

NEWSLETTER

TOWN OF LEVERETT

www.leverett.ma.us

December 2023

Notes From Around Town

- **Hunting Season:** It is deer-hunting season until Dec. 31, 2023. To keep yourself and your pets safe please wear blaze orange—it has proven to be the most effective color for safety.
- Please, keep your **mailbox** clear of snow. The post office will not deliver your packages if the driver can't easily reach the box.
- **Village Neighbors** is available for some services to folks over 60, including small home repairs with a grant they received for the labor. Contact Village neighbors.org or call 413-345-6894.
- Leverett has a **parking ban:** no parking anywhere on the road or roadsides—anytime during a snow storm.
- If you are elderly and not accustomed to reading the *Newsletter* online and would like a copy dropped off at your house, please call 548-9150. Copies of the Newsletter will be available for pick-up at the Town Hall, Library, and Village Co-Op.

NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINES:

1 February, 1 April, 1 June 2023

Send news items and exotic dahlia bulbs to Lisa Stratford, Box 300, Leverett, MA, 01054 or e-mail to townclerk@leverett.ma.us. Call 548-9150 for information and guidelines.

Winter Reminders:

Winter sand is available to all residents, for private use only, at the Safety Complex. If you are elderly or physically unable to get sand, the Highway Department will deliver a 5-gallon bucket to you. Call 548-9400 for a delivery.

The Select Board has adopted the following policies and would appreciate your cooperation in regard to them:

(February 12, 1996)

No person other than an employee of the Highway Department shall **push, pile, plow, or blow snow or ice onto a town or county road** that impedes the flow of traffic. Whoever violates this resolution shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$50 per offense and be rolled into a snowball with only head and feet sticking out.

(December 29, 2003)

Residents are advised to secure their **mailboxes** against possible damage from snow removal operations. **The Town is not responsible for damage to mailboxes caused by snow removal operations.**

Leverett's Season of Giving

The Kimball Trust was set up in 1909 in the will of Catherine Kimball to provide **clothing for Leverett children in need**. You may make checks payable to Kimball Trust, in any amount, and send to Collector, PO Box 300.

The Select Board will be **collecting food** at the Town Hall, School, and Library to bring to the Montague Food Pantry. No doubt your generosity will be greatly appreciated.

When your tax bill comes your **voluntary donation** will assist many of our elderly and disabled residents to ease their real estate tax bill. **If every household donated \$5 we would have close to \$4,000 to defray the burden for our qualified residents.** Look for the check-off box on your bill.

Thank you.

Select Board

A highlight these past two months was a Special Town Meeting addressing a series of land transfer measures that will allow the state to replace the Millers and Bradway Roads bridge. (The bridge is located on the right side of Shutesbury Road as one begins to ascend Shutesbury Hill, for those who did not attend the meeting.) All land transfer motions passed unanimously by an 80-plus member town meeting.

Still on Shutesbury Hill, much praise was afforded to Highway Superintendent Matt Boucher for his continued efforts to improve safety at the intersection of Shutesbury Road and Cushman Road. The cement barriers have been an excellent deterrent to those drivers wanting to cut corners while passing through the 3-way stop. Matt has since learned these barriers are not permitted for such use, so his crew has replaced the barriers with grass and curbs. Aesthetics of grass and curb are far superior to concrete, so it appears the Highway Department found another winner.

An *ad hoc* Town Forest Committee was created to evaluate the proposed gift by Bruce Spencer of 147 acres of managed forest in northeast Leverett. The first meeting of the committee took place at the Town Hall November 30. Eric Donnelly agreed to serve as chair.

Distributing paper copies of the town newsletter to certain or all residences continues to be discussed. Richard Nathorst offered to collect quotes to generate and mail newsletters from a few local business service centers. These quotes will be discussed in an upcoming meeting. (Note the town has, and still does, offer to deliver paper copies of the newsletter to any resident requesting such service.)

