



The Littleton Weekly Record

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026

LOCAL & STATE

Casino Developer
Buys Littleton Properties

PAGE 2

FREE



Rescuers Respond To Downed Trees, One Almost Fatal

Ruling That Child Rapist Matthew Brousseau Must Be Allowed To Confront Accuser, N.H. Supreme Court Reverses Child Sex Assault Convictions

LOCAL & STATE

Casino Developer Buys Littleton Properties

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

LITTLETON — Three years after presenting his proposal for a casino in the building that currently houses the Staples office supply store, a Chicago-based casino developer has purchased the Staples property at 804 Meadow St.

Also through his newly formed LLC registered on Feb. 6, 2026 with the New Hampshire Secretary of State, Greg Carlin, who previously created G2 Gaming LLC for his New Hampshire ventures and who formed the new GSG Littleton Propco LLC for his Littleton property acquisitions, purchased from King Covey, on Feb. 27, the nearby building at 758 Meadow St. that until last year housed Tire Warehouse.

According to the Grafton County Registry of Deeds, the Staples property was sold on Feb. 18 by Waterstone NH Retail Properties to Carlin.

That property, which includes other buildings at 780-804 Meadow St., had an asking price of \$8.75 million, which was also the transaction price, according to the New Hampshire Registry Review. According to town property records, the total appraised value is \$6.614 million.

The 758 Meadow St. property is assessed at \$1.493 million. According to the registry review, the transaction price was \$1.535 million.

In May 2023, Carlin visited Littleton to present to residents his proposal for a mixed-use casino in the 23,000-square-foot Staples building, which would feature historical horse racing

(HHR) machines, which are similar to slot machines, and table games, such as blackjack and roulette.

Of the 100 residents turning out to the listening session, the vast majority were in opposition and cited concerns such as increased traffic, crime, gambling addiction among local residents, business being siphoned off from local restaurants, and a type of enterprise that doesn't fit the character of the town.

Carlin's plan for Littleton, called Granite State Gaming and Hospitality, is to offer 150 to 200 historical horse racing machines, which are allowed under a 2021 New Hampshire law, about 15 table games, and a pub-style restaurant and bar.

At the 2023 presentation, Carlin said the proposal for Littleton came about after the New

Hampshire Legislature approved HHR machines, which he said "changed the gaming landscape in New Hampshire."

It was the Massachusetts-based Waterstone Properties Group that reached out to him, he said.

Because casinos qualify as a commercial business and Carlin's would be located a commercial zone, local approvals appear to not be needed, but the project might need wetlands approvals for any additional parking spaces because of wetlands behind the building.

The Staples parking lot currently has 115 spaces. Carlin said he expects a need for about 300 spaces, equating to 185 new spaces.

A former CEO of Rush Street Gaming, Carlin has overseen the development of seven mixed-use casinos in North America.

A casino in Littleton, he said at the time of his presentation,

would create 50 to 60 full-time jobs.

Under New Hampshire law, for table games (or games of chance), the casino operator keeps 55 percent of gross revenue, with 35 percent going to charitable nonprofits and 10 percent to state taxes.

For HHR machines, the operator keeps 75 percent of gross revenue, with 8.75 percent going to nonprofits and 16.25 percent to state taxes.

Under current law, a casino is limited to 30 percent of its active gaming space set aside for games of chance and 70 percent for HHR machines, which use a database of about 10,000 past horse races to select several races from that pool to determine the outcome.

In 2024, the New Hampshire Legislature approved a 7-year moratorium on issuing new HHR machine licenses. It expires after June 2031. The rationale for the pause is to give the

state time to study the impact of HHR machines on charities and charitable gaming.

During Littleton's annual town vote on March 10, 2026, some two weeks after Carlin's property purchases, residents voted 610-449 to approve a petition to prohibit casinos in town, which is allowed through a new state law that gives towns a local option.

Because Carlin's proposal is already in the pipeline and his application has been submitted, his Littleton casino would not be included in the ban, which only applies to future casino proposals.

On Tuesday, Carlin's short-term and long-term plans for his new Littleton properties were undetermined, and a voicemail left with the Chicago-based telephone number listed with his New Hampshire LLC did not receive a response as of press time.

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SUPERIOR COURT

N.H. Supreme Court Reverses Littleton Sex Assault Convictions

High Court Rules Matthew Brousseau, Convicted Of Repeatedly Raping Young Child, Must Be Allowed To Confront Accuser

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

A Littleton man sentenced in 2024 to at least 42 years in state prison on charges of raping a child for six years beginning when she was 4 years old has had his convictions reversed by the New Hampshire Supreme Court.

On Friday, the court issued an order concluding that the trial court did not allow Matthew Brousseau, 42, who is currently being held in the Grafton County House of Corrections, to confront his accuser face-to-face in the courtroom, as a right guaranteed under the New Hampshire Constitution.

