

TOP TEN

Local school districts struggle to pass budgets

Like school districts around the state, most of the learning communities that serve Addison County students struggled to get spending plans approved by voters this spring.

Voters in school districts serving the majority of local preK-grade 12 pupils shot down proposed spending plans for fiscal year 2025 on Town Meeting Day — and in some cases, rejected spending proposals on the second, third and fourth try, too.

The Bristol-area Mount Abraham Unified and Vergennes-area Addison Northwest school districts both needed three tries to get budgets passed, as did the Brandon-area Otter Valley Unified Union School District, which serves the Addison County towns of Leicester, Whiting and Goshen.

Residents in the Slate Valley Unified Union School District, which includes the town of Orwell, went through four failed budget votes before finally passing a spending plan on the fifth try.

The situation locally mirrored budget woes across the state, as about a third of Vermont school districts had to rework budget proposals that had failed on Town Meeting Day.

What was behind the historic wave of failed budget votes? Largely double-digit property tax hikes caused by a variety of factors. While Vermont school districts have for years wrestled with rising overhead costs and declining enrollment, this past budget season saw what was described as a “perfect storm” of inflation, expiring COVID-era federal funding, and an around 16% increase in employee health care premiums, as well as salary increases and the cost of addressing aging facilities.

School districts were also navigating a new education funding formula outlined in Act 127 aimed at correcting inequities in how the state funds the cost of educating students with different needs. Spiraling real estate values also complicated matters. Property tax rates around Addison County were in most cases driven up by low Common Level of Appraisals, a ratio the state uses to adjust locally assessed property values to reflect estimated fair market value.

All in all, education property tax bills rose an average 13.8% across Vermont, and voters time and time again made their message clear at the ballot box — that was too much. In some cases, voters’ rejection of spending proposals was in response to what the money would be spent on rather than how much was being spent. Such was the case in the MAUSD, where community officials to preserve student-facing positions in any budget put before voters.

By the end of June local school districts, and most every other learning community around the state, had passed budgets for the 2024-2025 academic year.

(See Budgets, Page 10)

Voters in school districts serving the majority of local preK-grade 12 pupils shot down proposed spending plans for fiscal year 2025 on Town Meeting Day — and in some cases, rejected spending proposals on the second, third and fourth try, too.

Reunited
Performers bring life to an Irish musical they performed in together long ago. See Arts & Leisure.

Easy as 1-2-3
The Tiger girls' Noelle team dominated in winning a third straight D-II title. See Page 1B.

Town meeting
At gathering end in the ballot box crucial local decisions were made this week. See Pages 11A-17A.

ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT
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County voters reject most proposed school budgets
ADDISON COUNTY & BRANDON — Voters in seven town areas that serve the majority of Addison County K-12 students rejected proposed school budgets on Town Meeting Day.

Mt. Abe's spending falls 228 votes short
By MAREN HOWELL
Voters in the Mount Abraham Unified School District on Town Meeting Day narrowly defeated the proposed budget for the 2024-2025 academic year and opposed by a much larger margin the purchase of the building that houses the district's central office.

ACSD, Career Center plans are approved
By JOHN FLOWERS
The Addison County School District and the Addison Career Center on Tuesday approved their 2024-2025 budgets.

ANWSD residents defeat board's \$28.3M budget
By ANDY KIRKLAND
Residents of the Addison Northwest School District on Tuesday defeated the board's \$28.3 million budget.

Building community
REGULAR CITIZENS FROM Addison County's 25 municipalities gathered for their annual town meetings in schools, gyms and town halls this past Monday and Tuesday.

By the way
Remember that extra ballot of sleep you get last year on Sunday, Nov. 5, when the election rolled back to the weekend?

Middlebury police to launch drone program
Chief cites missing-person searches

Midd. elects two selectmen, OKs budget

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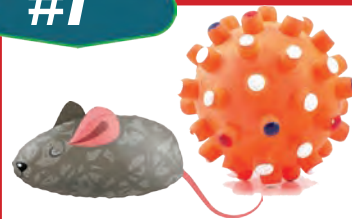
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Building projects change the face of the county



The face of Addison County

communities is changing — literally. Big building projects started in Middlebury, Vergennes and elsewhere will result in some major change in the appearances of several Addison County villages and downtowns.

One of the last big building stories of 2023 was the breaking of ground for a big 7,000-square-foot expansion of Middlebury's Town Hall Theater, and work has proceeded on the project throughout 2024. As the year ends, the large brick façade looks complete and interior work should wrap up in the next few months.

Another big project that saw the first baby steps in December 2023 was Vergennes Grand, a \$25 million senior living project in the heart of the city. That elderly housing complex, when complete within months, will house up to 82 seniors, mostly of modest means, in a facility fronting the Vergennes city green. It will blend 40,000 square feet of new construction with a 10,000-square-foot restored building at 34 North St., formerly known as Vergennes Residential Care.

In May, Middlebury residents voted, 956-200, to back a \$17 million bond to expand and remodel the 100-year-old Ilsley Public Library. Much of the rest of the year was spent planning for the big makeover, which will remove 1977 and 1988 additions to the original 1924 stone building then add a new, 8,000-square-foot, two-story addition on its northeast side. The new-and-improved facility will boast double the space for youth services; new activity and conference/flex rooms; a new "early learning" area; new spaces catering to teens and 'tweens; a new outdoor programming area; two additional small meeting rooms; a larger community meeting room; and redesigned adult reading rooms and gathering spots.

Ilsley worked out a deal with National Bank of Middlebury to make some of its collection and services available in the lobby of the Duclos building on Main Street. The rest of the collection will be in storage in Vergennes during the 15 or so months that Ilsley is closed during construction.

Middlebury taxpayers were expecting to be

responsible for 25% (through a \$4.4 million bond) of the total \$17 million project cost, with the rest covered by a local option tax surplus fund, state and federal grants, tax credits, rebates, and private donations. But, late in the year we found out that local taxpayers will have to pony up a larger amount of that \$17 million price tag after Ilsley failed to win a \$1.5 million grant it had been counting on. Thankfully, in October Middlebury College trustees OK'd a \$1 million gift toward the Ilsley, which had been counted on.

A year and a half after it was first announced, work crews in December broke ground on Stonecrop Meadows, a 218-unit residential neighborhood to be built in phases on 35 acres off Middlebury's Seminary Street Extension. In October, Middlebury College trustees agreed to front developer Summit Properties \$2.5 million so it could begin work on roads, street lighting, sidewalks, landscaping and municipal water/sewer connections for Phase 1. This phase will build 80 units of housing with construction on the first Stonecrop structure — a large multi-family building — beginning in April or May.

