 minutes with Santa in a separate sensory friendly room to share their wishes and snap festive photos. Participants are also invited to participate in a holiday craft, listen to stories, and receive a winter themed book. Enjoy delicious baked goods provided by the Friends of the Beals Memorial Library. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

A Classic Christmas - Concert with Cassie Swartz

December 14, 5:00-6:30 p.m. Experience the wonder of the holiday season as we transport you to Christmases of the past! The evening begins with a festive reception featuring charcuterie eats and holiday refreshments, followed by a heartwarming concert in the grand living room.
Featuring:
Cassie Swartz, Vocals
Dave Twiss, Piano
Special Guest Performers
Expect beloved classics, sing-alongs, and a few surprises. Benefits the Wonderfund of Massachusetts. Tickets \$28.52, purchase at www.eventbrite.com/e/a-classic-christmas-tickets-1839952520519. At Winchendon History & Culture Center, Murdock-Whitney Mansion, 151 Front St.

Classic Movie Night at the Beals

December 17, 3:00-5:30 p.m. Screening this month: *It's a Wonderful Life*. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

Winchendon Community Caroling

December 18, 5:30 p.m. Bundle Up and come together as a community to share holiday cheer through caroling! Gather friends and neighbors to spread festive spirit while “making spirits bright.” by participating in this year's holiday carol. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

Pioneer Valley Brass Quintet

December 20, 2:00 p.m. This fine five-member ensemble performs holiday and classical favorites. Free admission. PVB appears courtesy of the First Universalist Parish of North Dana Trust. Reception and refreshments follow the concert. At UU Church of Winchendon, 126 Central St.

Recreation

Pickleball - Open Courts

Mon-Fri, 9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Open Bowling for the Public

Fridays & Saturdays, 10:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m. FOR DETAILS and TO RSVP VISIT: <https://www.the-hub.org/community-bowling>. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon

Toy Town Swing Sampler Class

Thursdays, 2:00-2:30 p.m. \$5 per lesson. To get more info or sign up, contact thehub@winchendon-cac.org or call 978-297-1667. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Crafternoon: Wood Sign

December 6, 10:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. \$20 per person. Bring your imagination and craft a festive piece to brighten your home for the holidays. All materials are provided—just come ready to paint, create, and enjoy a relaxing morning with friends and neighbors! Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation with the Local Makers Hub. Spots are limited—register today! Register at <https://www.clover.com/pay-widgets/4e64aeb1-e65c-4562-8538-66b90659a266>. At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Latin Dance Social

December 6, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Come on out to The HUB for some Latin dance lessons! free dancing will be happening as well so come and join us whether you're a seasoned dancer or you're trying it out for the first time. First Saturday of each month. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon..

Toy Town Swing at The HUB

December 21, 5:00-9:00 p.m. No partner needed! \$10 per person includes lesson. Dance class 5:00-5:30, no experience needed. Drop-ins welcome. Food, drink, wine and beer for sale. Live music by Steve and Anna of TakeJazz. 100% of proceeds go to benefit the Winchendon CAC. 3rd Sunday of every month. For info and to register, go to <https://www.the-hub.org/event-details/toy-town-swing-the-hub-2025-08-17-17-00>. Presented by The HUB and TakeJazz. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Check out the full online town directory at winchendoncourier.net/directory.htm and the online community calendar at winchendoncourier.net/index.html#connector

Food and Meals

Vet to Vet Cafe

December 9, 10:00-11:00 a.m. Are you a Veteran looking to connect with fellow vets and share experiences from your time in service? Join us for coffee, refreshments, and meaningful discussions with others who have served. Open to all Veterans in the local community. 2nd Tuesday of each month. At Broadview Assisted Living, 547 Central St, Winchendon.

Our Neighbor’s Kitchen Dinner

December 4, 5:15 p.m. at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. Served in the Parish Hall. This week the menu is Chicken Dinner. Free-will donation \$2 per person, \$5 per family; no one turned away. 52 Spruce Street, Winchendon.

Our Neighbor’s Kitchen Dinner

December 11, 5:30 p.m. at UU Church of Winchendon. Dinner will be served in the Parish Hall; take-out available after indoor diners are served. This week’s menu a Christmas baked ham dinner with sides and dessert. Free-will donation \$2 per person, \$5 per family; no one turned away. 126 Central Street.

Taste of Home Lunch

Tuesdays, 11:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m. Enjoy a homecooked lunch made by volunteers! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Growing Places Mobile Market

December 16, 10:30-11:30 a.m. Join us at Growing Places for a once a month Farmer’s Market that comes to the Senior Center. Fresh vegetables available for purchase using cash, debit/credit or SNAP! HIP benefits accepted! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Excursions

Fitchburg Art Museum Trip - Free Admission!

December 4, 12:00-4:00 p.m. Featured this month, MOC Head Start Student Work Showcase at the Community Gallery. Departs from the Senior Center at 12:00 p.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Lunch At the Park Theatre with Virtual Art Gallery Tour

December 10, 11:30 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Ride departs from the Senior Center at 11:30 a.m. Purchase lunch in Jaffrey and enjoy the Park Theatre's “Exhibition on Screen Series.” Featured artist for December: Edouard Manet. Call 978-297-3155 or visit the Senior Center for more information. Rides leave from the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon.

Entertainment

Denis Cormier Concert

December 11, 10:45 a.m. At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Sound Bites Community Jam & Food Drive

December 12, 6:30 p.m. An event to support the Winchendon Community Action Committee’s Food Pantry. Bring a non-perishable food item and receive a raffle ticket for swag and other fun prizes. Sponsored by The HUB and Sound Bites Events. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

For Teens

Teen Cooking Class

December 10, 3:00-5:00 p.m. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Teen GSA Meeting at the Beals

December 3, 3:30-4:30 p.m. A safe space for teens to meet, exchange information, receive support, socialize, build a community, and talk about issues and concerns related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon..