The high court also concluded that the trial court might have erred by not providing records and documents that could have been relevant to his defense.

In the 8-page order, the Supreme Court reversed the convictions and remanded them to the superior court.

In August 2024, Brousseau

was convicted by a Grafton Superior Court jury on charges of raping the girl and threatening to kill her if she told anyone.

He had been indicted by two grand juries, in October 2022 and January 2023, and was ultimately convicted by the trial jury on six special class felony counts of engaging in a pattern of aggravated felonious sexual assaults (AFSA), one count of felonious sexual assault, and five felony counts of criminal threatening.

The jury convicted him after deliberating for less than six hours following a five-day trial.

In addition to threatening to kill the victim, Brousseau also threatened to kill four adults if they told police about the rapes, said authorities.

The sexual assaults are alleged to have occurred between November 2015 and February 2022 at Brousseau's South Street residence.

According to the charging documents, between 2016 and 2022 Brousseau placed the victim in fear of imminent bodily

injury when he held a shotgun and threatened to kill her if she disclosed the sexual assaults to others, and in the same time frame "threatened to commit the crime of murder" when he used or threatened to use a shotgun while making the threat to the four adults.

He was given a total prison sentence of 50 years, but was eligible for a 7-1/2-year reduction upon successful completion of the sex offender program while in prison.

Brousseau appealed his convictions to the Supreme Court on three arguments: that the superior court judge erred by allowing the girl to testify outside of his presence at trial and in violation of his constitutional right to confrontation, the evidence was insufficient to support convictions on three of the pattern AFSA charges, and the trial court might have erred when it failed to disclose more of the victim's records than it reviewed.

The jury could have found that the victim/complainant

visited Brousseau every other weekend and on some holidays during the time in question and later told her mother about Brousseau's conduct, which prompted the mother to contact the New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families, the Supreme Court justices wrote in their order.

Prior to trial, Brousseau filed motions seeking the superior court's in-camera review of records pertaining to the victim, which the trial court granted in part and denied in part.

"The State moved allow the complainant to testify at trial by way of a 'remote live video-feed,' asserting that the 'trauma inflicted on [the complainant] by the defendant's presence would very likely render her 'unavailable' ... to testify in the courtroom," said the Supreme Court justices.

The superior court judge granted the state's motion.

But citing case law and the constitution, the justices said the New Hampshire Constitution provides that an individual accused of a crime shall have a right to meet the witnesses against him face to face and "the constitutional right to confront adverse witnesses is fundamental and of such importance that the State's interest in protecting certain classes of

witnesses must fall before the right of the accused to seek out the truth in the process of defending himself."

"Although the right is not absolute, we have recognized few exceptions," they said. "Consistent with [State v.] Warren, we conclude that allowing the complainant to testify remotely from another room in the courthouse by way of a two-way video feed violated the defendant's right under the State Constitution ... The complainant testified outside the defendant's presence, and there was no face-to-face meeting regardless of whether the complainant and the defendant saw each other by video."

The justices also concluded that the evidence is insufficient to prove that Brousseau's conduct demonstrated a pattern of sexual assaults as defined by law and that no evidence was established that the alleged sexual intercourse occurred more than once during a period of two or more months, which they said is an essential element of the crime.

On the third argument, Brousseau sought production of the complainant's counseling and mental health records, which the trial court reviewed and which disclosed to Brousseau and his attorney some re-



Matthew Brousseau

records, but not all.

"The defendant requests that, even if the trial court applied the correct legal standard, we review the records to determine whether the trial court erroneously failed to disclose any additional records to the parties," said the justices.

"We conclude, based upon our review, that the trial court did not unsustainably exercise its discretion with respect to the majority of the records, with the exception of certain specific records, which we will identify to the trial court in a separate order under seal," they said.

"We reverse the defendant's conviction on the pattern AFSA charge alleging sexual intercourse, and reverse and remand as to his remaining convictions," they said.

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OBITUARIES

JOSEPH A. DUBEY, JR.



Joseph A. Dubey, Jr., 55, died peacefully at his home in Littleton on Thursday, January 15, 2026. He was born on September 12, 1970, in Littleton, NH. He graduated from Littleton High School in 1989 and served in the United States Marine Corps from 1989 to 1993.

His time in the service was during the Cold War era (1945–1991). His training was at Parris Island, South Carolina. His duty stations included Okinawa twice and the Philippines, where he served in the 1st Platoon, 2nd Marine Division, Charlie Company. He also served aboard the USS Dubuque. While overseas, he served in the 3rd Marine Regiment and later returned to Camp Pendleton, CA. He received hazardous combat pay, led small teams, and mentored junior Marines.



Joey was honorably discharged in 1993 with the rank of Corporal, a noncommissioned officer who displayed strong qualities of leadership and responsibility.

