

THE GREYLOCK INDEPENDENT

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Adams Revives Greylock Glen Project More Modest, Eco-Friendly Project Than Those Proposed For The Site in The Past



One of the ponds on the Glen property

By Tela Zasloff

The Town of Adams is finally ready to realize a plan for developing its adjacent natural treasure, Greylock Glen, that was so long in the making, many skeptics were sure it would never happen. Greylock Glen is at the eastern base of Mount Greylock, the tallest mountain in the state, 1,060 acres of woodlands, small lakes, wild flowers and animals, and volumes of rushing water flowing through brooks in the spring.

On October 17 Mass. Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Commissioner Jack Murray and Adams Selectboard Chair Arthur "Skip" Harrington signed the master lease for 56 acres of Greylock Glen which will serve as the centerpiece of a collaboration between DCR and the Town of Adams. The signing of the lease allows the Town of Adams to move forward with implementation of development plans that have been ten years in the making. The signing was celebrated as finally bringing a much-needed economic development opportunity to Adams.

A four-season resort is planned, including two campgrounds, an environmental education center, conference facility, an extensive trail system, and a number of other amenities. The development will be limited to the 56 acres covered by the lease, leaving the remaining 1,000 acres protected as conservation lands. The strategy is to expand the regional economy by establishing Adams as a destination for outdoor recreation and environmental education, while conserving the unique, natural qualities of the Glen. The facilities will be designed to have a low impact on the environment, using green building and renewable energy technologies.

\$5 million was included in the State's Environmental Bond Bill last summer for the Environmental Education Center planned for the Greylock Glen. This will be one of the centerpieces of the project.

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Williams College Plans New Williams Inn

by Alex Brooks

Williams College is seeking to relocate the Williams Inn to the bottom of Spring Street in the area behind the American Legion where there are some storage barns, a short way up Dennison Park Drive. The facility, at least initially, is planned as a 60 room inn with a restaurant and a large function room. Jim Kolesar, Vice President for Public Affairs at Williams College, said the facility has not been designed yet, but the college envisions a New England style inn on the banks of Christmas Brook, elegant perhaps but not fancy, with room rates similar to The Porches.

The College has consulted with Cambridge Seven architects and Vince Guntlow to come up with preliminary site plans.

Kolesar notes that the current location of the Williams Inn is not convenient for bringing visitors to patronize the business district on Spring Street and Water Street, and the new inn would help to strengthen the business climate in the downtown area, as well as bringing new taxable property onto the Town's rolls.

The Williams Inn currently has 124 rooms, so the move to the new Inn would be a reduction in the number of rooms available in town. The College had a consultant study the projected demand for lodging and recommended a facility with 60 rooms. However, the consultant noted that at certain times of year there is a demand for more, so some kind of annex is also being considered, which could be opened in times of high demand and closed at other times.

The Spring St. business zoning doesn't currently extend to the site where the college plans to build, so they will be asking the Town to make a zoning change to allow this use.

If the zoning maps are to be changed, that would happen at Town meeting in May. Kolesar estimates 14 months for design and 18 months for construction, so it will probably be three years or so before the new inn would be ready for occupancy.

Building a new Williams Inn of course begs the question of what is to be done with the site of the old one. Kolesar said the College has not made any plans for that property after the new Williams Inn opens. The College will have several years to make such plans, and in the meantime the current Williams Inn will continue operating as it has for many years.

Greylock Glen, *continued*

The Town and DCR will solicit proposals from private developers for the lodge and conference center, which will be another centerpiece of the project. The total cost of the development is estimated at 35 to 40 million dollars.

But the idea this time is not to build a resort separate from the Town, but to integrate the Town and the recreational facilities.

Donna Cesan, Director of the Adams Community Development Department and Acting Town Administrator, glows in describing this Glen project and how it will affect the future of Adams. "The 1985 plan was way too large. It would have sucked all the vitality out of Adams itself. And it was this question of scale that most disturbed the environmentalists. It was good that the discussions centered on how much is too much—how much would destroy the land." Another problem with the grandiose plans put forward in the past was that, because the planning process was so long, developers and their partners changed.

