

Town Manager Gives Preliminary Budget Presentation for FY2027 to Tri-Board Meeting



Town Manager Bill McKinney, Board of Selectmen members Erika Eitland, Tiffany Newton and Andrew Beauvais, and School Committee member Greg Vine listen to a question from School Committee Chair Mike Barbaro

Photo copyright Town of Winchendon

by Inanna Arthen

At the joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee and School Committee on Thursday, February 5, members of the three boards heard the first “preliminary budget presentation” of the FY2027 town budget given by Town Manager Bill McKinney.

There was some suspense around the FY2027 budget, because it was at this time last year that voters were told about the deep budget deficit—more than \$4 million initially—faced by the town for FY2026, and the need for a Proposition 2-1/2 override to keep the library, Senior Center and Parks & Recreation Commission from being defunded and closed. After the more modest of two proposed overrides passed last May, voters were warned that the town would continue to face the same dilemma because some mandatory costs (such as health insurance) were consistently increasing more than 2.5 percent.

It came as a muted relief when Mr. McKinney explained that in the preliminary budget for FY2027, which is still being worked on, the town is only seeing a deficit of \$1.4 million, and no override or closing of entire departments was recommended.

Mr. McKinney explained that some of the budget figures were based on estimates, and he hoped the final information will be coming in within a few weeks. The School Department budget is increasing by \$608,169 (or 3.37 percent). Police Department is increasing by \$137,230, and Fire Department

by \$345,645. “The [Fire] chief has a pretty impressive business plan put together that will actually bring more revenue for the town, which is why that number is higher. But you also see the ambulance revenue number is higher as well,” Mr. McKinney said. DPW is increasing \$225,570. “There are just a lot of costs going on with maintaining all the town vehicles,” Mr. McKinney said.

Grouped together in the presentation, Town Manager/Board of Selectmen/Finance Committee expenses were reduced by \$216,210. Mr. McKinney explained that although there were some salary increases, a \$250,000 line item called “Town Manager Reserve” for covering negotiated salary increases has been zeroed out. Finance/Legal is increasing by \$48,500 because attorneys’ rates are going up. IT/Town Clerk is increasing by \$48,185. The town is moving its accounting from QDS to Munis, and this will make handling the accounts more efficient. But Town Clerk expenses are budgeted higher because there will also be a state election in FY2027, in November 2026, along with the annual town election in May 2027.

On the second slide, Conservation, Planning, Town Hall, Building Department and Health Department all had small increases. Council on Aging is increasing \$21,470, Veterans’ Services \$16,000, Beals Memorial Library \$19,625, Parks & Recreation and Historical Commissions jointly are increasing \$13,370.

Mr. McKinney explained that

he was using an estimate for the Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School (Monty Tech) assessment because he didn’t have the actual number for it yet—it’s calculated based on the school’s costs and Winchendon’s enrollment there. The placeholder is an increase of \$17,000.

“Unfortunately, [school bus transportation] continues to go up,” Mr. McKinney said—it’s increasing \$101,000 in the preliminary budget. “We’re going into year two of a five year bid that we had with only one bidder. That is something...that they are looking at, because a lot of town and school districts only have one bidder. So that’s something the state is looking into.”

School tuition, for Winchendon students to attend school choice placements and charter schools, is up \$3,020, but the total budget amount is \$1,041,790.

Debt service is increased \$100,000 (to a total for FY2027 of \$1,285,000) because of borrowing for a new ambulance, the school boiler project and the \$200,000 feasibility study for the MSBA school buildings. Property and liability insurance is increasing \$68,000.

Retirement costs are increasing \$256,200 (10.46 percent), Workers’ Compensation \$15,000, Unemployment insurance \$30,000. “I put some extra money into there because we’ve had a lot of unemployment claims this year. I think we’re well over halfway through that \$150,000 that we had budgeted,” Mr. McKinney said. Medicare is increasing \$15,000 and Health/

Life Insurance is increasing \$549,300 (17.53 percent) “So the health insurance, we do not know our number yet,” Mr. McKinney clarified. “Obviously, last year we had a significant increase that was projected through by 16 percent, I put in, I think a 15 percent escalation. The health insurance is broken down between active and retirees. So the actives are on a fiscal year, the retirees are a calendar year, because it ties with Medicare. And that one just went up January 1, was up over 20 percent for the retirees. So that’s a significant cost. So again, that’s an estimate. I don’t know what that final is going to be. Then Medicare taxes. So as salaries go up, obviously the Medicare tax goes up.” (Medicare is one of what are called “payroll taxes,” along with Social Security.)

Added all together, the expense side of the FY2027 budget is increasing \$2,452,544 from FY2026, or 6.45 percent.

Mr. McKinney then presented the projected town revenues for FY2027.

Chapter 70/Local Aid from the state is increasing \$121,023 (or 0.73 percent). Property tax revenue is expected to increase \$546,737 (or 3.12 percent). Excise tax has not yet been confirmed by the state, so that is an unknown. Ambulance revenue is projected to increase \$300,000, or 46 percent.

Other revenues are projected to stay largely the same, and are relatively small bits of the whole budget. They include things such as building permits, the 3 percent retail cannabis tax, the meals tax, Special Ed Medicaid reimbursements, interest income, PILOT payments from solar fields, and fines and fees paid to the Town Clerk. (Voters rejected a lodging excise tax at the Special Town Meeting last December which would have added a bit more revenue from AirBnB short-term rentals that have sprouted up around Lake Monomonac and a few other places in town.)

Turn to **FY2027 BUDGET** page 2

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FY2027 BUDGET
continued from page 1

Altogether, the town's revenue is projected to increase by \$1,127,726, or 2.98 percent. The difference between projected expenses and projected revenues for FY2027 is a deficit of \$1,439,871.

Mr. McKinney moved to a slide displaying a chart of the amount of state aid Winchendon has received from FY2023 through FY2027, showing how the annual increase has plummeted over those years. Between FY2023 and FY2024, Chapter 70 funding increased 12.07 percent and Local Aid increased 3.2 percent. For FY2025, the increases were only 2.78 percent for Chapter 70 and 3.0 percent for Local Aid. For FY2027, the increases are 0.64 percent for Chapter 70 and 1.4 percent for Local Aid.

"So here's a chart that I've brought up every year since I've been here," Mr. McKinney said. "It's the revenue from the state. The Mass Municipal Association put out a study. It's actually on their website. They've been talking about

it quite a bit, called the Fiscal Storm. It's hitting all of the cities and towns across the state. And basically the state's not keeping up with what it should be giving the cities and towns...the property taxes are only going up two and a half percent. And as you can see, that's a very small number on what the state gives us [for FY2027]. That's less than a 1 percent increase. So that's a big part of the problem, we're not getting more money from the state." (You can read the MMA report at www.mma.org/resources/a-perfect-storm-cities-and-towns-face-historic-fiscal-pressures/.)

(When Proposition 2-1/2 was passed in 1980, there was an agreement baked into it that the state would compensate cities and towns for their lower property tax amounts through higher levels of funding from the state budget. To a large extent, this has not happened.)

School Committee Chair Mike Barbaro raised the topic of the delinquent property taxes owed to the town, saying that the town could hire one of the third party companies

the town auditor mentioned to buy the debt and collect the taxes. Mr. McKinney said that was possible but it would only be a one-time payment. School Committee member Karen Kast mentioned another source of uncollected money mentioned by the auditor, the tailings or uncashed checks that are floating around, suggesting that the town can resolve those.

Continuing with his presentation, Mr. McKinney said, "The goal this year is to not have to go for an override, but to try to find some of those one-time funds to try to get through the year. But again, we have an ongoing, like every town does, a problem that we have many, many costs that are growing more than two and a half percent, and we can only go up two and a half percent on our property taxes. The state, which gives us almost as much as taxes, is going up less than 1 percent. So if they were going up two and a half percent, we'd be in much better shape. If they gave us the extra \$400,000 that they gave us last year, that'd be \$300,000 off

this \$1.4 million. So that's where we stand right now."

Mr. McKinney then went over the four Enterprise Funds. The Water, Sewer and Transfer Station Enterprise Funds are doing exactly what they are supposed to do, with revenue higher than expenses by very small amounts. The PEG Access Enterprise Fund is unchanged. He confirmed that the town still has a contract with Templeton allowing Templeton residents to use the Winchendon transfer station, as well as a shared animal control agreement. Those agreements will be looked at with Templeton's town administrator.

Several members of the boards suggested possible things to consider, including changing town counsel (Mr. McKinney said that attorneys' fees are about the same everywhere) or forming an Enterprise Fund for the ambulance service (the ambulance fees are not enough to cover the Fire Department expenses as well).

Beals Memorial Library Plans "Community Conversations"

by Inanna Arthen

At the Board of Selectmen's meeting on Monday, February 9, Patti Stanko, long-time staff member at the Beals Memorial Library and J Lillie, member of the Friends of the Beals Memorial Library, came forward to introduce the library's upcoming series of open community discussions, titled "Bridging Ideas and Building Futures." These will be held monthly from February through May.

"I have flyers with me, which I'm glad to pass out to the Select Board, and we will have information at the library and all around town," Ms. Stanko said. "And we're going to be just talking about 'community' – what it means, how people can get involved in the town, addressing issues that have been facing the town over the last couple of years, and see where we go from there. We're inviting everybody to come, any age. If someone's in high school or younger, we would appreciate their participation as well. So they're going to be on a Saturday morning from 10:00 to 12:00 at the library [at 50] Pleasant Street."

Asked if registration was required, Mr. Lillie said, "People can just show up. However, there will be information on both the library Facebook page and on partnering websites like Cornerstone Church, and people will be able to sign up and let us know that they're coming or that they're attending the event."

"This sort of springs out of the *Hey, Kiddo* conversations that we were part of a few years ago, and carrying on in that spirit. We were able to get a CHNA9 grant, which allowed us to hire a mediator to come in and mediate and process after these conversations with the citizens of the town. Our goal is to bring out about 50 people intergenerationally, and that way to have a conversation around the idea of, 'what is community to you?' 'What do we want our community to look like?' And then 'what do we have to do to get there?' And 'what are we willing to pay, or what the cost of that?' And we're



J Lillie and Patti Stanko address the BOS
Image copyright Town of Winchendon

hoping to create, through the mediated conversation, some form of action steps that we maybe can take to move forwards towards the community that we are beginning to say we want to have. We've made some marvelous strides in the last few years, and I'd love to see those continue."

As Board Chair Andrew Beauvais noted, there are four sessions, all from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., each with a different topic.

- Saturday, February 28, "What Does the Word Community Mean to You?"
- Saturday, March 28, "Who Do We Want to be as a Community?"
- Saturday, April 25, "How Do We Build the Community We Want to Live In?"
- Saturday, May 16, "What Are we Prepared to Do to Become the Community We Want to Be?"

Board member Erika Eitland said, "I would also like to invite Patti and J back after those sessions to have a bit of a report out, so that we have the synthesis for how it might help guide us in our conversations, knowing that the Board of Selectmen is responsible for helping make that a reality for us. So if you would mind coming back in June or July, it'd be wonderful to have you." Ms. Stanko and Mr. Lillie said they would love to do that. Ms. Stanko added that their third partner in organizing the conversations is Beals Memorial Library Trustee Jane LaPointe, who wasn't able to be there that night.

(For more details, see the entries on each date in the Community Connector calendar, or the Beals website page at www.bealslibrary.org/conversations)

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Winchendon News

Department Heads Clarify FY2027 Budget Requests to Tri-Board Meeting



Chief Smith (left) confirms a point with Town Manager Bill McKinney
Photo copyright Town of Winchendon



Chief Wolski (left) explains the PD budget to the Tri-Board members
Photo copyright Town of Winchendon

by Inanna Arthen

Following Town Manager Bill McKinney's preliminary presentation of the draft town budget for FY2027 to the joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee and School Committee on Thursday, February 5, the Fire and Police Chiefs came forward to explain their budget requests in more detail and answer questions.

Chief of Police Dan Wolski was the first to take "the hot seat," saying he wouldn't go through all the police budget line by line, but wanted to touch on the bigger items. While most of the salary line items have increases, Chief Wolski said, "a significant factor is that, as I mentioned several times in the last year and a half, we're anticipating five police retiring in the next three years. Two of those five are going to be retiring around July of this coming year...I did not reduce the salaries for those officers that are retiring because, particularly for a preliminary budget, I didn't think it was prudent to do that, because although I'm pretty confident that they're going to retire, until they actually retire...I factored out, we intend to hire folks to replace those officers that are retiring, but the officers that are retiring

are retiring at the very highest pay step that they could be receiving, and they have a lot of seniority. Not only do they have seniority, but they're sergeants, so they're at a higher pay. The officers that will be coming in will be at a much, much lower step." The savings will be about \$65,000 from this difference, he said, but it's not reflected in the budget.

Chief Wolski also clarified that when the FY2026 budget was being discussed, contracts had not been settled because no one knew whether the override would pass or not. The larger increases in FY2027 compared to the FY2026 budget include this year's contracts being settled. The line items in FY2027 show a 5 percent increase but it's actually two years of contracted 2.5 percent increases.