A proposal to discontinue Rattlesnake Gutter Road as a county road and converting much of the middle of the road already on town land into a recreation area, was presented by Eva Gibavic and Steve Weiss. The proposal has been vetted by town council, and Highway Superintendent Boucher agreed his department could perform routine maintenance of the passage (road? trail?) since it will be on town-owned property. Presenting a different perspective, Silas Ball believes the Gutter could and should be reopened for vehicular traffic at an acceptable cost to the town. Reopening the Gutter would provide a short-cut connecting northeast Leverett to near the center of town, the post office, *etc.* Outstanding are questions about costs to rehabilitate the road, and the influence of state-mandated safety improvements, if any, on the character of the Gutter. This discussion and research continue.

An invoice from the Putney Road Association to pay a portion of the cost of repaving the road was received by the Board. The Association reasons that the town should be responsible for some of the maintenance costs because it owns 3/5 of an acre of undevelopable land at the far end of the road. As there is no precedence for such a relationship between the town and the Association, and there appears to be no particular benefit to the larger community, the Board declined to pay the invoice.

The Select Board accepted the Finance Committee recommendation for a +2.5% budget guidance for all town departments for FY'25. This was based on the most recent Consumer Price Index of 3% (Phil Carter, Chair, Finance Committee).

Upon request from Shelly Hicks of the Fire Department, the Board approved an increase in mileage reimbursement for personal vehicle use from 44 cents per mile to the current IRS standard of 65.5 cents per mile. The IRS rate currently is used by 13 of 16 western Mass municipalities queried.

The town recently submitted a \$15,000 grant proposal to fund a feasibility study for a micro-grid to collect and distribute solar power to municipal buildings, specifically the Safety Complex, Elementary School, and Library. This is a necessary first step toward town-wide decarbonization.

In response to lingering issues with two dog hearings this summer, the Select Board has agreed to seek volunteers to serve on a Dog Bylaws Review Committee. This will be a short-term committee designed to review all Leverett dog and noise bylaws for relevancy and utility and to make any recommendations back to the Select Board. The committee would not last more than two or three months. Interested parties are asked to contact Lisa Stratford, Margie McGinnis or any member of the Select Board. We would like to begin in December.

All other business was carried out in due course.

Note: On November 14, Tom Ewing, Planning Board Chair, notified me of a potential large development on the Kittredge properties at the corner of Amherst Road and Juggler Meadow Road. As currently envisaged, the project would be a cooperative effort between Leverett and Amherst. Tom, Margie and I are scheduled to meet with Chris Bestrup, Amherst Planning Department Director and Dave Ziomek, Assistant Town Manager this afternoon, December 1, for a preliminary discussion. Information about the proposed project will become available in the coming weeks and months. The Planning Board and Select Board are responsible for collecting and reporting new information as it becomes available and we recommend following Planning Board and Select Board meeting agendas, attending meetings where this topic is to be addressed, and stay current with the local news media and Montague Reporter in particular for information updates as they arise.

Tom Hankinson, for the Select Board

From Tax Relief Committee

In this season of giving, the Tax Relief Committee asks for your help in raising \$10,000 to assist seniors who are having difficulty paying their property tax bills. We currently have only a few hundred dollars in the account to distribute and property tax bills are scheduled to be sent in December.

The Tax Relief Committee wishes to thank the citizens of Leverett for their generosity in donating in previous years to the Tax Relief Fund. We have been able to award funds ranging from \$500-\$1000 to eligible senior applicants in need of assistance to pay their property tax bills. With your help, we hope to reach a fundraising goal of \$10,000. There will be an insert included with your next tax bill, on which you may indicate the worthy cause you choose to donate to and in what amount. (the check should be made out to the Town of Leverett, and it's helpful to note on the check that it's a donation to the Tax Relief Fund). Please generously support the Senior Tax Relief Program.

It is our intent to post a notice once a month on Leverett connects regarding this ongoing fundraising effort, and to remind folks that donations are welcome at any time. Similar notices will also be placed in the town newsletter between now and when the spring tax bills are mailed. The Tax Relief Committee thanks you in advance for your support and for thinking about your senior neighbors, some of whom find it challenging to continue to meet their property tax obligations.