The current Master Plan for Greylock Glen was developed over the last ten years through a collaborative process led by the Town of Adams and Mass. DCR, with participation by many civic and environmental organizations, including Mass Audubon Society, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, MCLA and MassMoCA. The Town of Adams was designated "Provisional Developer" a few years ago, and has already made investments in getting utilities to the property, as well as preliminary design and permitting. Cesan describes the project as just about "shovel-ready." But implementation of the full plan is expected to take ten years or so, and be accomplished in phases.

Chairman of the Selectmen Arthur "Skip" Harrington said, "The deliberative planning and permitting process undertaken over the past several years by DCR, the Town, and collaborating organizations and institutions has yielded a more economically and environmentally sound project."

Cesan remarked, "One of the best parts of the present plan is that the revenue from use of the Glen, stays here, so we can maintain the trail system and the beauty of the place."

It was a lot of community participation and support that finally pushed through the right plan. The Town, at every Town Meeting, voted "Yes" overwhelmingly every time the proposal to develop the Glen came up. "People in our town

feel very attached to our mountains and we all agree that, if we want to develop, we have to build on our strength, which is the beauty of both our town and our mountains. The Adams downtown has so many precious old buildings. Our pull to visitors, is natural beauty and outdoor recreation. We can be the hub for the whole State." On protecting the rest of the Glen's 1,000 acres under conservation, Cesan describes this as their biggest worry. "We need to do this sooner rather than later, to keep ATVs from destroying the woodland paths, and be vigilant in protecting the land."

A History Of Grand Plans That Never Happened

A number of development plans for the Greylock Glen put forward over the past 50 years have failed. The plans themselves are remarkable for their grandiosity, and the history of their progress is remarkable for the enormous amount of money and energy invested in them which all came to nothing.

1964—Tramway Authority plans a \$5.5 million tramway, chair lifts, 11 miles of ski trails, an international shopping center and an amusement park; Mt. Greylock Protective Association files suit and, in 1966, the Tramway Authority is abolished by the State Legislature

1967—North Berkshire Area Redevelopment Authority plans for a recreational development at Mt. Greylock, with a golf course and hotel planned for the Glen lands, was never developed.

1973—ELCO Resort Development, Inc. buys family farms and begins construction on Greylock Glen Resort Project, to include a 350-room convention center, golf course, alpine ski area and 740 condominiums; the developer runs out of money and project is abandoned.

1980—MGM Grand Hotels expressed interest in Glen if casino gambling is legalized in the state; Berkshire County referendum on gambling loses.

1985—Glen concept plan distributed, including a 40-acre lake and health facility; legislature authorizes \$8.5 million for developer; selected developer proposes a \$260 million plan including an alpine ski area and 1,275 condominiums; plan is curtailed in 1988 and project is abandoned by acting Governor Jane Swift in 2001.

Williamstown Solar Array

By Alex Brooks

The Town of Williamstown is negotiating with a company called Solar City to install a large solar array at the Town landfill site. It will generate 1.8 megawatts of electricity.

The Town is still negotiating the final terms of the contract with Solar City, but Town Manager Peter Fohlin described the broad outlines of the project when he came to the Mt. Greylock School Committee to ask them to sign on as one of the users of the electricity that will be generated by the project.

Fohlin emphasized that the School District will not in any direct sense be using the electricity generated. The electricity generated goes into the grid, and the Town and the School District get their electricity from the Grid as they always have. What they get from Solar City are something called "net meter-

ing credits," which reduce their cost of electricity significantly.

Solar City will own, install, and maintain the solar array, and the town will sign a 20-year contract with them to buy the net metering credits.

Fohlin said the Town and the Elementary School will use about half of the credits available. The Williamstown Fire District will use about a quarter of them, and he offered the remaining credits to the School District.

The School Committee was happy to have this opportunity to cut their electricity bill, and voted unanimously in favor of pursuing a partnership with the town on this project, subject to approval of the contract by the District's attorney. The District would be committing, like the Town and the Fire District, to a 20-year contract.

The Concussion Crises in Athletic Health in US Colleges and Universities

Will the brains of our athletes be protected by the current Return to Play Guidelines?

By Nicholas H. Wright

In its recent settlement with the Players Union, the NFL has accepted an actuarial estimate of 30% for the number of players who eventually will need to be compensated for dementia. This settlement is part of a growing national awareness of the extent of brain injuries incurred by high school and college athletes. Findings from recent autopsy studies that have identified the tau protein buildup of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) have drawn the obvious relationship to repeated concussion. These findings are supported by imaging studies on the size of certain critical regions of the brains of college football players.