Other line items cover expenses such as utilities and maintainance of the police station. Other items have been reduced because the expense wasn't needed. Chief Wolski gave an example of line item #519040, PD Uniforms. "It's not exclusively uniforms, but another thing that was coming out of PD Uniform line items was an expense for tasers, a service agreement that we had, and when we got tasers five years ago, the department was equipped with tasers. We had a five year service agreement, and the cost of that service agreement was \$10,000 a year...It included certain equipment that's required with the tasers, things of that nature...The vendor said at the end of this five years that the tasers that you currently have are now at their end of life and no longer supported by the manufacturer, and so they're basically really expensive paperweights."

The company would not allow an extension of the agreement, Chief Wolski said, so the department applied to Robinson Broadhurst Foundation and received funding to replace the tasers. This meant that the old service agreement was cancelled, so that line item shows a reduction of \$9,900.

Chief Wolski said that he'd actually put in a budget for about \$7,000 less than in Mr. McKinney's budget, with small reductions for things like utilities where he felt he could pare it down. Mr. McKinney explained that he left those items level-funded because he was concerned about the costs of electricity going up.

Board of Selectmen Chair Andrew Beauvais asked if the department had looked into energy efficiency grants or solar panels to help reduce electric costs, and also, whether the department had considered electric vehicles and generating some of its own power to charge them.

Chief Wolski said, "All of our cruisers now are hybrid vehicles, and that's something that we've embraced in the last five years. So we've slowly phased out our complete gas vehicles and

gone to hybrid and I've again, looking at previous fiscal years, I've seen a marked reduction in our fuel costs for gasoline. So that's one of the line items that I did ask for reduction. Because I think that we're seeing a savings because we're driving hybrid vehicles." Going to all-electric, he said, runs into the limitations of available infrastructure to support all-electric vehicles in the region.

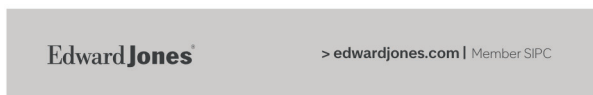
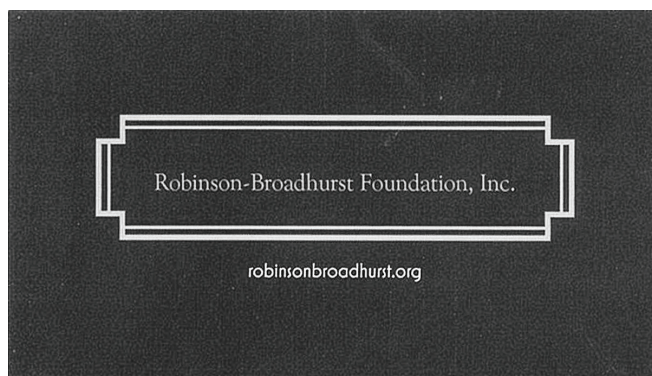
With a nod to Planning and Land Use Coordinator Nicole Roberts who applied for the grant, Chief Wolski said the department had benefited from the Green Communities grant to weatherize and insulate the police station, which is an old building that formerly served as a courthouse.

Following Chief Wolski, Fire Chief Tom Smith came forward. Mr. Beauvais asked about the large increase in the fire department line item for housemen (that is, regular duty crews who work scheduled shifts in the fire station). That item increases \$273,780 in the FY2027 budget, 35.4 percent. Meanwhile, budgeted overtime is reduced by \$90,000, or nearly half.

Chief Smith explained that he is requesting two additional firefighters, which will give him more ability to restructure the schedule and reduce the overtime paid. "One of the biggest things that I've heard from the community, from the various boards and meetings, is the town needs to figure out a way to increase their revenues, and in order to increase revenues, and for the fire department and the ambulance service to effectively do that portion, we need to basically run it as a business," he said. Additional personnel will reduce response times, provide better service, and allow the department to staff two full ambulances 24 hours a day. Potentially the department could be bringing in \$400,000 on top of the additional revenue in the budget, he estimated.

The department is looking at taking over the facility at Clearbrook Treatment Center, which is in Winchendon but very close to Templeton. This will allow them to bring in more revenue—a minimum of \$200,000, he said—through answering calls in Templeton. They have also been negotiating with Royalston, which does not have its own transporting ambulance. But to handle these opportunities, the department needs additional crew. Chief Smith said he has also been talking to the new fire chief in Rindge, NH. "So with the \$200,000 additional plus the potential to go anywhere between \$350K and \$400K more, I feel the two additional staffing, which is the housemen account, is an investment into bringing more monies into the community. Obviously I'd love to have six more guys, but we can only start at a

Turn to DEPT BUDGETS page 6



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Tri-Board Meeting Hears Detailed Presentation on School Repair Project



Town Manager Bill McKinney, Board of Selectmen, School Committee and FinCom listen to Greg Walsh on Zoom
Image copyright Town of Winchendon

by Inanna Arthen

At the joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee and School Committee on Thursday, February 5, members of the three boards heard a presentation on the repairs to be made to Memorial School, Toy Town Elementary and Murdock Middle High School, utilizing a reimbursement program from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA).

The project was brought before the School Committee about a year ago, by then-Superintendent Dr. Marc Gosselin. It has been proceeding over the past year, but was somewhat overshadowed last spring by the attention given to Winchendon’s critical budget deficit and the passage of the Proposition 2-1/2 override.

Article 21 on the 2025 Annual Town Meeting warrant asked voters to approve borrowing \$200,000 for a feasibility study and schematic design for repairs to the roofs of all three buildings and window replacement at Memorial, along with other improvements. The School Committee had spoken to state Senator Jo Comerford about getting an “earmark” from the state budget funds for cities and towns from excess Fair Share amendment revenue to pay for the study. This one-time revenue amount would come from the so-called “Millionaires’ Tax” in Massachusetts. As of Town Meeting, the earmark had not yet been confirmed, but in June, 2025, Gov. Healey signed the supplemental budget bill including the earmarks. (See “Senator Comerford Secures Hoped-For Earmark for Winchendon Public Schools to Fund School Building Repair Feasibility Study” in the June 26-July 3, 2025 edition of the *Winchendon Courier* (scroll down).)

At the Finance Committee’s hearing on the ATM warrant on April 29, there was a long discussion of the rationale for taking advantage of the MSBA reimbursement program and not letting the buildings continue to deteriorate. (See “FinCom Public Hearing on Annual Town Meeting Warrant Includes Long Debates on Schools, Capital Spending” in the May 8-May 15, 2025 edition of the *Winchendon Courier* (scroll down).)

Voters at Town Meeting approved article 21 with 81 percent in favor, 19 percent opposed.

On February 5, boards heard the results of the feasibility study the earmark paid for. Superintendent Charlotte King introduced the presentation, saying, “The MSBA is the state agency that helps communities fund major school building improvements. On February 25 the MSBA will vote on whether to invite Winchendon into the Accelerated Repair Program. This vote is critical, because entering the program gives us access to a reimbursement rate of 77.53 percent, meaning the state would cover more than three quarters of the cost of the needed building repairs.

“Why is this so important? Because three of our schools—Memorial Elementary, Toy Town

Elementary and Murdock Middle High School, have significant infrastructure needs. Roofs at each building are at or beyond their useful life, and we’re now seeing active leaks and moisture issues. Memorial’s windows and doors are fifty years old, causing energy loss and security concerns. At Toy Town, the existing chair lift no longer functions, leaving us out of compliance with ADA accessibility requirements. If we don’t move forward with this program, these repairs will still need to be made, but the town will be responsible for 100 percent of the cost. If we are not accepted or choose not to proceed, it could be another 10 years before Winchendon is considered for this opportunity again.”

If Winchendon is invited to participate in the program, the next steps would be a Special Town Meeting vote and a ballot vote as part of the annual Town Election on May 4. Construction would begin in summer of 2027.

Supt. King gave the floor to Greg Walsh, Project Director and Michael Ulichney, Project Manager for the project, from PCA360, and Jason Knutson, architect for the project from CGKV Architects, who all joined the meeting via Zoom.

Mr. Walsh began the presentation by explaining that the MSBA partially funds new school buildings and accelerated repair projects such as a roof and window replacements. The Accelerated Repair Program (ARP) focuses on preserving existing school buildings with energy-efficient and cost-saving upgrades (such as roofs, windows and heat pumps) as an alternative to new construction. It will also cover required ADA (accessibility) upgrades. As the name suggests, ARP projects are speedy, typically being completed over a single summer recess. Funding is based on a “wealth factor” for towns, and Winchendon is eligible for 77.53 percent.

Mr. Walsh summarized the repairs needed at each school—all of the schools’ roofs are more than 29 years old, he said, and the windows at Memorial School are 50 years old. “At the Toy Town Elementary School, we’ll be replacing the roof, and then we’ll be also doing a series of ADA upgrades, which also will include the installation of a new elevator that will connect all the levels of the schools and provide accessible path to travel. At the Memorial Elementary School, we’re going to be doing a new roof. We’re also going to be replacing windows and doors, and there are also ADA compliance requirements at that school, although they’re mostly related to physical conditions and doors that need to be adjusted for path to travel, bathrooms that need to be upgraded to be accessible, and other less extensive things than an elevator. And then the last is the Murdock Middle High School, where we’re just going to be doing a roof replacement.”

He added, “The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a law 521 CMR, which dictates that if the cost of construction improvements to an existing building exceeds 30 percent

of its assessed value, then the entire building has to be brought up to full current accessibility, which is why we’re going to be doing an elevator at the Toy Town School, in addition to lots of other accessible upgrades as well.”

Mr. Knutson then took the floor to explain in careful detail, with photographs, the current conditions they had found at the buildings, including inside and underneath the roof surfaces, and explaining the full scope of the work involved in repairing all of the problems. Beginning with Town Town, Mr. Knutson said that it was originally built around 1960 as the new Winchendon Junior Senior High School, and has a roof last replaced around 1997. The roof is ponding water and leaking; surfaces are weathering; insulation is insufficient; internal components are separating; and debris from the original roof is still inside the newer roof. The entire roof will be replaced and upgraded to be solar-ready—that is, able to support an array of solar panels on the roof at a future time. In addition to the roof, the existing lift will be replaced, and ADA compliant improvements will be made to bathrooms, doorway thresholds, cabinet heights and similar areas.

The total projected budget for Toy Town is calculated at \$8,872,666, with \$6,878,978 reimbursable by MSBA and \$2,485,697 covered by the town.

Memorial School was originally built around 1975, Mr. Knutson said, and the current roof, they estimate, was installed around 1996. Memorial will also get a completely new roof, to correct similar issues as those at Toy Town as well as make the roof solar-ready. Mr. Knutson’s presentation also included numerous photos of the problems with Memorial’s windows, including corroded frames and water condensation between the double panes. The windows will be replaced. Memorial will receive some ADA upgrades, including an elevator. The total projected budget for Memorial is calculated at \$11,029,086, with \$8,550,850 reimbursable by MSBA and \$3,072,645 covered by the town.

Finally, Murdock Middle High School was constructed around 1994-95, Mr. Knutson told the boards. It has the original roof, which is quite complicated compared to the roofs of the elementary schools. It will be completely replaced with solar-ready enhancements.

The total projected budget for Murdock is calculated at \$6,530,821, with \$5,063,346 reimbursable by MSBA and \$1,818,049 covered by the town.

The budgets have a 10 percent contingency amount baked into the totals. Mr. Walsh explained, “This is a very conservative in the sense that we are trying to protect the interest of the town, the interest of the voters, by carrying a 10 percent contingency on both (hard and soft costs). We’re quite confident that those will cover

Winchendon News

SCHOOL REPAIRS

continued from page 4

any unforeseen conditions or issues that might arise that would be an increase to the cost of the project...this is really intended to be very conservative and not need us to ever come back to the town and request additional funding for this project. In fact, it's our hope that we would not use nearly this much contingency. But again, it's to be conservative and to never have to come back to the town with a second task on the project."

The total budgeted cost for all three projects together is calculated at \$26,432,573, with \$20,493,174 reimbursable by MSBA and \$7,376,391 covered by the town, with a contingency allowance of \$1,436,992.

Mr. Knutson explained how paying for it all works: "The full total project budget, which we just discussed, would need to be appropriated and funded by the town, and then the invoices to be paid through that fund. Then after that point, we would request reimbursement from the MSBA. We do this on a monthly basis. I need to supply the warrant numbers and dates and invoices, and then there'd be a review, and all eligible costs would be reimbursed at that 77 percent."

Mr. Walsh added, "The MSBA is a Pay As You Go program...the MSBA requires that the town appropriate the full \$27 million even though it's anticipated that the MSBA is going to pay 77 percent of that. That's because the MSBA's program is what they call a grant program, meaning that the MSBA can decide, if we were to do something that didn't comply with their rules, then they could alter their grant funding."