Something less obvious, but certainly in the multi-million-dollar range, is the required updates of water and sewage systems in Middlebury, Vergennes and Bristol. In the latter town, residents in November OK'd spending \$3.95 million on the next phase of a large project to replace 100-year-old water mains in the village.

Middlebury officials in February were working on a 10-year plan for upgrading the community's 54-mile municipal water system, some of it over 100 years old, which had been springing an alarming number of leaks in prior months. Later in the year, Middlebury residents found out they will likely vote on a proposed \$49.5 million makeover of their town's wastewater treatment plant this coming March. It's an outlay that would improve the plant's ability to process sludge, as well as pay for several age-related upgrades to the 24-year-

old facility. In Vergennes, they were moving along in 2024 with a multi-year effort to fix the city's wastewater treatment system.

In the fall, Bristol and Salisbury found out they

were among 14 Vermont communities whose public libraries will share \$15.9 million in federal funding for much-needed capital projects. The Salisbury library will use \$978,807 of an ARPA grant for lots of infrastructure fixes. Bristol's Lawrence Memorial Library will receive \$483,000 in ARPA funds that will help pay for a new HVAC system, building envelope repairs for structural integrity, as well as electrical and mechanical system updates.

As the year came to a close, the Vergennes Opera House said it has the millions of dollars it needed for its All Access project, which will improve accessibility to theater, the stage and then city hall building. Work begins in February.

Middlebury College continued to make progress on a big new dormitory on campus in 2024. When that building is ready for occupancy late next summer, the college acknowledged this year that it is raising money to take down the Battell Hall dorm and replace it with a new art museum.

2024 set the stage for some other big building infrastructure projects. In Vergennes, state officials from the Department for Children and Families and from Buildings & General Services floated the idea of building a 20,000-square-foot, 14-bed, locked facility on Comfort Hill. It would house young people involved with Vermont courts and criminal justice system. The city is discussing what they would want in return for hosting the facility.

Nearby in Pantown, developers said they want to install the state's largest solar array.



In the fall, Bristol and Salisbury found out they were among 14 Vermont communities whose public libraries will share \$15.9 million in federal funding for much-needed capital projects.

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County sees changing faces in leadership

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The year just ended

saw the departure of many local leaders serving in top positions in some of Addison County's largest institutions and towns.



Middlebury College President Laurie Patton announced in May that she would step down from her post at the end of 2024 to lead the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in Cambridge, Mass. Patton had led Middlebury College for nearly a decade, taking office in July 2015 as the institution's 17th president and the first woman to hold the position since its founding in 1800.

During her presidency, the college announced and made major progress on the four climate goals outlined in its Energy2028 initiative, renovated and constructed buildings on its Middlebury and Monterey campuses, and increased its financial aid offerings, among other accomplishments.

Middlebury College kicked off a national presidential search to find the institution's next leader, an effort led by an 18-member committee and facilitated by executive search firm Isaacson, Miller. College officials announced in

September that Steve Snyder, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the Middlebury Language Schools, would take over as interim president in January and serve in the position until June 30, or until the next president is hired, depending on whichever happens first.

Meanwhile, longtime Middlebury Town Manager Kathleen Ramsay left her post in September to take a new job with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. She'd served as the shire town's top administrator for 12 years, succeeding Bill Finger in 2012. Ramsay had previously served as Middlebury's assistant town manager from 2000-2007.

Her time helping Middlebury's municipal government overlapped with several major events, including the COVID pandemic, completion of a major downtown

rail tunnel project and construction of new town offices and a new recreation center.

The Middlebury selectboard in October chose Mark A. Pruhenski, who most recently served as town manager of Great Barrington, Mass., to succeed Ramsay. He is slated to begin his new role on Jan. 15. Retired Police Chief

Tom Hanley is serving as interim town manager until then.

Further up Route 116, another longtime town administrator confirmed news of her retirement in October when Bristol Town Administrator Valerie Capels announced she would step down in December.

She'd served as Bristol's town administrator since 2017, helping the town navigate staff changes, natural disasters and several major (See Leadership, Page 6)

Another important community leader took a bow this year when Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival founder and producer Lloyd Komesar announced that he would pare back his involvement in the annual event.

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GOP makes gains in November elections



Politically, Addison County

has been solidly blue for the past 20 years. In 2022, Democrats accomplished something they'd never done before: They won every one of Addison County's nine seats in the Vermont House and both its seats in the state Senate.

Two years later, the Democrats emerged from the 2024 election with still a solid majority, but having lost three seats to a Republican Party that also made similar gains in other parts of the state. When the dust had settled on Nov. 5, the GOP had picked up 17 seats in the House and six seats in the Senate.

Democrats will still hold solid majorities in both chambers, but they've lost their supermajority.

Did Vermont Republicans benefit from a strong national showing by Donald Trump?

As noted by Vermont Public, Trump received 6,645 more Green Mountain State votes in 2024 than he did in 2020, while Democrat Kamala Harris, his Democratic rival, received 7,131 fewer votes than President Joe Biden had in 2020. But Harris still outpolled Trump on Nov. 5 by a 63% to 32% margin.

Those analyzing the post-election fallout cited increasing taxes, state spending and the regulatory climate as among the top reasons for the Democrats' 2024 losses. Republic Gov. Phil Scott has branded himself as a bulwark against Democrats' spending initiatives and used his veto powers liberally. But the Democrats held a veto-proof majority and used their strength in numbers to override six of Scott's eight vetoes

in 2024.

Among the local casualties on Election Day: Addison County's two most senior lawmakers, Rep. Diane Lanpher, D-Vergennes, and Sen. Chris Bray, D-Bristol.

Lanpher, an eight-term incumbent and chair of the House Appropriations Committee, finished third in a four-person race for two seats representing the Addison-3 district. In a very tight contest, Ferrisburgh Republican Rob North finished first, with 2,679 tallies, followed by incumbent Rep. Matt Biron, D-Vergennes (2,374). Lanpher finished out of the running with 2,357 votes, while Ferrisburgh Republican Joe Baker finished fourth, with 2,240.

As leader of a key money committee, Lanpher faced strong headwinds in her re-election bid.

Bray, a longtime incumbent and chair of the Senate Natural Resources & Energy Committee, also found rough sledding on the election trail. Among the drags on his campaign: his support of the Affordable Heat Act (S.5) — which critics said would further increase the cost of fossil fuels; and S.258, which would have transferred the authority to adopt rules for the taking of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals from the Fish & Wildlife Board to the Department of Fish & Wildlife, thereby making the Fish & Wildlife Board advisory in nature.