Tax Relief Committee

Barbara Carulli; Shirley Thomas; Sam Black; Ryan Mailloux; Don Robinson

COUNCIL ON AGING NEWS December 2023

The Massachusetts Councils on Aging awarded the Town of Leverett a \$25,000 Service Incentive Grant to hire a consultant to complete and rehabilitate a system for community connection and access to supportive services among older adults in town. The project will lay the groundwork for the larger aim, to develop a Service Navigator position. The Leverett COA is happy to report that the Town of Leverett awarded the contract to the UMASS School of Public Health Center for Evaluation. Thanks to the ongoing skills of our town administrator who worked with a subgroup of the COA to write the contract. Nora Finnerty from that program is our primary contact person and she and her

colleagues will be reaching out to community members in the coming months.

The COA has been working to understand and publicize transportation opportunities for older adults in Leverett. One option available is the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)-Senior Van Service. This service offers door-to-door demand-responsive accessible van service to seniors over the age of 60 throughout the PVTA's 24 member communities. The cost of your trip is based on your pick up and drop off location. Trip within town: \$3.00, Trip to a surrounding town: \$3.50, Trip within PVTA's service area: \$4.00. For more information call (413) 739-7436.

We are still looking for a Meal Site Manager. Please refer interested people to the town website to apply.

To build on our efforts to provide gathering opportunities, we will begin offering educational events once a month. More information will be available on Leverett Connects (leverettconnects+subscribe@groups.io).

Ongoing COA Offerings:

Take it easy Yoga is currently on Zoom and in person on Wednesdays at 10am at the Town Hall. A \$6.00 donation is suggested for Leverett residents, \$10.00 for those from out of town. Contact Nancy Paglia at: npaglia62@gmail.com

Foot Care by Nurses Clinic: The foot care clinics are scheduled for the 3rd Tuesdays of every month at Leverett Town Hall for Leverett residents over 60 years old. The 30-minute sessions are by appointment only - please contact Fay Zipkowitz at 367-9573 or email: the_czarina@fastmail.fm. Suggested donation is \$35-\$45 to help cover our costs.

The Council of Aging can be reached through e-mail: judifonsh@gmail.com if you would like more information on any of our programs.

Village Neighbors is available for some services to folks over 60, including small home repairs with a grant they received for the labor. Contact VillageNeighbors.org or call 413-345-6894.

\$\$\$ Energy Committee Update \$\$\$

Notice to Leverett Residents from the Energy Committee
Right now three important things are happening at the same time:

One---you are reading the Town Newsletter for December 2023 which includes a long-awaited message from the Energy Committee about choices you have for your residential energy use beginning in January 2024;

Two---The 28th United Nations International Conference on the Climate Change is happening in Dubai;

Three--You have already received--or are about to receive a large postcard in the mail from Colonial Power giving you a chance to make a personal connection between One and Two.

Many of us are paying attention to the warnings coming from Dubai. Each year the warnings are more alarming and more people are taking these warnings more seriously. And each year we see/hear/experience more evidence for the gravity of the global warming temperatures. What will each of us in this tiny town decide to do?

A quick review of Leverett's Community Choice program: In March 2019, the Town initiated the idea of creating an aggregation for town energy use which followed an earlier Town Meeting vote that mandated a search to give residents a choice of green energy at a cost lower than the rates set by Eversource. The town later signed a three-year contract with Colonial Power, an independent energy broker, to get 100% green energy from wind sources based in Texas. The conclusion of our three-year contract unfortunately coincided with the infamous hike in electricity rates brought about by international conditions including Russia's war against Ukraine. The Energy committee--even though not responsible for the new rates--understands that enduring a year of unavoidably higher electricity rates has been burdensome for everyone. Last fall the Energy committee signed a new two-year contract with Colonial with the expectation that electricity rates would be considerably lower. That contract will be in place for all residents of Leverett beginning January 2024. The postcard each resident will receive from Colonial describes three different options available to residents. The options are presented clearly and the rates are indeed lower.