If the town decides not to move forward with the ARP program, Mr. Walsh said, all three building roofs are expected to fail within the next five years (all of them are leaking now) and the town will be responsible for 100 percent of the cost of replacing them. It typically takes 10 years for a district that has opted out to be accepted into the program again.

School Committee member Greg Vine asked if the leaking roofs had caused any current issues such as mold or rotting ceiling tiles. Mr. Walsh said the schools have done a good job dealing with leaks quickly, and they saw no signs of mold. Toy Town actually doesn't have ceiling tiles, the ceilings are the bottom of the roof deck.

The projects will be presented to voters as three separate warrant articles, and voters can appropriate funding for them separately. If all three are not approved, the MSBA will participate in those schools where the appropriation was passed, Mr. Walsh said. In answer to more questions requesting clarification, Mr. Walsh said that asbestos remediation, if necessary, is included in the budgeted amounts.

The boards asked some further questions about solar options for the roofs (in the future) and whether solar panels might help offset some of the costs of the repairs. There was also some discussion about the bidding process for contractors, which would take place in the fall if the projects move forward.

School Committee member Karen Kast asked if there were any safety hazards for students or staff with the buildings in their current condition. Mr. Walsh and Mr. Knutson did not think there were "imminent" hazards, but if the roofs were allowed to continue deteriorating, issues from water leaks such as electrical shorts were a possibility.

Mr. Vine asked if there had been a study on the energy impact of the repairs and whether the district would see a reduction in heating and cooling costs. Mr. Knutson replied that there had not been a formal study or energy modeling done, but replacing the current two inches of insulation with six to eight inches, and replacing all the

leaky windows at Memorial with triple-glazed thermal windows would undoubtedly make a big difference. Mr. Vine also asked if the new windows, which can be opened, would represent a falling hazard for kids, and Mr. Knutson said the windows can be set to only open a certain amount and should not be a hazard.

(The entire presentation and discussion may be watched on WinchendonTV at <https://winchendon.cablecast.tv/internetchannel/show/346?site=1> ("Joint School, Finance, and Selectmen Meeting 02-05-26 pt. 1").)

Following a short recess, the three boards continued discussing the funding for the project.

School Committee Chair Mike Barbaro began with a statement that this was their first crack at putting information out for the public and offering some initial numbers on what the project would cost taxpayers. There would be information sessions around town and other ways of sharing what the project's scope is, why it's needed and so on.

Town Manager Bill McKinney then offered some basic numbers on the cost. The amount would be borrowed, so it would need to pass as a Proposition 2-1/2 debt exclusion. A debt exclusion increases the maximum tax levy temporarily — after the debt is paid off, the increase is removed. This means that the town would be looking to balance paying off the loan faster with not having to raise the tax levy too much. Mr. McKinney explained, "The net cost to the town is potentially about \$7.4 million, so using an aggressive timeline, we could borrow for 20 years, we could borrow for 30 years. We could do level debt, we could do level principal. There's different ways to do it, but both aggressive and probably most cost effective would be the 20 years of level principal."

"So what that means is that on \$7.4 million that the total cost would be 10 and a half million dollars to the town, and the tax rate, which is currently \$12.69, that would add 48 cents. So basically it's about 3.77 percent would be an increase to the taxes as they are now...at [a home assessed for] \$400,000 that would equate to an extra \$191 per year."

With level principal, Mr. McKinney said, you're paying down the same amount of principal every month, so it reduces the amount of interest you pay over the life of the loan.

The key point to understand is that voters will need to approve to appropriate, and authorize spending, the full cost of the project(s), in order to comply with the MSBA's requirements. But the town will only borrow the amount that is not reimbursed by MSBA. Taxpayers will only need to cover the amount that is actually borrowed, not the amount that is appropriated at Town Meeting. Because all the work will be completed in the space of a few months, the town will know exactly what is needed very quickly.

The MSBA requires that the town assemble a building committee specifically for the project. The boards discussed some of the qualifications members of that building committee would need to have.

It was brought up that once these buildings are repaired or improved through the MSBA program, they must be used as school buildings for at least 20 more years. The MSBA will not, for example, pay for a new roof for a building that is retired and repurposed for something else three years later. This segued into the topic of possible regionalization down the line with a neighboring community. Would Winchendon be left with empty school buildings with shiny new roofs that couldn't be used for anything else?

Board of Selectmen member Erika Eitland said, "I would like us to also have an open dialog, perhaps, about the fact that we have a smaller student body than our buildings have capacity for. Do we need three buildings? It's really

an important question, because if we're looking at Toy Town Elementary, where there's over \$9 million of this total cost. It has greater energy consumption compared to Memorial. It has more heating oil needs than Memorial. It doesn't have a generator for backup power. It has the smallest cafeteria and library compared to the other schools. And we are also seeing the fact that it doesn't have that solar potential that the other two buildings have. So to me, and also acknowledging that Toy Town was built for older students, even from the first place, so it was never totally designed for these types of students. I feel that there's an opportunity here where, and again, this is, maybe this won't stick, but I feel like consolidating our school buildings to two buildings is like an internal regionalization."

In 20 years, Toy Town will be an 85-year-old building, Ms. Eitland went on. It will continue to have issues and shortcomings, and it's a workplace for employees as well as a school for students. She urged the boards to think about the facilities master plan. Should the town be looking primarily at Memorial and Murdock for this project?

Supt. King said, "I think there was a feasibility study, very informal, done last year, and we looked at, could we combine the two elementary schools? And it was just not feasible with the spaces that we have to combine the two at this time. And I think our lower class sizes are at the high school level, and we need to still be offering the amount of classes that we're offering, to give kids a suitable transcript to move on post graduation...we had to add a kindergarten class last year based on enrollment. I think our lower enrollment is at the secondary level, not at the elementary level, which is part of the space issue." Also, she added, the state is moving toward requiring universal preschool, so the district might have to add those classes in the future.

Ms. Kast added that there are very specific legal spacing requirements for students in schools at different ages and in different kinds of classes, and the district couldn't meet those requirements with just two buildings. It's not as simple as measuring raw square feet and calculating how many chairs will fit in it. Every learning environment has rules for physical space. Special needs students need even more space.

The board members agreed that several important topics were being floated, and the most important issue was making a decision about the MSBA program itself and repairing the buildings the town has before things become more critical. Mr. Barbaro promised to send Ms. Eitland the space capacity study done by the previous superintendent showing how and why the spaces were used the way they currently are.

Regarding past discussions of school building uses:

At the School Committee meeting on December 20, 2022, then Superintendent Thad King presented a detailed proposal to reorganize the school buildings and create an Early Childhood Literacy Center with only Pre-K and K classes in Toy Town Elementary, while grades 1 through 12 would be split between Memorial and Murdock. The School Committee voted to approve the proposal at their meeting on January 19, 2023. The proposal was controversial, and Mr. King withdrew the proposal in June, 2023. His lengthy initial presentation included analyses of the buildings' current and proposed populations and uses. His Powerpoint may be seen here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x65y6KORDcvWEnCzJeSv7Q6FViP-SweXx/view?fbclid=IwAR0nocMIDQ3tN2p-SuGVO214ooL62-sUIDI6Fmti6mHufRsZs75x-l4F5Qhrk>

and the video of the meeting may be seen on

Turn to **SCHOOL REPAIRS** page 6

SCHOOL REPAIRS
continued from page 5

YouTube, here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMjjX3O8oC8&t=521s>.
For more details, see “Proposal to Reorganize Schools Evokes Concerns and Questions” in the January 5-January 12, 2023 edition of the *Winchendon Courier* (scroll down)
and
“School Committee Approves Proposal to Create Early Childhood Literacy Center and Shift Grades Among Schools” in the February 2-February 9, 2023 edition of the *Winchendon Courier*.

DEPT BUDGETS
continued from page 3

certain point,” he said.
Mr. Beauvais asked about the department’s ISO rating (this is a rating established by Verisk indicating a community’s fire-protection and fire-suppression abilities. It directly impacts homeowner insurance rates. The scale runs from 1 to 10 with 10 being the lowest level of protection. www.isomitigation.com/ppc/).
Chief Smith said, “I believe, with ISO, they’ve changed their rating systems, and I want to say we’re in the vicinity of a 9...we were at 9, and went to a 6.7 on their new scale. And I do not know exactly where we are right now. We are due to have ISO come in and reevaluate...It does take into consideration, not just fire. It takes in fire, police, DPW, water systems, and a lot of factors. But ultimately, I think that the staffing would increase our rating, our points for the fire department, because we’d be able to get additional pieces out the door sooner.”
“So overall, is it true that improving the ISO rating overall, homeowners would see premium reductions in their hazard insurance, because it would evaluate, the better your rating, the lower your premiums?” Mr. Beauvais asked, and Chief Smith said, “yes.”
In response to questions, Chief Smith said there are currently three personnel on shift at a time, around the clock. If two are out and a call

comes in, they have to wait for call firefighters to come in or staff on a call to get back. In one instance, a single person initially responded to a structure fire on Mill Street. This is a real safety issue for the crew who respond.
School Committee Chair Mike Barbaro said, “I absolutely agree that we need to add more firefighters. I think that’s been a conversation ongoing. It does cut down your overtime, it’s more safer operations for the fire department. My main concern is when you talk about the ambulance. So by adding all this other area, did you factor in the fact that the ambulance is \$500,000 and we’re burning them out every two years, two to three years. Adding this additional territory, we can’t even get the ambulances we order” because it takes so long for them to be built and delivered. Another one was ordered last year.
Chief Smith said that the ambulances take about two years to build, and they’re currently lasting about six to eight years. He said that the department has considered the issues of maintainance and additional mileage on the ambulances, and they have a solution. They’re changing the mileage fees for billing, and the new vehicle will not be diesel, it will use regular gas, which “will save drastically as far as maintenance cost goes” as well as the amount of down time for the vehicles.
School Committee member Greg Vine asked if the town had thought about establishing an

FOLLOW-UP:
At the Board of Selectmen’s meeting on Monday, February 9, the Board decided not to set a date for a Special Town Meeting to place the MSBA Project before voters. As with all Proposition 2-1/2 override questions, this requires two votes. The authorization to appropriate and spend the budget amount is held at a Town Meeting, and since this one is contingent on borrowing, it requires a two-thirds (2/3) majority to pass. The question to approve overriding Proposition 2-1/2 and raising the levy limit is a ballot vote at the polls and requires a simple majority to pass. The Board agreed that there didn’t seem to be a reason to spend the money on an extra Town Meeting or ballot vote when both votes could be incorporated into the annual Town Election and Annual Town Meeting. This can be re-considered later if it seems necessary.

ambulance reserve fund, so that ambulance purchases wouldn’t always require a debt exclusion vote.
Chief Smith said, “What would be almost more my preference than an enterprise account would be a return receipts account. When I was previously Chief in Templeton, before I left, I created a return receipts account over there. We sat down and ambulance revenue goes into the return receipts account. And then at Town Meeting, it can be X amount can be set aside, and then the remainder can be voted out to go to the community, or in your budget. We had it set up so that when I left, it was set up for not only the ambulances, but for the fire engines, all in lease to purchase agreements with the ambulance revenue. And in the fifth year of those lease to purchase agreements, the town would then replace three dump trucks.” Right now, he said, all the ambulance revenue goes into the General Fund.
The Fire Department has gotten a total of more than \$2.6 million in grant money over the past 12 years, Chief Smith said, with more than 50 grants awarded. “Pretty much any grant we put in for, we do,” he said. He concluded by answering some questions about the nuts and bolts of setting ambulance fees in a competitive market for ambulance services.

Winchendon DPW Worker Injured When
DPW Plow/Sander Truck Rolls Over



Photo by Sharon Larochelle

ed himself on a public Facebook post on the Town of Winchendon Facebook page), would be hospitalized for several days. His injuries were reported to be serious but non-life-threatening. He stated that he was improving and thanked everyone for their prayers and well-wishes.
DPW Director Patrick Wood told the *Courier*, “The vehicle involved in yesterday’s accident on Benjamin Street was a six-wheel dump truck used primarily for salt spreading operations. The truck sustained damage and is currently out of service while we assess the extent of the repairs needed. It will not be operational in the near future. Our primary concern remains the injured employee, and we hope for a quick and full recovery.”

by Inanna Arthen
On Wednesday morning, January 28, as Department of Public Works crews continued to clean up and treat roads around Winchendon after “Winter Storm Fern” dumped more than 17 inches of snow Sunday and Monday, a DPW truck rolled over on Benjamin Street. The DPW worker driving the truck had to be extricated with the assistance of the Winchendon Fire Department, who called a Lifeflight helicopter to transport the worker to UMass Memorial Medical Center-University Campus in Worcester. No one else was in the vehicle, Winchendon Fire Chief Tom Smith told the *Gardner News*. Other crew members from the DPW also responded immediately to the scene to assist the driver and the Fire Department and supervise removing the truck from the roadway.
Benjamin Street is a steep, narrow road that goes up the hill toward Old Centre from Waterville, and dead-ends at the top with very little room to turn around. The heavily loaded truck was apparently coming back down the road, skidded and overbalanced onto its side.
According to persons connected to the DPW, the worker, Roy F. Winn Jr. (who comment-

Van vs Utility Pole on
School Street Snarls Traffic,
Cuts Electric and Cable for
Residents

by Inanna Arthen
On Tuesday, February 17, at 2:18 p.m., a single vehicle accident was reported to Winchendon Police and Fire Departments—but some Winchendon residents already knew about it. A commercial van driven by Kevin Sutton of Troy, NH was traveling south on School Street (Route 12) at approximately 2:10 p.m. when the van crossed the center line and struck a utility pole on the north-bound side of the road at the corner of School and Mill Streets. The utility pole sheared off and toppled over onto the roof of the van, draping the van and area around it with utility wires, with the driver inside the van.
Residents around the area reported losing electrical service as far as North Royalston Road, and residents as far as Lake Monomonic experienced interruption in cable internet service. Traffic came to a standstill in both directions on School Street, as vividly shown by Google Traffic, as police and fire responded to the scene. National Grid was summoned to the site immediately. The Winchendon Post Office fire alarm was triggered, possibly by the surge in the electrical lines from the accident.
Mr. Sutton was transported to the hospital to be checked out, but was not reported to be seriously injured. He was given a summons by Winchendon PD for negligent operation of a motor vehicle.
The cause of the accident is under investigation. The weather was overcast but not precipitating, with temperatures above freezing, and there had been a very slight dusting of snow the night before.