When all the votes had been counted in the race for the two state Senate seats representing Addison County, Huntington, Rochester and Buel's Gore, incumbent Sen. Ruth Hardy, D-Middlebury, was the top finisher with 11,713 votes, followed by first-time Republican candidate

Steven Heffernan of Bristol with 11,644. Bray came away with 10,997; and Landel Cochran of Huntington got 8,210.

The third seat pickup for Addison County Republicans was in the Addison-Rutland House district, where Jim Casey ran unopposed. Incumbent Rep. Joe Andriano, D-Orwell, chose not to seek re-election, and no other Democrat chose to run in that district. Casey did not have a candidate website and didn't seem to have a public campaign, and reported spending less than \$1,000.



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Local efforts target housing crisis

Housing remained out of reach for many in 2024, as the cost of building and buying homes has skyrocketed. Though, local organizations and municipalities saw some progress this year in their efforts to alleviate the housing crunch.

In Middlebury, crews broke ground on Stonecrop Meadows, a 218-unit residential neighborhood to be built in phases on 35 acres off Seminary Street Extension. Middlebury College trustees in October agreed to invest \$2.5 million to support the effort. The college has played a key role in the housing project, which could see work start on the first mixed-income, multi-family building next spring, if all goes to plan.

Plans were also in the works to build 74 units of mostly workforce housing in Vergennes on land behind the city police station on Main Street. Developer Peter Kahn was working with a partner on a proposal for that project, which could eventually add 50 more units.

In April, the Vergennes City Council took action aimed at helping Kahn build workforce housing elsewhere in the city. Councilors approved a \$100,000 loan from the city's Revolving Loan Fund to Kahn that could help him move ahead with a 14-unit apartment building on Armory Lane, which would be located next to an existing 10-unit apartment complex that opened in June.

Recent changes to Act 250, the state's land use and development law, have helped guide Kahn's work on the projects. An Act 250 reform bill (Act 181) passed by the Legislature earlier this year was aimed at making updates to the law that would reduce barriers to building in Vermont while protecting the state's green spaces.

The bill set up some temporary Act 250 exemptions to encourage housing development, such as one for projects of up to 75 units in certain areas, including part of Vergennes. Those exemptions will be available over the next couple of years.

Other local efforts were also aimed at making it easier to create housing in parts of the county. In November, Bristol voters agreed to adopt amendments to the town's zoning regulations, which are intended to expand housing opportunities in and around Bristol's village, particularly by making it easier to develop smaller, affordable homes in the Village Planning Area in accordance with the Bristol Town Plan.

The changes fielded to voters came out of the Bristol Planning Commission's exploration of potential revisions to the town's zoning regulations, an effort the committee tackled through its work with a \$9,800 Bylaw Modernization Grant Bristol received from the Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development in 2022.

Those proposed changes to the town's zoning regulations include adjustments to the Dimensional Standards to allow for greater flexibility for residential use/housing in the Village Business and Village Mixed Districts and "parameters identifying 'clearly subordinate' with regard to an Accessory Dwelling Unit."

As 2024 wrapped up, a proposal that would give Vergennes zoning officials greater flexibility in handling some applications, including for proposals to create more housing units, was making its way through the channels.

The proposal would allow the city's zoning administrator or Vergennes Development Review Board to approve some applications if they conformed with more lenient state housing-density standards, even if they wouldn't yet be allowed by current city zoning and subdivision regulations.

The Vergennes City Council in December agreed to warn the amended regulations and a public hearing on the changes was slated for January.

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The bill set up some temporary Act 250 exemptions to encourage housing development, such as one for projects of up to 75 units in certain areas, including part of Vergennes.

Addy Indy Numbers Quiz

Take this little numbers quiz to test how well you know what we do at the Addison Independent!

- How many pages did the Addy Indy team create in 2024?
- If all of last year's Arts + Leisure pages were laid end to end, how far would they stretch?
- How many print display advertisers did the Addison Independent have in 2024?
- How many newsdealers sell the Addy Indy?
- How many weekly visitors does addisonindependent.com get?
- How many impressions did advertiser ads on addisonindependent.com get last year?
- How many ADDY ALL-STARs donated to support the newspaper, and how much was raised?

(Answers on page 14D)

ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT
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Leadership

(Continued from Page 6)

capital projects, which she highlighted in her retirement announcement.

By early December, the town of Bristol had received eight responses to the town administrator job announcement from applicants in and outside of Vermont. Town officials were hoping to move quickly in their search for Bristol's next town administrator and planned to review applications and rank candidates on a matrix before starting interviews.

Another important community leader took a bow this year when Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival founder and producer Lloyd Komesar announced that he would pare back his involvement in the annual event. The film festival in July hired Caitlin Boyle as its first-ever executive director to take on the bulk of the workload previously performed by Komesar.

The Addison Central School District's top administrator left in 2023, but the district didn't get a fulltime replacement until 2024. This past summer, Wendy Baker took over as ACSD superintendent, bringing with her years of experience in Vermont and New York schools.

Up in Lincoln, Principal Tory Riley retired after 35 years at the Lincoln Community School. Other long-time educators retiring in 2024 included Amy Johnston from Robinson Elementary in Starksboro, and Matt Schlein as founder of the Vergennes Union High School's Walden Project.

Towns seek compassionate but effective solutions to growing houseless encampments



The charitable

organization Helping Overcome Poverty's Effects, or HOPE, this fall was asked to help a growing number of houseless folks who've temporarily settled in the shire town, either at the Charter House Emergency Shelter or at makeshift campsites in the village area.

The local homelessness problem could get significantly worse this winter, according to advocates like Susan Whitmore, executive director of John Graham Housing & Services.

In a recent op ed for the *Addison Independent*, Whitmore noted the state on Sept. 15 capped its emergency housing program for those experiencing homelessness at 1,100 hotel/motel rooms statewide, down from 1,700.

"Our shelters are full and affordable housing waitlists number in the hundreds. Even as many towns and cities have imposed new restrictions on camping in public areas, many households will have no other option but to camp this fall," Whitmore said.

"We're ... offering use of our shower, tents, sleeping bags and food that lends itself to a lifestyle devoid of a kitchen," HOPE Executive Director Jeanne Montrose said in an October letter, noting the HOPE's recent houseless clients included a single mom with two children and an elderly man with a rescue dog.

People in our communities living outside because they don't have inside housing has become a more visible problem over the past year. The homeless shelters in Vergennes and Middlebury are constantly full, and as a result some people end up living in tents or under tarps, even as the weather got cold.

It's a population that's been omnipresent in Middlebury, though more abundant and overt in 2024: houseless individuals camping downtown and in other areas of the shire town's village. With it becoming more difficult to ignore their presence, community leaders began drafting an encampment policy to regulate the makeshift settlements.