Joey belonged to the VFW, where he served as Chaplain for several years. He was also a member of the Honor Guard for over 20 years. Joey enjoyed his career as the owner of Rock Hard Masonry.

He was predeceased by his father, Joseph A. Dubey, Sr. (2018), and his brother, Daniel W. Dubey (1997). He shared 11 loving years with his wife, Dorothy.

A Celebration of Life will be held on Saturday, March 21, at 2:00 PM, at the Littleton VFW Post 816. To offer your condolences to the family, please visit www.rossfuneral.com

ANN DOWNS

Ann Downs, 81, of Lancaster, N.H., died Saturday, March 14, 2026 at Coos County Nursing Hospital in West Stewartstown after a period of declining health.

Ann was born in Rochester, N.H. on Oct. 26, 1944, to LeRoy C. Wiggin and Dorothy J. (Wiggin) Wiggin. She grew up in Dover, N.H. and graduated from Dover high school in 1962. She married Lawrence A. Downs in 1964. They lived in a couple of places and finally settled down in Lancaster, N.H. in 1974.

Ann started working at the Lancaster Elementary School in 1979 after losing her oldest son. She retired in 2008.

She enjoyed going out for rides in the car with Larry and going out to eat. She also enjoyed taking trips to see the many lighthouses in New England. She attended Faith Bible Church of Littleton.

Surviving family members include a son,



Dennis A. Downs and wife Atashia of Lancaster; grandsons Matthew Downs (Erica) & Tyler Downs (Alyssa) of Lancaster; great-grandsons Gracyn, Dylan, Camden, and Masen; a great-granddaughter Lily; a sister-in-law Dorothy Wiggin of Rochester; a niece and two nephews.

Ann was predeceased by her husband of 58 years, Larry Downs; brother Wayne Wiggin Sr.; half-brothers Harry Wiggin & Clayton

Wiggin and her son, Kevin Downs.

Calling hours will be held from 7 p.m. - 9 p.m. at Bailey Funeral Home, 210 Main St. in Lancaster, on Wednesday, March 18. A funeral service will be held at Faith Bible Church, 355 Union Street, Littleton at 11 a.m. on Thursday, March 19. Ann will be laid to rest at Pine Hill Cemetery in Dover at noon on Friday, March 20. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made to Faith Bible Church.

JEANNE DICKERMAN



Jeanne Karen Dickerman, 73, of Rock Strain Drive in Littleton, N.H., died peacefully at home on Wednesday, March 11, 2026, after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's disease.

Jeanne was born on July 22, 1952 in Newton, Massachusetts, the daughter of Pasquale (Pat) and Eileen Parillo. She was raised in nearby Needham, Massachusetts, and graduated from Needham High School in 1970. After working several different jobs in the Boston area during her early adult years, she embarked on a long career as a librarian, working first at Boston University and later at Northeastern University.

She was introduced to her future husband, Mike Dickerman of Littleton, on New Year's Day 1993. Following a nearly 20-month long distance relationship, she moved to Littleton and was married on Aug. 27, 1994, at the home of her sister and brother-in-law, Julianne and Brad Bailey. Just days after the wedding, she began a one-year stint as librarian at Lakeway Elementary School in Littleton. For the next three school years, she was a library assistant at Littleton High School, and in May 1998 began her long association with Littleton Public Library, where she was appointed Library Director in 1999. She remained in that position until her retirement in January 2018. During her tenure as Library Director, she also attended Vermont College in Montpelier, Vermont, where she received a Bachelor of Science degree.

She was a kind and considerate woman who often went out of her way to assist those in need. She was also a strong believer in social activ-

ism and proudly worked as a local volunteer for the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign in 2016. Her longtime hobbies included gardening, birdwatching, reading, book collecting, observing nature and drawing. One of her favorite activities after retiring was taking long walks with Mike, usually along the Parker Mountain trail system and around the Pine Hill Conservation Area in Littleton.

Jeanne was predeceased by her parents and two brothers-in-law, Robert Dickerman (Greentown, Pa.) and John Dickerman (Bethlehem, N.H.). She is survived by her husband, Mike; her sister and brother-in-law, Julianne and Brad Bailey of Monroe, N.H.; a brother and his wife, David and Andrea Parillo (San Marcos, Calif.); nephews Jonathan Bailey (Dallas, Texas), Garth Dickerman (Littleton), and Wyatt Chinn (Vista, Calif.); nieces Caroline Bailey (Manchester, N.H.); Thea Dickerman (Washington, DC); Sedona Chinn (Madison, Wisc.), and Molly and Jewel Dickerman (Greentown, Pa.).

Family members wish to thank North Country Home Health and Hospice Agency for their excellent, compassionate care during Jeanne's final two weeks of life.

A graveside service will be held later in the spring at Glenwood Cemetery in Littleton.

Contributions in her memory may be made to North Country Home Health and Hospice, 536 Cottage St., Littleton, NH 03561 or Riverside Animal Rescue, 236 Riverside Ave., Lunenburg, VT 05906.