Teen Night at the HUB

December 20, 5:00-9:00 p.m. At the Winchendon Community HUB, 5 Summer Dr.

Teen Dungeons & Dragons

December 2 & 16, 3:30-5:00 p.m. This is for kids in grades 8-12. Membership is limited, contact the library to sign up. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

For Kids

Lego Club for Kids at the Beals

Mondays, 4:00-5:00 p.m. Join us for fun-filled afternoons building Lego creations straight from your imagination! For for information, contact the library at 978-297-0300. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St., Winchendon.

Family Friendly Story Hour at the Chapel

Tuesdays, 10:00-11:00 a.m. For preschool age children. Parents must stay with their children for the story time. At the Chapel Downtown, 286 Central St, Winchendon.

CFCE Preschool Playgroup at the Beals

Thursdays, 1:00-2:00 p.m. Join us for an afternoon of free play, a craft, story time and music & movement. This program is in partnership with the Winchendon CFCE. Contact the library at 978-297-0300 for more information. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St., Winchendon.

Story Time at the Beals

Fridays, 10:00 a.m. Join us for a fun half hour of stories with Ms. Kristin and Ms. Melissa. This program is in partnership with the Winchendon Community Playgroups & CFCE. Contact the library at 978-297-0300 for more information. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St., Winchendon.

Beals Memorial Library

50 Pleasant St, Winchendon
978-297-0300
bealslibrary.org

Old Murdock Senior Center
52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon
978-297-3155
facebook.com/oldmurdock

The HUB / Winchendon CAC
5 Summer Dr, Winchendon
978-287-1667
www.the-hub.org
facebook.com/winchendoncac

UU Church of Winchendon
126 Central St, Winchendon
978-297-0554
uucw.ncmuuc.org

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church
52 Spruce St, Winchendon
978-297-0280
www.heartofmary.net

Winchendon American Legion Post #193
295 School St., Winchendon
978-297-0754

G.A.R. Park
Grove St and Murdock Ave,
Winchendon
Winchendon Community Park
86 Ingleside Dr, Winchendon
Winchendon Parks & Rec, 978-297-5410
facebook.com/Winchparksandrec

Murdock Middle High School
3 Memorial Dr, Winchendon
978-297-1256
www.winchendonk12.org

Clark Memorial YMCA
155 Central St
978-297-9622
www.theclarkymca.org

Winchendon News

Veterans Housing Project Kicks Off in Winchendon, MA

The Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center is moving forward with a state-supported project that will add 44 units of affordable housing for veterans to North Central Massachusetts

WINCHENDON, MA—(November 7, 2025)—After over five years of pre-development work, construction is underway at the former Poland and Streeter Elementary Schools in Winchendon, MA. The Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center (MVOC) intends to combine these two adjacent buildings into 44 units of affordable housing for veterans.

The Streeter and Poland re-development project is an adaptive re-use and new construction project that will transform the two vacant school buildings into one combined affordable housing complex for veterans. The interior space will also include a meeting room, clinic space, and staff offices. Throughout the exterior of this 3.8-acre site there will be 22 parking spaces, a courtyard, and recreational spaces.

Says Executive Director Dr. Stephanie Marchetti, “we’ve been hard at work with many partners throughout the state to get this project off the ground, and we’re excited the time has come to move forward. This project will add much needed and deserved housing for a vulnerable population, we’re excited to not just spearhead it but add to the 50 units of housing we already have.”

MVOC obtained the two schools for a nominal fee of \$1 from the Town of Winchendon via an RFP process a handful of years ago. Since that time they’ve received approximately a dozen “OneStop” program was created several years ago to allow organizations to apply for many state grants at one. These funds were appropriated by the legislature as part of the state’s broader

effort to address the housing shortage across the Commonwealth, which the new Healey-Driscoll administration has made a top priority. This combined award, coupled with a \$2m award secured by Representative Jon Zlotnik in the Economic Development Bill and several other state and private awards, gave the project the funding it needs to move forward.

“We have worked tirelessly with the state, who has been a steadfast supporter throughout the many ups and downs of this project,” stated Marchetti, “as well as with a variety of other entities—to include our joint venture partner at Valley Affordable Housing, our financial consultants at Barbara Sokoloff and Associates, our project managers at Accenture, our architects at Jones Whittsett, and our construction management team at veteran-led Commodore Builders. It takes a village to build a village, and we’ve certainly got a deep roster of collaborators.”

Photo courtesy of Stephanie MarchettiJoe Albanese, Chairman and CEO of Commodore builders, shared “we’ve worked closely with MVOC and the design team to right-size the project and budget, and we are eager to get started. The best part of our business is building projects that strengthen communities, and there is no better cause than creating housing that supports the veterans who have served our country to preserve our freedom.” Commodore is New England’s largest veteran-owned construction firm.

Said State Representative Jon Zlotnik, “I’m proud to have been part of the years long effort

to secure funding for this project. MVOC and Dr. Marchetti have a proven track record providing top notch support for our veterans. I’m glad the state is able to make this important investment in our community. This means a lot for Winchendon, MVOC, and it will mean even more for those vets who are able to live there.”

Currently, the MVOC offers veterans supportive services (such as counseling, benefits advisement, counseling, and a food and clothing pantry), as well as transitional supportive housing opportunities and 20 independent apartments. This project will double their housing inventory.

Board President and MVOC Founder Cathy McWilliams stated, “As Founder of MVOC, I have seen and experienced many chapters in the ongoing growth of our organization—an organization whose goal has always and will always be assisting our veterans in living resilient and productive lives. This project is yet another very exciting chapter in the long history of MVOC, thanks to the hard work of our Executive Director Stephanie Marchetti, the State of Massachusetts and especially State Representative Jon Zlotnik. This project will provide a wonderful place for our Veterans to call home.”

The Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center has been providing housing and supportive services to veterans throughout North Central Massachusetts for over 42 years. For more information on services provided and ways to support this project, visit veterans-outreach.org.



The Poland School as it currently is
Photo courtesy of Stephanie Marchetti



The Streeter School as it currently is
Photo courtesy of Stephanie Marchetti



From left: Winchendon Town Manager Bill McKinney, MVOC President and Founder Catht McWilliams, Congresswoman Lori Trahan, MVOC Executive Director Dr. Stephanie Marchetti, State Representative Jon Zlotnik

Photo courtesy of Stephanie Marchetti

Arina Masalskaia Wins Beals Prize for Young Poets



Arina Masalskaia
Photo courtesy of Beals Memorial Library

A panel of three distinguished judges proclaimed Cushing Academy student, Arina Masalskaia, the winner of the Beals Memorial Library’s third annual Beals Prize for Young Poets, for her poem, *Pending*. Second went to Grace Alatalo of Oakmont Regional High School for *At Atomic Tangerine*, and Yukimura Takahashi, also of Cushing Academy, took third prize with *Reminders of Japan*.

Ms. Masalskaia is a junior at Cushing and is spoken-word performer and multilingual writer from Moscow, Russia. She competed at National Speech & Debate Association Nationals in Original Spoken Word Poetry and publishes articles on philosophy and politics.

Her work is often based on her experiences growing up between cultures. In her free time, she fences competitively.

The competition judges had this to say about her poem, “The first place poem was instantly and unanimously chosen by the three of us. A long poem borrowing a form from the format of an interview, the questions it asks in each stanza are answered in short but cutting replies suggestive of harder truths without saying those directly. This poem has many of the features that make poems enjoyable—great use of pacing and rhythm, internal

sounds pulling us in, metaphor, great diction and clarity, surprises that keep us alert and on our toes, great syntax and a well-woven whole from its many parts, a clear and definite voice, and a sense of mystery leaving us aching from what might have come before the poem, and what comes next. Simply put, this is a very powerful poem.”

Other competition finalists included: Lukas Botnick of Cushing Academy for *The Game*; Ines Khamis of Cushing Academy for *To Be From a Place I Cannot Go: The Distance Between Two Freedoms*; Ophylia Li of Cushing Academy for [Untitled]; Kaitlyn Rossi of Athol High School for *Dead Eyes*; Stella Sun of Cushing Academy for *A Wanderer’s Song*; Lucas Torrado, formerly of Cushing Academy for *After Practice*; and Angelina Yu of Cushing Academy for [Untitled]. Jurors for the contest were poets Dr. Fred Gerhard, the 2024 winner of Art on the Trails in Massachusetts, and the author of *Drifting to “Hello”* (Khotso Publishing, 2023); and Dr. DeMisty Berllinger, author of *All Daughters Are Awesome Everywhere* (University of Nebraska Press) and the poetry collection *Peculiar Heritage* (Mason Jar Press). Also judging was educator, Jared D’Arcey, a Spanish teacher and Assistant Dean of Academics for Faculty Development at the Winchendon School.

The contest honors the memory of Charles L. Beals, the benefactor of the Beals Memorial Library, whose dedication to the written word continues to benefit the townspeople of Winchendon, Massachusetts over 110 years later. The Beals Prize for Poetry was funded by the Beals Memorial Library, and the Friends of the Library.

Winchendon News

Citizens Present Community Heart & Soul Action Plan for Winchendon to BOS



from left, Jane LaPointe, Miranda Jennings and Paul Hackett

Photo copyright Town of Winchendon

by Inanna Arthen

At the Board of Selectmen's meeting on Monday, November 10, three local residents who have been working with Winchendon's Community Heart & Soul project for the past three years came before the Board to discuss the action plan going forward that has evolved from the project. Appearing were Winchendon residents Jane LaPointe and Miranda Jennings, and Gardner resident Paul Hackett who has contributed a great deal of support to the project. As Ms. Jennings said, this was the third presentation the Board had heard about Community Heart & Soul over the last three years.

It all started, Ms. Jennings recapped, when "an opportunity was shared with us through our HEAL Collaborative work about the Vermont Country Store, which many of you have probably been to, has a grant through the Orton Foundation to help rural communities discover what matters most to them in a really engaging way. As all of us know who work in the community to try to really figure out what our community wants, is that community engagement is really hard—engaging the parents, engaging the residents, getting feedback."

The Community Heart & Soul team undertook a process of collecting residents' stories and interviewing them to find out what mattered most to Winchendon residents. "We actually went to where people were at," Ms. Jennings emphasized, not just posting another survey or inviting people to a meeting they couldn't attend. Interviewers spoke to residents individually at places like Fall Fest, and a lot of work went into collecting, transcribing and analyzing the responses. Winchendon was the first community in Massachusetts to be selected as a Heart & Soul community. Now there are three Massachusetts communities in the program, and the Town Administrator of Pepperell has reached out to Winchendon about how our process worked. Paul Hackett has given talks about it at several conferences.

Out of more than 400 pieces of resident feedback and stories, in interviews and surveys, the team derived five clear themes representing the shared values of the town. These were: "Local Matters" (strong economy, thriving small businesses), "People Matter" (connections, inclusion, kindness), "YOUth Matter" (safe spaces, education, leadership opportunities), "Town Pride Matters" (beautification, communication, community spirit) and "Nature Matters" (protecting our natural environment).

The first three of four steps in the process are "Connect," "Listen," and then "Prioritize" to create an action plan for the community going forward. After getting the data, the next question was "what are we going to do with this?" Ms. Jennings said, "It's very similar to our Master Plan. I was on the Master Plan Implementation Committee, and I know Jane here was part of

developing the Master Plan. I think this really informed the Master Plan in terms of letting us know, is it on point with what residents want? Because there wasn't a whole lot of resident input into the creation of the Master Plan, not anybody's fault, it's hard to get community input. And what we found is that it really is our Master Plan."