The town of Middlebury has long been proactive and compassionate in extending care to the homeless. The Congregational Church of Middlebury in 2006 launched the Charter House Coalition, which began offering free community meals and eventually an emergency shelter at 27 North Pleasant St. Officials from the Counseling Service of Addison County,

the Turning Point Center and Middlebury police have been checking on those living outdoors.

But Charter House shelter beds have been consistently full as the numbers of houseless folks have been growing, and many have slipped through the cracks of an overwhelmed human services system trying to help those with housing, addiction and mental-health challenges. Growing numbers of houseless individuals from Addison County and beyond have been pitching tents in the village, with the largest concentration settling off Bakery Lane.

At one point this past summer and early fall, Middlebury police said more than a dozen houseless persons had been camping in Middlebury, including off Bakery Lane, along Otter Creek, off Merchants Row and in woods near Mary Hogan Elementary School. School officials raised concerns, as did others who reported unruly behavior among occupants of the most high-profile encampment, behind Ilsley Library.

Middlebury police officers were frequently called to encampments to sort out problems, ranging from fights to public drinking.

So the Middlebury selectboard asked the town's Policy Review Committee to draft an encampment policy to put in place this spring. Using Montpelier's policy as a template, the local committee's first draft suggested a ban on encampments "on the premises of a town or other government building (including the town offices, library and recreation center), public or private school, hospital, childcare facility, or adult day-care facility."

The ban would also extend to the premises of a business, residence, or other privately owned land and upon which the town has been requested to intervene and enforce an encampment no-trespassing order; cemeteries, monuments, public greens or parks;

town highway rights-of-way, lane of traffic, parking lot, sidewalk, bike lane, electric substation or transformer; a designated environmentally protected or recognized wildlife habitat area; or mountain biking or hiking trails, including the Trail Around Middlebury.

The draft document doesn't reference areas where encampments might be acceptable. Advocates acknowledged that a community could open itself up to lawsuits and/or substantial financial responsibilities if it sanctions encampments in specific areas.

But the policy is intended to be more than a regulatory document, according to those

working on it. It will also address "trauma-informed protocols" to guide any relocation of those living in an encampment that is determined to be unsafe and/or a health hazard or located in a restricted location.

The policy will also encourage "self-determination, by involving those with lived experience of being unhoused in decision-making processes," according to the draft.

Although Middlebury seems to be a draw because of the available social services, Vergennes too has been struggling with individuals who don't have housing. In early November, Vergennes police responded to a report that an unhoused

(See *Houseless*, Page 10)



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2024 Photos



Close to home

The fun part of publishing a community newspaper is getting the opportunity every week to reflect the community back at itself. Nothing is a purer reflection than a photograph, which in many ways can capture and present nuances of a situation that are difficult to enumerate in words. The *Addison Independent* is lucky to have Steve James behind the lens catching little moments throughout the year. Here are 10 local images that caught our fancy as we looked back over 2024. Clockwise from below, audience members joined the Middlebury Union High School dance team, led by Jordyn Rushton, left, and Gedeleine Franklin, for an impromptu dance party Saturday after a home competition this past January. David Allan Rose, featured in January's Health & Well-being section, built an outdoor gym at his Leicester home where he can swing on monkey bars and build upper-body strength. MUHS senior Ethan Sweet has a dramatic reaction to being painfully hit by a pitch a during a Division-II playoff game in June. Singer/songwriter Myra Flynn captivates the audience at Middlebury's Festival on the Green this past July. The dynamic of disagreement among community members is clear in this image from Bridport Town Meeting in March.

Independent photos/Steve James



Photos 2024



Dogs almost always steal the scene when they are featured in a photo; two instances stood out in 2024 — clockwise from top left, WVTK-FM radio personality Bruce Zeman goes about his job in April accompanied by his rescue dog Gracie, and Middlebury film director Andy Mitchell has fun with his dogs, Boon, a golden retriever, and a street mutt named Nola, before an August screening of his documentary “Inside the Mind of a Dog” at the Memorial Sports Center. Middlebury’s Lucy Bowdish shows great form in the 10-and-under skillet toss competition at Addison County Fair and Field Days in New Haven in August. We usually like to focus on people in our photos, but in this image at the Sinclair Family Tree Farm in Ripton last month we loved how small Katie and Steve Abbott looked amidst the vast forest of Christmas trees. Middlebury College sophomore Katie Fynn dips and swerves around the gates of the slalom course at the Snow Bowl during February’s Winter Carnival.

Independent photos/Steve James



Panton rejects solar array; state has final say

There are a handful of certainties about the 50-megawatt solar array proposed to be installed on a 220-acre tract of Panton land.

through a new transmission line via Ferrisburgh to the VELCO substation in Vergennes. The consortium planning the array has contracts with farmers in Panton and Ferrisburgh for the array and transmission lines.

all could remain in Vermont. A Viridis fact sheet prepared before the Panton vote describes the destination of the power generated by the array as “Unknown.”

The Vermont Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has the final say on approval of a proposal put forth by a group going by the name Viridis Solar, including Freepoint; an affiliated Pennsylvania firm, SunEast Development LLC; and VT Real Estate Holdings 3 LLC.

In that packet, the companies also estimated the array will generate about \$350,000 a year in town taxes over the estimated 35-year lifespan of the array (not including land value), plus another \$200,000 in school taxes. They have also pledged, per town officials, \$450,000 a year in additional funding. Panton’s fiscal year 2024 budget was about \$1.2 million.

When an application for the array is filed, Panton will be granted special standing before the PUC because of its Enhanced Energy Commission. But that standing is ill-defined by state law and has never been tested. It is unclear what weight the PUC will give Panton’s status.

The Panton selectboard had been on the fence prior to that vote, citing those potential tax and financial incentives to the town. But after working with legal counsel, they issued a statement in late December that backed residents’ sentiment, while retaining the board’s right to negotiate in executive sessions with Viridis representatives on the town’s behalf.

Meanwhile, the proposed array is about as popular in Panton as the New York Yankees in Fenway Park or Wisconsin cheddar in Cabot. In a petitioned Nov. 5 advisory vote, town residents voted by 307-100 that they did not want the array as proposed.

The statement read, in part, “We, the Selectboard of the Town of Panton, value the contributions of our citizens in all civic matters, and the vote held by the Town recently regarding the installation of the Viridis Solar project is a clear statement on the attitude of the citizens of the Town. We support the feelings and clear preference of the Town in this regard.”

In public meetings and interviews with the *Independent*, opponents say they favor renewable energy, but object to the array’s scale, visual impact, location on usable farmland, and its location about 75% outside the area designated in the town’s Enhanced Energy Plan for such arrays.