SARAH 'SALLY' ARMSTRONG

Sarah "Sally" Armstrong, of Franconia, N.H., passed away peacefully on Dec. 5, 2025, at the age of 64.

Born on Nov. 2, 1961, Sally grew up immersed in movement and a deep love of animals. From an early age, dancing and time spent with horses were central to her life and remained steady sources of peace throughout her years. She lived with a tender, generous heart, expressed through laughter, kindness, and the simple way she made people feel safe being exactly who they were. Her presence was warm and unguarded, and people—and animals—felt genuinely loved in her company.

She had a special connection to water, believing in its power and its life-giving force. This deeply held conviction mirrored her approach to life and her belief in service to others. Later in life, she returned to school and became a nurse. Caring for others came naturally to her and re-



flected both her compassion and her desire to heal.

Sally is survived by her children, Cameron and David ("DJ"); her son-in-law, Kevin; her grandchildren, Esme, Callan, and August; her beloved horse, Mozambique Spice ("Mo"); and her siblings, Stewart, Janet, and David, who will carry forward her love, values, and memory.

She will be remembered for her generosity of spirit and the enduring love she gave so freely. Her life and love were, and will remain, a gift.

A memorial service celebrating Sally's life will be held on April 11, 2026, at 11 a.m. at the Community Church of Christ in Franconia. Rev. Robin Bartlett will preside. Family and friends are invited to gather in remembrance and reflection and are encouraged to wear tie-dye in honor of Sally's favorite attire and her hippie heart.

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OBITUARIES

LEONARD REED



Leonard F.B. Reed, of Whitefield, N.H. — devoted husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather — passed away on March 5, 2026 surrounded by family.

Born Dec. 9, 1931 in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Len was the beloved son of Leonard and Annabelle Reed. After graduating from Chicago's Loyola Academy in 1949, he entered the United States Military Academy at West Point, beginning a lifelong journey defined by service, curiosity, and integrity. Upon his graduation in 1954, Len was commissioned as a second lieutenant and went on to serve 24 years in the U.S. Army.

His career took him across the world — from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to teaching history at West Point, and serving overseas in Korea, Germany, and Vietnam. Len was decorated for his courage in combat and excellence in peacetime service alike. He wore with pride both the Parachute Wings and the Ranger Tab. He concluded his military career at the Pentagon, where he served as the Army's spokesperson in the Office of Information. Just a month ago, he was honored with a Quilt of Valor in recognition of his service and dedication.

After retiring from the Army, Len brought his leadership and energy to the civilian world, first as Director of Public Affairs for the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, advising the Bishop. Fulfilling a dream in 1979, Len moved to New Hampshire, where he and Joan settled in Bethlehem. This would become home for the rest of his life. He worked at Littleton Hospital before joining the Tender Corporation — the entrepreneurial venture behind After Bite — he then went on to create Len Reed & Company, a marketing and development firm serving the hospitality industry. Len poured his energy and optimism into his community as well. He founded the Bethlehem Redevelopment Association, laying the foundation for the thriving,



creative town Bethlehem is today — a far cry from the one blinking light it had when he arrived. Among his proudest local achievements was leading the revitalization of The Colonial Theatre, transforming it into a cultural centerpiece that continues to bring art, film, and live performance to the North Country. His passion for progress was matched only by his kindness and belief in the goodness of people.

Len will be remembered for his steadfast faith, his curiosity, and his ability to make anyone feel heard and valued. His genuine warmth and interest embraced everyone he met — he truly never met a stranger. Guided always by his lifelong principles of duty, honor, and country, Len lived every day with purpose and heart, and a faith strong and mighty.

Len is survived by his loving wife of 68 years, Joan, their children Kathie (Mark) McKain, Deb Reed (Carol Leech), Tim (Basak) Reed, and Beth (Dodge) Bingham; grandchildren Alyssa, Jillian, Hartley, Reed, Cole, Sarah, Olivia, Wilson, Iris, and Aydin; and great-grandchildren Joanie and Hugo; his sister Virginia Charbonneau's (deceased) children Robert, Jean and Louise — each the recipient of his boundless love and pride.

As a longtime member of St. Rose of Lima Church, 82 High St., Littleton, NH, a Mass of Christian Burial for Len will be held there on Thursday, March 26, 2026, at 10:30 a.m. Reception following. Go to <https://strosechurchnh.org> and click on "Livestream" to view the funeral service on March 26.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to The North Country Chamber Players at <https://northcountrychamberplayers.org/donations/> or The Catholic Charities at <https://www.cc-nh.org/ways-to-give/donate/>.

The Cremation Society of NH is assisting the family with arrangements. To view an online memorial, leave a message of condolence, or for more information visit www.csnh.com.

LESLIE G. RODGER JR.