Ms. Jennings went on, "The funding was not to fund a project. It was to fund a process. So there's not a big end of project thing that we can show you. Other than that, everything we've done since then, including the transportation grant, the website, the *Courier*, the cross country sewer projects, all of those things, for those of us involved in this process, this was kind of the lens or the thumbs-up, yes, you're on track with what our community wants, making sure our projects align with what our residents want."

Mr. Hackett explained, "One of the reasons we found this successful is because you ask the people what they want, and then you engage the people with what they want to do. We sat down and listened to 61 stories. Some talked for 10 minutes, some talked for an hour and a half. Afterwards, we had mini-grants that we asked different people in town, 'what do you think is important? Okay, here's some money from the project that we had, go off and show us how this is going to work.' One of them that's still working well because of that is the youth engagement project. You had a number of people that worked in the middle school last year, and one of the stories that came from that project alone was that the kids felt engaged. They felt heard. The people that were doing that were making a difference. Doing this type of thing and actually listening to people, and then having them run with what they have, is where they take ownership." When people feel ownership, they continue the process by their own momentum.

Also, Mr. Hackett said, the surveys and interviews were checked against Winchendon's demographics—age groups, genders, income levels, types of housing and so on—to make sure that data was collected from members of every demographic group in the community. It all had to be analyzed and collated by hand, in hundreds of hours of work, because this was before AI. All of this data has had a very practical value in applying for grants for the town over the last couple of years.

Ms. LaPointe said, "That's really at the basis of Heart & Soul. It's the the engagement, what you hear from people. I know I'm off-script here, but it's how that then relates to the actions you take, the initiatives you put forward and the way you're able to engage people, because they see the evidence of having been heard, and it plays out."

She went on, "When I talk about a local, vibrant economy, or 'Local Matters,' they're talking about supporting small businesses, creating local

jobs, trying to keep buying and spending here in Winchendon. It was encouraging to review this data, Paul and I did a lot of that, and to begin to see how it directly aligns with what's in our Master Plan. So 'Local Matters' really aligns with the Economic Development chapter of our Master Plan, and it aligns with the land use goals also in our Master Plan, and maintaining that small town feel that really makes Winchendon special."

"The next one was 'People Matter,'" Ms. LaPointe went on. "And again, what people really talked about wasn't just our history, our location and all of that. They talked about the people who live here, and the appreciation for living in a place where they can have connections, a small town feel going on, where people look out for each other. There's a certain connection, things that we've been able to build on. A lot of people talked about the diversity that's here in Winchendon in terms of backgrounds, identities, perspective, how important that is. And that relates to the Master Plan in the chapter on Community Health and Engagement, which really talks about, how do we improve communication, get people working together, and things like that."

"The next one was 'Town Pride Matters.' Now, this shouldn't come as any surprise at all, because this is the value that people have in a town that looks cared for, well maintained, safe roads, attractive parks, clean neighborhoods, a downtown that looks well maintained and well used. But also people, when they talked about Town Pride, it was really a lot of the events that happened. Just to see how those have taken off, even in the last year or so with Parks and Rec, has been really, really good. And this, again, connects to the Master Plan with the focus on economic preservation, our open spaces and community engagement. So that combination of, it's what we look like as a town, but also what we do together as a town."

Ms. LaPointe added, "The fifth one was 'Nature Matters.' And this was really powerful to people, a wide variety of comments about the the natural land, the forests, the lakes, the trails, the access to them, the links this has to our open space and our land use goals. It speaks very well for some of us who a few weeks ago attended the state's celebration of the 1300 acres of land that the people from this town came out to speak to preserve, and that was the perfect example of this."

"YOUth Matter" is not actually part of the Master Plan, as Ms. Jennings pointed out—the Master Plan doesn't have a section about Education. "This was brought to the attention of the Master Plan Implementation Committee," Ms. Jennings said. "I think it really does speak to what matters in our community. I think our community cares deeply for education, for opportunities for our kids in terms of school, but also outside of school, opportunities and things for kids to do and giving back and things like that."

Ms. LaPointe said, "This isn't so much focused on what we adults can set up, so then the youth can do it. This is how do we help the youth engage in a way that they can become leaders in this, that we're listening to them and to the things that they care about, and help their voice and their initiatives take root. So they're learning to lead. They learn that they matter."

It was very encouraging to see that the Master Plan aligned with things that residents really want for their town, Ms. LaPointe said. In September, 2024, the Planning Board voted to formally adopt the Community Heart & Soul

Regional News and Events

Gardening

Gardening Gifts That Keep Giving



Kids gardening tools make a great gift for the youngsters in your life.
Photo courtesy of Corona Tools

by Melinda Myers

Gift the gardeners in your life with tools that are sure to make them smile as they put them to work throughout the coming years. No matter your budget, you are sure to find the perfect gift for your favorite gardener.

Help gardeners track the weather and rainfall in their backyard. You can find decorative and functional low- and high-tech thermometers in a wide range of prices. Consider giving them a rain gauge to help monitor rainfall so they know when and how much to water.

For the indoor gardener, paint a pot, preferably one with drainage holes, that they can use to display their favorite plant. If your budget allows, add potting mix and a plant or gift certificate so they can select a new or favorite plant from the garden center. Include a pair of snips to help them trim, groom and keep their indoor plants looking their best.

Purchase a fun watering can or decorate one with decoupage. This is a fun gift for kids and adults to make for family and teachers. Just select a plastic or metal watering can, gather pictures, and secure and seal them to the watering can with a suitable material found at craft stores.

Dress up your favorite gardener's gear with colorful tools like the British Meadow Pruner & Holster Set endorsed by the Royal Horticultural Society. The pruners have a comfort grip and are perfect for cutting small branches and stems and the floral holster will keep them handy when gardening. This makes a great gift for gardeners that appreciate aesthetics as well as quality tools.

