

The Warren Observer

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

Vol. IX, No. 5

May, 2004

Highlights of: www.warrenct.com

The Warren Observer

Please note: The Warren Observer is only for people who do not have access to the web. If you would like to know when the PDF version of this newsletter is available for printing on your printer, just register in the Community area of our web site and we will automatically notify you by email each month when it is ready.

If you have web access and are getting this paper, we would appreciate you getting in touch with us and taking your name off the mailing list. Remember, the paper version of the The Warren Observer is a free service for members of our community who do not have access to the web.

webmaster@warrenct.com

Upcoming Events

May 3 Vote on the Region 6 budget at the high school at 8 pm.
May 6 Warren town budget hearing at 8 pm
May 17 Referendum on Region 6 land purchase from 6 am to 8 pm in town hall
May 20 Town meeting to vote on the town budget and to elect a member for the Region 6 Board of Education at 8 pm

Town Budget Hearing

There will be a hearing on the proposed 2004-2005 Town Budget at Town Hall on May 6 at 8 PM. All taxpayers are invited to attend.

Warren General Store Opens for Business

The welcoming flag was out at the Warren Store this weekend. Visitors to the store found a smaller store, newly renovated with tables and chairs to the front and a counter in the back. Offerings include soft drinks, sandwiches, baked goods, snacks, newspapers, and a variety of specialty items. Hours are 7 am to 6 pm Monday through Saturday and 8 am to 3 pm on Sunday.

Warren Landmarks

Paul Skaff, a television producer for CT-N the Connecticut Network, is conducting research into significant and distinguishable buildings, parks, and landmarks in CT towns as part of a project to videotape local landmarks and incorporate them into their broadcasts. He has asked for recommendations of landmarks in Warren. People have suggested the church, the Brick School, Hopkins Inn, Hopkins Winery and Warren Woods. Any other suggestions may be sent to: Paul Skaff, The Connecticut Network, 21 Oak Street, Suite 605, Hartford, CT 06106.

Garbage Pick up

Litchfield Carting Service reminds residents that to insure that your garbage is picked up, you must have your garbage out by 6:00 AM on your regular pick up day.

Parks and Recreation Meeting

by Bill Peters

Bill Peters led the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting on March 22 and began with public comments. A local resident asked if heat will be installed in the main building at Warren Woods and who governs building. The resident expressed concerns about year round and nighttime use of facility.

In a discussion of Warren Woods the Commission focused on the potential areas for the walking / nature trail.

In discussion of the town beach, focus was on the playground equipment. The current equipment is pressure treated (contains arsenic) and is in disrepair. Discussion ensued on the need to remove the current equipment and replace with updated equipment. Dean A. proposed a design from "game time" which would cost between \$11,000 and \$14,000. The design is for ages 2-12. The footprint of the proposed equipment matches the current beach playground area fairly closely. Two feet would need to be added on one side. The proposed playground will be submitted to Jack Travers, First Selectman, for discussion with the insurance company.

The beach sticker letter and rules were approved as was an increase in price to \$15 for the first vehicles and \$10 for every vehicle after the first. All fees will double after June 1st.

MLS soccer in August will be on Monday, August 23rd at Wamago. Ages 6-12 will be in the morning (8am-12). Ages 13-18 in afternoons. Boys and girls will be separate.

New Books at the Library

The following books have been added to the library:

"3rd Degree" by James Patterson
"At the Tomb of the Inflatable Pig" by John Gimlette
"Deception Point" by Dan Brown
"How Tough Could It Be" by Austin Murphy
"The Darwin Awards 111 (Survival of the Fittest)" by Wendy Northcutt
"One Hundred Years of Solitude" by Marquez W. Gabriel
"The Birth of Venus" by Sarah Dunant
"The Island at the Center of the World" by Russell Shorto
"Codex" by Levi Grossman
"The Game" by Laurie King

The following books have been ordered and are due to arrive shortly:

"The Full Cupboard of Life" by Alexander McCall Smith
"Three Weeds With My Brother" by Nicholas Sparks
"American Horticultural Society Great Plant Guide" 3rd edition
"Washington Crossing" by Donald Fisher Haskett
"Prisoner of Van Dam St." Fredman Kinky

Selectmen's Meeting

by Marilyn Hendricks

A Selectman's Meeting was held on April 6, 2004. Present were Jack Travers, Marian Smith, Cal Tanner and Linda Kennedy.