Leslie (Buddy) Rodger Jr., 68, of Whitefield, N.H. passed away with his family at his side peacefully on March 13, 2026 at his home. Leslie was born on September 18, 1957 to Leslie and Iola Rodger, both of whom predeceased him.

Growing up in Dalton, N.H., he was a jack of all trade. He loved to hunt, fish, camp and be with his family in his free time.

Buddy is survived by his loving wife Chris-



tine, whom he married on August 21, 1999, and his only son Nathan (Nate) who he loved dearly. He is also survived by his sisters, Myra (Leo) of Lancaster, N.H., Sue (Tom) of Bath, N.H., Viola (Curt) of Bethlehem, N.H. and his two cats and a rabbit.

He will be missed dearly by all who knew him. Arrangements are to be made.

ALICE WILSON

Alice Mary Dodge Wilson, 84, passed away on Sunday, March 8, 2026, at her residence in Littleton, N.H. She was born on Nov. 19, 1941, in Lisbon, N.H. to parents, Roy and Gertrude Dodge (Howland). She was the loving wife of Robert G. Wilson Sr.; they were married on Oct. 24, 1959, in Littleton, N.H., and they raised four children together.

Following her graduation from Littleton High School, Alice built a strong work ethic dedicating 20 years working full-time at Fleet Bank. She also devoted 20 years to a part-time role at Cumberland Farms, steadily working toward retirement.

Outside of work, Alice found happiness in the simple joys of life. She loved playing bingo, going camping, and sitting around the table for a good game of cards with friends and family. Alice also enjoyed taking long walks, visiting local fairs, and trying her luck at casinos. Whether sharing laughs over a game or enjoying the fresh air outdoors, Alice treasured the experiences that



made life meaningful. She will be remembered for her warmth and steady spirit.

Alice was predeceased by her parents, Roy and Gertrude Dodge, her husband of 63 years, Robert G. Wilson Sr., five brothers and one sister, her mother-in-law, Margaret Wilson, and her father-in-law, Galen Wilson.

She is survived by her three sons: Robert G. Wilson Jr. and

his wife Connie, Randal Wilson and his significant other Tina, and Rodney Wilson and his significant other Heidi, her daughter, Terri Wilson-Russell and her husband Greg, as well as many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

A private burial will be held at the convenience of the family.

Assisting the family with arrangements is Phaneuf Funeral Homes and Crematorium.

To view Alice's Online Tribute, send condolences to the family, or for more information, visit www.phaneuf.net.

BRUCE JAMES BELL

Bruce James Bell, 83 of Peterborough, New Hampshire, passed away at Concord Hospital, on March 7, 2026. He was born in Whitefield, N.H. on July 12, 1942, the son of Clinton and Ruth (Brown) Bell.

One of six siblings, Gregory Bell (deceased), Elizabeth Pearson, Barbara Martin, George Bell, and Mailyn Bell growing up in South Lunenburg, Vt.

In addition to his wife Doreen (Bashaw) Bell, of Peterborough, Bruce is survived by his children, Jim Bell, Sharon Morales, Karen Perras, and Stephen Bell; eight grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, as well as several extended family members.

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Budget Committee Conducts Post-Vote Analysis, Voices Concerns

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

LITTLETON — On Thursday, members of the advisory town-school budget committee offered their analyses of Tuesday's town vote, what the numbers tell them, and what their big takeaways are — that taxation and affordability are foremost on many voters' minds, and the budgeting process needs to change.

Although the vast bulk of warrant articles passed, the proposed \$11.527 million town operating budget scarcely did so, by just 12 votes out of slightly more than 1,000 cast. The default budget was \$151,000 lower, at \$11.376 million.

"My take on it is people are concerned about taxes and affordability, and they want us to basically slow down a little bit," said Diane Cummings, chair of the budget committee.

She suggested that the committee and the town work to streamline the budget process and set goals before the process begins in earnest each October.

"The taxpayers' feelings were pretty clearly reflected in the votes," said committee member Mary Menzies.

Voters realized the sewer plant, while expensive, was in crisis and needed to be addressed, but the fact that the budget passed by just 12 votes shows that voters "are saying this is your last chance and we expect to see something very

different in the future," said Menzies.

"It boils down to, I'm sorry to use the word, staffing," she said. "That's the biggest expense and is the only way to see any significant change in the budget."

"Even though the budget wasn't defeated, it was mighty close," said budget committee member John Goodrich. "I think there's a clear message there."

There's always a balance between property tax values and what property owners can pay, he said.

"I think we pushed that balance too far," said Goodrich. "People of lower incomes are probably really reeling at this point."

Voters — including in Vermont, where many towns didn't pass their school or operational budgets — are feeling the financial pinch, and town votes also reflect what's going on at the national and state levels, said Kerri Harrington, chair of the Littleton Select Board.

