

The Warren Observer

Fact and Opinion about Warren, Connecticut, Population: 1300+

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Highlights of: www.warrenct.com

Warren News

by Toni Richardson

Planning and Zoning had to reschedule its regular February meeting due to lack of a quorum.

There is a proposed purchase of land to expand the holdings of the Region 6 school district. The land is adjacent to the existing school property in Litchfield. Informational meetings are planned for each town in the district and a district wide vote will be held to authorize the purchase. Watch for information on the dates for meetings and voting.

The school budget for next fiscal year is under development by the Region 6 Board of Education. The budget will be presented to district residents at the budget hearing on April 12 at 8 pm at the WAMOGO auditorium. The district meeting to vote on the budget is scheduled for May 3 at 8 pm in the WAMOGO auditorium.

Warren Library News

Martha Winkel, Director of the Library announced the beginning of the Spring Story Hour for pre-kindergarten children. Starting March 16 at 2 pm and continuing for a total of 5 weeks, children are invited to the library to hear a story and do a small craft. Ms. Winkel will conduct the story hours and there is no charge. To register or for more information, call the library at 868 2195.

A Wine-Tasting Party fund-raiser will be sponsored by the library on March 27 from 5 – 7 pm at the Hopkin's Vineyard. Admission will be by donation of \$10 to the library. The wine-tasting will be held at 5:30 pm. Hors d'oeuvres will be served and entertainment provided by a harpist. Wine will be available for purchase by the glass or by the bottle to share. All are welcome.

The Library Board is pleased to announce that new carpeting has been installed in the children's room. And the board extends thanks to the town for recent upgrades to the bathrooms.

Some of the new books recently added to the adult collection include:

"Absolute Friends," by John LeCarre
"Angels and Demons," by Dan Brown
"Benjamin Franklin," by Walter Isaacson
"Fine Balance," by Rohinton Mystery
"Gospel of Mary Magdalene," by J. Leloup
"High Country," by Nevada Barr
"Lady and the Unicorn," by Tracy Chevalier
"Last Juror," by John Grisham

New children's books are expected in about two weeks.

Warren Town Hall – What Next?

by Toni Richardson (member of the Town Building Committee)

Warren Town Hall has some problems that need to be addressed. The flat roof over the town clerk's office and the vault leaks badly. The windows in the building have needed to be replaced for some time. The building needs to come into compliance with federal and state handicapped accessibility rules. This means bathrooms, entrances and offices must be accessible to people with difficulty walking. It also means all offices need to be on one floor or we will need to install an elevator which is very expensive. The town must provide for emergency shelter and meet other Homeland Security requirements. An architectural firm has said that the building itself was well-built and remains sound. But it needs major upgrades to windows, doors, heating and plumbing to be used economically.

In addition the town hall does not provide adequate office space or meeting space. Available spaces are either too small or too large. Anyone who has attended a Zoning Board meeting knows that sometimes the people who want to attend cannot fit in the room. When meetings are held in the upstairs hall, the acoustics prevent many people from hearing and participating. Meetings can be held in the downstairs room, but, again it is too big for smaller meetings.

Historically the hall on the upper level was designed for multiple purposes. At the time the school did not have a gym or an auditorium and it was used by the school for activities such as basket ball and other recreation and as a venue for school graduations and performances. The school now has its own gym and only rarely uses the hall for its activities. The town uses the hall for the Firemen's Ball and for various recreational activities and meetings.

Times have changed since it was built in the 1940's. Today it is too small for regulation basketball. It has poor acoustics, making it a poor choice for meetings. The radiators are too close to the playing area as are the windows, making it less than safe for some recreational uses. In addition it is hard to heat. Today, a better choice for recreational use would be a building designed for that purpose, with adequate floor space, room to change clothes and store coats, space to store equipment and with plenty of parking.

So the question now before the town and its building committee is how to address the immediate concerns for repairs, office and meeting space, accessibility, and homeland security as well as the needs for good recreational space.

The Buildings Committee has met and reviewed needs and options as well as the potential impact on property taxes. Warren has been able to avoid the heavy borrowing and associated finance charges that contribute to high taxes in many towns. This means that the town is relatively free of long term debt except that of the schools. Whatever project is undertaken to address the town hall issues will mean incurring debt and that will cause a rise in taxes. That rise can only be kept down by thoughtful use of resources and good planning for the future.