A state grant to purchase a defibulator was accepted.

Jack Travers sought approval to sign a contract for new software for the assessor's office at a cost of \$9,000. It was approved. In 90 days, an additional \$2,000 will be requested.

The Conference of Connecticut Municipalities is organizing a consortium to buy electricity for town buildings. The town is considering becoming a part of this effort.

A town Safety Committee will be appointed with Cal Tanner representing the selectmen.

A request for a contact person was asked for by the Komen C.T. Race For Cure to raise awareness of breast cancer. The race will take place on June 12th in Hartford.

The school budget for Warren will increase. Enrollment is up and this could mean a \$308,000 increase for us.

Estimates for housing the metal dumpster to meet state environmental requirements have been received. The W.J.Layman quote of \$11,000 included crane service and was more inclusive than other estimates.

The 2004-2005 budget is in draft form. A special town meeting is planned for April 22nd to accept Partridge Road. The engineer said everything was fine.

The Building Committee will have \$20,000 for seed money to begin renovation of the Town Hall.

Capital improvement funds will pay for generators to run the Town Hall, the Academy and the Fire House for a cost of \$40,000 for equipment plus labor costs. The present generator at the fire house is WW2 surplus and very outdated. The town garage generator does not need replacement.

Town Meeting

by Toni Richardson

Nancy Scofield moderated the town meeting on April 22 to consider three issues.

A proposal to accept Partridge Road into the town road system was approved without debate. First Selectman, Jack Travers, indicated the road meets specification and said "it's time." In replies to related questions, he said that garbage pickup would begin on the street with the next pick-up and decisions about mail box changes would be made by the postal service. He indicated he would inform them that the road is now in the town system.

A proposal to spend \$20,000 to study town building needs and to assess the existing ones drew some discussion. Mr. Travers explained that the building committee will send out a request for proposals to a variety of architects and design companies and select one from those who respond. The person or firm selected will review the town's holdings, the needs for office, emergency, and recreation space and present at least two options for use of existing space to meet needs and for development of additional space that may be needed. He will make a presentation of his alternatives at an open meeting. Before anything is decided, it will be presented to the town for a vote at referendum. The proposal passed without objection.

A proposal to spend \$50,000 from the current year operating budget to purchase an emergency generator to serve the town hall, the town garage and the Academy passed without objection. This will replace the old generator. A towns person raised the question of what would be done with the old generator. Mr. Travers indicated it would be saved or sold, he had not decided.

Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting by Toni Richardson At the April 13 Planning and Zoning meeting an application of Ellen and Jack Baron of Kent Road for a timber harvest was approved pending state DOT sign off and fee.

Kurt Fabishe received approval for construction of a dwelling on, Lot #52, subdivision lot #47 on Anita Way. This is a nonconforming lot because the access strip is only 25 feet wide and the usual allowance is for 50 feet. However, the Commission determined the lot and driveway had been approved on previous maps.

The Commission reviewed a request by Douglas Schloss of 186 Flat Rock Road to construct an accessory building on property without a primary building. This property adjoins his land with a house in Cornwall. The Commission judged the regulations to say that if the house is on a contiguous lot, it is permitted. However, once built, the Warren land cannot be conveyed separately because it would create a nonconforming property.

Robert Kramer spoke for Susan Summers on an application to sell wine from their property on 23 Strawberry Ridge Road. They requested a change of use to farming so they can produce their own wine and do some retail sales from their property on a small scale, on the order of a farm stand. A building in use as a private gallery would be converted to the farm stand. The Commission determined that the building meets square footage and setback regulations and approved the use of the building for wine sales as accessory to a farming operation.

Application for new construction on 19 Partridge road, a slightly nonconforming lot, was approved. The lot is 1.9 rather than 2 acres, making it nonconforming. However the proposed dwelling meets all setbacks and is in an approved subdivision lot.

The Commission continued its review of Washington's recently adopted regulations for docks on Lake Waramaug. Washington allows two of the following: a regular dock, a rowing dock and a float. Docks must be capable of being removed. This means the dock has no footings and thus precludes piers. Members expressed concerns about the provision for review of applications by the Lake Waramaug Authority and suggested the authority give advisory opinions. Some questioned the wisdom of allowing only two of three options and suggested all three be permitted. They discussed possible over-development of the shoreline and interfering with navigation. They noted the need to prohibit carcinogenic materials such as pressure treated woods and discussed whether building official regulates docks.

