

LITTLETON School Board Delays \$40M Elementary

School Vote



> Executive Committee Taps Brakes On Proposed County Courthouse > Littleton Voters to Decide on Restoring School Resource Officer > ICE Reportedly Apprehends Seven In North Country

LOCAL

Trees For Troops Sees More Donors In 2025

BY ROBERT BLECHL

Staff Writer

BETHLEHEM — In making the holidays brighter for servicemen and women, it was a year of giving.

The 21st annual loading of the Trees For Troops in Bethlehem on Wednesday morning saw more business donors and more donating Christmas tree farms, in all amounting to just north of 600 trees at the collection point at South Farm, a good notch above the average of 450 trees in years past.

Two big rigs from FedEx in Berlin, Vermont, arrived at the farm, where nearly two dozen fifth-graders from Bethlehem Elementary School came to load them into the long trailers.

"It's awesome," said Dan Hamel, one of the FedEx drivers. "There's no way I'd pass it up."

One trailer will go to Hampton, Virginia, and the other to

From there, the trees will be distributed to military personnel and their families.

Several years ago, the loading was done at the adjacent Rocks Estate before it moved to South

For that many trees to come from one collection spot, especially over three consecutive years totaling 1,500 trees, is an accomplishment, said Hamel.

"When you think about it, that's a lot of trees, but there's no better cause," he said.

At South Farm, owned by Nigel Manley, trees were being delivered this week.

"We got 100 dropped yesterday," said Manley. "I thought 25 were coming from Beloin's [tree farm in Colebrook], but 35 came. We were lucky. The farmers just keep dropping trees. I'm really pleased with farmers because the harvest has been so difficult that some farmers are still trying to harvest and get trees out and load, so to be able



Bethlehem Elementary School's fifth-grade class snapped into action Wednesday morning for the 21st annual loading of the Trees For Troops. Here, they celebrate after loading just north of 600 trees. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

to give something away is pretty incredible because most people would be like, we just can't do

In all, 25 to 30 participating Christmas tree farms in New Hampshire and Vermont donate.

Nationally, the total average number of Trees For Troops is

are predicted, so we've had the diversity. I actually had peo-

more given, particularly on the West Coast," said Manley.

The number of local businesses donating trees also increased, this year to just below 200 from the Littleton-Bethlehem area and ranging from banks to dental practices and more.

"A whole litany of different businesses and people sponsor "Right now, just over 18,000 the trees," said Manley. "I like

ple ask if they could sponsor this to say thank you to FedEx for

The desire to donate comes amid an uncertain economy, so for businesses to take the risk, or to do the same or more in tree sponsorships, is gratifying, he said.

"I think the veteran part really touches on people," said Manley. "A lot of people have known someone who's been in the military."

On Wednesday, the fifth-graders met one such serviceman, John Barth, of Sugar Hill, who served 20 years in the Marines and who last year began picking up trees to deliver to South Farm, where he also helps the kids load them.

After they tucked the last tree into the trailer and gathered for a group photo, Barth spoke about what the effort means to those servicemen and women who can't make it home but want to celebrate Christmas and the holidays with a tree.

"I would like everybody here

making this possible, and thank you to Nigel and South Farm for making it possible, and thank you to yourselves for doing the work," he said.

The kids — all decked out in purple FedEx caps — shouted "thank you" and broke into ap-

The annual event has become a two-decade tradition for BES's fifth-grade class.

For 2025, BES had 23 fifth-graders participate.

"They didn't all make it today, but they helped make the tags," said Brooke Campbell, a teacher of the class.

In addition to loading trees, the kids write the donor's name on each tag, along with a Christmas message from the donor, and attach the tag to a tree.

"They did over 300 tags," said Campbell. "It was a great crew. I'm just so glad we get to do this every year. I feel like it's so good for them to be involved

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Executive Committee Taps Brakes On Proposed County Courthouse

BY ROBERT BLECHL Staff Writer

The Grafton County Executive Committee has tapped the brakes on the proposed new \$47 million county courthouse.

On Nov. 17, the committee voted 7-2 to have the county go

that the state — which leases space for the courts — can give, as well as take another look at the size and scope of the building and continue to work on the design of the building upon any changes being identified.