We encourage everyone to read the details of each option offered as well as the press release Leverett will make available for all of us which includes information helpful for making your choice. Examples of details to pay attention to include rate differences; starting in January 2024 the rate of the past year will change from \$0.236 per kWh to \$0.143 per kWh. The new Eversource rate is \$0.15845 per kWh. If you want to align your household with the most hopeful predictions coming from Dubai and you can afford to do so consider choosing 100% Massachusetts renewable energy (most expensive option) or the option marked NEW that adds 25% renewable energy to the standard mix (more expensive than 100% Massachusetts renewable, less expensive than the new Eversource rate). Choosing the NEW option will support our own state's ambitious goals to combat the worst

consequences of our ongoing climate crisis. We hope everyone makes the best choice for themselves and Planet Earth that sustains all of life.

Important updates or clarifications will follow if these are necessary.

Portia Williams Weiskel for the Energy Committee
pweiskel@post.harvard.edu
413-548-9737

Police Department Update

Leverett Police Department will be bringing a proposal forward for an additional full-time police officer. This is an item that was brought up last budget season, but was ultimately placed on the back burner. Now the police department is seeing the staffing issues that have been brought on by Police Reform's elimination of the part time police academy. With a very limited pool of part-time police officers, small town police departments are struggling with being able to fill open shifts.

The Leverett Police has felt these issues firsthand. We have lost three part-time officers since June of 2023. One of the officers took the open full-time position here in the department while the other two have taken on full-time police jobs in the area. I have also been advised from another part-time officer that 2024 will most likely be his last with the department. This is happening in most small towns. Part-time officers are getting their full-time certificates (exemptions from the full-time police academy) and are moving on to full-time positions. Their time is then limited and they are leaving their part-time departments.

So, at a time when the Leverett Police Department is providing police services for two communities, we now have four fewer officers than we did when the merger started in October of 2020. Inter-Municipal Agreements are the future of small-town policing, but we need the people to properly provide those services that we have agreed to provide.

Part-time police officers are becoming less of the norm I am proposing hiring a fourth full-time officer to the ranks of Leverett Police. Funds can be used from the Wendell budget as well as funds from Leverett to make this happen. [More funding will be required from both communities as well as the benefit package.] This would help the department fill most shifts with full-time officers reducing the use and reliance on part-time officers will be less. One of Leverett PD's current part-time officers would be interested in the full-time spot. If anyone has any questions, feel free to reach out to me. We ask for your support in adding another full-time officer at this year's town meeting. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Chief Scott D. Minckler

Library updates

Hours: Tuesdays 3-8, Wednesdays 10-3, Thursdays 1-6, and Saturdays 10-3
548-9220 or leverettlibrary@gmail.com

The library has been bustling lately and it has felt so warm and joyful. We've loved seeing you at the Wednesday morning playgroup for littles, tai chi classes on Saturday mornings, after school library runs, and so many of you at the art openings. Let's keep meeting up like this!

Upcoming in the Community Room:

1. Author Christian McEwen reads from *In Praise of Listening*. 12/9 at 1:00 p.m.
2. Annie Tiberio photography exhibit through December
3. Jen Lambert exhibit of monoprints in January / February

Or let us come to you virtually:

You can sign up for two library email newsletters: a monthly newsletter highlighting our events and services and a weekly email listing our newest books and movies. Sign up for one or both on our website: leverettlibrary.org

Your free library card can be used for 24/7 online services such as **Kanopy** (stream movies and documentaries), **Libby** (read an ebook or audiobook on us), and **Craftsy** (embedded in the Libby app).

Feel sick? Stay home and let us bring the library to you.

Call or email to get help placing holds, or we'd be happy to make a surprise selection for you! Let us know that you need a **home delivery** or **curbside pickup** of your items.

Don't forget that we can also deliver the town newsletter, monthly spice samples, and town surveys.

Thanks for helping us protect vulnerable members of our community.

No winter Storywalks on the Bill Rivers Memorial Trail behind the library. Look for new stories starting in the spring. Thanks to the Community Network for Children for this program. In the meantime, borrow a book or two and take it on a walk with you! We are always happy to recommend seasonal titles perfect for this purpose.

With gratitude,
Hannah Paessel -- Library Director
(preferred pronouns she/her)

Why am I including my preferred pronouns? Since it isn't always clear what pronouns people prefer to be called, it reduces confusion to include them in an email signature. Now you know what to call me! Look for people using other pronouns such as they/them/theirs or ze/zir/zem or he/him/his.