Warren Town Hall – What Next? (continued)

The Buildings Committee decided to focus on how to renovate the Town Hall to make the best use possible of the existing building to address the most immediate needs first. The preliminary plan calls for all town offices to be on the upper level by renovating the hall and stage areas into offices and meeting rooms and by adding an upper level to the existing town clerk's office. The lower level of the town hall would be renovated so that the kitchen and bathrooms allow for the use of the lower level for emergency shelter as required by Homeland security rules. The current vault space would become available for records storage and a new vault in the upper level would provide for current land records and other documents that need to be available for easy reference. All windows would be replaced and doorways made accessible. There would be bathrooms on the upper level and the lower level.

The Committee considered a proposal by a member to construct an addition to the building to house office space and to preserve the existing gym for recreation. However, the cost would be nearly three times that of renovating the building to use the gym space for offices and in the end, we would still have a gym that does not provide adequate recreation space. The thought was that it would be better to build separate recreation space at a later date.

But what would the people who rely on the existing gym do for recreation space in the meantime? There are several options. The dining hall at the Warren Woods could be heated for year-round use at a cost of approximately \$10,000. This would allow for exercise classes, parties, dinners, dances, etc. to be held there. The school gym is available for basketball and other sports that could not be played at the dining hall due to the type of lighting there. And the downstairs room in the town hall would be restored to its original size or larger as part of the renovations and would still be available for all the activities that now use it.

What the building committee did not do is focus on planning an alternate building for recreation. But this could be done and probably should be, so that there is a clear plan in place for meeting future recreational needs.

Save Our Space by Keith Layman

The Town of Warren is in need of office space, and has been for some years.

I am not sure how many townspeople know about the plan to renovate our Town Hall "upstairs" into town offices and thereby completely eliminate the stage and the gym - a valuable town indoor recreational area. Building another one is highly unlikely and is not part of the current renovation plan. Warren is growing rapidly; the number of young people is increasing dramatically so it is important to save this existing space.

Having been born and raised in Warren, I can attest to the positive aspects of having a town hall where people gather for pageants, plays, talent shows, shooting hoops, and most recently F.N.O's (Friday night out) for our youth. The 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students from Warren, Morris and Goshen congregate with supervision, and there is a D.J. and dancing downstairs, and basketball being played upstairs. With renovations, this space will no longer be available for these and other activities historically held at the Town Hall, including the need for emergency shelter. The Warren School lacks the space to do these activities.

I spoke with our First Selectman for whom I have a great deal of respect. We talked about my concerns. All these years any responsible person could call someone (Luke Tanner, Trudy Tanner, Dan Dacey, as examples) and they would be willing to open up the Town Hall providing there were no other activities going on at the time. My feeling is that it is better to have responsible people doing something constructive with the young people of this area instead of these young people doing something that may not be as desirable. Some of my fondest memories are getting together with friends and family on the spur of the moment and shooting hoops.

I feel that the Building Committee must give consideration to alternative plans for office space without eliminating the current recreational areas. I feel they are "Robbing Peter to pay Paul". They should be considering a plan which serves more of the town's people further into the future and not just those who need office space now.

Warren Good Neighbor Fund by Toni Richardson

The Good Neighbor Fund was established in 1977 to provide emergency assistance to a family under extreme financial hardship. In the ensuing years, with the help of many donations, the Fund has been able to assist individuals and families in emergency situations where no other resources were available.

Individuals are appointed by the selectmen to serve on the committee that manages the fund. The funds are held in the town's account in the custody of the town treasurer.

Although recipients are not obligated to repay, some have done so by subsequent donation or service to the town.

People in need can access the fund by calling a member of the committee, the First Selectman, or the Pastor of the Congregational Church. The Fund only does a general request for funds once every few years. This is not the year. But if anyone wishes to donate to the Fund, they can do so by making out a check to "The Warren Good Neighbor Fund" and sending it to the town hall, attention Dave Scofield, Treasurer.

Members of the Committee are:

Toni Richardson, Chair
Cleve Gray, Vice Chair
Ellen Prindle, Secretary
Dave Scofield, Treasurer
Jack Travers, First Selectman
William Lover, Pastor
Lois Abrams
Joyce Keith
Susan Haxo
Kathy Newton
Carolyn Reynolds
Mary Miller

The Warren Land Trust

by Tom Paul

The Warren Land Trust, Inc. (WLT) is a non-profit corporation founded by Warren residents in 1989 to preserve the rural character of our town. We are managed by a Board of Directors, which is elected each year at our annual membership meeting. To date, we have 201 acres under our protection and more than 170 members. We are a qualified conservation organization under Section 170(h) of the Internal Revenue Code, so gifts to us are tax deductible to our donors. Please see Preservation Strategies & Tax Benefits on the web site for a summary of possible tax benefits.