On Nov. 18, during a meeting

lease terms and the commitment Oakes, maintenance superin- code, according to the recently tendent for the county complex, released commission meeting said he discussed with the committee the difficulties of repairand what would be a need to relocate staff and the cascading effects of beginning one project that then leads to more re-

minutes.

Commissioner Katie Heding the building piece by piece berg said she believes the appropriate next step is to reconvene the courthouse building committee to reevaluate.

County administrator Ju-

wrong with returning to all departments within the building to review their space needs, and the concerns expressed at prior public meetings need to be considered. A discussion can be had with the architect about what it would cost to reconfigure the building, she said.

Most concerns voiced have been about the state and a belief that the state should do more, said commissioner Wendy Pip-

Hedberg said what she got out of the executive committee discussion was that all representatives recognize that something needs to be done, but not all are on the same page moving forward.

There has been a lot of finger-pointing, but Oakes has done a good job maintaining the infrastructure of the county campus, said Piper.

The commission on Nov. 18 agreed to reconvene the building committee.

In October, county offi-

back to the state and discuss the of the county commission, Jim pairs to bring everything up to lie Libby said there is nothing cials visited several Grafton County municipalities to present the plan for a possible 64,668-square-foot courthouse (about 20,000 square feet larger than the existing building) and gather input, including in Littleton, where the project was not well-received by some, who questioned the need, voiced concerns about an increase in county taxes, and said the state should pay more.

> County officials said past county commissions deferred some maintenance at the courthouse, that the 53-year-old existing courthouse has many life-safety and other deficiencies, and that a new build would cost about \$2 million less than the needed renovations and would result in cost savings through reduced maintenance and greater energy efficiency.

> About 40 percent of the building is dedicated to state agencies. Currently, the state pays \$380,000 a year to lease the space.



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Trees

Continued from Page 2 in any kind of volunteerism. It's a fun day they look forward to when they get to fifth grade. Our sixth-graders are helping this year. They're preparing hot chocolate for the fifth-graders, so when we get back to school we'll have a special treat that the sixth-graders prepared for them, which is nice. It's a good community event ... I love that our students get to participate in this volunteer event every year."

After forming a human assembly line to load the trees, the kids sang Christmas carols and, for the first time, chanted "heave-ho."

Two students spoke of what the morning meant for them.

"We all work together and sing songs and really learn how to do good teamwork," said Kaiden Cooke. "I feel like everyone is closer friends from this, because we were all next to each other, and it was super fun because we had so many people to help."

Cleo Storella called it a fun experience.

"I think it's so amazing that so many people care about the people who can't be with their families," she said. "It's definitely going to make people feel a lot better. I've never done this before, but it was a really fun experience to do and I'm sad I can't do it next year. It was amazing that we got 600 trees just by working together. My arms hurt, I'm tired, and I'm covered in snow, but I'm happy, and I'm especially happy that people away from their families will be able to have a Christmas tree and be reminded of home. So I'm happy to try to do whatever I can to make people feel better about it."

ON THE COVER

Bethlehem Elementary School's fifth-grade class snapped into action Wednesday morning for the 21st annual loading of Trees For Troops in Bethlehem. (Photo by Robert Blechl)



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OBITUARIES

DONALD FRANK ROLLINS

Donald Frank Rollins was born and raised in Lisbon, N.H., upon graduating from Lisbon High School he worked in the logging industry before enlisting in the Navy where he served on the USS Gainard and the USS Ranger.

When he left the service he drove truck for a short time before, going to work for the phone company in Arizona, California, New Hampshire and Wyoming.



Don was in his true element in the mountains hunting and being with his horses and dogs. Upon retirement he spent his time traveling to see family and lived in Arizona, Idaho and Wyoming.

Donald is survived by his wife Betty Rollins, daughter Pam (David) Mena, son Donald (Evette) Rollins, brother Dale (Betsey) Rollins, along with numerous grandchildren, nephews and nieces.

BILLY LEE HALE

Billy Lee Hale, 59, of Cyr Road in Littleton, N.H., passed away peacefully on Nov. 18, 2025, after a long illness.

He was born in St. Johnsbury, Vt., on May 5, 1966, the son of the late Kenneth Hale and Janet Pilotte Hale, of St. Johnsbury. Billy graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy and worked for many years as a carpenter. He also enjoyed his time serving as a chase-car driver for several local dealerships.