These and other findings are a forceful reminder of why most US colleges and universities gave up boxing by mid-20th century. Cases of “dementia pugilistica” from repeated blows to the head was a more immediate outcome of concussion than the longer term consequences we are now seeing, especially related to earlier participation in collision sports. While premature dementia or early cognitive impairment is only a part of the symptomatic/pathological picture, it is the most challenging since it cannot be fixed medically. It is also troubling because it is occurring in sports sponsored by institutions devoted to the cultivation of the mind. The NCAA’s long term (1988-2003) surveillance project monitoring all serious athletic injuries, and published in 2007 shows no change in the level of rates of defined serious injury—except for concussion, which increased 7% over the 1988-2003 period—despite claims that NCAA rules governing play were tweaked in selective instances to lower risk of specific injury.

There are several reasons why this situation has developed. While the earlier goal of sport was the development of a “sound mind in a sound body,” the driving philosophy of the new athletic activities (now called programs) has morphed into a “be all you can be” environment. Bodies are bigger each generation, and, with increasing pressure to win, more aggressive training and playing – all on faster artificial surfaces – has been the rule. Although the objective evidence is thin, at some educational institutions, “successful” athletic programs are seen not only to motivate more generous alumni giving, but perhaps even more importantly, to generate immediate and substantial cash revenue at the gate (not to mention TV contracts). Finally, compared to earlier writing about sport, the “role” of athletics in educational institutions is seen as important to personal development, personal discipline and encouraging the kind of sharp competitiveness and team play thought to be useful in a society like ours. The consequences for short and long term health have been shown by the NCAA Surveillance Study to be significantly greater in the contact sports, especially men’s football (although this study did not include rugby).

Health and prevention has not been taken seriously enough as the number of injuries piled up. The common belief that modern orthopedic surgery and sports medicine can fix serious injuries is strong, although the evidence for the brain is, to say the least, not at all encouraging.

Brain damage in most of the collision sports starts long before

play at the college level. For example, a concussion suffered by a Williams football player playing in the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) is most unlikely to be his first. Since the natural history of CTE is poorly understood and its development cannot as yet be followed by imaging, it is not clear which blow, of what force, and in which direction to the brain started the process of tau protein buildup, or how subsequent blows may have moved the pathology along to what has been seen at autopsy in men as young as 30.

This situation prompted the adoption of a ‘Return to Play after Concussion’ protocol within most, if not all NESCAC Schools, from late 2011. While the exact content of the return to play protocol at, for example, Williams College, has not been made public, it appears to rely on a series of post-concussion clinical appraisals, presumably by the same observer, and a neurocognitive test package that can be compared to a baseline test done pre-season by an experienced technician. In effect, these are screening tests. Because variation in clinical observation is well known, even by the same observer, it would be folly to rely on clinical observation alone as a reliable guide to letting a player return to the game and/or study. As for the neurocognitive testing, there is significant variation of test results within the same individual in a healthy state, throwing into doubt the ‘sensitivity’ of the test, i.e., its ability to truly diagnose return to brain health. The weakness of the test will lead to too many concussed players declared ready to return, when they are not. All this is further complicated by the question of whether or not the technician is adequately trained to interpret the test. Many are not.

Finally, since it is clear that we know very little of the natural history of concussion and its short and long term effects, and are employing a testing sequence with dubious reliability, it must be asked if this strategy is protecting the athletes’ health. Since a concussed player is at much higher risk of having another one, has this strategy reduced the rate of repeat concussions? Will the policy reduce the incidence of the rare “Second Impact Syndrome?” No one seems to know and there is no evidence of a significant evaluation protocol designed to answer these questions.

Without questioning the motivation of the educational institutions that have adopted the Return to Play Protocol, it appears –and at some considerable expense— that the strategy protects the game, and perhaps even the still current state of denial in some quarters, rather than the players. Until the most unsafe sports are radically changed, or abandoned, like boxing, it would be just as rational, and I believe far more prudent, to sideline for the season (and probably permanently) all players with a concussion, and get them back to their studies as soon as possible.

Nicholas Wright, MD, MPH, is a 1957 graduate of Williams College who now lives in Williamstown.

