

ALFORD TOWN NEWS

ISSUE NO 47

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2010

EDITOR'S COLUMN

PLANT A RADISH.....GET A RADISH

This time last year I finally got to realize a long time wish of having my own vegetable garden. After an unsuccessful attempt a few years ago of planting one in the wrong location (no sun) and no water (hose was miles away) as well as no fence enclosure (deer problems) I learned that these were 3 essential ingredients for beginning a vegetable garden.

So this time around, my husband and I got out the drill, ordered enormous amounts of materials from garden catalogues, and got to work measuring, sawing, hammering and finally attaching all the components together creating 6 raised beds, enclosed by a lovely green wire fence, and a hose bib with drip irrigation tubes resting comfortably on top of each bed. Even if I never planted a thing, it was a delight just looking at it! Weather permitting, I eventually put vegetable plants that I bought in each of those areas and watched them grow from my windows while inside the house. It was pure green pleasure. If I had questions of what to do and when, I often consulted the very informative website www.berkshiregrown.org for answers. It was very helpful when the tomato blight arrived, as they had photos of what tomatoes looked like with this airborne blight, and I was able to compare their photos with my tomatoes, confirming the diagnosis and using their advice of what to do about it.

This year is a little different. I have gotten a jump on the growing season by planting a garden in my basement. Growing my own seedlings under special grow lights is a delight that requires very little in the way of equipment. I tend to visit my "babies" every day to make sure they're getting the right start and knowing that soon...spring's arrival is just a little earlier this year when it begins indoors.

Hoping that you're all looking forward to an early and beautiful spring as I am.....

Roberta Haas,
Editor, Alford NewsLetter

SELECTMEN'S UPDATE

An early Spring has come to Alford and it is very welcome!

Winter was long, but busy. As usual, we have been working on the budget for your consideration at our upcoming Town Meeting on Tuesday, May 11th. Town Elections will be on Tuesday, May 18th. We are happy to report that, once again, with the proposed budget, there should be no increase in Real Estate taxes - most likely a slight decrease.

Work on refurbishing the Town Garage should be underway by mid-May. The project is in the county register and is out to bid. We should know the awardee by early May and work should begin as soon as possible after that.

An important article that will be on the Town Warrant this year has to do with the Southern Berkshire Regional School District Agreement. For almost a year we have been meeting with Selectmen from the other four District towns, trying to revise the agreement that has been in effect for over 50 years, but

aspects of which have become troublesome in recent years. A few years ago, a compromise of district wide voting for school committee representatives addressed the problem of “one man - one vote”, while allowing us to retain at least one representative per town without making the board too large to be workable. State mandates about assessments for the operating budget have over ridden the original agreed upon method , but left the original assessment method for the capital budget - disturbing a balance that needs addressing. Another previous attempt to update - the “ten year rolling average” for enrollment (the basis for determining assessment shares) is due to expire this June 30th. An update is needed to address this and other areas of concern, such as Capital Assessment and how to determine when/if a school building can/should be opened or closed. The revision group worked hard to come up with a draft that has been placed on the warrant for your consideration and vote. It will be a very important decision and we hope that as many voters as possible will come to learn about it , ask questions, and vote.

We are very fortunate that our small town has so many people willing to volunteer their time, expertise, and effort to help make our town the best it can be. Though there are many, we'd like to recognize three in particular that have stood out this past year:

Lucy Prashker - for volunteering her time and guidance in the negotiations/rewriting of the proposed new School District agreement at no cost to the district or the member towns.

A.J. Dellea - for volunteering his time and expertise in designing and setting up the Alford Town website. If you haven't already seen it, you are urged to check it out. The website is www.townofalford.org

Bob Lichter - for his continuing work with the Broadband Committee - trying to get better communications available to Alford and other towns in our area that are underserved.

We hope that you are all enjoying the warm Spring weather! See you at Town Meeting on Tuesday, May 11th!!

Charlie Ketchen

ALFORD GARDEN CLUB NEWS

Spring is finally here! On May 19th, the Alford Garden Club opens its 2010 season with a wonderful Spring luncheon at a local restaurant. We all look forward to welcoming the new gardening season by meeting with our fellow gardeners and friends after the long winter hiatus.

The rest of the gardening season is celebrated with monthly meetings where we visit local area gardens, listen to speakers who educate us on various aspects of horticulture and enjoy delicious refreshments provided by member hosts.