Billy is survived by his wife, Lori Hale, of Littleton, N.H.; his children, Ryan Aldrich, of



Washington, Vt., Joanna Chace and her husband, Raymond, of Monroe, N.H., and Shae Gordon and his wife, Grace, of Louisiana. He leaves behind his brother, Kerry Hale, and wife Susan of Fayston, Vt.; his sister, Dorene Brown, and her husband, Jeff, of Granby, Vt.; five grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews.

Billy loved the outdoors, especially hunting, NASCAR, the

big fairs and camping with family.

No services will be held at this time. A celebration of life will take place in late spring.



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JEAN-MARIE PETERSON

Jean-Marie Peterson, a woman whose life overflowed with love, creativity, and service, died in a car accident on Nov 11, 2025 in Whitefield, N.H. Born on June 13, 1941, Jean-Marie was the youngest of five siblings and grew up in the close-knit community of Suncook, N.H. Her childhood there shaped her spirit, which was resilient, compassionate, and deeply connected to the people around her.

A proud graduate of Pembroke Academy, Jean-Marie married Norman Demers in 1963. The following year, they settled in Concord, where they welcomed their two sons: Kevin (61), and Peter, (58). Jean-Marie poured her heart into motherhood while also building a meaningful professional career. She worked as a legal secretary with the law firm Gallagher, Callahan & Gartrell in Concord, and in public relations with AAA, where her warmth, sharp mind, and reliability left a lasting impression.

Jean-Marie's love for the arts shone brightly through her decades-long involvement with the Concord Community Players. Whether on stage, behind the scenes, or supporting the performers around her, she brought creativity, organization, and joy to every production! This was truly her passion that she carried throughout her adult life.

In 1991, life brought a beautiful new chapter, when Jean-Marie began a love story with Henry "Hank" Peterson. Together, they built a partnership full of laughter, adventure, travel and shared purpose. In 1996, they married and moved to Littleton, N.H., settling in a beloved home that came to be known by family and friends as "The Inn on Broomstick Hill." Jean-Marie & Hank became active and cherished members of the Littleton community for the next three decades.



Her faith was a cornerstone of her life. As both attendee and volunteer at All Saints Episcopal Church, Jean-Marie gave generously of her time and talents. She could always be counted on to support church events, serve others, and bring people together. She also extended her love of theater to Littleton, becoming heavily involved in local community theater groups—continuing her lifelong commitment to the arts.

But Jean-Marie's favorite role was as a grandmother, when she became known, and will forever be known, as Mimi! She was Mimi to Kevin's daughters Anna & Zoe, as well as Hank's granddaughter Allison & Megan & his great-granddaughter Adelyn.

Jean-Marie will be remembered for her true joi-de-vie - her warmth, her generosity, her smile, her sense of humor, her wonderful laugh and her ability to make every person feel seen and valued. She lived fully, loved deeply, and left an indelible mark on every community she touched.

She is survived by her sons, Kevin and Peter, granddaughters Anna and Zoe, Hank's son Chris & his wife Rikke, his daughter Laura, his granddaughters Allison and Megan, his great-granddaughter Adelyn and a wide circle of family and friends who will forever carry her spirit forward.

She was joined in death by her forever love Hank. Our loss is heavens gain. Au revoir...

Services for Jean-Marie & Hank will be held Jan. 10, 2026 at All Saints Episcopal Church in Littleton, N.H. at 11 a.m. If you would like to send flowers we ask that you contact Cherry Blossom in Littleton.

In lieu of flowers donations can be made to the Eating & Shelter Ministries at All Saints Episcopal Church.



OBITUARIES

HENRY "HANK" HUNT PETERSON

Henry "Hank" Hunt Peterson, 85, of White-field, New Hampshire, passed away on Nov. 13, 2025, surrounded by his family. He died from injuries sustained in a car accident on Nov. 11. He was predeceased by his beloved wife, Jean-Marie Peterson from the same accident.

Hank is survived by his son, Chris Peterson and his wife Rikke; his daughter Laura Peterson; his grandchildren Megan Aslanian, Allison Palagi, and her husband Bryan; and his great-grand-daughter Adelyn.