As well as the unknown of how Panton’s energy plan might weigh in the PUC’s deliberations, at year’s end it was also uncertain what was the status of the Viridis companies’ plans. A spokesperson for the project told the *Independent* over the summer that an application would most likely be filed by the end of 2024.

Opponents also criticized the likely out-of-state destination of the power, and the fact renewable energy credits would be transferred with it. They also wondered if the companies would, as promised, remove the array when it was no longer productive.

But as of late December, Panton Town Clerk Kyle Rowe said the town had not received a notification from the PUC that would be required if a Viridis application had been filed.

Most of the power from the proposed arrays appears destined for the larger New England grid, according to Viridis officials, although it is possible some or

Stay tuned in 2025.

Budgets

(Continued from Page 1)

But as one challenging budget season came to an end, district officials across Vermont readied for the potential of another one. Many of the inflationary pressures that school districts struggled with in the previous budget-building season were expected to return, from overall price inflation to rising health care costs.

Taxpayers, school districts and state officials appeared to agree on one thing: The state’s education funding system needs reform. As 2024 came to a close, conversations about how to strengthen Vermont’s public education system were unfolding across the state, and school districts were once again struggling to build budgets that would both serve students and be palatable to voters.

Houseless

(Continued from Page 7)

accessing a Walker Avenue residential complex’s lobby to sleep. Also this year, the city council began talking about a policy that would set ground rules for homeless people camping within city limits.

Middlebury’s homeless encampments in advance of a new policy: The onset of winter, which has sent houseless individuals to warmer climes or subsidized motel rooms; and a town decision to clear the campsite behind Ilsley Library, with officials citing safety, emergency access and winter maintenance issues.

Meanwhile, two forces have affected

ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT
Middlebury, Vermont • Thursday, May 9, 2024 • 48 Pages • \$1.50

- Hog wild**: The Vermont Wildlife Council has a party idea to celebrate its 125th anniversary. See page 10.
- Tiger lax hot**: The MEHS boys team flexed its muscles on the field. See page 12.
- Bristol green**: The Bristol school district is looking for a new superintendent. See page 14.
- Ilsley bond gets a thumbs up**: Middlebury voters endorsed a \$17M makeover by 956-200 margin.
- Panton grapples with plan for Vt.'s largest solar field**: A consortium planning the array has contracts with farmers in Panton and Ferrisburgh for the array and transmission lines.
- College president Panton is leaving**: Will start new job in Mass. in January.
- Riverflow will serve adults with disabilities**: Monkton community for all is taking shape.
- MAUSD to host budget forums**: The school district will have several opportunities to meet with the community.
- Bang bang**: The school district is looking for a new superintendent.
- Ripton music venue to host its final show**: The venue will close its doors after a long run.
- Coffee House caps magical 29-year run**: The venue will close its doors after a long run.

Power would be sent from the array

Top Ten ways to reduce waste in 2025

- Avoid impulse shopping. Buy only what you need.
- Say no to freebies from events, work, and other gatherings.
- Use reusable containers and bags at stores.
- Repair broken items instead of discarding them.
- Shop secondhand instead of new to extend an item's life.
- Buy items made from recycled content, not raw materials.
- Make your own non-hazardous cleaners.
- Donate usable items instead of throwing them away.
- Before grocery shopping, shop your fridge first.
- Consider online subscriptions and bills; avoid junkmail.

District Transfer Station Hours: Mon-Fri 7 AM - 3 PM & Sat 8 AM - 1 PM
HazWaste Center Hours: Mon-Fri 8 AM - 2 PM & Sat 8 AM - 1 PM

Addison County
Solid Waste Management District
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1223 Route 7 S. Middlebury, VT
www.AddisonCountyRecycles.org

City residents wary of proposed juvenile facility

News first surfaced

in April of a proposal to build a 20,000-square-foot, 14-bed, locked facility in Vergennes. It would house what state officials called “justice-involved” youth on a short-term basis. They called it the Green Mountain Youth Campus.

Officials from the Departments for Children and Families (DCF) and Buildings & General Services (BGS) acknowledged at that point that a state-owned, 8-acre site on Comfort Hill’s west side, next to a state-owned solar array, had emerged as their preferred location.

Officials, including DCF head Chris Winters and then BGS head Jennifer Fitch, explained the need for and functions of such a facility at a June public meeting in the Vergennes Opera House.

They described the facility as a missing link in Vermont’s system of care for troubled youth. They said the beds provided would open up beds elsewhere in Vermont for long-term, in-state placements for juveniles further along in the system who are now being sent out of state for care.

State officials said the campus would offer a six-bed program offering

short-term “stabilization” of youths in crisis, probably for stays of up to two weeks before a move to other DCF facilities, and an eight-bed program to provide longer-term mental health care.

The operation would include a gym, office space, and room for outdoor recreation. The design includes secure, no-climb, fencing, but the buildings themselves would be aligned to provide much of the perimeter security, officials said. They said the Vergennes site was chosen because it

was a pleasant rural setting that is close to services, it has an available workforce, and it is on state-owned land, thus reducing development costs.

DCF plans to contract with a third-party provider to operate the facility, and Winters said the department would closely supervise its operation. He also said no youths would be released into the local community from the facility.

Officials also said the buildings would be designed to be comfortable, bright and airy to provide a welcoming atmosphere.

Despite the promises and a polite

reception at the June public forum and state officials’ pledge of further public outreach, many in Vergennes remain wary. Despite good relations between the city and current Northlands Job Corps management, there have in the past been problematic times between the city and the private operators of the federal job-training center for economically disadvantaged youth.

Similarly, the substance-use disorder program now operating at 1 Alden Place has at times been a burden on the city police force, particularly when the program dismisses clients without provisions for returning them to their home communities.

And the track record of the former Weeks School for juvenile delinquents, which operated on the Northlands site under varying names for the better part of a century, included bullying, beatings, eugenics, and staff abuse of residents.

“What happened in the past cannot happen in this community,” said Waltham resident Liz Ryan at the June meeting.

“You’re right. You have every right to be concerned based on the track record,” responded Winters.

Others pointed to the existing facilities for troubled youth in the city and said enough is enough. Others mentioned the potential effect on property values and risk to the city’s reputation.

At the same time, state officials made clear that Vergennes would reap tangible benefits if it supported the proposal. The BGS commissioner pointed to the fact the state of Vermont also owns much of northwestern Vergennes.

“We know, for example, the city of Vergennes is really interested in building housing,” Fitch said. “And we know we’ve got a little land there. And those are the types of discussions we really want to have.”

The Vergennes City Council appointed a committee to study what the city should ask for in exchange for supporting, or at least accepting, the Green Mountain Youth Campus. That acceptance will ultimately hinge on a city-wide vote.