FRIENDS OF THE LEVERETT LIBRARY

The holiday season is upon us!

The Friends of the Leverett Library's annual Holiday Basket Auction is underway, ending December 16 at 1PM. Eleven festively decorated baskets, ready for giving or sharing, are on display at the library during browsing hours. Please place your bid online on the library website (leverettlibrary.org). Look for the link on the main library page that will route you directly to the basket auction. The bidding email is leverettlibraryauction@gmail.com. Current bids are displayed under each picture and are updated daily.

A generous anonymous donor has offered the Friends of Leverett Library a \$10,000 matching grant. Donations matched by the community will be used for the outdoor spaces at the library.

The Friends of the Library hope to plan fundraising activities beginning in 2024. Details to follow. The fundraiser thermometer is in the lobby of the library to track the community's donations!

Thanks to all who help support our community library.

In Memory of Richard Drury

Two years ago, Richard Drury disappeared while walking his two dogs near his home. In spite of an extensive search he has never been seen since. Among his many contributions to the town, residents remember him as one of the founders and managers of our modern Transfer Station. In appreciation of his efforts and kindness, at Town Meeting we voted to call the road leading into the Transfer Station as "Drury Lane" and to create a commemorative from which we can remember him.

On Dec 17th at 10am at the Transfer Station there will be a brief memorial celebration where we will speak in his honor and unveil a plaque of gratitude. Should Richard happen to return he would be pleased to know we remember his good deeds.

Town Hall is looking spiffy

Have you noticed the sprucing up of the gardens surrounding our Town Hall! Over the summer, Select Board member Melissa Colbert thought we should get Town Hall ready for our 250th birthday. She and Select Board member Patricia Duffy began purchasing perennials, native shrubs, bulbs, and a Weeping Spruce. They chose plants that would attract bees and butterflies and offer some berries and seeds in the winter. In fact, as soon as they put in the flowering plants, they were filled with bees and butterflies! This happened with the help of Macaylla Silver, Isaiah Robison, Matt and Doug from the Highway Department (thanks, Matt for pulling out the massive bittersweet vines!), and Town Administrator Margie McGinnis for her help with the design. More folks will be involved as mulching needs to get done, and weeding in the Spring! Funds from the defunct garden committee were used to get the plants, and the Highway Department provided the mulch.

Community Announcements

LEF Fund Drive Boosted by Local Business Partners

The Leverett Education Foundation's 2023 Leverett for LES Challenge was given a huge boost last week thanks to a major contribution from Apollo Contracting, owned by Leverett resident Neal Bannon.

The Apollo gift comes on the heels of significant donations to the Leverett Education Foundation's fall fundraising campaign by other Leverett businesses and businesses owned by Leverett residents, including Grass Roots Landscaping (Harijap Fuller and Isaiah Robison), Wright Builders (Seth and Rachel Lawrence-Slavas), GoBerry 'n Cream (SiriNam Khalsa), and the Mt. Toby Stables and Craig Memorial Equestrian Center (Roberta Bryant).

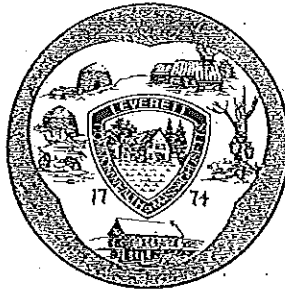
The campaign has also benefited greatly from donations made by businesses in surrounding towns: Woodsmith Forestry (Montague), Jamrog HVAC (Turners Falls), West Branch Capital (Amherst).

Those contributions make up an important part of what LEF can draw upon to provide resources for much-needed programs and innovative projects at Leverett Elementary School that the Town could not otherwise afford, and we are deeply grateful for their financial support and commitment to LES.

But we depend, above all, on Leverett residents whose generous donations over the past three years have bolstered in-person and remote learning during the pandemic, including the rental of tents for safe, outdoor classrooms, donors also made possible the restoration and expansion of the LES Greenhouse program, field trips, programs at the Morse Hill Outdoor Education Center, the creation of the LES Library Bird Nook, the construction of a new low-ropes challenge course, and the establishment of a Principal's Discretionary Fund for Outdoor Learning.