Born Jan. 7, 1940, in Indianapolis, Indiana, Hank moved with his family to Natick, Massachusetts at the age of four, where he spent most of his childhood. He graduated from New Hampton School and later earned his Associate and Bachelor's degrees from Mitchell and Nichols Colleges. In June of 1964, he married his first wife, Martha Louisa Tichy, and together they settled in Woodbury, Connecticut, where they raised their two children. During these years, Hank began his long and successful career in the banking industry.

In 1977, Hank accepted a position as Vice President of Commercial Loans at Concord National Bank, prompting the family's move to New Hampshire—a place that quickly became home and remained so throughout his life.

While living in Connecticut, Hank had been an active member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. After relocating north, he continued to deepen his involvement within the Episcopal community in Concord. It was during this time that he also developed a lifelong love of the outdoors. Hank became an avid hiker and set himself the goal of climbing all 48 of New Hampshire's 4,000-foot peaks. He completed this remarkable achievement in June 1983, forging many enduring friendships along the way. His passion for the mountains only grew from there. He served the Appalachian Mountain Club in numerous capacities and, with his friend

Doug Wyman, explored historic plane-crash sites throughout the region—an endeavor that led to a feature article in the Concord Monitor and later in AMC Outdoors magazine in 1994.

A new chapter of joy began in 1992, when Hank met Jean-Marie Demers. They were married on Dec. 7, 1996, and spent the next three decades building a rich and adventurous life together. They settled in Littleton, New Hampshire, in a home on Broomstick Hill Road affectionately known among friends and family as "the inn." Together they explored the outdoors, especially through their shared love of canoeing, and became deeply woven into the fabric of their community.

Hank and Jean-Marie joined the congregation of All Saints Episcopal Church, where Hank served on the vestry, chaired both the investment and finance committees, and led the search committee that called the Rev. Curtis Metzger as minister. His commitment to service extended well beyond the church. Hank volunteered with the Littleton Police Department on community homecheck rounds, participated actively in the Rotary Club, and delivered countless meals through the Meals on Wheels program. He gave generously—both of his time and his resources—to organizations and causes he believed in.

Hank will be remembered as a devoted father, a loyal friend, a man of deep faith, and a steadfast pillar of every community he touched. His legacy lives on in the mountains he loved, the people he served, and the family he cherished above all else.

Services for Hank and Jean-Marie will be held Jan. 10, 2026 at All Saints Episcopal Church in Littleton, N.H. at 11 a.m. Reception at the church will follow. If you would like to send flowers we ask that you contact Cherry Blossom in Littleton.

In lieu of flowers donations can be made to the Eating & Shelter Ministries at All Saints Episcopal Church.



NEWS BRIEFS

Littleton Water and Light Partners With Energy New England for Power-Supply Expertise

LITTLETON — Littleton Water and Light (LWL), the town's municipal utility founded in 1903, has entered a new partnership with Energy New England (ENE), a move officials say will strengthen long-term reliability, improve market strategy, and help contain energy costs for ratepayers.

ENE, the largest electric cooperative in New England, announced this week that it is partnering with both the Midcoast Regional Development Authority in Maine and LWL in New Hampshire. The cooperative provides expertise in wholesale power supply, risk management, ISO-New England market operations, sustainability planning, and customer service strategy.

"Partnering with ENE gives us access to unmatched expertise and the resources of the largest electric cooperative in New England," said Lori Hogan, LWL's CEO and treasurer. "Their guidance will help us strengthen reliability, manage long-term costs, and prepare for a more dynamic and innovative energy future for the Littleton community."

LWL, known for maintaining some of the lowest utility rates in New England, regularly buys energy on the open market to secure favorable pricing. Commissioner Peter Cooper said ENE is helping LWL forecast future power costs and lock in multi-year contracts to reduce volatility. "We recently secured some of that for this winter," he said. "We're hoping in the spring and into the summer that the market will be more favorable so we can do additional contracts of that nature."

Cooper said LWL has worked with other energy firms in the past, but ENE's capabilities and experience with municipal utilities — particularly in Massachusetts — made it an appealing choice. He noted the importance of a steady, long-term relationship with market experts who monitor trends, including the effects of weather and natural gas prices. ENE provides LWL with weekly market updates.

The ability to secure 80–90 percent of LWL's energy needs in advance helps stabilize rates and maintain the utility's strong credit position, Cooper said.