That committee came up with a “Draft Wish List” of what its members believe Vergennes should receive. It included requests for 180 acres of state-owned land in Vergennes to be transferred to city ownership, a direct infusion of almost \$1.5 million to the city, \$20 million tax assessment of the facility and a future

assurance of either direct tax payments or Payments in Lieu of Taxes, and a right of first refusal for a possible future purchase of the land now occupied by Northlands.

At year’s end nothing had been settled, and according to City Manager Ron Redmond the original plan of a vote on Town Meeting Day of 2025 had been scuttled.

In an email, Redmond reported that recently appointed BGS



(See Facility, Page 12)

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Despite the promises and a polite reception at the June public forum and state officials’ pledge of further public outreach, many in Vergennes remain wary. Despite good relations between the city and current Northlands Job Corps management, there have in the past been problematic times between the city and the private operators of the federal job-training center for economically disadvantaged youth.

Once-in-a-lifetime eclipse wows the county

The vast majority

of our top 10 stories typically involve issues with a weeks-long buildup and/or fallout.

Number 9 on this year's list keys on an event that spanned a mere six minutes: the total solar eclipse of April 8, 2024.

Sure, there was some buildup. News sources provided ample notice the eclipse was coming, and that it would plunge the northern half of Vermont into an extremely rare, otherworldly darkness between roughly 3:25 to 3:31 p.m. on April 8. Plus, most people kept an eye on the weather forecast to see if there would be cloud cover at that time.

Around 160,000 visitors entered Vermont to get a firsthand look at the eclipse.

But if you lived in most parts of Addison County, all you really had to

do was make sure you had your special viewing glasses, and a chair set up in your backyard.

Still, many Addison County folks sought to share the experience with their friends and neighbors. Entire neighborhoods organized watch parties, or gathered at events organized by towns, nonprofits and entertainment organizations.

Scores of people set up folding chairs and blankets at Middlebury's Recreation Park, Triangle Park, on the banks of Otter Creek in the Marble Works, in College Park, across the Middlebury College campus, and even at the cemetery of South Main Street.

In Bristol, they converged on the town green and the rec park. That's where Bristol Cub Scout Troop 453, led by Greg Grover, staged a hands-on, educational dynamic to the occasion — Grover had each Scout hold a large, colorful bouncy ball, representing the sun or one of the eight planets in the solar system. At one point, the youngsters began to spin and circumnavigate the sun to mimic the dynamics of the solar system.

Vergennes-area folks watched from the Bixby Library and Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.

In Starksboro they held an Eclipse Party behind Robinson Elementary School. The Fire Department and the Auxiliary sold hot dogs and snacks, and people brought many different kinds of homemade eclipse-themed desserts.

Local musician Patrick Melvin provided live entertainment. At least 200 people showed up, mostly from Starksboro, though some were from nearby states.

Monkton saw scores of people gather behind the town office/library, where they lounged on the lawn and enjoyed each other's company.

Those who wanted a more solitary experience simply pulled into a parking lot or to the side of the road, popped on glasses, and waited.

Excited chatter reverberated across the county as the sun and moon crossed paths. Sprinkled in with the exclamations were the hurried

shutter-clicks of specially outfitted cameras, enlisted to immortalize the occurrence.

Fortunately, Mother Nature cooperated with clear skies, which gradually darkened. For a moment, it was "nighttime" when most kids would normally be getting home from school. Some watchers dashed to their vehicles to retrieve sweaters or jackets as the sun's rays became more muted. Ample exclamations of "Oooohh" and "Aaaahh" rang out to the heavens in appreciation of the rare celestial sight.

When the show was over, the mass exodus began. Traffic on Routes 116, 7, 22A, 30 and other major thoroughfares plodded southbound as visiting eclipse viewers excited the county. They left with memories they would cherish the rest of their lives.



ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT
Middlebury, Vermont • Thursday, April 11, 2024 • 50 Pages • \$1.50

Eclipse: Cool enough to yell about
People of all ages entranced by the celestial display

ANWSD reduces spending, sets vote
About \$1M cut since first defeat

MAUSD voters will field new budget on Tuesday

Documentary puts Vermont food security at center stage

Healthcare, housing top concerns at leg. breakfast

Lincoln man helps rebuild Notre Dame
Woodworker restores cathedral roof

By the way

Index



A COUPLE FROM Ludlow, Vt., experiences eclipse totality at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in Addison. Independent file photo/Angelo S. Lynn

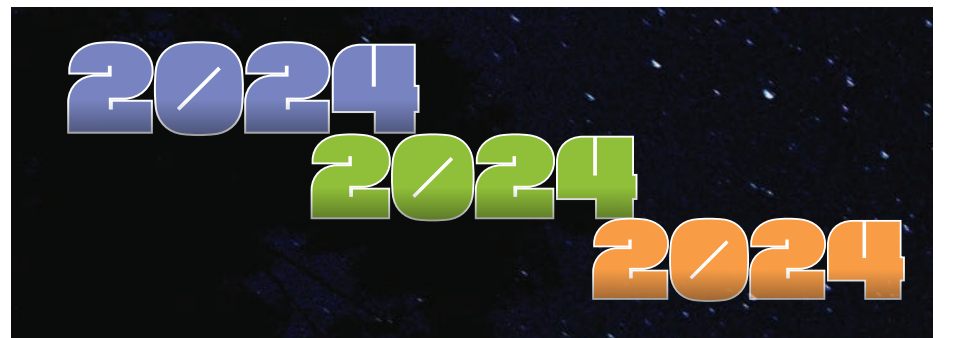
Facility

(Continued from Page 11)

Commissioner Wanda Minoli and Winters met with the committee on Dec. 3, after which the committee requested more specifics on the buildings' safety measures, staffing protocols and levels, contract details between the state and a potential operator, more details on the

nature of the juveniles the facility would serve, and an "assessment of potential changes in community risk levels."

Redmond called the meeting cordial and concluded his email: "The Committee and State will continue their work. There will be a ballot measure at some point in the future."



Sports teams excel, garnering many titles



We play sports

and offer them in our schools for any number of reasons — fitness, the lessons of teamwork and striving for common goals, the idea that striving leads to improvement, and the simple joy of participating.

Addison County saw many local athletic champions in 2024, but there were also many worthy teams and individuals efforts that fell just short — Eagle girls' soccer, Middlebury College men's soccer, and Tiger boys' lacrosse, and Mount Abe track & field standout Joseph Darling, just to name a few.

But many did break the tape, sink the winning putt or reel in the biggest fish. Let's have a look.