Note: The author thanks Ms. Lindsay Von Holtz for background information on concussion policy at Mount Greylock Regional High School. All opinions, however, are the responsibility of the author. Williams College has denied two requests to provide a representative for interview on these issues.

Tri-District News

By Alex Brooks

The somewhat chaotic affairs of the Williamstown/Lanesborough schools have had a busy month, with a plethora of committees and subcommittees working on a variety of issues.

Superintendent Search

The search for a Tri-District Superintendent was postponed and the committee is now seeking to quickly hire an interim Superintendent to serve until July (see story on the next page).

Superintendency Union 71

At the urging of Lanesborough School Committee Member Bob Barton, the Lanesborough Board of Selectmen on Oct. 27 appointed a nine-member committee to study alternatives to continuing in Superintendency Union 71 (SU-71).

The Lanesborough School Committee scheduled a special meeting on Wednesday, October 29 to vote on withdrawing from SU-71, which is essentially the same thing as dissolving it, since it is a Union of only two Districts.

The School Committee did not take a vote on that matter at that meeting, because the rather compelling argument was made by School Committee Chair Regina DiLego that the School Committee ought to wait for the study committee appointed by the Selectmen to do its work before taking action.

At the Mt Greylock School Board meeting the week before, School Committee member David Langston said he found it "extremely irritating" to hear that the Lanesborough School Committee was seeking to dissolve SU-71, since he believes public opinion in Lanesborough does not support such a move, and he believes that if the Town is going to make a decision of this magnitude, it ought to require more than just the votes of two School Committee members.

Legal guidance on this from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has not yet been forthcoming. School Committee Chair Carrie Greene said legal opinions coming from DESE seem to be "in flux." Earlier communication suggested that DESE would have to give its approval to dissolve SU-71, but more recently they seem to believe it can be dissolved by simple majority vote of one of the school committees. District Superintendent Rose Ellis said she has been talking frequently with the legal department of DESE, but they have not yet issued their legal opinion about this.

Regionalization

Mt Greylock has asked Williamstown and Lanesborough to put a regionalization vote on the warrant for their Town meetings this spring. School Committee Chair Carrie Greene said there are plans to reach out to both Towns on this subject. She said a presentation about it is planned for January 12 at 7 pm.

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Mt Greylock School Board

Chris Dodig has been re-elected and Richard Cohen has been elected as the two Lanesborough members of the Committee. Gary Fuls was elected to complete the remaining two years of the four-year term to which he was appointed last summer. There were three candidates for the two remaining Williamstown seats on the Committee. Committee Chair Carrie Greene was the top vote-getter with 2255. Wendy Penner was elected to the other four year term with 1417 votes. Steven Miller received 1238 votes. Richard Cohen will take the place of retiring Lanesborough member Robert Ericson, and Wendy Penner will take the place of retiring Williamstown Member David Langston.

Mt. Greylock Hired "Owner's Project Manager"

Building Committee Chair Mark Schiek said his committee has put in many hours evaluating the 8 proposals they received from firms offering to be the Owner's Project Manager for the \$850,000 building feasibility study that is about to get underway. They cut the number down from 8 to 3 by examining the written applications, and then invited three to come make presentations. After the presentations, the Committee chose Dore and Whittier. This choice needs to be ratified by the MSBA at their Nov. 3 meeting.

Dore and Whittier is a group of Architects and Construction Project Managers with offices in Burlington, Vermont and Newburyport, Mass., with extensive experience in school construction. The firm was the architect for a 2006 feasibility study on renovating or replacing the Mt Greylock school building, so they have previous experience with this site and this building.

November's "Farm Focus" Cheese



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Tri-District Will Seek Interim Superintendent

By Phyllis McGuire

When Dr. Rose Ellis announced she would be stepping down as Tri-District Superintendent of Schools as of December 31, six months before her contract expires, the Superintendent Search Committee faced the challenge of finding a replacement in less than four months.

But in October when the applications had all arrived, they decided to seek to hire a Superintendent to start in July, so as to have a better chance for a large, high-quality pool of applicants.

They are now seeking to hire an interim superintendent to lead the schools until the new Superintendent is hired, and hope to hire an interim as soon as Dec. 1.

