

BBA OFFICERS

Pres: Nick Nikolaidis
VP: Bev Washburn
Sec: Heidi Nikolaidis
Treas: Carroll Ketchum

BBA NEWS

Jan. 2006

Bethel Business Association

BBA LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST !!!!!

The 2006 legislative session is upon us, and the Bethel Business Association will host its first Legislative Breakfast of the year at the Black Forest Cafe on Main Street on Monday, January 30 from 7:30 AM to 9:00 AM.

Here's a chance to meet with your legislative and local representatives, ask questions and express your opinions. And it gives them a chance to give ear to their constituents.

There's much to talk about. There are all sorts of bills before the legislature that are of key importance to the future of our state.

As usual, there will be a free continental breakfast---rolls, pastries, juice, coffee---courtesy of the BBA.

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 19

6:30 PM

Regular Meeting
at Paradigm Consulting Co.

Monday, January 30

7:30 AM

Legislative Breakfast
at the Black Forest Cafe

Wednesday, February 1

6:30 PM

Regular Meeting
at Paradigm Consulting Co.

Thursday, February 16

6:30 PM

Regular Meeting
at Paradigm Consulting Co.

Monday, February 27

7:30 AM

Legislative Breakfast
at the Black Forest Cafe

JOIN THE BBA !!!

The BBA is a non-profit, unincorporated association of professional and business people dedicated to improving the commercial, aesthetic, civic and environmental aspects of the town of Bethel. We want YOU to join the BBA. Come to our meetings and see what we are all about. You may write us at: **BBA, PO Box 342, Bethel, VT 05032,** or call the membership chairperson Geneva Gaiko at 234-9876.

PREPARING FOR THE LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

It's particularly easy to bone up for a legislative breakfast if you're on the internet. Go to: www.leg.state.vt.us. Then click on the third item down, specifically on the words "Legislation Information Database." About 3/4 of the way down under "Reports" click "Pending Bills." Scroll down the whole list of House and Senate bills. Click on any bill that interests you. Then at the very bottom of the page you can click onto the text. Try it!!!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!!!

BETHEL HOME AND GARDEN SHOW

Saturday, March 11, all day long
at the Bethel Schools

BBA MIXER: SPAULDING PRESS

Thursday, March 16, 6:30 PM

BBA ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, April 5, 6:30 PM

(Details in forthcoming Newsletters)

Check it Out!!! www.bethelvermont.com

TAXES!! TAXES!! TAXES

Property taxes might not be as bad this year for Bethel as some people predicted. The selectboard's proposed budget for the coming 18 months will require about a two to two-and-a-half cent jump from last year's \$0.73 per \$100 of property valuation. This is not so bad, especially since the 2004 rate was \$0.75. In the face of increasing costs, a straight-line budget can't be maintained forever, much less a declining budget.

The school property tax, however, remains controversial. Last year, voter dissatisfaction with the perennially increasing residential school tax rate manifested itself in a rebellion of sorts, requiring three tries before a budget was passed. Even then the passage was narrow (106 to 100) despite the lowering of the estimated tax impact from an original \$2.40, to \$2.22, to \$2.16 per \$100 of property tax valuation. Later, state recalculations lowered the 2005 rate further to \$2.13, which was still over the previous year's \$2.09. This year, school expenses were expected to rise because of a contractual 4% increase in salaries, a 9% increase in health insurance, and other increases in fixed costs. However, the school board ordered a \$300,000 cut in expenditures, which will reduce the budget to \$143,000 below that of last year, and will require an elimination of over six teaching or counseling positions at the school.

It is too early to determine the tax impact of the budget cuts, in view of the complicated formulas and certain not-yet-determined input factors, such as adjusted school population size, state revenues and state penalties for excessive per-pupil spending. One of the perennial wild cards is the so-called common level of appraisal, which measures the relationship between the last town-wide property appraisal in 1995, and current property values as determined by statistical analysis. In a rising real estate market, any property tax must be adjusted upward to reflect the growth of local property values, and in Bethel these have risen at twice the normal rate this past year than in previous years.

Using projections gleaned by a consulting study that the supervisory union commissioned late last year, and after plugging in the reduced budget figures and the increases in local real estate values, a residential tax rate of \$2.21 per \$100 of property valuation might be possible (about 3.8% over last year). The commercial tax rate (and rate for rental homes and second homes), is also affected by real estate values but not by local school spending. It will probably be \$2.01 per \$100 of valuation this year.