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).

The HUB 5 Summer Dr

Friday March 6



Saturday March 21



Thursday March 26



Friday March 27



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.

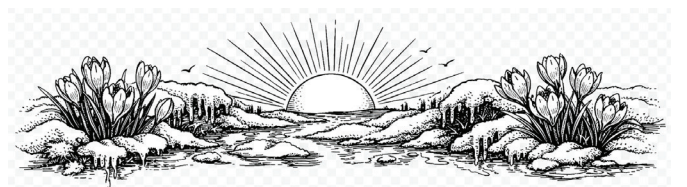
Winchendon Community Park 86 Ingleside Dr Saturday March 28



Sunday, March 8 - 2:00 a.m.
Daylight Savings Begins

Tuesday, March 17
St. Patrick's Day

Friday, March 20
First Day of Spring!



Sponsorship Opportunities

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

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SUBMIT YOUR LETTER OF INTEREST TODAY!



Interested?

Submit your letter of interest to:
Shaina Cunningham - SCunningham@winchendon-ma.gov
Deb Dennis - DDennis@winchendon-ma.gov

Have questions?

Reach out to Shaina Cunningham:
(SCunningham@winchendon-ma.gov)



MARCH

MONDAY MARCH 2

Music with Bob Jordan

10:30-11:30 a.m. Come to the Senior Center and join us for some tunes featuring Bob Jordan! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

TUESDAY MARCH 3

St. Paddy's Day Bingo with Bill O'Connor Lifecare

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 the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Social Art Circle with GALA

1:00-3:00 p.m. Explore a variety of art in a supportive social environment—a group with different skill levels who wish to learn, explore, laugh, share, connect, and be inspired in a safe, low key, non-intimidating space. Bring your portable works in progress or try and pick from the shared community art supplies we have on hand. This is a self-led group, but there will be classroom monitors who will assist you. No cost, but registration required, at <https://form.jotform.com/253415023143949>. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Miniature Art Show and Book Fair

5:30-7:00 p.m. Please join us for Memorial Elementary School's Miniature Art Show and Book Fair! All Students in grades k-2 will have a miniature artwork on display. At Memorial Elementary School, 32 Elmwood Rd, Winchendon.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 4

Integrity Medicare Appointments

10:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Have questions about insurance? Call the Senior Center at 978-297-3155 and make an appointment with Margaret from Integrity Medicare! At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Ukelele Group

11:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Teen GSA Meeting at the Beals

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 Cooking Class

3:30-5:30 p.m. For middle and high school students. Build real-life skills, confidence, and independence in the kitchen. Limited to 5, register at www.the-hub.org/event-details/wednesday-teen-cooking-class-2026-02-04-15-30. Sponsored by United Way. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

THURSDAY MARCH 5

Teen Cooking Class

4:00-6:00 p.m. For middle and high school students. Build real-life skills, confidence, and independence in the kitchen. Limited to 5, register at www.the-hub.org/event-details/thursday-teen-cooking-class-2026-02-05-16-00. Sponsored by United Way. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

FRIDAY MARCH 6

Karaoke Night at The HUB

6:30-9:30 p.m. Hosted by Winchendon Parks & Recreation. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

SATURDAY MARCH 7

Winter Market

10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. Winchendon Farmers Market Winter Market—produce, preserves, salsa, crafts, jewelry, baked goods and more! Inside the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Toy Town Bridge Artists Circle

10:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. Come and join the Bridge Artistic Network for a time of encouragement, to engage and empower each other to keep creating and become who we were created to be. Bring your art supplies! This is a free event and Lunch is provided. At Cornerstone Church, 122 Gardner Rd, Winchendon.

TUESDAY MARCH 10

Financial Scam Awareness & Prevention - presented by Fidelity Bank

10:30-11:30 a.m. Meet with Andrew and Towma from Fidelity Bank and learn how to recognize and avoid financial scams. Come in and learn and stay for lunch! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Teen Dungeons & Dragons

3:30-5:00 p.m. A tabletop roleplaying club for teens! Membership is limited, contact the library at 978-297-0300 to sign up. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 11

SHINE appointments

9:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. Free, unbiased Medicare counseling. Call 978-297-3155 for an appointment. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

MSBA School Building Project Public Information Session

6:30 p.m. Learn more about the MSBA-reimbursed school building repair project and the forthcoming debt exclusion override votes. Bring all your questions! In the 2nd floor auditorium in Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

THURSDAY MARCH 12

Denis Cormier Concert

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

Beals Book Club

3:00 p.m. Join a discussion group that allows avid readers to discuss the themes, plots, and characters of selected books. The library provides the book each month! Contact the library for this month's title. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

American Legion Spaghetti Dinner

5:00-6:30 p.m. \$12 per person, open to all! Sponsored by Winchendon American Legion Auxiliary Unit #193. At Winchendon American Legion Post #193, 295 School St.

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 is curried chicken over rice with sides and dessert. Free-will donation \$2 per person, \$5 per family; no one turned away. 126 Central Street.

FRIDAY MARCH 13

Sound Bites Friday the 13th Community Jam

6:30-9:30 p.m. We're coming back with our March 13th Open Mic Community Jam. No bad luck here. Just good music and people. Sign-up list will be available at the HUB at 6:00 p.m. on Friday the 13th. Music starts at 6:30. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Blakkat Bone at Whispered Spirits Speakeasy at the Snowbound Club

8:00-11:00 p.m. Blakkat Bone is so excited to do this unique show at the Whispered Spirits Speakeasy. We are putting away the electric guitars and breaking out the Acoustic guitars, Mandolins, and banjos. You can expect 3 hours of acoustic versions

of our normal sets as well as some things we put together just for this format. We will be looking to bring some guests musicians along with as well. We hope you can make it for this fun and unique night. At the Snowbound Club, 130 Baldwinville Rd, Winchendon.

SATURDAY MARCH 14

Winter Science with Melissa the Mad Scientist

2:00 p.m. for kids ages 4-8. Explore exciting winter themed experiments with Melissa the Mad Scientist. Space limited, registration required. Call the library at 978-297-0300. Sponsored by Friends of the Beals Memorial Library. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

Teen Night at The HUB

6:00-10:00 p.m. Teens Bowl for \$2/person (or bring in 2 cans/non-perishable & non-expaired items to donate to the Food Pantry). At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Corned Beef and Cabbage Dinner with the American Legion Riders

6:00-7:00 p.m. \$15 per person. At Winchendon American Legion Post #193, 295 School St.

SUNDAY MARCH 15

Annual Skate Show with the Winchendon Skate Club

2:00-4:00 p.m. Come on over to the Ice Rink at the Winchendon School and see all of the wonderful skills the kids in the Winchendon Skate Club have been working on all year! Tickets \$10 at the door. At The Winchendon School, 172 Ash St.

MONDAY MARCH 16

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. 3rd Monday of each month. For more information visit the library or see bealslibrary.org. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

TUESDAY MARCH 17

Growing Places Farmers Market

10:30-11:30 a.m. Fresh local vegetables available for purchase using cash, debit/credit or SNAP/HIP benefits! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 18

Integrity Medicare Appointments

10:30 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Have questions about insurance? Call the Senior Center at 978-297-3155 and make an appointment with Margaret from Integrity Medicare! At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Teen Cooking Class

3:30-5:30 p.m. For middle and high school students. Build real-life skills, confidence, and independence in the kitchen. Limited to 5, register at www.the-hub.org/event-details/wednesday-teen-cooking-class-2026-02-04-15-30. Sponsored by United Way. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

THURSDAY MARCH 19

Red Cross - Emergency Preparedness

11:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Teen Cooking Class

4:00-6:00 p.m. For middle and high school students. Build real-life skills, confidence, and independence in the kitchen. Limited to 5, register at www.the-hub.org/event-details/thursday-teen-cooking-class-2026-02-05-16-00. Sponsored by United Way. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Social Art Circle with GALA

6:00-8:00 p.m. Explore a variety of art in a supportive social environment—a group with different skill levels who wish to learn, explore, laugh, share, connect, and be inspired in a safe, low key, non-intimidating space. Bring your portable works in progress or try and pick from the shared community art supplies we have on hand. This is a self-led group, but there will be classroom monitors who will assist you. No cost, but registration required, at <https://form.jotform.com/253415023143949>. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

SATURDAY MARCH 21

Sensory Friendly Browsing Hour at the Beals

9:00-10:00 a.m. Enjoy a special library hour designed to provide a safe and friendly environment for individuals who are neurodivergent, on the autism spectrum, or have other special needs, and their families. For more information, call the library at 978-297-0300. Every 3rd Saturday of the month. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

Art Critique with GALA

10:00 a.m.- 12:30 p.m. Are you looking for encouragement and support from other artists? Bring up to 2 pieces of your artwork (finished or unfinished) to share with your circle of artist friends. The first 15 minutes will be social time, then we will go into sharing our artwork. You may bring snacks to share with the group. Free to all GALA members. New artists, first 2 classes are free. Janet Dupuis will help guide us during our time together. Email Janet to let her know that you will be joining us at Jandu516@gmail.com. For more info about GALA see www.galagardner.org. In the 1st floor Gallery of the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Comedy Night at The HUB

7:00-9:00 p.m. Get ready to laugh the night away! Join us for an unforgettable Comedy Night featuring headliners John Perrotta and Joe Hebert—two of New England's funniest comics bringing the laughs right to The HUB! Tickets \$30 per person. Limited seating—tickets will go fast, so don't wait! <https://www.eventeny.com/events/comedynight-25068/>. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

SUNDAY MARCH 22

Annual Meat Shoot at the Legion

1:00 p.m. We will have a special guest who will have personalized entertaining products, Easter Raffle Basket, Scratch Ticket Raffle and of course light foods. Proceeds benefit American Legion Auxiliary programs. At Winchendon American Legion Postr #193, 295 School St.

TUESDAY MARCH 24

MSBA School Building Project Public Information Session

10:30 a.m. Learn more about the MSBA-reimbursed school building repair project and the forthcoming debt exclusion override votes. Bring all your questions! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Teen Dungeons & Dragons

3:30-5:00 p.m. A tabletop roleplaying club for teens! Membership is limited, contact the library at 978-297-0300 to sign up. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

MSBA School Building Project Public Information Session

5:30 p.m. In the Murdock Middle High School auditorium, 3 Memorial Dr, Winchendon.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 25

Thriller & Mystery Book Club

4:00 p.m. If you love the thrills and chills of a good thriller, then join the Beals Mystery Book Club! Participants can share their favorites and enjoy some new ones with

H 2026



other fans of the genre! The library provides suggested books each month. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

THURSDAY MARCH 26

Our Neighbor’s Kitchen Dinner

5:30 p.m. at UU Church of Winchendon. We’re marking 30 years of bringing hot, nutritious meals to our community! Join us as we recreate the very first meal served by Our Neighbor’s Kitchen back in March 1996: corned beef and cabbage, soda bread and dessert. Dinner will be served in the Parish Hall; take-out available after indoor diners are served. Free-will donation \$2 per person, \$5 per family; no one turned away. 126 Central Street.

Bingo at The HUB

7:00-9:00 p.m. Bring your friends, grab your lucky charm, and get ready for a fun-filled evening of bingo and prizes! Play 15 exciting games. Last game is a COVERALL with a GUARANTEED \$75 pot! Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

FRIDAY MARCH 27

Friday Night Frequencies at The HUB

7:00-9:00 p.m. Whether you’re coming to support local musicians, hang out with friends, or just enjoy a fun Friday night, this event is for you! Free & open to the public, all are welcome! Come out, bring a friend, and keep the music alive in Winchendon! Featured musicians this month: Moonlight Dive! Check them out on Facebook: www.facebook.com/p/Moonlight-Drive-61555883399773/. Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Morton E. Converse Tournament of Plays

7:00 p.m. Each class at Murdock High School will stage a one-act play in competition for awards. At Murdock Middle High School Auditorium, 3 Memorial Dr, Winchendon.