And what gardener doesn't need a good bypass hand pruner with two sharp blades to make clean cuts. Look for one with a large 1/4" cutting capacity if your gardener does extensive pruning. Select one with narrow, comfortable nonslip grips like those on the ClassicCUT® Bypass Pruner for those with small- to medium-sized hands. Stuff one in their stocking, combine it with a new garden book, or wrap it up as it makes a great gift on its own.

Don't forget the youngsters on your list. Research shows children exposed to the outdoors and gardening are more focused, do better in school, and have less severe ADHD symptoms. Girls raised in a landscaped environment are more confident and less subject to peer pressure. By encouraging them to garden you might be helping them acquire a lifelong skill and get help planning, planting and tending the garden.

Giving them their own kid-sized garden gear (coronatools.com) can make gardening more fun and easier as they garden by your side or in their own garden plot or container. Look for tools designed to fit children's hands like Corona's kids 3-piece garden tool set that has everything a young gardener needs to dig, explore, plant and tend their garden. A kid-sized

wheelbarrow is just the right size for hauling plants, soil and mulch.

Don't let the hustle of the holiday season put a damper on your gift giving. Keep in mind this act of kindness generates happiness in ourselves and others.

Melinda Myers has written over 20 gardening books, including *The Midwest Gardener's Handbook, 2nd Edition* and *Small Space Gardening*. She hosts *The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything"* instant video series and the nationally-syndicated *Melinda's Garden Moment* radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine and is commissioned by Corona Tools for her expertise to write this article. Her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.

Financial Focus®

Smart financial moves to make before year-end

As the year winds down, it's the perfect time to make some smart moves before the calendar flips to 2026. Think of it as a financial tune-up that could help with saving money and setting you up for success in the months ahead. Here are some things to consider.

- Don't forget about required withdrawals. If you're 73 or older, you'll need to take your required minimum distribution from traditional retirement accounts to avoid a 25% penalty on any amount you should have withdrawn but didn't. This rule also applies to some people who inherited retirement accounts, including certain Roth accounts.
- Use your flexible spending money. Got money sitting in a flexible spending account at work? Remember, these accounts follow a "use it or lose it" rule. Check with your HR department about your plan's specific deadlines for spending the money and submitting receipts. Whether it's that dental work you've been putting off or new prescription glasses you need, now's the time to use those funds before they disappear.
- Boost your retirement savings. Consider ramping up your pretax retirement contributions before year-end. Not only will this help your future self, but it might also reduce your current tax bill. If your workplace plan allows it, you can even set up automatic increases for next year so you won't have to remember to do it later.
- Share the wealth through gifting. In 2025, the current tax rules let you give family or friends up to \$19,000 per person without affecting your lifetime gift tax exemption. Married couples can combine their allowances to give up to \$38,000 per person. Plus, you can pay someone's tuition or medical bills directly without these payments counting against your gift limits at all.
- Navigate new tax changes. The recently passed One Big Beautiful Bill Act has made several tax provisions permanent, including lower individual tax rates and higher standard deductions. However, it also introduces new changes that might affect your situation. It's worth sitting down with a financial advisor or tax professional to understand how these updates impact your specific circumstances.
- Examine your investments. Take some time to review your investment portfolio. Ask yourself: Did your investments perform as expected this year? Do they still match your goals and comfort level with risk? You might need to rebalance things to get back on track.
- Build up your emergency fund. It's ideal to have enough cash saved to cover three to six months of living expenses in an easily accessible account. This safety net can prevent you from having to raid your retirement savings when unexpected expenses pop up.
- Review your estate planning documents. This is especially important if you've had major life changes like marriage, divorce or a new baby. Don't forget to check the beneficiary designations on all your bank and brokerage accounts as well as life insurance policies—these often override what's written in your will.

Taking care of these financial housekeeping tasks now can help you start the new year on solid ground.



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HEART & SOUL
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action plan as an addendum or appendix to the town’s Master Plan. A lot of things that have happened in Winchendon in the last two years have been inspired and motivated by the Community Heart & Soul initiative.

Mr. Hackett said that he gets calls from all over the country asking how Winchendon was so successful with the project. Winchendon was featured on the Community Heart & Soul website as “a shining town in the United States.” “It hasn’t happened yet, but the next thing we’re working on is engaging volunteers where they want to fit,” he went on. “What we have found is there’s a lot of people in Winchendon that want to give back, but they’re not sure ‘Where do we give to? How do we do it?’ And so we’re actually in the beta process of working with different organizations to say, Okay, you want to help out. Here’s where we can fit. Let’s figure out what works in Winchendon, because it may be different than Gardner or Westminster or whatever. So probably about six months from now, you’ll hear some stats of, hey, we’ve got 50 or 60 volunteers that actually are now engaged in the community and weren’t before because of the process that we learned through Heart & Soul.”

Ms. Jennings said to the Board, “Our request for you is just to really please include resident input. We have some funding in this town that a lot of times we don’t have through the HEAL

Collaborative. We have funding for resident leaders and youth leaders, because a lot of people don’t have the luxury of volunteering. So we have a built-in leadership body of citizens in our community that we can utilize to call on and as Paul mentioned, we are activating all of these volunteers. So please use this process, or some resemblance of this maybe, or think about using it when we do another Master Plan.”

Also, Ms. Jennings said, “We would respectfully propose that the Board of Selectmen would formally endorse the Heart & Soul statements in a resolution, just to reinforce our commitment and celebration of these statements and everything that the residents have done. We want to make some big posters that we can put around Town Hall or around the town in different areas with the statements. I think it will help unify the town around the things that they care about, which are in the Master Plan. The Master Plan can be a big, scary document, but this is something that the community came up with, and I think has five very clear statements.”

Members of the Board of Selectmen agreed that they’re in favor of a resolution supporting the statements, and they would just need a formal document to vote on and sign. The Heart & Soul team members agreed that they can prepare such a document.