ENE President and CEO John Tzimorangas said the cooperative tailors power portfolios to meet each client's long-term goals.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Littleton School Board Delays \$40M Elementary School Vote

LITTLETON — Citing a difficult economic climate, rising financial pressures on the town, and the likelihood that it would fall short of the 60 percent supermajority required for passage, the Littleton School Board voted 5-0 on Nov. 17 not to place a \$40 million elementary school bond on the 2026 town meeting warrant.

The decision follows the school building committee's recommendation. The committee continues to support constructing a new school on 17 acres offered for donation by the Daughters of the Charity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but agreed that current conditions make a vote inadvisable.

Board Chair Matt St. John said the three key reasons for postponing a vote — improved macroeconomic conditions, capital budget space, and the ability to establish the project as a town-wide priority — "all fell short." He noted inflation, rising borrowing costs, and significant

fiscal pressures facing both the town and school district. Littleton is fifth in line for state building aid "for no money," he said, with low prospects for funding.

A previous bond vote in 2024 earned nearly 51 percent support but failed to reach the supermajority threshold. St. John said the need for a new school has not changed, calling renovation or consolidation "not feasible," and describing the architect's proposed design as "bare bones."

Budget committee members pointed to competing major expenses, including \$2.5 million in sewer plant upgrades with talk of an additional \$10–\$12 million, and the possibility of a \$47 million Grafton County courthouse. "I think everybody's scared," said budget committee member Bill Latulip.

School board member Erica Antonucci, who serves on the building committee, said the timing is wrong despite consensus that a new school is appropriate. "We can't help it's going to be \$40 million this year and will be \$60 million before we decide yes or no," she said.



The board also voted unanimously to dissolve the elementary school building committee, thanking Banwell Architects and construction manager Bonnette, Page and Stone for their work.

Littleton to Meet With NHDOT on Crosswalk Safety Upgrades

LITTLETON — After increasing concerns from residents and town officials about downtown pedestrian safety, Littleton leaders will meet with the New Hampshire Department of Transportation on Jan. 13 to discuss potential crosswalk upgrades.

Police Chief Paul Smith, Fire Chief Chad Miller, Public Works Director Eric Oliver, Town Manager Troy Brown, and Select Board Chair Kerri Harrington will participate in the meeting, which follows repeated complaints about visibility, lighting, and driver compliance at several key crossings.

"We recognize that there are concerns with the safety of our cross-walks," Brown said at the Select Board's Nov. 24 meeting. "We've heard concerns about inconsistent striping, inadequate lighting, and the need for modern flashing pedestrian signals."

The issue was raised again last week by resident Karen Lord, who previously urged the board to prioritize safer downtown conditions, particularly at the First Congregational Church crosswalk, which lacks a flashing beacon. Lord said she has nearly been struck by drivers more than once and has contacted state Sen. David Rochefort, R-Littleton, for help. "I don't want someone to get injured," she said.

Board members noted that injuries — including one Main Street fatality — have already occurred. Although primary downtown roads are state-owned, Littleton will likely bear the cost of improvements with DOT approval.

Brown said the town will pursue "low-cost items" quickly while developing a long-term plan with DOT, the highway department, and police and fire. However, more substantial upgrades could take one to three years due to limited funding and state approval processes. District 2 Executive Councilor Karen Liot Hill is also aware of local concerns, following recent regional discussions on pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Possible funding opportunities include \$25,000 AARP Community Challenge grants, which have previously supported local projects.

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ICE Reportedly Apprehends Seven

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

CARROLL — Seven people were taken into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement last week, according to multiple reports.

The individuals — six from India and one reportedly from Indonesia — were detained at a Carroll apartment on Dec. 3, according to people familiar with the incident.

ICE declined to confirm details or offer additional information, but six of the names provided to the Caledonian-Record match Indian nationals currently in ICE custody.

Four of them — Rajesh Bairava, Sandeep Kalluri, Harshal Taru and Kaustubh Rane — are being held at the Strafford County House of Corrections in New Hampshire. Ashray Rao is being held at the Plymouth County Correctional Facility in Massachusetts, and Sangeeta Bangera was transferred to the South Louisiana ICE Processing Center.

The location of the seventh person, believed to be Widyastuti Putu of Indonesia, is unknown.