While the Commission reached no decision on adoption of regulations by Warren, they agreed that definitions of terms will be needed and agreed to review those in the Washington regulations. They asked representatives of the Lake Waramaug authority to find out whether the authority needs 35 days to review applications and what length of time would be needed to review for safety only. Further discussion was tabled to the next meeting.

The Commission then undertook a discussion of fences near the lake. The Zoning Enforcement Officer offered that a 4 foot fence still obscures the lake from the viewer in a car, but a 3 foot 6 inch high fence would not.

The Chairman, Wayne Wilson, asked what statute allows a zoning commission to regulate scenic vistas. He noted that views are being blocked by vegetation and landscaping. Current Warren regulation of fencing limits height to 6 feet within the setbacks. The Commission decided it needed more information before acting and asked the Lake Waramaug Authority to provide some research on the concerns of owners at the lake. Further discussion was postponed to the next meeting.

A continuation of last month's discussion of accessory buildings began with a review of a modified outline of provisions. Whether this outline will lead to amendment of existing regulations or guidelines for implementing current regulations is still undecided.

Members agreed that garbage/recycling boxes should be foundationless, have a maximum size (perhaps 3' x 6' and 4' high), not require setbacks or permits, but require adherence to highway department guidelines and inland wetland requirements. They agreed that mailboxes are adequately regulated by the postal service and that walls, fences and gates are regulated by current zoning code, noting that all roadside construction with 15 feet of the traveled portion of the road requires prior approval of the selectman and road foreman. Other roadside structures such as bus shelters and agricultural stands should require permits and should have a specified maximum size, but delayed further discussion until the ZEO can do some research on appropriate sizes.

Accessory buildings, ornamental structures and additions on foundations require zoning, health, and building permits prior to construction and may require wetland permit.

They agreed that portable accessory buildings with no foundations up to 50 square feet and 400 cubic feet should not require zoning permits, may require wetland and building permits and must be at least 5 feet from property lines. Three or more such buildings would require a zoning permit. Anything larger, even without a foundation, would require a zoning permit and code setbacks (25' sideline and 30' road way) would be enforced.

Members discussed at length how to regulate animal enclosures, how to define them, how close to property lines they should be allowed and did not reach agreement. They discussed temporary buildings such as non residential trailers and tent-like structures and tabled discussion of the outline at that point.

Finally, the Commission discussed enforcement efforts against those in violation of existing regulations and possible alternative actions. The list of violations continues to grow and members were anxious to adopt appropriate strategies to deal with them. They agreed to contact an attorney on at least one violation.

The ZEO reported on issuing permits to: James Beckman of 296 Brick School Road for a garage; Gale Fernandez of Anita Way for a deck and detached garage; Ellen Prindle of 215 Cornwall Road for a utility shed; to Northland Custom Homes 24 Partridge Road for a front portico roof on piers and to Alfred Brown of 12 Sunset Lake Road for a screened porch and stone patio.

Board of Education Hearing

by Toni Richardson

Four members of the Region 6 Board of Education, accompanied by Tim James, Superintendent, held a hearing on the upcoming school budget and the proposed land purchase on April 7.

Proposed Land Purchase

The proposed land purchase calls for spending \$1.1 million to buy some 60 acres of land adjacent to the high school property in Litchfield. Board Chairman Rick Valine, from Warren, told the 50 or so Warren residents that the proposal is not driven by a plan to build. The land has come on the market and is attracting housing development buyers. If the Region does not make the purchase now, there will not be another chance to acquire property adjacent to the Wamogo campus. Immediate possible uses of the property include an alternative access road onto Maple Street, vocational agriculture projects and playing fields. Long term, it may be used for constructing additional school space, if the population continues to grow.

There are several steps required to make the purchase. Since the land is located in Litchfield, that town had to hold a referendum to allow townspeople to approve the sale. Litchfield overwhelmingly approved the sale at a referendum in March. Next, a hearing was scheduled in each of the three Region 6 towns for residents to learn about the purchase and to ask questions. These meetings were completed by April 8. A district hearing was held April 13 at 7:30 pm at the high school and a referendum is set for May 17, in which voters will have the opportunity to decide whether to go forward with the purchase.