Board member Erika Eitland said, “I also think it’s really timely to hear these five pillars because of our strategic goal planning that we’re

going to do with the Town Manager. Some of the suggested goals are very aligned, from economic and community development, from communication and civic engagement, from organizational leadership. I feel like there’s an opportunity to in the spirit of ‘de-siloing,’ bringing in some of the sub-themes that you brought up in that overall report, to make sure that we’re providing that specificity that has been reinforced and validated by what the community has already said, so that we’re using those actions to move this forward and have some kind of measurable change.” She added that having so much data on what the community wants and is asking for is a tremendous help in writing grants such as the one recently awarded to the CAC by T-Mobile for the Community HUB.

You can read the not-at-all big or scary Master Plan at www.townofwinchendon.com/DocumentCenter/View/397/Community-Master-Plan-PDF

and the Community Heart & Soul Action Plan, also totally friendly, at www.townofwinchendon.com/DocumentCenter/View/1490/CHS-Community-Action-Plan

These are PDFs so you can also download them and read them offline.

More information about Winchendon’s Community Heart & Soul Initiative can be found on the HEAL Collaborative website at www.thehealcollaborative.org/communityheartandsoul

Mass Dept. of Fish & Game Hosts Opening Celebration for 1,325 Acres of Conserved Land in Winchendon and Ashburnham

by Inanna Arthen

On, Tuesday, October 21, a Winchendon Forest Conservation Celebration was held in the woods off of North Ashburnham Road, to officially open and celebrate one of the largest conservation projects in Massachusetts history. The celebration was hosted by the Massachusetts Department of Fish & Game (DFG), the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Mass Audubon and Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. Invited were local leaders, community partners and neighbors from Winchendon and Ashburnham, which share parts of the conserved property. Some 75 people attended, many of them walking into the site from the parking area on Spring Street, enjoying a perfect fall day with blue sky, bright sun, mild temperatures and brilliant foliage at peak colors.

A small clearing off North Ashburnham Road was set up with tables, a lectern, a sound system, folding chairs, easels holding displays and large United States and Massachusetts flags. Stretched between two brass stands was a taut red ribbon. Refreshments included apple cider and apple cider doughnuts from Red Apple Farm in Phillipston, part of which is protected by a Conservation Restriction

(CR) put in place with help of Mount Grace.

The ceremony itself started with the reading of a Proclamation by Town Crier Kathy Ann Becker, from Wendell, MA, dressed in 18th century garb and ringing a handbell to call everyone to attention.

Following this, Winchendon Town Manager Bill McKinney came to the lectern. He gave a summary of how this project happened. “We had a group that came that wanted to purchase this. They were looking to build a solar field. They had come, they made some presentations, I think was about 1500 acres. Most of it was here in Winchendon. The rest was in East Winchendon, also known as Ashburnham,” he said, raising laughter from the group.

He went on, “They threw out a \$6 million number to be able to buy this property, and they thought, okay, they’re gonna have it. But because it was in conservation, the town had the right of first refusal, and the town didn’t have \$6 million to come up with.” Then Mount Grace approached the town saying they wanted to match the offer. “We were looking at it, obviously, from a financial point of view. Another \$400,000 a year in [solar] revenue would be helpful,” Mr. McKinney said. “But the town came

together. They packed that Board of Selectmen meeting in December, almost two years ago now. There had never been that many people on the second floor of Town Hall. Fortunately, the Fire Chief looked the other way, so we could get everybody in there. And the public spoke. One after another, got up and said, We want to protect this land. We do not want these trees taken down. And that public outpouring really swayed the Board of Selectmen. You know, obviously times are tough all around for all communities, but the town spoke and the Selectmen listened, and thanks to all of you, we now have this land protected forever. So on behalf of the town of Winchendon and the Board of Selectmen, I want to say thank you for your outpouring of support and making this happen.”

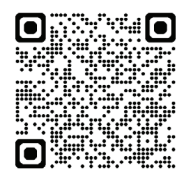
Many people that morning mentioned that Board of Selectmen’s hearing with its historic high attendance. (For the *Courier’s* report of that night, see “Huge Turnout For Public Hearing as BOS Makes Decision on Conserving 1100-Acre Property” in the December 14-21, 2023 edition of the online *Winchendon Courier*)

Tom O’Shea, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, said that this was

one of the first things he was asked to work on when he was appointed as Commissioner two and a half years ago. “It’s the sixth largest in the central district for the department in terms of acquisition,” he said. “It’s one of our largest projects ever. I believe that the Department of Fish and Game have about 882 acres, and the remainder are with [Department of Conservation and Recreation] and Mass Audubon... some of the things that are really special about it, one is, it is really critical habitat for both rare and common plants and animals, including five listed species, which include some dragonflies and some other species that are protected. It protects water quality. It’s up in the headwaters of the Millers River. It’s got a lot of these big, great trees that are really helpful at storing carbon. And really it’s preserving what is a connected landscape, a large forested landscape all the way up to New Hampshire.”

Commissioner O’Shea said that preserving and restoring biological diversity is a primary goal of the department. In Massachusetts they have a goal to protect lands and waters 30 percent by 2030, and they’re now at 28 percent. They’re aiming for 40 percent by 2050, focusing on 425,000 acres most important for

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Read the Winchendon Courier Online Every Week!
News, events, police logs, obituaries, community directory
and archives of every previous issue back to September, 2019
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Uploaded every Thursday night

Community Notice Board

Town Committee Monthly Meetings by Week
All Meetings in Town Hall

week	MON	TUE	WED	THUR
1st	Communications Committee 4:30pm Board of Health 6:00pm	Planning Board 6:00pm		School Committee 6:00pm
2nd	Board of Selectmen 6:30pm	Finance Committee 7:00pm	Agricultural Commission 7:00pm	Conservation Commission 6:00pm
3rd		Planning Board 6:00pm	Winchendon Redevelopment Authority 5:00pm Zoning Board of Appeals 7:00pm	School Committee 6:00pm
4th	Board of Selectmen 6:30pm			

Agendas, minutes and meeting recordings available on the Town website at www.townofwinchendon.com/129/AGENDAS-MINUTES, as well as on the pages for each Board or Committee.