The apprehensions follow the Trump administration's announcement that more than 2 million undocumented immigrants have been removed or have left the country voluntarily since President Trump took office in January.

An ICE spokesperson said, "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement conducts immigration enforcement activities throughout the state of New Hampshire. As part of its routine operations, ICE arrests aliens who commit crimes and other individuals who have violated our nation's immigration laws. All aliens in violation of U.S. immigration law may be subject to arrest, detention and, if found removable by final order, removed from the United States, regardless of nationality."

The incident, believed to be the first such ICE action in the immediate area during Trump's sec-

ond term, has rattled the region's legally present foreign workforce.

Rao, Bairava and Bangera worked for the Omni Mount Washington Hotel, according to people who know them, while Rane and Kalluri worked at Applebee's in Littleton, and Taru and Widyastuti worked at E-Smoke & Beer Island, also in Littleton.

"We are just worried," said a friend who declined to be named.

The friend said foreign workers have changed their routines to avoid scrutiny, fearing they may be targeted because of racial profiling or misidentification.

"Even though we haven't done anything and we have clean backgrounds ... we are all just worried what will happen, that they will search for more people and just pick up anyone," the friend said.

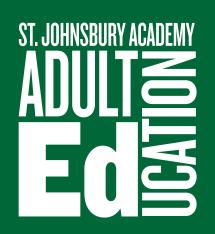
Three of the individuals taken into custody had prior contact with the New Hampshire criminal justice system. Rane, 24, and Rao, 27, were charged with driving under the influence on Nov. 27, shortly before they were detained by ICE, and their cases remain pending. Kalluri faced separate, unspecified charges in May 2024 and October 2025. The others have no criminal records, according to available court information.

In September, the Department of Homeland Security said 1.6 million undocumented immigrants had voluntarily left the country and another 400,000 had been deported during the first 250 days of Trump's second term.

The Boston Globe reported that the number of people in federal immigration detention in New Hampshire has doubled over the past six months, reaching 338 in November, based on ICE data.

Vermont Public Radio reported that ICE arrests in New England from Jan. 20 to Dec. 2 rose sharply — from 2,044 in 2024 to 8,848 in 2025 — and that removals increased from 933 to 9,987 over the same period.









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NEWS BRIEFS

Continued from Page 8

Smith emphasized that requests from the church and community have not been ignored. "I've made numerous attempts to fix safety problems, and it's very frustrating," he said.

The town is awaiting DOT's response regarding the First Congregational Church crossing.

Littleton Water and Light Sets Jan. 1 Rate Increase After Deficit Study

LITTLETON — Littleton Water and Light (LWL) will increase water rates across all customer categories beginning Jan. 1, marking the first adjustment in years and addressing what officials say are long-standing financial shortfalls.

A typical residential user consuming 500 cubic feet of water per month will see an increase of about \$10. Commercial and industrial customers with extensive fire protection connections will see larger hikes due to the significant infrastructure required to support high-volume fire flow.

The decision follows a 2025 water rate study showing more than five years of financial deficits and insufficient reserves to maintain the system, LWL said in a statement. "Historically, LWL customers have benefited directly from a stable water rate that has provided some of the lowest rates in the region," the utility said. "Unfortunately, LWL cannot continue to absorb these shortfalls ... LWL is committed to its customers and will make every effort to provide a product that is safe, dependable, and at the most economical cost."

Commissioner Peter Cooper said average rates will rise about 10

percent. He noted several upcoming capital needs, including activating a new well off Lafayette Street, expected online by late summer. The well will supplement the system's primary supply from the Gale River, which has flowed to town by gravity since 1903. LWL was established that year after a typhoid outbreak linked to the Ammonoosuc River prompted the town to secure a new water source.

Cooper said LWL has not raised rates during his more than six years on the board. The study, he added, gives the utility a solid basis for updated pricing.

A key factor in the adjustments is recovering the cost of maintaining fire protection capacity for large facilities. "Even though they don't use much water, usage alone doesn't cover the cost of ensuring that fire protection flow is available," Cooper said.

LWL compared its rates regionally and found they remain below those of other municipalities and private water providers.

Littleton Voters to Decide on Restoring School Resource Officer

LITTLETON — For the first time in nearly 20 years, Littleton voters will decide whether to restore the position of school resource officer (SRO), following a 3-1 Select Board vote Monday to accept a \$125,000 federal grant that would help fund the role.