The Administrative Review Subcommittee (ARS) held a meeting at Mount Greylock Regional High School on October 24 to discuss matters pertaining to the selection of candidates for interim school superintendent.

All members of the committee, Regina DiLego, Chair of the Committee, Carolyn Greene, Sheila Hebert and Valerie Hall, were present at the meeting.

"We are a joint committee comprised of members of SU 71 (Superintendency Union 71) comprised of Williamstown Elementary School and Lanesborough Elementary School, and members of Mount Greylock (Regional High School Committee) for purposes relating to hiring administrative shared personnel," said Hall. "We choose the candidates, but SU 71 and Mount Greylock vote to make the final decision on which candidate will be hired."

To help the ARS in their search for an interim, Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), provided them with a list of retired superintendents who are interested in working as interim superintendents. (Interim school superintendents are required to hold the same credentials as school superintendents) Koocher told The Greylock Independent via phone that the MASC routinely maintains lists of school superintendents as well as retired school superintendents.

"We have 6 pages, but location can make a difference," DiLego said. For instance, a person who lives an 8-hour drive from the District would not want to go that far on a daily basis.

Greene spoke of another factor that may deter people from applying for the position: "They are put off by our bureaucratic structure. It's scary—too many budgets, too many committees - an interim has to know what is going on."

All members of the committee agreed that it would not be productive to follow a suggestion made by a member of the Lanesborough School Committee to request a superintendent of another district to also take on the responsibilities of Tri-District interim superintendent. "Let's not go there. No one would be willing to do that," said DiLego, Chair of Lanesborough Elementary School Committee as well as Chair of the ARS.

"We will keep an open mind when choosing candidates," said Greene, referring to internal (from within the Tri-District) and external applicants.

Members of the committee will contact people selected from the list to find out if they are interested in the interim job, collect their resumes and interview them.

Greene would like to talk to the retired superintendent who was hired as an interim for six months and was kept on for two years in a school district in Vermont. Also, someone with experience in a multi-district, building projects, budgets and regionalization would be a good candidate, Greene said. One retired superintendent on the list has a glowing reputation for his work in a district with five schools.

The members of ARS already know one prospect as she is Tri-District Director of Pupil Personnel Services Kimberly Grady who has expressed interest in the interim position. Hall volunteered to speak with her, obtain her resume, etc. The Committee did not release to the public the names of potential external candidates.

Uncertain Future of SU-71

A question was raised at the ARS meeting about Lanesborough's part in the selection of the interim superintendent if they withdraw from SU 71. DiLego replied "No matter what happens (with SU 71) middle and high school students will still go to Mount Greylock."

DiLego also pointed out that the proposal to leave SU 71 put forward by Lanesborough School committee member Robert Barton provides for it to be effective June 30, 2015, so the interim would still serve Lanesborough.

"There are two ways that the dissolution of Union 71 could be avoided: a DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) decision that says one school committee can not vote on its own to leave, or if the townspeople convince Mr. Barton and Mr. (James) Moriarty it is not what they want," DiLego said, referring to members of the Lanesborough Elementary School Committee who are seeking alternatives to SU 71. She also pointed out that if Lanesborough and Williamstown vote in favor of a K-12 Region for the two towns, it would make the fate of SU-71 moot, since in that case it would be dissolved anyway.

Recently the principals of the three schools in the Tri-District participated in the ARS meeting at Mount Greylock High School. Mary MacDonald, Mount Greylock Regional High School; Ellen Boshe, Lanesborough Elementary School; Joelle Brookner, Williamstown Elementary School, were sitting side by side across the table from ARS members as MacDonald emphasized that they have a good relationship with each other and school committees, and are trying to build a functioning tri-district across the two communities.

"We continue to work together as if we were regionalized even though the formal question of regionalization has yet to be answered," she said.

Of selecting an interim superintendent of schools, MacDonald said "Our first concern has to do with the budget. The current budget is tight, and we expect the same challenges for the next budget cycle. Will the interim Superintendent be able to manage FY 16 budget development in the context of our two communities, and be able to provide oversight for the current budget?"

The principals indicated that they would support whoever the interim is. "We trust the committee to make a good choice," said MacDonald.