SATURDAY MARCH 28

Bridging Ideas and Building Futures: Community Conversations

10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Topic: Who do we want to be as a community? Every day, with every action and every decision we make, we are writing a story—not just the story of our individual lives, but the collective story of Winchendon. The question before us today isn’t just about the present moment; it’s about the legacy we choose to leave behind. Who do we want to be as a community for the children watching us, and for the generations who will inherit the town we build together? At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

Easter Egg Hunt

10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. FREE! Bring the kids to hunt for colorful eggs, meet the Easter Bunny, and snap some adorable springtime photos! Fun surprises are waiting, and it’s the perfect way to welcome the season with friends and neighbors. This event is FREE and open to the community—just bring your baskets and your smiles! Questions? Call (978) 297-3155 or email scunningham@winchendon-ma.gov. Rain date: April 4. Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation. At Winchendon Community Park, 86 Ingleside Dr.

Trivia with Tony

6:00-9:00 p.m. Custom team based/pub style trivia games w/hosting and interactive media/music. Custom games tailored to occasion and or interests. Bring your family and friends. Test your knowledge and win prizes!!! At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Morton E. Converse Tournament of Plays

7:00 p.m. Each class at Murdock High School will stage a one-act play in competition for awards. Final night—stay for the judging! At Murdock Middle High School Auditorium, 3 Memorial Dr, Winchendon.

SUNDAY MARCH 29

Palm Sunday Service and Parade

10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. Palm Sunday’s worship service begins at the United Parish at 10:00 a.m. celebrating Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem. At 12:00 noon we gather with other local church members celebrating Jesus with a short parade down Central Street waving our palm branches and being led by a donkey, weather permitting. The parade will start in the Dollar Tree parking lot, will go as far as the Clark YMCA and returns to the Dollar Tree parking lot to disperse. If you have any questions, please reach out to Pastor Jason Cox or Cheri Duval, the United Parish’s office manager at jason@unitedparish.com or cheri@unitedparish.com. Service at United Parish, 39 Front St, Winchendon.

RECURRING WEEKLY EVENTS

EVERY DAY

Prayer at TWR House of Prayer

5:00 p.m. TWR House of Prayer is open to the public and all are welcome to come and participate. While in the prayer room, feel free to worship, read and study the Bible and engage in prayer. Every prayer meeting is lead by live continuous worship music and each hour has a specific prayer topic that all are encouraged to pray for. For more details and information check out our website at twrhouseofprayer.org. At TWR House of Prayer, 10 Pond St, Winchendon.

MONDAY through FRIDAY

Pickleball - Open Courts

9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. Drop in and play pickleball! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

MONDAYS

Gentle Yoga with Paula

10:00 a.m. Chair yoga tailored to the older generations to increase flexibility, balance, and breathwork to lower stress levels. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Friends’ Book and Used Media Sale

1:00-3:00 p.m. The Friends of the Library Book Sale is back! Browse a wide selection of used books, DVDs, puzzles, music and more. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St., Winchendon.

Lego Club for Kids at the Beals

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.

Yoga With Chantal from Shadow Academy Wellness

4:30-5:30 p.m. Unwind, relax, and celebrate the beauty of yoga. All skill levels welcomed! Mats and Blocks are available, if needed. Open to adults and teens. For more info, contact 978-297-0300, bealsmemoriallibrary@gmail.com or visit www.bealslibrary.org. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St., Winchendon.

AA Meeting

7:30 p.m. Open meeting, all are welcome. UU Church of Winchendon, 126 Central Street.

TUESDAYS

Strength Training with Mary Lee

8:30-9:15 a.m. Work at your own pace, with guidance from Marylee, to build and retain muscle utilizing handweights. You may bring your own or use the weights on hand! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Line Dancing with Mary Lee

9:15-10:15 a.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Family Friendly Story Hour at the Chapel

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.

Taste of Home Lunch

11:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m. Enjoy a homecooked lunch made by volunteers! Call 928-297-3155 to reserve a spot. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Game Day Tuesdays

12:00-3:00 p.m. Tables will be set up with a variety of games, including cribbage, Scrabble, checkers, chess and cards. All experience levels welcome to drop in and play. Transportation available via the Community Connector. Contact the Senior Center at 978-297-3155 or winchendoncoa@gmail.com with any questions. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon.

Sons of the American Legion Tuesday Dinner

5:00-7:00 p.m. Come and join us in the downstairs hall and lounge for a wonderful time of food and fellowship at the Winchendon American Legion. Please see our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61554947800863) where we will post the menu and prices each week. At Winchendon American Legion Post #193, 295 School St.

WEDNESDAYS

Ukelele Class with Julie

9:00-10:00 a.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Gentle Yoga with Paula

10:00-11:00 a.m. This class is suitable for all abilities. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Bingo!

12:30-2:30 p.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

ESL Classes

6:00-8:00 p.m. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Meet-Up With the Kiwanis

6:30 p.m. 2ND AND 4TH WEDNESDAYS EACH MONTH. All are welcome! Come join in community projects, make new friends, make your community better, have some fun! Younger folks welcome. For more information, call Caitte Kelly, 978-413-9930. Hosted by Kiwanis of Winchendon MA. At the Clark Memorial YMCA Community Room (in new gymnastics building down by the bike path), 155 Central St., Winchendon.

THURSDAYS

CFCE Preschool Playgroup at the Beals

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.

Friends’ Book and Used Media Sale

1:00-3:00 p.m. The Friends of the Library Book Sale is back! Browse a wide selection of used books, DVDs, puzzles, music and more. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St., Winchendon.

Cub Scout Meetings

6:30-7:45 p.m. For more information, please contact ccpack193@gmail.com.

FRIDAYS

Story Time at the Beals

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.

Open Bowling for the Public

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.

Senior Lunch and Free Bowling

10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Come in and enjoy lunch, free bowling, and fellowship! Please call 978-297-3155 at least 24 hours in advance to reserve a lunch. Bowling is free for all seniors 55+ from 10:00 a.m.- 12:30 p.m. Suggested donation, \$5. At the The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Zumbini with MaryLee

11:15 a.m.- 12:15 a.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Teen Drop-in at The HUB

4:00-6:00 p.m. Looking for a safe, welcoming place to hang out after school? Teen Drop-In at The HUB is your space to relax, connect, and have fun—completely free. In partnership with The Sunshine Café, we’re offering free bowling plus a rotating lineup of activities designed just for teens. Whether you’re competitive, creative, or just want to chill with friends, there’s something for you every week. 1st Friday, Gaming Night; 2nd Friday, Paint & Sip; 3rd Friday, Movie Night; 4th Friday, Surprise event. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

SATURDAYS

Toy Town Trolley

8:00 a.m.- 8:00 p.m. Scheduled rides, call or use the Community Connector app to reserve a ride. Sponsored by the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon, call 978-297-3155 for more info.

Brunch & Bowl at The HUB

10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Come on over to The Hub and grab brunch and enjoy bowling! Fun for the whole family. PAJAMAS welcome! Continental breakfast, unlimited coffee, 1 hour of bowling (shoes included), beverages available to purchase. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Open Bowling for the Public

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.

Friends’ Book and Used Media Sale

1:00-3:00 p.m. The Friends of the Library Book Sale is back! Browse a wide selection of used books, DVDs, puzzles, music and more. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St., Winchendon.

Shopping Transportation to Rindge for Seniors

3:30-4:30 p.m. Leaves from the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. Must reserve your ride one week in advance. Call 978-297-3155.

North Central Collective Greenhouse

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.

SUNDAYS

ESL Classes

6:00-8:00 p.m. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Art, Music and Dance

Line Dancing with Mary Lee
Tuesdays, 9:15-10:15 a.m. At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave., Winchendon. 978-297-3155.

Karaoke at The HUB
March 6, 6:30-9:30 p.m. Come one, Come all to The HUB for Karaoke! Join the Winchendon Parks and Rec and have a blast singing and building community together! At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Toy Town Bridge Artists Circle
March 7, 10:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. Come and join the Bridge Artistic Network for a time of encouragement, to engage and empower each other to keep creating and become who we were created to be. Bring your art supplies! This is a free event and Lunch is provided. At Cornerstone Church, 122 Gardner Rd, Winchendon.

Social Art Circle with GALA
March 3, 1:00-3:00 p.m. and March 19, 6:00-8:00 p.m. Explore a variety of art in a supportive social environment—a group with different skill levels who wish to learn, explore, laugh, share, connect, and be inspired in a safe, low key, non-intimidating space. Bring your portable works in progress or try and pick from the shared community art supplies we have on hand. Spend a few hours to be a part of our social art gathering with artists, friends and seniors! Share your project and make new friends. This is a self-led group, but there will be classroom monitors who will assist you. No cost, but registration required, at <https://form.jotform.com/253415023143949>. At The Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Sound Bites Friday the 13th Community Jam
March 13, 6:30-9:30 p.m. We're coming back with our March 13th Open Mic Community Jam. No bad luck here. Just good music and people. Sign-up list will be available at the HUB at 6:00 p.m. on Friday the 13th. Music starts at 6:30. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Art Critique with GALA
March 21, 10:00 a.m.- 12:30 p.m. Are you looking for encouragement and support from other artists? Bring up to 2 pieces of your artwork (finished or unfinished) to share with your circle of artist friends. The first 15 minutes will be social time, then we will go into sharing our artwork. You may bring snacks to share with the group. Free to all GALA members. New artists, first 2 classes are free. Janet Dupuis will help guide us during our time together. Email Janet to let her know that you will be joining us at Jandu516@gmail.com. For more info about GALA see www.galagardner.org. In the 1st floor Gallery of the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Ukulele Class
Wednesdays, 9:00-10:00 a.m. Come to the Winchendon Senior Center and learn how to play the Ukulele, no experience necessary! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Food and Meals

Winchendon Farmers Market Winter Market
March 7, 10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. First Saturday of each month. Inside the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

American Legion Spaghetti Dinner
March 12, 5:00-6:30 p.m. \$12 per person, open to all! Sponsored by Winchendon American Legion Auxiliary Unit #193. At Winchendon American Legion Post #193, 295 School St.

Our Neighbor’s Kitchen Dinner
March 12 and 26, 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. Free-will donation \$2 per person, \$5 per family; no one turned away. 126 Central Street.

Corned Beef and Cabbage Dinner with the American Legion Riders
March 14, 6:00-7:00 p.m. \$15 per person. At Winchendon American Legion Post #193, 295 School St.

Growing Places Farmers Market
March 17, 10:30-11:30 a.m. Fresh local vegetables available for purchase using cash, debit/credit or SNAP/HIP benefits! At the Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Annual Meat Shoot at the Legion
March 22, 1:00 p.m. We will have a special guest who will have personalized entertaining products, Easter Raffle Basket, Scratch Ticket Raffle and of course light foods. Proceeds benefit American Legion Auxiliary programs. At Winchendon American Legion Post #193, 295 School St.

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.

Sons of the American Legion Tuesday Dinner
Tuesdays, 5:00-7:00 p.m. Come and join us in the downstairs hall and lounge for a wonderful time of food and fellowship at the Winchendon American Legion. Please see our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61554947800863) where we will post the menu and prices each week. At Winchendon American Legion Post #193, 295 School St.

Brunch & Bowl at The HUB
Saturdays, 10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Come on over to The Hub and grab brunch and enjoy bowling! Fun for the whole family. PAJAMAS welcome! Continental breakfast, unlimited coffee, 1 hour of bowling (shoes included), beverages available to purchase. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

For Teens

Teen Drop-in at The HUB
Fridays, 4:00-6:00 p.m. Looking for a safe, welcoming place to hang out after school? Teen Drop-In at The HUB is your space to relax, connect, and have fun—completely free. In partnership with The Sunshine Café, we're offering free bowling plus a rotating lineup of activities designed just for teens. Whether you're competitive, creative, or just want to chill with friends, there's something for you every week. 1st Friday, Gaming Night; 2nd Friday, Paint & Sip; 3rd Friday, Movie Night; 4th Friday, Surprise event. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Teen Cooking Class (Wed)
March 4 and 18, 3:00-5:00 p.m. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Teen Cooking Class (Thur)
March 5 and 19, 3:00-5:00 p.m. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Teen GSA Meeting at the Beals
March 4, 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
6:00-10:00 p.m. Teens Bowl for \$2/person (or bring in 2 cans/non-perishable & non-expired items to donate to the Food Pantry). At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Teen Dungeons & Dragons
March 10 and 24, 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.

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

Entertainment

Music with Bob Jordan
March 2, 10:30-11:30 a.m. Come and join us for some folk music with Bob Jordan! At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Denis Cormier Concert
March 12, 10:45 a.m. At Old Murdock Senior Center, 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon.