Your gift – in whatever amount – truly makes a difference. Please join our business partners in their recognition of what Leverett Elementary School means to our community. Donate at leveretteducationfoundation.org or by mail at P.O. Box 235, Leverett, Massachusetts 01054.

*Thank you.
The Leverett Education Foundation*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 1, 2023

CONTACT: Marjorie McGinnis,
Town Administrator
413-548-9699
Mark Cappadona
508-485-5858 ext. 3

LEVERETT ENERGY PROGRAM ANNOUNCES REDUCED RATES

LEVERETT, MA – The Town of Leverett has signed a twenty-four month contract with a new supplier, Dynegy Energy Services. The Leverett Community Choice Power Supply Community Choice Power Supply Program, tailored to meet the specific needs of the Town's electricity ratepayers, will offer the following options:

- A standard product that meets Massachusetts Renewable Energy Requirements (MA Req) plus uses an additional 38% National Wind Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) at a rate of \$0.14302 per kWh.
- An optional product that uses 100% Massachusetts Class I RECs at a rate of \$0.18092 per kWh.
- [NEW] A second optional product that meets MA Req plus uses an additional 25% Massachusetts Class I RECs at a rate of \$0.15136 per kWh.

For Leverett residents and businesses who are enrolled in the Town's standard product, the current rate of \$0.23600 per kWh will expire and the new rate of \$0.14302 per kWh will take effect with the January 2024 meter reads. This represents a decrease of \$56 per month on the supply side of the bill given average usage of 600 kWh. Additionally, this new rate is 10 percent lower than Eversource's recently announced Residential Basic Service rate of \$0.15845 per kWh. Residents can expect to see an average savings of \$9 per month for the months of January 2024 through July 2024*.

"After the high electricity prices we have experienced recently we are excited to announce a drop in the program's rate," said Marjorie McGinnis, Leverett Town Administrator, "The Program's goal is reduce our dependence on non-renewable energy sources and decrease our carbon emissions, while also stabilizing electricity bills."

Leverett launched its electricity program in March 2019 in an effort to develop an energy program that would be stable, affordable and incorporate renewable energy. From inception through June 2023, the Program has saved residents and small businesses over \$173,000 in electricity costs as compared to Basic Service.

It is important to note that no action will be required by individual consumers. This change will be seen on the February 2024 bills. All accounts currently enrolled in the Program will remain with their current product offering and see the new rate and Dynegy Energy Services under the “Supplier Services” section of their monthly bill. If you would like to choose the Town’s new optional product, please visit colonialpowergroup.com/leverett to opt-in.

The Leverett Community Choice Power Supply Program has no fees or charges. However, anyone switching from a contract with a third-party supplier may be subject to penalties or early termination fees charged by that supplier. Ratepayers should verify terms before switching.

Basic Service rates change twice a year or more, depending on rate class. As a result, the aggregation rate may not always be lower than the Basic Service rate. The goal of the aggregation is to deliver savings over the life of the program against Eversource Basic Service. However, such savings and future savings cannot be guaranteed.

Eversource customers who meet certain means criteria can qualify to receive a discount on their electric bills. To learn more, please visit eversource.com/content/residential/account-billing/payment-assistance/discount-rate.

Residents may also visit colonialpowergroup.com/leverett or call (866) 485-5858 ext. 1 to learn more about Leverett’s Community Choice Power Supply Program, to opt-in or opt-out, or to change your current product selection.

**Normally, the term would be through June 2024 but this is a transition term. The Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities issued an Order on September 1, 2023 that requires Eversource change its residential and small business Basic Service periods to February through July and August through January. This is expected to mitigate large seasonal changes in Basic Service electricity supply prices and differences across electric distribution companies. [See mass.gov/news/dpu-orders-schedule-changes-to-basic-service-rates.]*



ABOUT COLONIAL POWER GROUP: *Based in Marlborough, Mass., Colonial Power Group is the leading aggregation-consulting firm in Massachusetts. Colonial Power has been working with local governments since 2002 in the design, implementation and management of municipal aggregation programs.*