A number of people spoke in favor of the proposal. Jack Travers, First Selectman of Warren pointed out that we are sure to need additional school space sometime in the future. If we do not purchase this land now, we will have to develop an entirely separate campus. He said, "It is a lot of money, but we are irresponsible ...if we don't buy it." Another person noted that it could cost upwards of 10 times as much to acquire land for a school 20 years from now.

One person questioned how buildable the land is. While board members pointed out that the 60 acres includes some steep land, Litchfield has approved a nine house subdivision of this property. They pointed out that it would be possible to build on the existing playing fields if necessary and move playing fields to the new property.

Another asked if the land could be resold if not used. Board Chairman, Rick Valine indicated there will be no restrictions on future sale of the land, provided it is not subdivided.

Questions were posed about the size and potential for building on the present site. Board members said the current location is on about 50 acres. Buildings, playing fields and parking lots already cover 90% of that space, so there is no room for further expansion without additional land.

The board members talked about the costs to the three towns. The purchase price would be spread over ten years with a probable interest rate of 3.75 %. Each town would be responsible for its proportionate share of the principle and interest each year. A town's proportionate share is determined by the relative number of students in school. Warren's current share is 19.5%. This means the cost to taxpayers would be approximately \$13 per year per \$100,000 in assessed value of property. As an example, a property valued at \$400,000 would pay an additional \$52 per year in taxes.

Region 6 Budget for 2004-2005

Chairman Valine led the assembled group through the budget process and the two documents available at the meeting. He noted that school officials began the budget process months ago by collecting information on changes and improvements they would like to make to the upcoming budget. Those changes would have produced an increase of about 14% over the current year's spending.

Using that as a base, they proceeded to trim and cut wherever possible to arrive at the proposed budget which includes a 6.56% increase over current spending. Mr. Valine noted that a spending freeze was put in effect in January to help keep the current budget within its authorized spending limits. This was needed because some costs such as special education grew more rapidly than anticipated.

Deborah Wheeler, newly appointed Special Services Director, addressed the costs of special education and efforts to control them. She noted that some high school age children with behavior difficulties are being sent to programs in other schools. These can be costly particularly since transportation must be provided. She has proposed an alternative of bringing the children to Wamogo for a program that would run from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm and would include both core subject work and therapeutic work to address behavior issues. Board members noted that placements of children with severe disabilities cannot be avoided. These are very costly, as much as \$75,000 per year including transportation.

Several people asked questions about agricultural education, its impact on the budget and whether Region 6 taxpayers are subsidizing this program which benefits many out-of-district children. Superintendent James said that there are 73 tuition paying children in the program and 26 from Region 6. Sending districts pay \$6009 per child by state statute, while the net cost of a child in the district is \$11,242. Helen Stewart, Business Manager for Region 6, noted that to fairly compare these costs, you need to extract from the \$11,242 the cost of transportation which is borne by the sending district, and other costs which would be borne by the region even if no out-of-district students were served. Her calculations showed a net financial gain to the region from serving the out-of-district students.

While the proposed budget increase is 6.56% overall, Warren's proportionate share of the budget has increased. This is due to the rising number of children from Warren relative to the number of children in the other two towns. In the current year Warren pays \$2,282,849. This will rise to \$2,591,816 or an increase of \$308,967. As a result, Warren taxpayers will see an increase of about 14% in the school portion of their budget.

The version of the budget presented at the hearing differed significantly from the one presented to the town selectmen and boards of finance on April 1 with regard to the revenue. The April 1 version anticipated a surplus to be applied to the upcoming year. In the April 7 version, the surplus had been eliminated. This resulted in an additional budget increase of \$18,251 for Warren. Jim Richardson, Chairman of the Warren Board of Finance, pointed out that school costs represent about 67% of the town's budget. Until the school budget is set and the town knows what it will have to pay, it is difficult to make decisions on other town priorities. Superintendent James noted that the time crunch the school was under led to the error in the April 1 version of the budget. Editor's note: Since the local hearing additional changes have been made to the school budget, increasing the costs.

The district hearing on the budget was held on April 12. The district vote on the budget will be May 3 at the high school at 8 pm.