Annual Skate Show with the Winchendon Skate Club
March 15, 2:00-4:00 p.m. Come on over to the Ice Rink at the Winchendon School and see all of the wonderful skills the kids in the Winchendon Skate Club have been working on all year! Tickets \$10 at the door. At The Winchendon School, 172 Ash St.

Comedy Night at The HUB
March 21, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Get ready to laugh the night away! Join us for an unforgettable Comedy Night featuring headliners John Perrotta and Joe Hebert—two of New England's funniest comics bringing the laughs right to The HUB! Tickets \$30 per person. Limited seating—tickets will go fast, so don't wait! <https://www.eventeny.com/events/comedynight-25068/>. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Friday Night Frequencies at The HUB
March 27., 7:00-9:00 p.m. Whether you're coming to support local musicians, hang out with friends, or just enjoy a fun Friday night, this event is for you! Free & open to the public, all are welcome! Come out, bring a friend, and keep the music alive in Winchendon! Featured musicians this month: Plunge Pool! Check them out on YouTube: www.youtube.com/@plungepoolband4336 and Facebook: www.facebook.com/PlungePoolBand. Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation. At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

Morton E. Converse Tournament of Plays
March 27 and 28, 7:00 p.m. Each class at Murdock High School will stage a one-act play in competition for awards. Judging on the second night. At Murdock Middle High School Auditorium, 3 Memorial Dr, Winchendon.

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.

Yoga With Chantal from Shadow Academy Wellness
Mondays, 4:30-5:30 p.m. With Chantal from Shadow Academy Wellness. Unwind, relax, and celebrate the beauty of yoga. All skill levels welcomed! Mats and Blocks are available, if needed. Free with a suggested donation. For more info, contact 978-297-0300, bealsmemoriallibrary@gmail.com or visit www.bealslibrary.org. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St., Winchendon.

Trivia with Tony
March 28, 6:00-9:00 p.m. Custom team based/pub style trivia games w/hosting and interactive media/music. Custom games tailored to occasion and or interests. Bring your family and friends. Test your knowledge and win prizes!!! At The HUB, 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon.

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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.

Cub Scout Meetings
Thursdays, 6:30-7:45 p.m. For more information, please contact ccpack193@gmail.com.

Winter Science with Melissa the Mad Scientist
March 14, 2:00 p.m. for kids ages 4-8. Explore exciting winter themed experiments with Melissa the Mad Scientist. Space limited, registration required. Call the library at 978-297-0300. Sponsored by Friends of the Beals Memorial Library. At Beals Memorial Library, 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon.

Easter Egg Hunt
March 28, 10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. FREE! Bring the kids to hunt for colorful eggs, meet the Easter Bunny, and snap some adorable springtime photos! Fun surprises are waiting, and it's the perfect way to welcome the season with friends and neighbors. This event is FREE and open to the community—just bring your baskets and your smiles! Questions? Call (978) 297-3155 or email scunningham@winchendon-ma.gov. Rain date: April 4. Sponsored by Winchendon Parks & Recreation. At Winchendon Community Park, 86 Ingleside Dr.

Beals Memorial Library 50 Pleasant St, Winchendon 978-297-0300 bealslibrary.org	Winchendon American Legion Post #193 295 School St., Winchendon 978-297-0754
Old Murdock Senior Center 52 Murdock Ave, Winchendon 978-297-3155 facebook.com/oldmurdock	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
The HUB / Winchendon CAC 5 Summer Dr, Winchendon 978-287-1667 www.the-hub.org facebook.com/winchendoncac	Murdock Middle High School 3 Memorial Dr, Winchendon 978-297-1256 www.winchendonk12.org
UU Church of Winchendon 126 Central St, Winchendon 978-297-0554 uucw.ncmuuc.org	Clark Memorial YMCA 155 Central St 978-297-9622 www.theclarkymca.org
Immaculate Heart of Mary Church 52 Spruce St, Winchendon 978-297-0280 www.heartofmary.net	

Winchendon News

Whose Big Fat Greek Wedding Will It Be? MMHS Cast Sings Our Hearts Out with “Mamma Mia!”



Photos copyright Winchendon Public Schools

by Inanna Arthen

On Friday, February 6 and Saturday, February 7, Murdock Middle High School presented a rollicking, energetic and colorful production of the rock musical “Mamma Mia!” Built around hit songs by the 1970s Swedish singing group ABBA—one of the most internationally popular pop groups in history—“Mamma Mia!” tells the story of 19-year-old Sophie, her never-married mom, Donna, and the great mystery of their lives: who is Sophie’s real father?

Although the Murdock musicals epitomize “less is more” with their clever minimalist set design—always utilizing a raised platform to the rear of the stage, one set of steps, backdrops and various small movable set pieces—set designers Ari Dibble and Kristi Iannacone outdid themselves this time. The “Mamma Mia!” set, representing entrepreneurial Donna’s hotel that she operates on a present-day Greek island, all but dropped the audience onto the shore of the Aegean. Dazzling white walls dripped with cascading vines and flowers, and the ever-present steps were decorated to resemble a tiled set of steps from the hotel to the beach. When the lights went up for the first time, I gasped. With very few changes, the stage became the hotel bar, the beach, Donna’s and Sophie’s bedrooms, a church with pews and even a brief nightmare.

The choreography, by Kaileen and Ari Dibble, was well designed and well-performed, and made it clear how hard the entire cast worked. There was a lot of nostalgic 70s disco feel to the steps and arm movements, but at one point the ensemble joined arms in a Greek wedding circle dance. “Choreography” is more than typical dancing, as well—the ensemble had a lot of very funny business during solo numbers, poking their heads out from behind the flies at the sides or appearing from behind set pieces to sing back-up to the leads. The cast was constantly in motion and everyone seemed to have some business whenever they were visible, all of it weaving together into a cohesive whole. At the same time, it never got too confusing (something I can’t say about some Broadway shows). The ensemble cast were all great.

The leads did an excellent job. Brooke Arsenault as Sophie and Doris Huggins as Donna were the two foundations of the show, and both held up their roles impressively. Equally strong vocalists, they knocked the audience’s socks off in their solo numbers. But they were most affecting in their scene together on the wedding morning when Sophie asks Donna to help her dress in her wedding gown. Honestly? I wasn’t the only one blinking back tears in that scene.

Luke Smith as Harry Bright, Colton Pearson as Bill Austin, and Jack Varca as Sam Carmichael—the would-be, might-be, wanna-be dads—all brought their characters out vividly and sang well. Shamus Solomon as Sky, Sophie’s note-so-sure-about-this groom, was a bit more understated, but

sang well.

Not all the supporting cast members got a chance to really stand out on their own—one who did was Bianca Touseul as Rosie, who convinced Bill to “Take a Chance on Me”—and not only sang down the house, but was hilariously funny when she did. Sophia Boisvert as Donna’s red-headed old friend Tanya was very funny as she fended off a smitten islander, Pepper (Walter Moriarity III). Emma Lavoie, Ava Malcolm and Sydney Houle were cute as Sophie’s three best friends Ali, Lisa and Bella.

Director Kaileen Dibble did a fantastic job pulling the whole cast and crew together.

Shout-out to costume designer Tina Santos—the costumes were very good. Every character actor had costumes that (I’ll never forget getting this lesson pounded into me) “made a statement about the character,” from hard-working Donna’s overalls in her first scene, to the matching satin disco outfits Donna, Tanya and Rosie appeared in to relive their young glory days in “Dancing Queen,” to Sophie’s sleek wedding dress and “Father Alexandrios”’s vestments. But funniest were the beach outfits the company appeared in during one number, looking like they’d actually gone pearl-diving as Donna kidded she would send her hotel guests off the pier to do.

As enjoyable as the show was, I did have a couple of constructive comments. Everyone could have used a little more coaching on their dialogue, diction, and overall spoken voice work. Especially in a musical, this often gets lower priority, but line delivery is very important, whether an actor is timing a joke or going for drama. (And especially if your actors are doing quite passable English and Australian accents!) As someone who teaches writers how to perform their own fiction in public, I know how much work this is. But Murdock performers have talent, and it’s frustrating to see it not come out as well as it could and should.

The stage lighting also did not work to bring out the best in the show and the performers. I don’t mean the tech crew—the lighting and sound cues were handled extremely well. The lighting made very fruitful use of color gels to transform scenes. But the show really needed spots for the actors. I have no idea what the limits of the stage lighting are in the auditorium, but more than once the actors were down-lit so severely, their faces virtually disappeared. Some of this can be minimized by blocking, but then you have the hindrance of not being able to use whole chunks of the stage.

It’s also a shame that the show didn’t have a pit band to accompany the singers live, but everyone worked well with the recorded soundtrack background.

It was the most fun I’ve had at a Murdock musical, I think, since MMHS did “Little Shop of Horrors”. I’m definitely looking forward to the Morton E. Converse Tournament of Plays next month (March 27 and 28, don’t miss it!).

Supt. King Presents Results of School Survey to School Committee

by Inanna Arthen

At the Winchendon School Committee meeting on Thursday, January 22, Superintendent Charlotte King gave a presentation to the Committee on a survey that had been taken through a partnership with Attuned Education Partners as one step in developing a long term strategic plan for the district.

“Tonight, I am sharing some of the survey results from the community, parents, families and students,” Supt. King began. “The

staff results were shared in staff meetings, and that’s an ongoing process. We started the first one this week, and then we’re planning on finishing up the first week of February, just based on staff meeting schedules. So those results are being shared with the staff first before they would be shared here. So we are sharing key insights from the district diagnostic to support transparency and collaboration. The results in these slides are simplified down from a very comprehensive diagnostic report that we

received. There is a mix in here of data that came from DESE [the Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education], some of our internal data, and then the survey results. Also, data from classroom observations. Some people from the Attuned Partnership came out to observe in some of the classrooms. So some of the data was derived from that.”

Committee member Greg Vine asked how the survey responses broke down among students, staff and families—were they weighted

toward any one demographic or another?

“We received about 500 or so responses, and it was given to all of students grade 6 to 12, so we had pretty much 100 percent participation there because it was an electronic survey that they were able to do in mentoring class,” Supt. King said. “And then the family survey and community survey was pushed out in a variety of ways. So we were also looking to engage families that were with the district and have

Turn to **SCHOOL SURVEY** page 16

Our Neighbor’s Kitchen Marks 30 Years with Special Commemorative Community Supper on Thursday, March 26



ONK diners get ready to enjoy a roast turkey Thanksgiving dinner
Photo courtesy of Jill Sackett

by Jill Nicholson Sackett

For over a quarter century the Unitarian Universalist Church of Winchendon (UUCW) has been at the forefront of Our Neighbor’s Kitchen (ONK), taking on increasing responsibility and commitment. This month UUCW celebrates 30 years of bringing hot, home-cooked meals to the community. They will mark the occasion by serving a special commemorative dinner on Thursday, March 26 at 5:30 pm. Chef Dave Faucher will reprise the first ONK supper served on March 28, 1996 featuring corned beef and cabbage. As with all ONK meals, the entire community is welcome to attend. Meals are free but donations are gratefully accepted.

Like so many good things in our town, ONK was the brainchild of a core group of dedicated volunteers. Initially, it was sponsored by The Winchendon Community Action Committee (CAC), the Bethany Bible Chapel and the Cornerstone Church. The committee that “started it all” consisted of Martha Trepanier, Michael Klimowicz, Dale Greene, Fred Nalette, Janet Mancini and Mary Ann Puemape. UUCW donated use of their kitchen, cookware, dishes and Parish Hall dining facilities.

The program was an instant success. During the early years, UUCW gradually absorbed more and more of the responsibilities with the CAC and different churches providing some much-appreciated volunteer or financial support. By mid-2000s UUCW had taken over all operations: facility use, cooking, menu-planning, fund-raising,

cleanup, promotion and recruiting volunteers. Sensing increased community demand, and in concert with the demise of our only remaining grocery store, UUCW doubled their efforts in 2015 to begin serving twice-monthly meals. During the COVID shut-down, UUCW continued service, handing out take-away meals to cars and pedestrians passing through their front circle drive.

And they haven’t looked back. Today, ONK is a “well-oiled machine” backed by a wonderful group of community volunteers. Two UUCW church families trade off setting the menus, preparing the entrees, and running the kitchen. They have a repertoire of popular meals, but don’t hesitate to try out new dishes on their willing diners. The workers are ServSafe® certified and the kitchen is inspected annually by the Winchendon Board of Health.

UUCW was thrilled to be joined by the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church several years ago who provide meals on alternate Thursdays. Free, home-cooked, nutritionally balanced meals are now available in Winchendon every Thursday evening, year-round.

On March 27, 1996, the eve of ONK’s debut, Winchendon resident Ron Muse wrote an editorial in the *Winchendon Courier*, highlighting the new supper program and those kicking it off. How timeless and relevant his words are! He wrote in part:

“There are stories that transcend politics. There are tales that don’t tell ‘who did what to who’ but rather who’s doing what for her...The goal of [Our Neighbor’s Kitchen] is simple. To provide food to anyone in the Winchendon community who is hungry or in need of fellowship.