Boards may cancel or change times for meetings, or add extra meetings, based on specific business at hand. Check the Town Meetings Calendar on the town website, www.townofwinchendon.com.

Toy Town Trolley Now Running Later on Saturdays!

We’ve expanded service hours to help more Winchendon residents—especially those in need of transportation to warming centers, shelters, and essential services.

New Saturday Hours are 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Book ahead! Saturday rides must be scheduled by 3:00 p.m. on Friday.

Door-to-door rides within Winchendon are available for:

- Medical appointments
- Grocery shopping
- Shelter and warming center access
- Pharmacy trips
- And more

Call (978) 297-3155 or email communityconnector@winchendon-cac.org.

Prefer to book with your phone? Download the Community Connector app at www.townofwinchendon.com/577/Get-the-App

Let your neighbors know! This expanded schedule helps ensure safe, reliable transportation for those who need it most—especially during colder weather.

Town Street List and 2024 Town Reports Available

Copies of the 2025 Winchendon Street List of Residents are available at the Town Clerk’s office in Winchendon Town Hall, 109 Front St. The cost is \$17 each, \$14 for seniors.

Report a Pothole to the DPW

You can report potholes directly to the DPW using this form on the town website:

www.townofwinchendon.com/FormCenter/Public-Works-6/Report-a-Pothole-50

Winchendon Lions Want to Welcome You!

The Winchendon Lions meet at the Winchendon American Legion Post 193, 295 School St., downstairs hall, 7:00 p.m.

Meetings are on the third Tuesday of each month, September through June. Dues are used for all Administrative cost, which is why we can say “All money received through fundraisers go back to the community, eye research, or other natural disasters around the world!”

Feel free to join us and try it out. We would love to see you!

If you have any questions feel free to call Joni 978-297-2753. Please leave a message if no answer!

“WHERE THERE’S A NEED, THERE IS A LION”

Questions or Concerns? Email the Town Manager!

A one-click email form has been added to the town website for all residents who would like to contact the Town Manager with concerns and questions about things happening in the community. The direct link is: www.townofwinchendon.com/506/QUESTIONS-COMMENTS-FOR-THE-TOWN-MANAGER

Special Town Meeting

Monday, December 1, 2025 - 7:00 p.m.

Murdock Middle High School Gymnasium, 3 Memorial Drive

Doors open at 6:00 p.m. - please arrive early to check in!

Town Committee Vacancies as of October 27, 2025

If you’d like to be an active participant in decision-making and management for your community, consider joining a town committee or board. There are a number of vacancies currently open.

- Agricultural Commission - 1 vacancy, 3 alternate vacancies
- Audit Committee - 1 vacancy
- Board of Health - 1 vacancy
- Charter/Bylaw Review Committee - 1 vacancy
- Communication Committee - 1 vacancy
- Council on Aging - 2 vacancies
- Cultural Council - 11 vacancies
- Fence Viewer and Field Driver - 1 vacancy
- Historical District Commission - 1 alternate vacancy
- Parks & Recreation Commission - 1 vacancy, 1 student vacancy
- Planning Board - 1 vacancy
- Winchendon Commission on Disabilities - 1 vacancy
- Zoning Board of Appeals - 1 vacancy

If you’d like more information about any of these positions or are interested in being considered for an appointment, contact the Town Manager’s office at 978-297-0085, or send a letter of interest to ddennis@winchendon-ma.gov or Town Manager, 109 Front Street Dept. 1, Winchendon MA 01475.

For a description of each board or committee, see: www.townofwinchendon.com/DocumentCenter/View/440/Selectmen-Appointed-Boards-and-Committees-July-2024-PDF (PDF).

Senior Workoff Program Applications for FY26 Available on Town Website

Applications for the Senior Property Tax Work-Off program for FY26 (July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026) are now available at www.townofwinchendon.com/civicalerts.aspx?aid=40.

This program allows eligible senior citizens to do odd jobs for the town in exchange for an offset in their property taxes. The credit is equivalent to \$15 per hour for a maximum of \$1,100 per household during the fiscal year.

To qualify, a senior must be at least 60 years old, own and occupy a home in Winchendon, have an annual income of less than \$40,150 if single or a combined household income of less than \$45,900 if married, have transportation to work, and be able to work during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Applications for the program are now available in the Town Manager’s office and on the town website at <https://www.townofwinchendon.com/documentcenter/view/226>, and will be accepted until the ten (10) slots are filled. There are different types of positions that are available depending on preference and qualifications of the resident and the needs of each department.

Types of past and current positions have been: Custodial services, clerical help for both School & Town, Library Aides, Senior Center Aides, Cable Station Operator, Bike Path Clean up, Painting, Light Outdoor Work and Classroom Volunteers.

Please contact the Town Manager’s Office at (978) 297-5431 or ddennis@winchendon-ma.gov for more information or if you need an application mailed to you.

Advertise in the Winchendon Courier!

The *Winchendon Courier* Online is uploaded every Thursday night and reaches hundreds of Winchendon readers every week. The monthly print edition of the *Winchendon Courier* has a press run of 500 and an uptake of over 90 percent. The press run will be increased as circulation and demand grow.

If you’re a business owner, entrepreneur, local organization or individual, contact us for information about display ad requirements and rates. We offer:

- Free ad design services for our paying advertisers, if desired
- Discounted annual rate for advertisers who commit to a full year of weekly ads
- Automatic placement of their ad in the monthly print addition, at no extra charge, for advertisers who place their ad for a full month in the online edition
- A range of sizes from business card to (in the print edition) full page
- Flexibility—if you have questions about formatting or dimensions, contact us.