INDEPENDENT *Perspectives*

Editorial

Pondering The Electricity Price Spike

By Alex Brooks

We all learned about a month ago that our electricity bills would go up this month by about 37%. Then we learned that a number of towns in Berkshire County, including North Adams and Williamstown, had joined the Community Choice Program, in which the Town aggregates all of its electrical customers and seeks bids from electrical suppliers in an effort to secure a better price than National Grid's "Basic Service" rate. The price offered by Hampshire Power through Colonial Power Group, Inc. was a little over 12 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh), which was about 4 cents per kWh better than National Grid's Basic Service price, which is now a little over 16 cents per kWh. All customers in Williamstown and North Adams (and many other towns in Berkshire County) were automatically signed up for the Community Choice power supplier, with the result that their bills will increase by about 24% instead of 37%. Better, but still not good news.

Hampshire Power is a non-profit electricity purchasing cooperative run by the Hampshire Council of Governments.

Since this is an increase in National Grid's bill, and the announcement of the increase comes from them, we naturally think of them as the villain in this story. But National Grid does not make any money from the supply portion of the bill. They make their money from the transmission and distribution portion of the bill, which is at present a little over 7 cents per kWh, plus your \$4 per month customer charge. So the total cost to us of National Grid's Basic Service is about 24 cents per kWh and of the Community Choice program about 20 cents per kWh.

The price per kWh of National Grid's Basic Service has just about doubled from last month to this month, from .08277 per kWh to 16.273 cents per kWh (last winter, during the November through April period, the price was about 10 cents per kWh). For someone using 500 kWh per month, that would be \$40 per month more if we were still on the Basic Service plan, but since most of us are on the Community Choice plan, a 500 kWh monthly bill will cost about \$20 more per month.

National Grid arrives at this price by doing competitive bidding, seeking the best price from electricity generators in order to pass on to you, their customer, the lowest price. They do not mark it up - they just pass on the cost.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities does not set or even approve the prices on the supply portion of our bills. It reviews and approves the competitive bidding process that determines the price.

The rate increase was pretty much determined by the market. Electricity suppliers are selling their product at a higher price than they were last year. The question is, what market forces are driving the price upward? It seems pretty clear that it is in

some way a reaction to the very cold winter last year, and the threat of another "polar vortex" in the coming winter.

National Grid blamed the rate increase on natural gas prices. Noting that about half of New England's electricity is fueled by natural gas, it said, "continued constraints on the natural gas pipelines serving the region, which decrease natural gas availability at times of peak demand, causing some generators to buy gas on the spot market at higher prices, switch over to alternate fuels, or not run at all."

I have read that on one day last December, wholesale electric prices went up to \$1290 per megawatt hour because of a shortage of natural gas. The average price of a megawatt hour is \$36.

Another contributing factor has been power plant closings. This past summer two coal-fired power plants in Massachusetts, in Salem and in Holyoke, have closed down, and a third one in Somerset is scheduled to close in 2017. Also, the 620 megawatt Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant is closing this year, which has until now provided about a third of Vermont's electricity. Vermont Governor Shumlin has proposed upgrading high-voltage transmission lines from Canada to improve access to low-cost hydropower from Hydro-Quebec.

Greater dependence on natural gas by the utility industry has increased the volatility of electricity prices, and has made a much bigger issue out of New England's shortage of gas pipeline capacity. The Patrick administrations's focus has been on energy efficiency and conservation, and encouraging renewable power generation. These efforts have been pretty successful, as electricity demand has flattened in recent years, and the generating capacity of solar installations in Massachusetts is growing faster than anyone anticipated, and the price of solar PV panels is falling. But some are saying these measures have not been adequate to protect the state from price spikes. The Solar Energy Industries Assn. said 237 MW of solar electric capacity was installed in Massachusetts in 2013. It may be that New England is losing more generating capacity in 2014 in closed coal and nuclear plants than we are gaining in renewable generating capacity, and we are facing a rocky transitional period towards a future of renewable power. And while it may be that the Patrick administration has focused too much on the long term and not enough on the short term, I for one am OK with paying \$20 a month more for electricity, if that's the price of progress toward a more benign energy regime.