The Warren Land Trust is dedicated to the preservation and conservation of all types of land within the town of Warren. Its mission is to preserve open space, to protect natural and endangered resources such as wetlands and wildlife habitats, to encourage the use of conservation restrictions and to educate the public on the benefits of land conservation.

Land under the protection of the Warren Land Trust is preserved and protected from development forever. This is accomplished this in several ways:

Land Ownership – Gifts of all types of undeveloped land – fields, forest land, wetlands and swamp areas, farmland, steeply sloped areas and ledge areas are welcome. All contribute to the natural beauty of Warren. Occasionally purchases of undeveloped land are made using funding from grants or neighborhood donors. No land owned by the Warren Land Trust will ever be developed or sold for development purposes.

Conservation Restriction – By using a conservation restriction (sometimes called a conservation easement); you retain ownership of your land and agree that no development (except for the limited activities permitted in the agreement) may take place on your land. This agreement is recorded on the Warren Land Records and permit The Warren Land Trust to enforce these restrictions against all owners of your land forever. See Sample Conservation Restriction for an example.

Preservation Strategies & Tax Benefits: Consult the website for a summary of Land Preservation Strategies & Potential Tax Benefits.

The WLT currently holds or protects the following properties:
Sunset Ponds on Cunningham Road - 17+ acres
Douglass Preserve off Hardscrabble Road - 17+ acres
Cashion property Gift on RT 45 - 7 acres
Skidmore Farm on Blue Swamp Road - 63 acres
Eel Pond McMurtry Gift on Kent Road - 25 acres
Sackett Hill Preserve on Sackett Hill Road - 32 acres
Graham M Brush Jr. Preserve off Wintergreen Lane - 40 acres
Graham M Brush Jr. Easements on Tanner Hill Road - 12 acres

Members of the Board of Directors include:

President: Dorothy Maier 23 Cornwall Road - 868-0336
Vice-Pres.: Thomas Paul 151 Melius Road - 868-6724
Secretary: May Hill 184 Brick School Road - 868-0632
Asst. Sec.: Joan Beattie 126 Sackett Hill Road - 868-7017
Treasurer: David Scofield 12 Kent Road - 868-7067
Director Ann Martindale 11 Bliss Road - 868-9919
Director William DeSeta 19 Town Hill Road - 868-0827
Director David Miles 1 Titus Road - 868-7198
Director Paul Prindle 375 Lake Road - 868-2287
Director Wayne Wilson 3 Laurel Mountain Rd. - 868-2985
Director Jack Baker Hardscrabble Road - 567-0749
You may call any of us for additional information about the Warren Land Trust.

Don't Know

by Dr. Everett Vreeland

In the midst of a blizzard I am recalling three days ago. In bright sun the phragmites (swamp grass - reeds) nod in unison with the wind. Their feathery tops catching sun and appearing magical as the seed crowns reflect the rays as a single shining torch. Some think that this plant is an invasive danger. I consider it, in the natural course of botanical things, a transient gift. Bitterns, rails, redwings, and others call it home and nursery while canoeists know it is a place of rest in big winds. It is everywhere - in fresh water or salt.

After the storm one of the feral (well fed) cats crouched in the bird feeder waiting, evilly, for hungry birds to arrive. Nan said "let nature take its course." I immediately concurred and busted the feline butt out of there. Nature's course would be no feeder - smart birds - and hungrier and more athletic cats.

The day before Christmas rain and warm weather prevail. The swamps and water courses are all over-full now and wait for freezing. All that room under the ice means easy going for beavers, muskrats, frogs, turtles and a real crowd of larvae including mosquitoes.

Birds in the feeders are wet but really happy and not bothered by rain. Very large squirrels are the same and crowd out most of the birds except chickadees and nuthatches that bravely go where other species put caution over valor.

Most water holes, not iced over at this date, have small groups of ducks, often mallards, hanging in here and probably don't know that plenty of food lays one day's flight to the south. Many geese are the same and we bear witness now to the development of strains that simply do not leave as long as there is open water somewhere near. The "wacko" strain. I often see mergansers and mallards crouched on ice with air at 0 degrees and looking totally in misery with comfort as close as the Chesapeake or the Carolina swamps. I have been frustrated all my life that I cannot converse with them, yet at -8 degrees the feeder is mobbed with happy appearing birds of many species who spend all day seeking food and sleep in some frigid roost in frigid night.

The ready wood gets lower and the sun country draws closer.