Although our annual Covered Dish Luncheon of December 2009 was cancelled because of bad weather, we did select a recipient of the Club's Recognition award. Mary Poole was awarded this honor because of her tireless work for the Alford Garden Club and the Alford community. She served for many years on the Club's Beautification committee, helping to keep our town beautiful. She also serves as the President of the Alford Land Trust and is a member of the Planning Board. We were delighted to recognize Mary's many contributions.

Our Conservation committee will be sponsoring our annual clean up of the trash that accumulates alongside the roads of Alford. You can help by picking up any trash you see as you walk anywhere in Alford. Our Beautification Committee is responsible for the magnificent barrels you see all over our

community as well as the beds in front of Town Hall and the Alford Fire Department. If you would like to help, please let us know.

Thanks to all the Officers and Committee Chairs of the Alford Garden Club who are devoted to our town, to gardening, to beauty and who make my job easy.

Cipora Brown, President

ALFORD LAND TRUST

The Alford Land Trust has had a busy winter and spring.

We will be telling you all about it soon and we are sure you will be as happy about it as we are!

We are getting ready for the Annual Alford Town Picnic which will take place this year on July 17th. Please save the date! We are hoping to have music again and, of course, we will be selling hats! We look forward to seeing you all there. As usual, please bring a dish to share, your own plates, utensils and, above all, family, friends and new neighbors.

SOUTHERN BERKSHIRE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT SPRING REPORT

I am very happy to report that there is a lot of good news emanating from the halls of the SBRSD.

The Selectmen of the five District towns have successfully completed a Restatement Agreement which essentially fixes the way District expenses will be apportioned among the District towns. The Agreement has been voted accepted by the School Committee on a unanimous basis. The new Regional Agreement is available for inspection at the Alford Town Office. All registered voters of the five District towns will be asked to vote to approve the new Agreement at their annual town meetings. If approved, the new Agreement will go into effect July 1, 2011.

Within the last few years the number of children who “choice-in” to our District has increased. The figures for December 2009 are as follows: 866 students attend SBRSD, 140 students choiced -in and 162 students choiced-out of the District. The financial net loss for 2009 from choice-in/out was \$ 84,498. This is a dramatic improvement over the highpoint net loss of 2007 of \$ 329,884.

Governor Duval announced that the SBRSD will be among the recipients of Energy Efficiency & Conservation Block Grants made possible through federal stimulus assistance monies. The District will receive \$ 308,733 in funds earmarked to purchase and install a new building automation system, install demand/controlled ventilation systems and update the components of the existing system. This will result in considerable savings in oil and electricity costs. Superintendent Singleton stated, “We are grateful to the towns of Alford, Sheffield and Monterey under whose sponsorship the District was allowed to apply for these monies.”

SBRSD has also been awarded a Clean Energy Choice Community Matching Grant which was applied for through the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. The grant will cover the installation of a photo-voltaic array to provide lighting to an exterior entrance area at the main campus. Superintendent Singleton stated, “Once again, a very special thank you goes out to the towns of Alford, Mt. Washington and Monterey who allowed us to use funds accumulated by their community through the Clean Energy Choice program for this project.”

The National Honor Society (NHS) and National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) are the nation's premier organizations established to recognize outstanding high school and middle level students. More than an honor roll, these organizations serve to honor those students who have demonstrated excellence in Scholarship, Leadership, Service, Character and Citizenship. The most recent inductees to the NHS and NJHS are: Class of 2010- Jocelyn Hastings, Samya Stumo Class of 20 11- Ariel Bush, Jeffrey Lowenstein, Mackenzie Loring, Katherine White. Class of 2012- Demitri Cassivant, Gabriella Makuc , Nina Scibelli, Samatha Swartz, and Claire Tomich.
Linda Silvestri Alford School Committee Member

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TOWN ASSESSOR'S OFFICE

ALFORD PROPERTY REVALUATION

The Alford Board of Assessors, as mandated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Revenue, Bureau of Local Assessment, will be conducting the triennial Fiscal year 2011 revaluation of all real and personal property in the town. The new valuations will be based upon extensive market analysis, subject to final certification by the Department of Revenue.

As a requirement of the Bureau of Local Assessment, the Board of Assessors has contracted the services of Mayflower Valuation Company to complete a cyclical program. This program requires an inspection of the interior as well as a measurement and inspection of the exterior of your property. The interior inspection process takes only a few minutes and is necessary in order to create equitable assessments throughout the town.