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Letters To The Editor

Weighing the Alternatives to Community Power

To the Editor:

As Williamstown residents we applaud the effort of the Town Manager and elected officials to reduce the impact of rising prices for electricity by offering a Community Choice program. The aggregation of western MA communities gives Williamstown residents a viable option for meeting their electrical needs at less cost. This only affects the supply-generation portion of the monthly bill, or about 55% of the total. National Grid will continue to charge for distribution, transmission, and energy efficiency measures. The projected monthly savings for an average household using 600 kilowatt hours (kWh) per month is \$24.00 over the projected cost of National Grid electricity.

As in many good deals, there are externalized costs, in this case born by the community and the planet. The Community Choice program does not have an option to buy electricity without climate-altering carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. The letter that went out to the community had no disclosure of the supply sources. We were able to obtain the information from Colonial Power and it is now posted on the website: <http://www.colonialpowergroup.com/williamstown>.

A brief analysis of the supply sources of National Grid basic service and Community Choice shows that they are roughly comparable in terms of the sources of energy and the CO₂ emissions they produce. Both are better than the New England average. For both suppliers 64% of the electricity is generated by natural gas and nuclear power, and 5% by coal. Each source has considerable environmental cost. Under MA regulation suppliers are required to have 9% renewable sources of

energy. National Grid includes wind (3%), which produces no emissions while the Community Choice program relies more on biomass and other renewable sources that emit CO₂, as well as other pollutants. There is no solar or wind energy in the Community Choice supply, in spite of the fact that Northern Berkshire produces considerable solar and wind generated electricity.

The disappointment is that the Community Choice program is not going to reduce our emissions and has no "green" option. If we are to reverse climate change, we have so much more to do. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that we will have to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050 to stabilize the climate. For those who are able to do more, there are alternatives: (1) reduce consumption; (2) opt-out (on line at website above) and join the Green Start program (www.massenergy.org/greenup), and (3) if feasible, install solar panels. If the average customer without PV panels reduces consumption by 25% to 450 kWh per month and joins the Green Start program, the monthly National Grid electric bill will increase by \$28.80, of which \$10.80 per month is considered a charitable deduction. We invite you to join us in opting for Green Start, and in urging our town leaders to develop a Green Energy Alternative. The planet, our children and grandchildren will thank you.

Margot and Bill Moomaw
870 Henderson Road
Williamstown, MA 01267
October 19, 2014

1. see: New England Pool Generation Information System <http://nepoolgis.com>
2. see: US Energy Information Administration <http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=74&t=11>

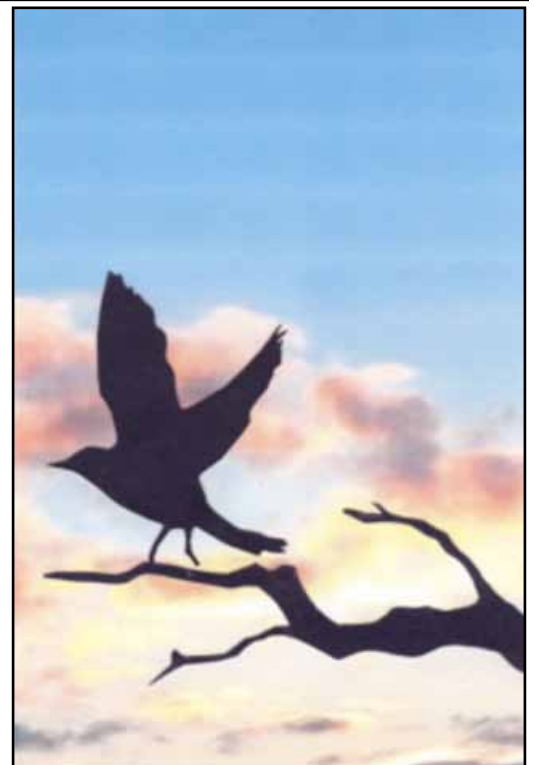
Bird Brains

By Tela Zasloff

An article on the latest findings about birds' brains reports that the bird's cerebrum is like that of a mammal, allowing such complex behavior as using tools and making the distinct and varied sounds of language. Our western Biblical tradition goes much further in forging bonds between birds and us. The raven and the dove were the messengers of hope to Noah. They told him that he was a good man, that he had survived the Great Flood that destroyed all the rest of Creation, and they led him to the mountains and dry land to begin life again.