“As complex as life seems to get sometimes, it is simplified by the sobering thought that some people still go to bed hungry. While the ideologies will say people who are doing without should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, they miss the point that what makes us strong is not our might alone, but our compassion.

“We continue to look at athletes and movie stars as our heroes, but the stuff of real heroes is not done on the silver screen or the athletic arena, but in the community where neighbor reaches out to neighbor...

“The strength of a community continues to be those who work quietly, seeking neither



Volunteer Joe Sackett prepares take-out trays
Photo courtesy of Jill Sackett

praise nor publicity. Their goal is as simple and as daunting as providing a meal for a hungry person.

In many ways, these people are our leaders. And they set an example the rest of us can only hope to follow.”

UUCW now serves ONK meals every 2nd, 4th and 5th Thursday of each month, year-round. Some join us for fellowship. Some bring friends for an economical break from their own kitchens. Some just plain love the food that’s served. And some are getting their only cooked meal of the day. ONK is open to all, regardless of their economic or residency situations. Sit-down dining begins at 5:30 pm with take-out service beginning after indoor diners are served. Visit the UUCW website at uucw.ncmuuc.org to see menus or to donate to the program.

At-the-door donations cover a portion of the costs, and are supplemented by a variety of sources, including the CAC, United Parish, and generous private individuals. As with any non-profit endeavor, UUCW pays strict attention to fundraising and responsible spending.

Advertise in the Winchendon Courier!

The *Winchendon Courier* Online is uploaded every Thursday night and reaches hundreds of Winchendon readers every week. In December, 2025:

- 1,437 visitors spent more than a minute on the site
- 124 visitors spent an hour or more on the site
- 92 people downloaded the PDF of the tax classification hearing packet from the article about the hearing
- 64 people downloaded the most recent Small Business Shopping Map (updated continuously!)
- 267 people reached the site through a link on Facebook

The monthly print edition of the *Winchendon Courier* has a press run of 500 and an uptake of over 90 percent. (That means 450+ copies in the hands of readers – and many copies are read by more than one person.) 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 – change your ad as often as you want, at no extra charge! (New ad every week? You’re good!)
- Discounted annual rate for advertisers who commit to a full year of weekly ads
- Automatic placement of any business card or double business card ad in the monthly print addition, at no extra charge, for advertisers who place their ad for a full month in the online edition
- Ad sizes available in the print edition range from business card size to full page. We’re flexible! If you have a specific size ad you want to use, ask us what it will cost. Questions about formatting or dimensions? Contact us!

For a rate card and/or a full information packet, contact:
editor@winchendoncourier.net

Ideas & Information

Gardening

Boost Your Raspberry Harvest with Proper Pruning



Routine raspberry pruning results in fewer pest problems and bigger harvests.
Photo courtesy of MelindaMyers.com

by Melinda Myers

Break out the leather gloves, heavy long sleeve shirt or coat, pruners and head out to your raspberry patch. Proper routine pruning can help reduce the risk of disease, manage insect pests and boost productivity.

When and how to prune raspberries is based on the type of raspberries you are growing and how you prefer to manage them. Summer and ever-bearing raspberries form fruit on two-year-old canes.

Start pruning once the worst of winter weather has passed and before growth begins in spring. Remove any canes that bore fruit last summer back to the ground. These canes are done producing and when left in place, they increase the risk of insect and disease problems and make harvesting more difficult. Leave the one-year-old canes intact, including those that bore fruit on everbearing plants last fall. These one-year-old stems will produce berries this coming summer.

Now thin the plantings to three to four canes per foot or six to eight stems per hill. This will allow for better light penetration and air circulation, helping reduce disease problems and increase productivity.

Slightly trim back side branches and remove no more than one fourth the total height of the remaining stems. Avoid more severe pruning that can greatly reduce the harvest.

Fall raspberries can be cut to the ground. Pruning back all the stems eliminates the summer crop, but results in an earlier and larger fall harvest.

Provide plants with a bit of support, if needed. Training is best done and easiest at planting, but if you skipped this step you may want to consider implementing a narrow-hedge row system. Training raspberry plants keeps the berries off the ground, increases light penetration, boosts productivity and makes harvesting much easier.

You can either install sturdy posts two feet into the ground at the end of each row or every 20 feet. Secure heavy gauge wire to the posts at 40" above the ground to help keep the plants upright. You can use a second wire surrounding the planting and secured a bit lower on the posts.

Another option is to use single or double T trellises. Run wires between the arms to help hold the plants upright. Consult your local extension service's raspberry publications for more details on these and other training methods.

Enlist summer pruning to help keep your raspberries healthy and

productive. Once you have finished the summer harvest, remove any canes that bore fruit along with insect-infested and diseased stems. Destroy these to further reduce future pest problems.

Make raspberry pruning a regular part of garden care. Your efforts will be rewarded with fewer pest problems and bigger harvests.

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 her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.

Financial Focus®

Unlock the full potential of your 401(k)

Your 401(k) is one of the most powerful tools for securing your financial future. The question is: Are you using it to its full potential?

Here are some strategies to help you maximize its benefits:

- **Earn your employer's match.** It's a good idea to contribute as much as you can afford to your 401(k) plan. (In 2026, you can put in up to \$24,500, or \$32,500 if you're 50 or older. If your plan allows, there's also a "super catch-up" contribution of \$11,250 for people aged 60 to 63, for a total contribution limit of \$35,750). At least put in enough to earn a matching contribution if one is offered. Otherwise, you're shortchanging yourself. For example: Your employer matches 50% of your contribution up to \$5,000. If put in \$8,000, your employer's 50% match is \$4,000, and you're leaving \$1,000 "on the table."
- **Give your plan a raise.** When your income increases, consider increasing contributions to your 401(k). When you get a bonus or a tax refund, you could use some or all of that to boost your retirement savings.
- **Evaluate the Roth option.** When you invest in a traditional 401(k), you contribute pre-tax dollars, lowering your taxable income that year. Your earnings grow tax-deferred and are taxed when you withdraw. If your employer offers a Roth 401(k), you contribute after-tax dollars, so your taxable income doesn't drop that year. However, withdrawals in retirement, contributions and earnings alike, are generally tax-free. (Employer matching contributions and related earnings remain taxable.) If you expect a higher tax bracket in retirement or want to diversify tax treatment for flexibility in retirement, consider the Roth option. In 2026, the Roth option must be used for catch-up contributions if you earn more than \$150,000 and you are 50 or older. Consult your tax advisor before deciding.
- **Build an appropriate investment mix.** You may have multiple investment options in your 401(k). The driving principle early on is growth so your plan can fund a long retirement. But growth-oriented investments are naturally riskier than fixed-income vehicles. When starting your career, you may prefer a portfolio weighted toward aggressive growth, as you have years to recover from downturns. Nearing retirement, though, consider shifting to a more conservative mix. A financial advisor can help you choose an appropriate mix at different stages, based on your risk tolerance, time horizon and goals.
- **Keep your plan intact.** At times, you may feel a financial pinch that leads you to consider taking out loans or early withdrawals from your 401(k). However, this can cause you to incur taxes and penalties and will likely slow the growth needed to help reach your retirement savings goals. Taking steps to prepare for unexpected expenses, such as building an emergency fund containing three to six months' worth of living expenses, can help you avoid dipping into your 401(k). You may also be able to find other ways to access cash.

By following these steps, you can unlock the full potential of your 401(k) and position it as a cornerstone of your retirement income.



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News, events, police logs, obituaries, community directory
and archives of every previous issue back to September, 2019

winchendoncourier.net

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Winchendon News

Robinson Broadhurst Foundation Wants Communities to Know “We’re Here to Help You”

by Inanna Arthen

“Winchendon owes so much to the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation. Where would this town be without them?” Residents of Toy Town have probably heard, and spoken, variations of these words more than once. Winchendon is the fortunate beneficiary of a unique charitable foundation—one that only provides funds to three small towns that its Benefactors loved and once called home. Two of these towns are in New York state, nestled in the Catskill mountains west of Albany: Stamford and Worcester, New York. The third, and by far the largest, is Winchendon.

Each year, any non-profit organization or town department in Winchendon can apply for a grant, or more than one. Robinson Broadhurst Foundation Inc. (or RBF) has funded building repairs and upgrades, purchases of important equipment, arts and music events, trainings and youth programs. They have funded or helped to fund accessibility entrances at the Immaculate Heart of Mary church, building upgrades at the Beals Memorial Library, renovations at The Hub community center, a new addition to the Clark Memorial YMCA, and a multi-year ongoing stonework restoration project at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Winchendon. They have paid for tasers for the Police Department and critical safety equipment for the Fire Department. The list is endless. Since 1984, Winchendon has received \$40,254,095 in grants from RBF.

RBF has also funded, apart from its regular grant cycle, a special major project in each of the three towns. In Winchendon, RBF’s gift to the town was the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation Performing Arts Amphitheater at the Winchendon Community Park on Ingleside Drive. The park itself also received some upgrades, with hiking trails, decks by the edge of Whitney Pond and a pollinator garden. With a cost of some \$3 million, the new park and amphitheater held its grand opening on June 10, 2023. The first Saturday in June is now an official town holiday, Founders Day, to commemorate the opening of the park and Winchendon’s gratitude for RBF’s generosity.

Don VanEtten, the President and Director of Robinson Broadhurst Foundation, Inc., spoke to the *Courier* recently about the history and work of the Foundation, and why the Board members are so passionate about it.

“Typically, we have triple the amount of requests for the money that we have to give. So it’s a very difficult thing to work through the grants and make the best decisions that we can. We try to fund as many applications as possible and help as many as we possibly can, even if it’s just portions of those,” Mr. VanEtten said.

Applications are due by November 30, and applicants are informed of the decision in May. The grant cycle follows the fiscal year of July 1 through June 30. For FY2026, RBF had \$3,185,544 to divide among all the applications from all three towns.

The applications are now filled out entirely online, via the RBF website. “This is, I think, our third or fourth year of being completely online with our application, and I think that’s worked out really well,” Mr. VanEtten said. “I think there’s been less than a handful of not-for-profit organizations that have struggled a little bit with being 100 percent online, but myself and [RBF Office Manager Diane Frazee] have helped the few of those that have needed the help, and they have gotten their applications in, and we’ve helped them through that process.”

Mr. VanEtten added, “I think one thing that’s important to mention is that our Board spends more time on applications that we do not fund versus the applications that we do fund, because it’s very difficult to say no, and we need a good

reason as to why we’re not funding that, and we may not fund it that particular year, but if we feel that it’s a worthwhile application, maybe they need to do some more work. Maybe they need to get some more funding in place before we can proceed. So we’ll encourage them to reapply. So just because it was a ‘no’ one year doesn’t mean it’s going to be a ‘no’ next year.”

Mr. VanEtten spoke warmly about some of Winchendon’s strongest assets. The UU Church of Winchendon was the church attended by RBF Benefactor Anna Broadhurst, who taught Sunday School there, and whose parents were married there in 1900. “It’s a very important building to Winchendon,” Mr. VanEtten said. The Fire Department holds a special meaning for him, he said, because he is a firefighter himself. “I think Chief Tom Smith has done a phenomenal job there, and I understand the trials and tribulations that he has in balancing a budget and keeping the department going, and so we’ve tried to help the department with all facets of equipment that they may need, whether it was a truck or turnout gear or air packs.” He praised the Clark, saying that Stamford has nothing to compare with it. “I’m just in awe of the generosity of Mr. Clark in those days to build the facility that was built and to offer the programming and things that those kids and adults have,” he said. The Winchendon CAC “could spread \$1 and make it go so far. I think they’re really making a huge impact in the Winchendon community, and it’s absolutely needed.”

The RBF Board does site visits to grantees when they can—as the Foundation is based in Stamford, NY, it’s a bit of a hike. But site visits are very important for building trust, Mr. VanEtten said. “I know it’s not easy for folks in Winchendon to walk into my office,” he said. “I tell everybody I have an open door policy, as my predecessor did. I’m very accessible, also by phone and email, and that’s what I tell folks in Winchendon. I give them my card. I say, anytime you have any questions, please email me, call me, and if I’m out of the office, I will certainly get right back to you. I think it’s very important to be transparent. I want the community to have trust in the Foundation.”

Part of this transparency is a new push by the Foundation to reach out to their communities, share their mission and their story, and let people know who they are, what they are, and what they do. “With some of the not-for-profit organizations, with government municipalities, you have changes in leadership,” Mr. VanEtten said. “So somebody involved with Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Little Leagues, even town government, leadership changes, and they don’t always know who the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation is, or that we’re here to help you.”

The Foundation has a brand new Facebook page, and has expanded some of the historical information on their website. They’re also reaching out to the local newspapers in each community.