These procedures for data collection are to ensure that all properties within a municipality are valued uniformly and equitably. Mayflower consultants will be properly identified and registered with the Alford Police Department. We appreciate your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Tammy Blackwell

LOVING A WILD LANDSCAPE

We are blessed to live in such a beautiful place. One way to care for it is to let it go wild. Wild lawns and landscapes are an emerging trend across the country because they eliminate the use of harmful chemicals and fossil fuels, they reduce our carbon footprint, and they increase the natural habitat for life above and below the ground.

This spring, consider these three ideas: Stop using chemical fertilizers and weed killers and switch to organic lawn and garden care. Stop mowing vast lawns and choose a portion to become a wild meadow. Stop burning brush and create a permanent brush pile for sticks and branches that will eventually compost while it provides habitat and shelter.

Reconsider your lawn and landscape practices. Conventional lawn and garden chemicals are a major source of ground water pollution, as well as being deadly carcinogens that threaten people, pets, and wildlife. Mowing burns fossil fuels. Brush burning releases carbon into the atmosphere. Compost stores carbon. Plants store carbon.

Let Alford go wild! Learn to see weeds as wild flowers and edible plants. Learn to see brush, fallen branches, and rotting logs as potential habitat. Learn to see an acre of mowed lawn as a lost opportunity. And cultivate the wild in and around your landscape. We'll all be healthier for it.

Billie Best

TRIAD NOTES

ALFORD SENIOR VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE OF TRIAD.

A new committee was formed in Alford this winter called the ALFORD SENIOR VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE OF TRIAD.

The overriding purpose of this committee is to enable seniors to remain in their home as long as possible.

The first project we undertook was to call every senior in Alford over the age of 65 who lives alone. There are 31 seniors in Alford that fit that description. We called them all just to ask a simple question. Did they want us to call them sometime during the day just to ask them, "Are you o.k.?" Seven responded positively so we divided the list

between the members of the committee and we have been making those calls every day since February. In addition a letter was sent to all the seniors in Alford explaining our purpose and offering to be available any time they need us.

As a sub committee of Triad which is a coalition of police, fire, and senior volunteers, we might be in a position to offer the seniors in Alford other services including "medical reminders" and "link to life pendants". As we become aware of other needs and services, we will try to offer those also. Please feel free to contact us with any services you might need in order to enable you to remain in your home as long as possible.

Mel Greenberg 413-528-4201
Joe Silvestri 413-528-0073
Mary Stephen 413-528-5034
Barbara Strauss 413-528-9644

MUNICIPALLY OWNED BROADBAND INTERNET NETWORK UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Frustrated by the lack of progress in making high-speed Internet capability universally available to the under-served and unserved low-population areas of Western Massachusetts, representatives of almost 50 Western Massachusetts towns have created Wired West (<http://www.wired-west.net>), whose purpose is to "design, build and operate an open-access, municipally-owned, fiber-optic network that offers comprehensive, affordable and reliable internet, phone and television services to all residents, businesses and institutions who want service, in our participating towns." Envisioned to be community owned and operated, financially sustainable, and focused on service and affordability, the network is intended to provide a universal, high-quality utility service to local residents.

A major topic, of course, is the need to raise the tens of millions of dollars needed to design and build the network. This, of course, bears on the timetable for completion, which remains vague. While no explicit funding commitments are in place, Wired West's Finance Committee says it is working with industry professionals in evaluating various municipal business models and sources of financing for the project. The organization states it is also working with the Massachusetts Broadband Institute and other public entities on this challenge. Participating towns, however, are not expected to contribute to project financing.

A discussion of this topic and approval of the following warrant article will be part of the town meeting on Tuesday, May 11, 2010:

To see if the Town will vote to enter into immediate discussions with other Western Massachusetts municipalities with the intent of entering an inter-municipal agreement, by and through the Select Board, pursuant to Chapter 40, Section 4A of the Massachusetts General Laws, for the purpose of establishing a universal, open access, financially self-sustaining communication system for the provision of broadband service, including high-speed Internet access, telephone and cable television to the residents, businesses and institutions of these municipalities; or act in relation thereto.

Although most of Alford and many parts of a number of other Southern Berkshire County towns do have WiSpring's high-speed wireless Internet service, others are not so fortunate, and the current service does have speed and capacity limitations. These limitations are not inherent in wireless technology, however. Indeed, WiSpring is planning a substantial expansion and enhancement of its services, enabled through collaboration with the Massachusetts Broadband Institute and a strategic alliance with another company, and indeed could position WiSpring to fold into a fiber-based/wireless system when it emerges. Approval of the article thus broadens Alford's options without committing it to any expenditures or ruling out consideration of other means to extend broadband service throughout the region.

Submitted by Bob Lichter