Birds are still bringing us the messages about the state of the Earth and ourselves that only birds can bring. When we follow their migration paths across the world, we learn how widespread are the effects of global warming on plants and air and water, and so, on us. We learn from close observation of birds, about pollination, about principles of flight and anatomy, about flocking habits and group behavior, about metabolism and heart rates, about infectious diseases. And when we watch them fly, we are struck by the fact that flight is both impossible for us to comprehend and beautiful—and so, across the world, it is one of the most prevalent metaphors for the soul.

Illustration by Karen Zasloff



Hoosic River Revival Chooses Site Of Pilot Project

By Alex Brooks

The Board of Directors of the Hoosic River Revival has chosen the location for the first phase of its restoration of the Hoosic River. The mile-long focus of their revitalization work will be the South Branch, from Foundry Road to the bridge connecting the former Sons of Italy to Heritage Park, one of seven potential restoration locations recommended by their consultants.

Although the project is still in the ‘conceptual drawing’ phase, it is likely that the primary restoration work will be on the northern half mile. Once completed, this revitalized section will: maintain existing flood protection; feature a much wider, healthier river with recreational opportunities; ensure a continuation of the Ashuwillticook Bike Path; provide access to downtown, the Greylock Market (renovated Heritage Park), and the future Scenic Rail; and include a large plaza with amphitheatre steps to the river and space for the North Adams History and Science Museum and the Hoosac Tunnel Museum. Mayor Alcombright expressed his enthusiasm for the pilot project choice of the River Revival, “City residents and visitors will love the close proximity of all these exciting projects, and enjoy looking at our beautiful Hoosic River.”

A conceptual plan presented to the North Adams City Council on October 28 showed many of the elements mentioned above located on the former Sons Of Italy property, now owned by the City, in the area between the river and the active rail line. Shown there is space for new quarters for the two museums, a “waterfront plaza” with small shops, and a terraced amphitheater space leading down to the river. Not all of these things would be built by Hoosic River Revival. The organization is working very closely with the City to integrate projects planned by HRR, the City, and private entities. HRR President Judy Grinnell said, “There are so many moving parts in the North Adams downtown renaissance. We are probably about a year away from knowing exactly what will happen.” But Grinnell said as HRR moves forward with its design process, it is committed to coordinating its efforts with those of the City and the many private entities involved.

Since its start in 2008, the River Revival has participated in more than 40 public meetings, sharing information about the condition of the 60 year-old chutes, the benefits of restoring a river, various systems for maintaining flood protection, and options for the North Adams section of the Hoosic. At these meetings, residents have consistently highlighted five qualities for the Board of Directors to include in any project: flood



A conceptual plan presented to the North Adams City Council on October 28, in addition to making the river more attractive and accessible, creates pedestrian access between parts of the city that have been blocked by natural and man-made barriers. From the pilot project area, there is a new bridge to the Greylock Market area and a tunnel under the railroad tracks to get to American Legion drive, in the area where the scenic rail line terminal is expected to be.

protection; a healthy, accessible river; economic development opportunities; neighborhood, historical, and cultural linkages; and overall improved quality of life in the city. The Board felt it had additional factors to consider: cost, feasibility, Corps of Engineers requirements, available property, environmental damage, relevant City projects, the new 2030 Vision Plan, and the plans of the North Adams Partnership.

Board President Judy Grinnell praised the extensive cross-section of area residents who participated in this long-term process of deciding how and where to begin the restoration: “Our Board of Directors and Advisory Council members, the Mayor and his staff, and of course the people of North Adams deserve so much credit for giving this 2.5 mile, complex, challenging project such serious consideration for the past 6 years. There were many issues to consider in choosing just one section of the river to restore. However, we believe the Board’s choice of the South Branch incorporates all of the primary goals highlighted by the community”.

Funding the pilot project is the next big challenge for the River Revival. Grinnell credits the persuasive efforts of State representatives, Senator Ben Downing and Representative Gailanne Cariddi, for the \$8,775,000 allocated in the 2015-19 Massachusetts Environmental Bond Bill for this first phase of the project. HRR is seeking to have those funds appropriated as soon as possible so that design work can continue to move forward. Over the next few years, it will be important for the project to be considered a priority by the next Governor. Not all items in the Bond Bill will actually be awarded. Grinnell emphasized that the River Revival has asked for no financial support from the City and it does not plan to request any City funds in the future.

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