It began in February, when the Middlebury Union High School girls' Nordic ski team completed its domination of in the two-day Division II championship meet, posting a 61-point victory over runner-up Montpelier. The title was the program's third straight, with juniors Beth McIntosh and Ava Schneider playing major roles in all three and sophomore Mary Harrington in the past two. They were joined by junior Lila Cook Yoder as the fourth scorer.

In the indoor track title meet, MUHS junior Jazmyn Hurley bolted to victory in both the D-II girls' 55- and 200-meter races. Winning events for the Vergennes boys were junior Grey Fearon at 1,000 meters and the four-by-800-meter relay team of Fearon, Riley Gagnon, Calvin Gramling and Calder Rakowski.

On the wrestling mats, VUHS senior Jamison Couture at 215 pounds and Commodore junior Isaac Preston at 190 pinned all of their opponents in claiming crowns, while Otter Valley senior Chase Cram completed a 30-0 season by winning at 157.

In late May, the Panther women's lacrosse team wrapped up a 23-0 season with its fourth straight NCAA D-III title, polishing off Salisbury, 16-5, in the final. The closest any team came to the Panthers

was in the semifinal: Middlebury won by only 15-9.

Jazmyn Hurley struck again in the outdoor high school D-II state track meet. The Tiger became the only runner to win three individual races, prevailing at 100, 200 and 400 meters, all by large margins. Mount Abraham senior Siena Stanley claimed the other victory for a local athlete with a big win at 3,000 meters.

In D-III track Commodore Calder Rakowski won the boys' 800, repeating his 2023 victory. And he teamed up with the same group that won the indoor track relay to win the four-by-800-meter outdoor relay for the second straight year.

A little later three programs that had never won titles broke through, two on the same June Saturday. First, the second-seeded Mount Abraham/VUHS cooperative boys' lacrosse team defeated top seed Green Mountain Valley. The Eagles played strong defense and scored the game's final three goals — two from senior Noah Ladeau — to win, 9-6. The program had lost in the 2022 and 2023 D-III title games.

Then many Eagle fans drove up to Centennial Field to watch their sixth-seeded baseball team take on No. 8 MUHS in the D-II baseball final. They saw heartbreak for Mount Abe, when what appeared to be the walk-off winning run in the seventh inning was waved off and turned into an inning-ending out due to a baserunning error. Then the Tigers claimed the program's historic first title in the eighth inning, 7-6, by scoring three runs. The Eagles then scored twice before leaving two runners on base in a thrilling finish.

As in baseball, where it ain't over 'til it's over, the D-I tennis final between MUHS and Champlain Valley played out over time. After six of seven matches were completed, the score was tied at 3-3, with Jackson Murray, Nate Cook Yoder and the doubles team of Eddie Fallis and Milo Rees netting wins for the Tigers.

It was all up to senior Iver Anderson at No. 4 singles, and after winning the first

set he lost a big lead in the second set, and it all came down to a first-to-10-points tiebreaker. Suddenly, Anderson caught fire to win the tiebreaker, 10-1.

In August the Vergennes Champs and Middlebury Marlins swim teams combined for 37 state titles at the Vermont Swim Association summer championship meet. Multiple title winners were Champs Will Clark, with five; Savannah Wallace, with four; Riker Cooley, Connor Husk and Luke Davis with three; and Scarlett Giroux and Noah Smits with two. For the Marlins Felix Poduschnick led with three victories.

Fall brought more titles. In early October at a tournament based in the waters off South Hero, Mount Abe sophomore twins Hailey and Isayah Isham became Vermont High School Bass Fishing champs. Fishing on a boat operated by Coach Carroll Isham, whom they also call Dad, the Ishams reeled in six bass — including the event's heaviest, a 5.3-pound large-mouth — totaling 23.84 pounds.

Then the OV golf team won both individual and team D-II hardware. Senior Lucas Politano earned medalist honors for the third straight season, and joined Jackson Howe, Connor Denis, Jacob Tripp and Jacob Warrell in winning the team title for the third time in the past four years. Politano's three-over-par 74 led the field by a wide margin, and OV's four golfers collectively shot 68 over par, good for a 15-stroke margin over second-place Hartford.

Last, and certainly not least, in late November the Middlebury College field hockey team claimed its seventh straight (not a typo) NCAA D-III title with a 2-1 victory over NESCAC rival Tufts. The Panthers finished at 19-2.

Will 2025's title count top 2024? Let the games begin!



STILL EXUBERANT FROM their lacrosse victory in June, members of the state champion MAV lacrosse team provide cooling entertainment at Bristol's 4th of July Parade.

Independent file photo/Steve James

2024 Stories that had us scrolling



It's always interesting to see what folks clicked on over the past year. On our website, the stories that draw the most traffic are often the most sensational breaking news stories. This past year, that included the accidental fire that destroyed the home of the Mount Abraham Union High School principal in January, the seemingly random knife attack on Middlebury's College Street in March, and the small plane crash in Ferrisburgh in September.

But this year readers were also particularly interested in the divergent fates of two local lumber mills. In March, the A. Johnson Mill in Bristol closed for good after years of struggle in the face of changing times, while in August, two young biotech entrepreneurs bought Goodro Lumber in East Middlebury, hoping to shepherd it into the future.

The third most-viewed story was an obituary for beloved Middlebury math teacher and hockey coach Derek Palmer Bartlett, who died unexpectedly in September.

On Facebook, new business news always spreads far and wide. This year readers were eager to share our news about the opening of Adagio Chocolates and Woof Pack doggie daycare in Middlebury. They loved the story of longtime school bus driver Sudona "Sudsey" Lou Hanfield, who was honored after her death in June with one more school bus ride to her final resting place. Readers this year also had quite a lot to say about bears.

Finally on Instagram, our followers enjoyed photos from big events such as Middlebury College's graduations (in February and May) and the Middlebury Maple Run in October. They were interested in the Gaza solidarity encampment college students erected on campus in April, and in the social workers who routinely check in with the folks at the encampment of unhoused people in downtown Middlebury. They offered words of thanks to the owners of Buxton's Store in Orwell, which closed after many decades in October.

See the list on the right for the other top stories.