However, an element of tax relief is in the air, in that the voters will have an opportunity to vote at town meeting for a fiscal year rather than calendar year billing cycle this year for school taxes. If passed, it will mean that instead of paying the full 2006 tax bill this year, voters can pay half of it in 2006 in two installments (August and November) this year, and the other half in two installments (February and May) in 2007, which means in effect a one-time calendar year slash of 50% in school taxes for 2006.

Taxes are too important to leave to a few people to decide. It is important that as many people as possible take the time to come to the town and school district meetings on March 7.

BETHEL PLANNING SURVEY

Bethel voters and property owners will soon receive in the mail a survey that the Bethel planning commission created to help finalize an updated draft Bethel town plan. The survey will also appear on the Bethel website.

The survey will include a stamped return envelope. It will contain "yes or no" questions on such matters as the focus of commercial development, location of town offices, extension of town infrastructure, zoning permits, limits and preferences to growth, town policy on roads, telecommunication towers, and use of the town hall building. Each question also allows space for the respondents to submit individual comments. In addition, there is a grid where the respondents can check off their preferences ("very important", "somewhat important" and "not important") regarding a number of issues facing the town, ranging from aesthetics, atmospheric, character, social services, schools, and environmental quality.

The planning commissioners attach considerable importance to the survey and have emphasized their hope for a significant response. One of their guiding principles, strongly supported by the Bethel selectboard, is to come up with language that is very specific to the needs and desires of the Bethel citizenry, and that will avoid the generalized planning language that has characterized previous Bethel town plans and also the plans of some other towns. The draft sections produced so far, on such topics as town history, population, economy, energy, land use, transportation, public utilities and facilities, natural, historic, and scenic resources, are significantly shorter than in the plan currently in place.

The Bethel town plan does not have the direct force of law, but will be a statement of the town's philosophy and will form the basis of town zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations. As a statement of public policy, a town plan is often consulted by quasi-judicial commissions and courts of law to help reach decisions in disputes arising from such matters as environmental regulations and licensing. The BBA urges all recipients to fill out and submit the survey.

TOWN FACILITY HONORED

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has selected the Bethel's wastewater treatment facility for the agency's Regional Operations and Maintenance Excellence Award in the Most Improved Plant Category for 2005.

The credit goes fully to plant manager Tim Mills. Town management has noted that Mills has undertaken numerous innovations in reviewing and monitoring the plant's processes, has been successful in early detection of potential problems, and been extremely proactive in his job.

The selectboard agreed unanimously to fund Mills' travel to Boston on January 25 to receive the plant's award.

Congratulations from the BBA, Tim!! Good Job!!

BOOSTERS WILL PRODUCE NEW BETHEL PHONE BOOK

The BBA has been asked to coordinate local business support for a new edition of the Bethel Telephone Directory. The appeal came at the BBA's January 4 meeting from Lisa Hill, president of the Whitcomb Boosters (Whitcomb High School's parent association), who visited the BBA at the invitation of Nick Nikolaidis.

The directory has come out every couple of years, usually under the auspices of local non-profit groups for fundraising purposes. Most recently, it was published by the Teen Scene, and before then by Bethel Day Care. The Boosters have now inherited the project, and they will be contacting various businesses that advertised in the previous telephone book to solicit new commitments for the forthcoming edition. New businesses in the area will be contacted as well. Hill expects the book to come out before Whitcomb graduation in June.

The BBA encourages its members to support this worthwhile and useful project.

POLICE AUTHORITY IN BETHEL

Bethel's selectmen decided last month to authorize town constable Jim Bennett to exercise certain law enforcement authority in such matters as traffic stops and ticketing, after he completes the requisite training that would legally allow him to exercise the police powers that the town authorizes.

Last spring the selectboard appointed Bennett as constable but limited his law enforcement authority to animal-control matters and to events carried out by the Bethel schools. His other duties, which do not carry law enforcement powers, are serving civil or criminal processes, destruction of animals and killing of injured deer in accordance with certain provisions of Vermont law, assisting the health officer, serving as district court officer, and removing disorderly people from town meetings.

BBA member Neal Fox, who is also chair of the selectboard, noted that the town appears somewhat divided as to how much law enforcement service the town of Bethel itself should administer, but that he himself supports increased responsibilities for Bennett commensurate with increased training.



BETHEL'S OLD FREIGHT STATION; Date: Yesteryear