For a rate card, more information or questions, contact:

editor@winchendoncourier.net

Winchendon News

Winchendon PD Arrest Suspect in Stabbing Incident

On Thursday November 20, 2025 at approximately 1:00 a.m. Winchendon Police responded to 5 School St. for a reported stabbing. On arrival Officers Dylan Mei and James Maynard discovered a female victim who had been stabbed in the neck with a kitchen knife. The alleged perpetrator was sitting inside a locked vehicle in the driveway. As the Officers approached the suspect, he began stabbing himself in the neck. Officers were able to break a window and gain access to the suspect who was eventually subdued with a Taser.

The female victim who is related to the suspect was transported to UMASS Hospital and is expected to make a full recovery. The suspect identified as 25 year old Jack Newbrough of 122 Riverbend St. Athol, MA had superficial self-inflicted injuries and was arrested at the scene. Mr. Newbrough is charged with assault and battery with serious bodily injury, and assault to murder.



The conservation land gets its official ribbon cutting
Photo by Carolyn Sellars



Town Crier Kathy Ann Becker opens the ceremonies with a proclamation
Photo by Inanna Arthen

CELEBRATION

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wildlife, and knitting habitats together in large, connected corridors.

Nicole LaChapelle, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, echoed what Mr. O'Shea said, adding, "Given that October is archeology month, it's perfect that we're here today, and also to understand the deep history above and below these lands and where they have been in the course of stewardship well before us, and that it's up to us and all of our partners to keep that going forward again."

David O'Neill, President of Mass Audubon said, "I was at the Winchendon town hearing back in December 2023. I was stuck in the hallway because there was so many people there like hanging from the rafters, and I didn't know how the town was going to resolve this question, and I don't think that the town council did either in that meeting. We had heard they were sort of on the fence as to whether or not they're going to accept us purchasing the property. And I was struck by person after person after person for two and a half hours talking about the importance of these forests. I was blown away by it. I was blown away by the people who came in with facts and statistics about the biodiversity and the carbon rich forest and everything else.

"But what struck me the most was the people who talked about how important these lands were for them from a cultural perspective, the fact that these are lands we hike on, these are lands we hunt on, these are lands we fish in. These are

places that I take my kids. I heard that over and over and over again, and we want to keep those places for the next generation, the next generation, and the next generation. And that cultural connection these forests had to the people around here, it struck me was very deep, and I think it moved the council to ultimately make a wise and good decision for all of us."

MountGraceLandConservation Trust Executive Director Emma Ellsworth spoke of how moving it was to hear stories people told about their long connection to these very woods. One young man had learned to hunt from his grandfather there. Another woman, a grandmother with her grandchild at the meeting with her, said she was listening to the Board of Selectmen talk about what the town stood to get in revenue from the solar project. She said, "My granddaughter's access to open space, to wildlife, to nature, is worth a whole lot more than \$29 a year. And if I pay \$29 to go out to McDonald's for lunch, I can pay it for my kid to have access to nature." Ms. Ellsworth added, "We protect nature because we're honoring those that came before us and hoping to pass some of that on. And then we protect it just because it is and because it needs us, and that's part of our relationship and our partnership. And so it was just such a blessing and honor to be part of this project."

Fred Sellars, retired environmental consultant and Chair of the Ashburnham Conservation Commission, also spoke about how many people came together and went to their town boards to make

a case for exercising the right of first refusal and conserving the land. He then said, "When a property is released from Chapter 61 protection, municipalities have the right of first refusal to acquire the property. One change in the process that I would like to see is a mandatory public hearing even when the municipality does not wish to exercise that right. The public needs the option to weigh in on any opportunity to preserve protected lands.

"I was impressed by not only the number of residents who showed up for the towns' meetings on the topic, but how important it was to people across a wide spectrum of ages, backgrounds, and political leanings. With the backdrop of the constant drumbeat of our nation's current political divisiveness, it was refreshing to see that the importance of preservation of our ecological resources was a powerful community unifier, something that people from all walks of life could agree on."

The final speaker, Winchendon resident Jane LaPointe, said, "In 2022, Winchendon's HEAL Initiative launched a Community Heart & Soul project. We spoke with people about what matters to them, what they care about, their hopes and dreams for Winchendon. We collected stories and data from many different voices, people from different backgrounds, people of different ages.

"Nature and access to the natural world rose to the top of what matters to Winchendon. 'Nature Matters' became one of our five Community Heart & Soul statements: 'We cherish the quiet beauty

of Winchendon's natural environment and all that it contributes to our lives, our health, and our sense of peace and well-being.'

"Embedded in this Statement is the recognition of what nature contributes to our personal, our social, and our economic health and wellbeing.

"This point is recognized in our Town's Master Plan. The chapter on Economic Development highlights our natural and scenic resources and the potential for recreation as a catalyst for commercial, economic, and community development.

"The young people in our community also care deeply about nature and our environment. When a banner project was launched in town, featuring drawings of young people from our schools, pictures of landscapes, trees, nature, and wildlife were prominent features on these banners.

"So, it was obvious even before this land conservation issue—or opportunity—surfaced that the people of Winchendon valued and cared about the natural world and the environment that we live in."

When the speakers were finished, Ms. Ellsworth, Mr. Sellars, Mr. O'Shea, Mr. McKinney, and Mr. O'Neill grouped around the ribbon stretched in front of the lectern, while Ms. LaPointe did the honors with the giant scissors. Attendees applauded as the area was officially opened.

(Read the state press release at www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-celebrates-1300-acres-conserved-in-winchendon-and-ashburnham.)

The January print edition of The Winchendon Courier will go to press on Monday, December 22 at noon. Content for that edition must be received by the publisher by Sunday, December 21.