Top stories on our website:

1. Bristol lumber mill hurt by changing times (March 21) — 11,369 views
2. Middlebury man charged with attempted murder after knife attack on College St. (March 21) — 6,363 views
3. Obit: Derek Palmer Bartlett of Middlebury (October 2) — 6,073 views
4. Vermont lifestyle lures biotech duo to buy lumber yard (August 15) — 5,923 views
5. Accidental fire destroys Ferrisburgh home of Mt. Abe principal (January 9) — 5,597 views
6. Four killed in Ferrisburgh plane crash (September 9) — 5,272 views
7. MUMS educator resigns after leave request denied (November 14) — 4,932 views
8. Truck fire halts Route 7 traffic in North Ferrisburgh (July 15) — 4,790 views
9. Local farm equipment dealer grows into New York state (November 14) — 4,732 views
10. Middlebury unhoused camp numbers ebb (January 18) — 4,496 views

Top posts on Facebook:

1. Middlebury College graduation photos (May 30) — 3.4k reach
2. College students put up a Gaza solidarity encampment (April 29) — 3.2k reach
3. Educator Matt Schlein leaves a legacy with the Walden Project (May 23) — 2.8k reach
4. First-time voters cast ballots in Addison County (November 5) — 2.8k reach
5. Middlebury College Febs graduate at the Snow Bowl (February 5) — 2.4k reach
6. Bear sightings on the rise around the county (July 11) — 2.4k reach
7. Middlebury Maple Run photos (October 7) — 2.2k reach
8. Valentine's Day contest winners (February 9) — 2.1k reach
9. Buxton's Store in Orwell closes (October 10) — 2.1k reach
10. Suicide hits Middlebury's unhoused community (July 3) — 2k reach

Top Instagram posts:

1. Photos from Addison County Fair & Field Days (August 7) — 31.5k reach
2. The hot chocolate hut has landed in Middlebury (December 3) — 31.4k reach
3. A chocolate shop opens in Middlebury (June 27) — 24.8k reach
4. Doggy daycare to open in Middlebury (March 7) — 24.8k reach
5. Bear sightings on the rise around the county (July 11) — 15.8k reach
6. Video: Mary Hogan kids cheer for MUHS grads (June 7) — 11.6k reach
7. School bus driver Sudona "Sudsey" Lou Hanfield gets a fitting sendoff (June 5) — 11.2k reach
8. Have a good time line dancing at Woodchuck Cider (April 11) — 11.2k reach
9. Sculptor Norton Latourelle closes up shop after 50 years (August 15) — 11.1k reach
10. Locals try to rescue orphaned bear cub (October 15) — 10.8k reach

ANSWERS:

Addy Indy Numbers Quiz

1. Our dedicated team brought **3,234 pages** to life this year. Bonus fact: If you multiply that number by the number of weekly subscribers and newsdealers, that's over 19.4 million printed pages!
2. They would stretch **3.18 billion inches**... enough to circle the Earth just over 2 times!
3. We featured display ads from over **680 different local businesses** and community members last year.
4. There are **61 locations** across Vermont that sell our newspaper.
5. The Addy Indy website gets **13,298 weekly visitors**, on average.
6. There were **8,052,729 web ad impressions!** Curious about buying a web ad? Email: advertising@addisonindependent.com.
7. A generous **329 ADDY ALL-STARS donated a total of \$38,161**. Want to help us get to our goal of \$100k? Visit addisonindependent.com/all-stars.

Thanks for playing and thanks for reading!

ADDISON COUNTY
INDEPENDENT

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And that's not all . . . 2024

When we choose the top 10 stories of the preceding year, we always produce a longer list than just 10. We will mention a couple of important stories that could have made the list, but didn't fit.

One issue that's missing — a big issue facing the state in general, as well as Addison County specifically — is health care.

A team from Oliver Wyman's Health and Life Sciences Practice hired by the Green Mountain Care Board was in Middlebury this summer to talk about the state health care in Vermont. He said that Vermonters must go beyond typical measures to fix an ailing healthcare system.

Some takeaways: Nine of the state's 14 hospitals ended fiscal year 2023 with negative operating margins. Health insurance premiums are going up faster than incomes. Vermont's aging population will require more healthcare. Health insurers are losing money.

Healthcare experts suggested some solutions, including increasing use of telehealth for emergency room/urgent care and specialists, expanding rural outreach programs for primary care and preventative services, and contracting for fulltime paid professional Emergency Medical Services organizations, among other things.

But while home-based care could save a lot of money in the system, the feds have been pounding nonprofit home health agencies with Medicare reimbursement-rate cuts, making those agencies less capable of maintaining current services

Another important issue for the state and the county in 2024 was access to childcare. Thanks to a big change in the law in 2023, Vermont started collecting a small payroll tax that funded expansion

of childcare in 2024. Well, it worked around here. More childcare slots opened as early childhood educators got a paid a little better. At the same time, Otter Creek Child Center in Middlebury, thanks in part to support from Middlebury College, began an ambitious expansion of its center on Weybridge Street in Middlebury. When it is finished next year, OCCC will have a capacity of 139 and care for children in four age groups.

Across town, Red Clover Childcare Center opened in the Congregational Church of Middlebury at the beginning of the year, and the new state funding enabled Mary Johnson Children's Center to expand its offerings, including a new toddler program. And in Salisbury, an entirely new childcare center opened in the building with the town office.

On another front, Addison County State's Attorney Eva Vekos got in hot water when she was cited by state police for drunken driving. Troopers said Vekos drove to the sight of an untimely death in Bridport with a scarf wrapped around her face, apparently to mask the smell of alcohol on her breath. The first-term county prosecutor refused to take sobriety tests, so police cited her for DUI. After that she sent an email to local law enforcement agencies saying she felt unsafe around police officers. Then local victims and victims' advocates complained about the way she was handling cases. Finally, the Vermont Supreme Court suspended Vekos's license to practice law due to how she handled their inquiry into the DUI.

Eventually, Vekos got her law license back.

Another series of stories worth mentioning revolved around student behavior in local schools. Now a couple years after the end of the pandemic, local educators say that student behavior has not

rebounded. At Middlebury's Mary Hogan School teachers in March asked the Addison Central School District board for more resources — and to preserve a key, student-discipline position that was slated to be cut — in response to a growing number of student behavioral issues. They said the behavior problems have been shrinking all children's learning opportunities as well as affecting working conditions for educators.

Mount Abraham Unified School District was working on concerns about student self-control in several schools, notably Beeman Elementary in New Haven.

Finally, we have climate change, which is not getting any better. The flooding in summer 2024 wasn't as bad as the previous summer, but it still warranted a federal disaster declaration. Plus unusually strong windstorms that buffeted the county earlier in the winter left some wondering if this is the new normal. A new report from the Climate Economy Action Center of Addison County told us that we are still dumping tons of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, and the rate actually inched up.



Make the Switch & Save, Addison County!

VGS estimates an average home uses 800 ccf of natural gas a year, equal to about 600 gallons of oil or 900 gallons of propane. Based on Vermont's average retail fuel prices¹, this equals an **annual fuel savings of more than \$550 for oil and \$1,150 for propane** customers when switching to natural gas.

1. November 2024 Retail Prices of Heating Fuels retrieved from www.publicservice.vermont.gov; VGS Residential Rates retrieved from www.vgsvt.com.

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