On Wednesday morning, Harrington, citing the barely passed Littleton budget, called Littleton town manager Troy Brown to say "the people have spoken."

"He said they spoke in a big way," she said. "He's very aware. I said they are not okay

with this budget. I said if it happens again, it probably won't pass. It was way too close for comfort at 12 votes, way too close. It was just too high for people. I think we need to listen to the people who are saying this is too much for them. People are being slammed left and right ... It's a struggle right now. I think it's a reaction to a lot of things."

Tuesday's ballot vote "is going to keep everyone on their toes," said Harrington.

"We need more discussion on setting a goal we can buy into and not wait until the last minute," said budget committee member Dan Stearns.

The budget committee is advisory; the Select Board has to take the lead, and the town manager has to direct the department heads, all with the goal of identifying efficiencies and ways to streamline the budget with less impact on taxpayers, said Stearns.

The town's draft 2026 budget first came in with an 11-percent increase before the budget committee asked the town to go back. The budget increase was then reduced to 8 percent.

On the school side, the student population is dwindling, births in New Hampshire "have fallen off a cliff," the town is "saddled retroactively with a bigger plant than we have stu-

dents for," and radical solutions need to be found, be they partnering with other school districts or allowing high school students to attend the school of their choice, said Goodrich.

"We're the hub of old people at this point," he said.

Littleton won't attract families unless it has a school system that produces results, said Goodrich.

On the town and school sides, increases in employee health insurance drove much of the 2026 budget increases.

Some committee members noted that the union contracts approved by voters for the police and public works departments and the transfer station have employees paying a greater share of their health insurance, now 15 percent, with the town paying 85 percent, before which the town was paying 95 percent or greater.

Going forward, budget committee members said the committee and town and school officials could agree early on to a percentage of a budget increase to target and work from there.

Budget committee member Bill Latulip said the town could also look at ways to generate revenue, including raising parking fees and allowing town plow trucks to be leased to the state, which pays \$149 per hour per truck for 10 hours per

storm.

"If you have four trucks running at \$149 times 10 hours, that's a nice chunk of money," he said. "Stuff like that we have to go after. It isn't coming to us."

Committee member John Plette said his take on the vote is that the money articles passed, except for the town resource officer and ladder truck cancellation fee.

"To me, the message is the townspeople are very supportive of the town government and want the services that the town government is providing," he said. "All of that being said, I think we need better planning."

Harrington said that while the warrant articles passed, the vote differences are getting closer.

For the future, guidance and objectives need to be set before the budget process begins, and the town manager needs to give marching orders to department heads, said Goodrich.

"I think people came in with what's essentially a wish list," said Goodrich. "When your first pass is at 11 percent, that ain't workin' ... The balance of the property taxes versus the income levels that the average citizen of Littleton has to be kept in mind. And that has to be right at the top of the whole

See **BudCom**, Page 10

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Fire Chief, Leader Of Regionalization Efforts Offers View on EMS Study, Future

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

An area fire chief who has served as president of the Twin State Fire Mutual Aid Association and is a leader for first responder regionalization efforts has offered his view on Grafton County's EMS study and his predictions for the future.

Released in January, the study by Municipal Resources Inc. concludes that a countywide Emergency Medical Services would not work in a county like Grafton, the age of the volunteer era is at an end, and the best solution is to build out the existing fire-based EMS systems throughout the county.

"My takeaway, number one, is I think the concept of a countywide EMS system would not work and all of us in the fire service knew that, but it was good for them to go through that exercise and come to that conclusion," said Clark.

He advocates for a "hub and spoke" approach to EMS.

"What works is the concept that's in place now and needs to get expanded, and that's having a regional transport agency, like Littleton, and then having the area towns having a fast squad or somebody that can get to the scene well ahead of the ambulance, but also assist the ambulance, so that the ambulance is responding only with two people and the local fire department

would provide a couple of other people to get there sooner than the ambulance to provide life-saving measures as necessary, cancel the ambulance if appropriate, and assist getting the patient to the ambulance," he said.

That allows the ambulance crew to maintain advanced skills because they're using them more, said Clark.

"You take a town like Sugar Hill, we have about 60 calls in a year so it's hard to stay really proficient," he said. "I think we're all competent, but we might do an IV once a month."

The area's advantage of being able to centralize at a higher level of care is clearly the model, and it's just a matter of time before smaller town ambulance operations realize they can't continue, said Clark.

"The other thing that came out of the report is the concept of using either volunteers or paid on-call to run an ambulance," he said. "Those days are pretty numbered for a variety of reasons. That model is not going to be able to sustain itself."

Clark said his third takeaway is that the report wasn't as clear as it could have been regarding compensating a 24/7 ambulance service and advanced life care support, such as at Littleton Fire Rescue.

"The problem is you have to pay for two people to wait for the call, and you're not getting any income," said Clark. "You're only getting income when you

transport somebody. Medicare rates don't really reflect that standby time."