The grant, awarded through the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) program, will cover part of the salary and benefits for three years. Acceptance is contingent on voter approval of the new police department position at the March 2026 town meeting. After the grant period, the SRO would be fully

taxpayer-funded.

Police Chief Paul Smith said the SRO would serve both Littleton school campuses and address a growing need as officers spend significant time on school-related calls. "Things have changed dramatically ... since our last school resource officer was there, in the 2006-2007 time frame," he said.

Proponents say SROs can identify and mitigate issues before they escalate, promote safe behaviors, support student programs such as Too Good for Drugs, and reduce the strain on patrol officers. Smith also noted new state guidelines requiring formal SRO training and a memorandum of understanding outlining duties — safeguards not in place when the former program ended in 2008.

The estimated full-year cost of the position is \$125,266. For the first year, covering nine months if approved by voters, the total cost would be \$104,295.59. With an annual grant offset of \$41,666.67, the net tax-payer cost in year one would be \$60,927. Smith said the calculations reflect the high end of hiring for a Step IV position under the town's family insurance plan.

Support letters from the school board, school principals, Select Board member Linda MacNeil, and Town Manager Troy Brown accompanied the grant application.

Select Board Chair Kerri Harrington supports putting the question before voters. Two members, Paul Lehmann and Roger Emerson, raised concerns about taxpayer impact and past issues with the position but agreed residents should decide.

The board approved accepting the grant 3-1. Lehmann opposed.

State Renews 10-Year Agreement for Headwaters Forest Management

LITTLETON — The New Hampshire Executive Council has renewed a long-expired memorandum of understanding governing stewardship of the 171,500-acre Connecticut Lakes Headwaters Working Forest, approving a 10-year agreement that maintains cooperation between the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) and New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG). The vote was 5-0.

The forest, the state's largest land tract, includes 146,000 acres of working forest under DNCR oversight and 25,000 acres of Connecticut Lakes Natural Area managed by NHFG. Three endowment funds totaling more than \$9 million, created when the conservation easement was acquired in 2004, support stewardship, monitoring, and road maintenance. The state spends 4 to 5 percent annually.

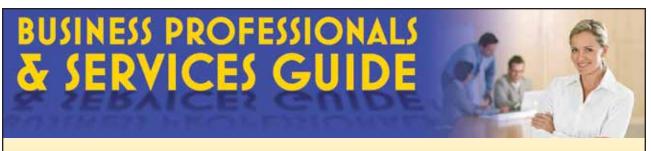
NHFG Executive Director Stephanie Simek said the long-term goal is sustainability. "Increasing costs are going to occur, so we're going to be frugal," she said. DNCR Commissioner Sarah Stewart added that discussions continue on additional revenues and maintaining state responsibilities.

The previous 10-year MOU expired in 2018, though the agencies continued cooperating. "MOU or not, we're working together on the ground," Stewart said. The renewed agreement runs through Dec. 31, 2035.

Councilor Joe Kenney raised concerns about reduced timber harvesting and Aurora Sustainable Lands' use of parts of the forest for carbon sequestration, which affects timber tax revenues. State Forester Patrick Hackley said the current landowner pays a \$25,000 annual base fee and \$1.40 per cord of wood harvested, revenue dedicated to maintaining roughly 285 miles of state-owned roads. The state is negotiating updated payments, as the rates are outdated. Last year, only 11,000 cords were harvested, well below the historic average of about 35,000

Gov. Kelly Ayotte said the agreement must support both road maintenance and the local timber economy. "It's a very important tract of land ... for the timber industry, but also for recreation," she said.

Cannon Mountain: The council also approved three Cannon Mountain funding requests: \$104,420 for snow-making upgrades; \$38,400 for compressor service and replacement; and \$468,456 for a new snow groomer. General Manager Jace Wirth said the upgrades improve efficiency and water conservation. Cannon opened Nov. 22, one of its earliest starts, and pass sales are up 9 percent year over year.

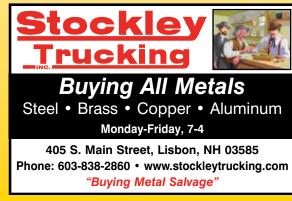












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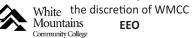
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