“We do those face to face conversations,” Mr. VanEtten said. “I hear so many times that when we do these site visits, I hear so many grantees telling us how much they appreciate us coming and taking that step and seeing the work that’s being done, and I think that gives us the best understanding. Honestly, it’s an honor for us to go and do it. I think it creates a relationship that’s strong and it’s important, and it’s trust both ways. I want the grantees to trust us. I want the community to trust us as we trust them.”

The RBF Board consists of six members. There is also an Advisory Committee for each of the three towns. Board members are generally business owners, and are very involved with their communities. Mr. VanEtten first became part of RBF in 2010 as a member of the Stamford



from left, Glenn Hunt, Vice President, Treasurer and Director; Don VanEtten, President and Director; Cindy Landanno, Director; Patty Callagy, Director; Heather Clark, Secretary and Director; Diane Frazee, Office Manager

Photo courtesy of The Robinson Broadhurst Foundation

Advisory Committee.

But how did this all get started, and why is it called the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation? Who were the Robinsons and the Broadhursts?

The Robinson Broadhurst Foundation Inc. was incorporated on March 24, 1984 and recognized as a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation by the IRS on June 10, 1985.

Siblings Anna June Robinson and Robert Avery Robinson were the children of Eliza and Byron Robinson and were born in Winchendon. Their uncle Sam Robinson, who lived in Stamford, NY, was an early investor in IBM and director of the National Bank of Stamford. When he passed away in 1948, he left much of his estate to Anna and Avery; they inherited the rest when their aunt passed away in 1955. Both siblings married but had no children. They dedicated their lives to helping the communities they lived in: Stamford, for Avery and his wife Winnie (who moved there to help care for their uncle Sam), and Winchendon for Anna, who married Ray Broadhurst in 1951.

Anna contributed generously to the Clark and the UU Church of Winchendon. She bought gifts for children in low-income families. Avery and Winnie assisted local families and organizations, and launched a ski resort in Stamford named Scotch Valley to bring tourists and visitors to the town year-round.

Despite their wealth and their philanthropic benevolence, Anna, Avery and Winnie preferred to live simple lives. Anna Broadhurst was known in Winchendon for her strong work ethic. Unmarried until she was 50, Anna worked for the Baxter Whitney company, whose plant was located in the building on Whitney Pond now utilized by Doody Burial Vaults. She also worked for the Frederick F. Davis insurance company at 33 Lincoln Avenue. She could be seen walking to her jobs, dressed in simple and practical clothes, and kept on working even after she received her inheritance.

Avery passed away in 1983. He stipulated in his will that a portion of the Robinson family assets be used to set up a charitable foundation, specifically to aid the communities of Stamford NY, Worcester NY and Winchendon. This initially amounted to approximately \$7,330,000. When Anna passed away in 1984, she left an additional \$3,590,000 to the Foundation. Winnie Robinson passed away in 1996 and left \$7,540,000 to the Foundation along with some \$7,700,000 from family trusts.

Today the Foundation’s assets total nearly \$70 million.

To learn more about the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation and how to apply for a grant, visit their website at robinsonbroadhurst.org. You can follow them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61583789019114.

Community Notice Board

Town Committee Monthly Meetings by Week All Meetings in Town Hall

week	MON	TUE	WED	THUR
1st	Board of Health 10:00am	Planning Board 6:00pm Parks & Rec Commission 6:30pm		School Committee 6:00pm
2nd	Board of Selectmen 6:30pm	Finance Committee 7:00pm	Economic Development Task Force 5:30pm Agricultural Commission 7:00pm	Conservation Commission 6:00pm
3rd	Winchendon Redevelopment Authority 5:00pm	Planning Board 6:00pm Parks & Rec Commission 6:30pm	Zoning Board of Appeals 7:00pm	School Committee 6:00pm
4th	Board of Selectmen 6:30pm		Economic Development Task Force 5:30pm	

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.

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.

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.

Winter Parking Ban is in Effect

No On-Street Parking Between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

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

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”

2026 Dog Licenses Available Now

2026 Dog licenses are now available at the Town Clerk’s office in person, or mail check with rabies certificate to Town Clerk, 109 Front St, Dept. 3, Winchendon, MA 01475. You can also put your application in the drop box outside of Town Hall or order online on the Town Clerk’s page of the town website. Cost for a Spayed/Neutered dog is \$10, Non-Spayed/Non-Neutered dog is \$20. Please provide valid rabies certificate.

Toy Town FYIs

Transfer Station Hours

Wednesday 12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Thursday 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Saturday 8:00 a.m. 4:00 p.m.
653 River Street
978-297-0395
Sticker price: \$85 (\$25 for additional stickers)
Pay-As-You-Throw bags required
33-gallon, \$5.00 per bag, 16-gallon, \$3.00 per bag as of July 1, 2025
2025-2026 Transfer Station sticker now on sale in Town Hall and at the Transfer Station.

Is Your House Number Clearly Visible from the Street?

The Winchendon Fire Department reminds all residents to make sure their house number is clearly visible for first responders who may need to find you. Numbers should be at least four inches high and facing the street, with lighting if possible. Put numbers on a contrasting background so they will stand out. If your driveway is long, put the number on a mailbox or pole on the street or at the end of driveway, facing in both directions. (Reflective numbers are helpful.) Check your house numbers to make sure foliage has not grown up in front of them without your being aware of it.

Winchendon Town Hall & Transfer Station Now Accepting Credit/Debit Payments

We are excited to announce that the DPW, Treasurer/Collector’s Office and the Transfer Station can all now accept in-person credit and debit card payments. This means next time you need to purchase or pay for:

- Trash bags
- Transfer station stickers
- Excise bills
- Tax bills
- Water & Sewer bills
- And more

You can pay with a credit or debit card! (subject to a convenience fee).

Winchendon News

SCHOOL SURVEY

continued from page 11

gone on to either homeschooling or some other options, to gain some information about why they left, and if they would be interested in sharing information that would help us keep students in district."

Going to the next slide, Supt. King continued, "Some key challenges that came up in the results were obviously achievement gaps that we've talked about quite a bit, low proficiency, AP results and SAT results, a low sense of belonging, discipline, consistency amongst the schools, and then retention issues."

"I don't think, as we go through these results, that anything is going to be very surprising. I feel like they're all things we have suspected or had our own data, but this just solidified that we're on the right track and the concerns that we want to address."

Mr. Vine asked about the "low feeling of belonging" and whether it was more prevalent among the younger or older kids. Supt. King said that the survey was only given to the upper grades, 6 through 12, but she thought it was evenly distributed. She promised to get a more detailed breakdown for the Committee.

The next slide gave a "snapshot" of the WPS student population. There are approximately 1,100 students. 54 percent of the students are low income. 30 percent have disabilities. District enrollment is declining, while the high-needs student population is rising.

For "bright spots" in Student Outcomes, Supt. King said that on DESE's point system for graduation rates, Winchendon has gained 13 points, while there are gains in early literacy for grades K-1.

For concerns, Supt. King explained that WPS has an MCAS proficiency below the state average, there are large gaps between student subgroups, the pass rate for students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses is only 15 percent, and SAT scores are low. The pass rate for AP classes is not the class grade per se, but the final exam for the AP subject.

Continuing with the slides, Supt. King went on, "In the area of school culture and well being—this was from family surveys—people felt that the extracurriculars we offer are strong. Families feel safe, but they do have concerns about a low sense of belonging and bullying."

"In the area of Curriculum and Instruction, HQIM, which is high quality instruction materials, has been adopted in almost every subject area, which really puts us ahead of the game, which is great. There was a positive school culture, but the rigor is inconsistent, and only half of the students find our coursework challenging. So that's definitely something we need to dive into."

Supt. King clarified that the response about coursework not being challenging came from the student surveys, with 50 percent not feeling challenged. Mr. Vine said, "There might be a correlation there to some extent, that if they're not finding them challenging enough that maybe their scores are lower because they're bored and just tuning out the course, right?" Supt. King said that in the next part of the strategic planning process, the district would be working to find the root causes of the concerns and start to create goals.

Going to the next slide, Supt. King said, "Under the Talent and Family Perception section, retention was down 19 points. There was reported mixed experiences with Special Ed, some very positive, some negative, which I don't think is a surprise, and then the negative NPS was the Net Promoter Score, which means, 'would you recommend your district to other students or other families?' That net promoter score was low, meaning that families in their surveys said that they would not recommend our district to other families, which is a concern."

"So What This Means? Obviously, we have urgent needs, and the areas we identified as those urgent needs are the rigor of the coursework, improving that sense of belonging, consistent expectations, staff stability, and then family trust. Then our next steps are to continue to engage the community in this work, to begin to create the strategic plan, strengthen our instruction, sense of belonging, student readiness and those family partnerships."

"We will continue with the community participation through forums, surveys, planning committees and partnerships that will begin to shape the next steps. So as a leadership team and a school community, we will identify some goal areas, and then as we start to define those goal areas, that's when we'll reach back out for people's input on what they think the defining steps are. So for example, if we choose a goal area of social-emotional learning and we identify five action steps, if we get feedback from the community that 'we think that step five is actually your top priority,' we will move those pieces around to reflect what the community needs."

Committee member Tara Teixeira said, "I don't think that leaving that up to them would be—I don't think that that's appropriate. I really think that us having our needs and what we need to have figured out, and then going to the community and saying, How can you fill the gaps? What programs do you have, what things you have, their opinion doesn't really mean much, really. It just doesn't. It's, what can you bring to the table so that you can fill in these gaps? And

it's a lot of talking and not a lot of action."

"I think that's where the action steps come in," Supt. King said. "I don't mean that we will not go with what our root causes are. If teachers and students and families say we think the thing that you've identified as step three is super important and maybe takes priority over what you've identified as step one, that would be something we would need to consider. So I think that, yes, we will go with these results, it's a piece of the pie, and then the root causes will be what drives it."

Using social-emotional learning as an example, Supt. King pointed out that there are many community organizations that can work with the schools on addressing that. "There are some programs that we have in district that people aren't even aware of. We are aware of it as a staff, and we communicate that with families, but I think the community isn't necessarily aware of all the things that we've been doing, so that will come to light in the plan as well," she said.

Committee Chair Mike Barbaro said that this report "gives us a baseline to go on with...People that have gone through the schools that had a really positive experience, it's a really positive thing, right? Then you have the some of the kids that feel left out. You get the negative. It's a way to try to find the balance. As we've seen over the last five years, our Special Ed needs have dramatically gone up because of mental health issues. One of the things that COVID did bring out is our attention to it, and so we became more focused on these issues that probably weren't up high enough. So now they've come out because of what transpired with the shutdowns and whatnot, isolation caused a lot of additional angst." Now, he said, the district was getting information from stakeholders, students in the classroom, and so on. "We're actually putting together a strategic plan for the first time, which gives us direction for the next five to seven years. So I think this is all positive, although some of the data is not positive."

Ms. Teixeira said "I think we should be looking at the positive, but there is the other side of it, where some people aren't having great experiences. So I love the positive, I do. And I think that things take time, so we put things into place, and then it takes time to see the evolution of it. However, there are families that are having rough experiences, and that's great that we know that. So that's what we can use as a level, to be able to go higher and to be able to make some changes using that data as well."

Mr. Vine said, "How big is the universe of people that makes the final decisions on how we either tweak problems to make them

better or make major changes to make them better? Because one of my concerns is, I love having the community and the families and the kids and the staff involved, but I'm always concerned when it comes to decision making, that sometimes if a group gets too large and too cumbersome, there can be so many cross currents that nothing gets done."

"Ultimately, the district leadership will drive the plan," Supt. King assured him. "This is the input we needed to get started, and then the plan will go out in a draft form for feedback, but it won't be drastically changed."

Mr. Barbaro said, "One of the things we're keying on, and it doesn't sound like it's resonating, is the fact that we've moved two schools out from being reviewed by the state. That's a celebration. That's a lot of work. It's just that our message is not getting out. And that's communication. We, all of us, constantly hammer away at the way it's going. I don't know what are the forms of communication we can use to celebrate these things."

Supt. King said that she thought people did know that, but the state change to drop the MCAS as a graduation requirement was a major distraction from that achievement. "I think the positives, although it's work and we're looking at change, is that we're doing these consistent walkthroughs," she said. "We are walking through a building as a leadership team every other week or every third week, and getting into classrooms and really trying to support teachers and offering [professional development] on these HQIMs that we brought in. There are high performing districts that don't have the amount of curriculum that we have that's been aligned with DESE's expectations of us. So we really do have a lot of positives."

"And again, there's more work to do, and there's obviously work to do to address people's negative experiences, because that needs to be done. But I think you're right. A lot of great work has taken place, and some of the feedback is that things are inconsistent, and the best thing to fix that is consistency with staff and leadership. And we're working on that, and that has come a long way. So I think we're going in the right direction. This plan will be a driver and a consistent driver for the next five years, no matter who comes and goes."

The plan will be a living, breathing document, which can change over time as DESE changes its requirements and as concerns are resolved, the Committee and Superintendent agreed. The plan will have "buckets," such as Curriculum and Instruction, or social-emotional learning, or sense of belonging, with specific steps and goals to take with each one.