Some 24/7 ambulance crews can go a whole day without a call, and there might be days with only one or two calls, but the crew still has to be paid and have the ambulances ready to go, he said.

The Medicare rates haven't provided adequate reimbursement rates for that, but a law passed in 2025 that requires managed care health plans to reimburse ambulance providers at 325 percent of the Medicare rate for EMS will help, said Clark.

"It's going to help significantly to bring in more revenue to offset that cost of really just having people standing by so they can respond 24/7," he said.

Clark is hopeful for a sustainable EMS future.

"I think we're ahead of the curve," he said. "I think we've recognized the problem."

Several years ago, Franconia, which contracts with Littleton for EMS, went out of the ambulance business and could be the first of others going the same way, said Clark.

"Working around Littleton as the transport agency makes a lot of sense," he said. "But it also reduces the cost for Littleton to provide ambulance service to Littleton, and, in case of a fire, it provides more firefighters than what they normally have. I think it's a benefit to Littleton. They're the only available method for the smaller communities to provide

quality emergency medical services."

As for the waning of volunteers, especially on the EMS side, reasons include more EMS educational requirements and the changing nature of 9-1-1 calls, which today involve less severe conditions for which people would get in their car and just drive to the hospital years ago, said Clark.

"For whatever reasons, over the years a portion of the 9-1-1 calls probably don't require ambulance transportation," he said. "So that's frustrating for somebody who has to leave work for three hours for something that someone can get in their car and drive to the hospital. If you dial 9-1-1, we're obligated to go, but if you listen to the scanner, you'll hear us coming out for cat scratches and upset stomachs and constipation. As a result, it's harder to motivate volunteers and part-time people to deal with that."

Everyone is willing to give up time to deal with the bad accidents in which people are severely hurt, but not the other calls, said Clark.

"So I think the model that seems like it's the best model is that hub and spoke, where you have a regional transport agency," he said. "We have Littleton. Woodsville a little further to the south is a hub that serves around eight towns. Littleton now serves three towns besides themselves. I think that's the future. And I'm

hoping the legislation that bills 325 percent of the Medicare rate will provide that even revenue to make up the cost that's primarily sitting around and waiting for a call."

In other regionalization efforts, the HAZMAT team, which was formed to clean up hazardous materials spills, mostly from vehicle crashes, is evolving differently than what was envisioned and is now a component of the Twin State Fire Mutual Aid Association.

"It's up and running and active and all of the equipment that was originally with Littleton is being conveyed to Twin State," said Clark. "Twin State has agreed to take on that function. We were hoping to include Coos County, but that part didn't work. They didn't see the need for it."

The other regionalization effort that's advancing is the swift-water rescue team, which will be used for not only river and water rescues, but can be deployed during catastrophic floods.

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Rescuers Respond To Downed Trees, One Almost Fatal

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

LITTLETON — Two days of high winds brought personnel from Littleton Fire Rescue out to several calls of downed trees in the early morning hours of Tuesday, including one that fell on a Crowe View Drive house and nearly landed on a sleeping resident.

"That could have been real bad," Littleton Fire Rescue Chief Tommy Hartwell said Tuesday afternoon. "It wouldn't have taken a few feet further toward the house, and she was sleeping right there. We're very, very fortunate."

A general alarm was transmitted to Crowe View Drive for a large tree into a residence and a car, bringing in off-duty full-time and call LFR members, LFR Chief Chad Miller said in a social media post.

"The resident was fortunate to escape injury when a large tree crashed through a bedroom closet," said Miller. "The tree tore through the corner of the structure and landed on a vehicle. A slight change in direction could have resulted in a fatality. Lt. Antunovic and 'A' Shift were stretched responding to multiple concurrent incidents throughout their shift."

In total, "A" Shift handled 13 calls for service during their 24-

hour tour, he said.

At about 4 a.m. Tuesday, Grafton County Dispatch began transmitting multiple calls for trees down into wires across the area as a cold front moved through, said Miller.

"A" Shift crews responded to incidents on Pine Hill, Manns Hill, Brook Road, and Interstate 93 for trees blocking roadways or involving wires, he said.

"Every once in a while, we do get a storm that comes through and causes these type of things," said Hartwell. "Aside from the tree that hit the house, it was just trees across the roadway or trees on wires, which are pretty common. It seemed like such a

short-lived little burst of a storm this morning. It didn't seem like it lasted that long. By the time these calls were coming in, it was still windy, but it wasn't causing trees to come down. I think there were five or six storm-related calls this morning, starting around quarter to four, all related to trees coming down, some on power lines and the one on the house."

LFR is fortunate to have in town Littleton Water and Light, which gets a lot of storm calls and makes its own responses to downed trees and trees on wires, he said.

"It was pretty quick-acting," Hartwell said of LFR's response.

See Wind, Page 10

Governor And Council Approves \$204 Million In Rural Health Funding

Proposed Coos County Nursing Home Conversion Highlighted

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

After tabling a vote on March 4 to further explore accountability and oversight, the New Hampshire Governor and Council on Monday approved four contracts to implement \$204 million in federal Rural Health Transformation (RHT) grant funding awarded to the state in December.

The first installment of a five-year award through 2030, the state is expected to receive equivalent amounts annually for the next four years to bolster health care access, quality, future sustainability, and workforce development in rural areas.

Overseen by the Governor's

Office of New Opportunities and Rural Transformational Health (GO-NORTH), a chunk of funding is allocated for Coos County, which is looking into an estimated \$22 million county nursing home conversion at the former Colebrook Academy in order to close its aging nursing hospital in West Stewartstown.

The GO-NORTH contracts were awarded for six designated RHT hubs.

For capital improvements in rural communities, one contract involves the New Hampshire Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA), which has been working with Coos County on a feasibility study for the academy building and for brick-and-mortar contracts.

About \$40 million annually over the next five years will be

allocated to capital projects.

District 1 Executive Councilor Joe Kenney inquired about the CDFA hub and said Coos County is relatively poor and has been designated a financially distressed county through legislation sponsored by state Sen. David Rochefort, R-Littleton.

Coos County, though, might be on the hook for \$5 to \$6 million above what it would receive from GO-NORTH, he said.

Kenney asked Donnalee Lozeau, director of GO-NORTH, for reassurance that the state will be looking for other types of funding in addition to GO-NORTH because he wouldn't want Coos County to pull out of its nursing home project like Strafford County did with its own a few years

ago.

In Coos County, the challenge is that no one wants to raise the tax rate, said Lozeau.

Recognizing the \$5 to \$6 million that Coos County would be on the hook for, CDFA is committed to determining if Coos could be eligible for CDFA funding or money of that nature, she said.

"We certainly will look if there are other possibilities," said Lozeau. "Based on closing the West Stewartstown facility, the savings in operational costs there would cover the cost, and then some, of any bond so that they would not see an increase in the tax rate for that purpose. We will continue to look."

For the CDFA contract, the council approved some \$40 million for the rural health infrastructure hub, which funds rural health capital improvement projects aligned with the state's

RHT plan.

Those projects will support capital and infrastructure improvements, such as nursing home renovations in Coos and Merrimack counties, childcare facilities within rural health care facilities, and other facility renovations and upgrades to expand access to care and support the financial sustainability of rural healthcare providers.

"This would be a big help to the taxpayers and those counties," said District 2 Executive Councilor Karen Liot Hill, who learned about the Coos County project from Coos County administrator Mark Brady while she was visiting Littleton. "We're looking out for the taxpayers, and that's an important part of what we're trying to do here."

The second contract, for the Foundation for Healthy Communities, funds the rural access, technology, and provider sustainability hub to support rural providers such as federally-qualified health centers, like the Littleton-based Ammonoosuc Community Health Services; critical access hospitals, like Littleton Regional Healthcare and Weeks Medical Center; county nursing homes; home health agencies; and EMS units to adopt innovative care models that expand access and invest in primary care and prevention, to include tele-health, team-based care, enhanced care coordination, mobile integrated health, and community nurse programs.

The third contract, for the Community College System of New Hampshire, funds the rural health career pathways and early workforce development hub.

The fourth, for the University of New Hampshire, funds the rural health workforce education and training hub.

In all, the state expects about \$1 billion through 2030.

"Since achieving the highest Rural Health Transformation award in New England, our GO-NORTH team has already been working to make healthcare more innovative, affordable, and accessible in rural areas of our state," Gov. Kelly Ayotte said in a statement following the approvals. "I thank the Executive Council for approving these important contracts. I look forward to working alongside the Council, GO-NORTH, and our partners to deliver a healthier future for all of New Hampshire."

According to the grant's federal guidelines, every county in New Hampshire has rural areas, said Lozeau.

The majority of the funding will be subject to competitive bidding.

Childcare facilities, sustainable childcare, and workforce development have been discussed for years, and the GO-NORTH funding will have an impact, said Kenney, who added that developing sufficient childcare will go a long way toward easing many economic challenges.

Wind

Continued from Page 9

"The guys handled a bunch of calls and took care of business.

We ended up going back to that house with a tarp and made sure we could get it as air- and watertight as possible so she can get the repairs taken care of. This morning was a little bit unique."

BudCom

Continued from Page 8

thinking."

Residents did vote to support town employees, the sewer plant, and facilities maintenance, but it was the other things, like the expansions of departments and department equipment, that they rejected,

said Cummings.

Positive movement has been made, including the town taking a suggestion by the budget committee to look into and implement new fees, such as at the transfer station, she said.

"We can suggest they look at revenues, impact fees, look at the fee structure, and perhaps fees that we don't have right now," said Cummings.

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