

BBA OFFICERS

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

BBA NEWS

Apr. 2005

Bethel Business Association

BBA ANNUAL MEETING BIG SUCCESS!!!

BBA Members had a grand time at the BBA Annual Meeting on April 6. talking about the future of the town, listening to the governor, and honoring Bethel's Iraq veterans.

Nick Nikolaidis, the BBA president, started the ball rolling by reviewing the BBA's main activities in 2004. Among these were the creation of a website for the town of Bethel (www.bethelvermont.com) that provides a public forum for news, events and information pertaining to the town. He also mentioned the resumption of a monthly BBA newsletter and the institution of "business mixers" open to the public, hosted by BBA member firms, that give an opportunity to learn about the companies in our community. Nikolaidis then described some of the BBA's public service projects, such as a raffle of a Vermont Castings gas grill that yielded a \$1,000 donation for refurbishing crumbling stone masonry around the downtown parking lot.



The BBA will not be sitting back on its haunches this coming year. Nikolaidis pledged that the organization will work to attempt to fill the empty storefronts in downtown business buildings, initiate a Main Street beautification project, and install an information kiosk in the village.

Governor Douglas, an old friend of the BBA who has attended BBA meetings in the past, was the guest of honor. He greeted old friends and well wishers in the room, and spoke briefly to the gathering about a number of topics.

Noting that the legislature is from a different party than his own, Douglas expressed hope that they could find common ground to generate progress. He said he was generally satisfied with the budget, which he said was "in the ballpark," although it contained a number of specific items he didn't like. Among these were cutbacks in the fit-and-healthy kids programs, in substance abuse programs and in the state police budget. Regarding the latter, the governor noted that the police had lost some federal funding for law enforcement, which he had wanted to replace with state funding. He also said he had hoped for additional funds for much needed cleaning of state waterways.

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COMING EVENTS

Monday, April 18

7:00 PM

History Talk (Carroll Ketchum) with Rotary Club and the Bethel Historical Society at the White Church

Wednesday, April 20

6:30 PM

Regular Meeting at the Black Forest Cafe

Monday, April 25

7:30 AM

Legislative Breakfast at the Black Forest Cafe

Wednesday, May 4

6:30 PM

Regular Meeting at the Black Forest Cafe

Thursday, May 19

6:30 PM

Regular Meeting 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.

CHECK IT OUT!!

BBA WEB SITE: www.bethelvermont.com

BETHEL SHOCKER: SCHOOL TAX RATE \$2.41 THIS YEAR

Total Educational and Municipal Property Tax Projected at \$3.15

It emerged from schoolboard meetings held in late March that the educational property tax rate for residential property in Bethel will jump this year to \$2.41 per \$100 of property value, up 15% from \$2.09 last year.

Although last year saw a decline in the educational property tax rate, other recent years have also seen double-digit increases, such as 13.6% in 2002 and 10% in 2003. On average, Bethel's rate has grown 6.5% a year over these past six years. By comparison, Bethel's municipal property tax rate (projected at \$0.74 this year) has grown on the average by 3.3% a year over the same period.

But the proposed 2005 budget wasn't as bad. The board proposed expenditures of \$4,721,527 for voter consideration at the May 10 annual school district meeting. The new budget is 4.98% (or \$223,784) greater than last year's, but school board chair Greg Hughes said that the increase is in line with that of many other school districts this year.

The reason the tax increase is out of sync with the budget increase lies primarily in Bethel's cost-per-student, which is \$12,643, or 81.3 % over the state grant of \$6,975. Furthermore, once a school district exceeds 135% of the state average, the state imposes a penalty by increasing the cost-per-student for tax computational purposes. Accordingly, when Bethel's cost-per-student is used to compute taxes, it must use the figure of \$13,798, the eighth highest in the state for the 2005 fiscal year. Since that is 97.7 % over the state grant, the basic state tax rate of \$1.02 must be raised by that percentage to \$2.02. But since the state estimates that the grand list appraisal of Bethel real estate is only 83.8% of its true market value, the tax must be raised commensurately to about \$2.41 per 100 of valuation.

The educational tax rate, combined with the projected municipal tax rate of \$0.74 (which is down one cent from last year), gives Bethel a combined property tax rate of \$3.15 for residential property, one of the very highest rates in the state. Rental and commercial property are not affected by local educational spending, so their total combined tax rate in Bethel will be only \$2.54 (\$1.80 for education and \$0.74 for municipal).

The only relief currently available for Bethel residential property owners is that households with an income of less than \$75,000 a year will have their tax on their house and first two acres capped at 3.66% of that income this year. According to published demographics, about 85% of Bethel residences have a household income of less than \$75,000.

LAND TRUST TO GO AHEAD WITH KELLOGG RIGHTS ACQUISITION

Town manager Dell Cloud told the selectboard March 28 that Vermont secretary of agriculture Stephen Kerr had informed the town office that, after talking with the governor, the Vermont Land Trust was going ahead with the acquisition of the conservation rights to the Kellogg property on Route 12.

Earlier, the selectmen had expressed misgivings about the project, noting that Land Trust activities take developable land out of circulation, that there is no declared limit to land trust acquisitions, and that state funding behind the land trust often puts the state at odds with local interests. Selectboard chair Neal Fox also expressed his discomfort with the process when he learned that the Land Trust had made its decision before it came to hear the town's concerns. Bethel's concern on this score was referred to the governor.

Secretary Kerr told Cloud that despite the decision to go ahead in this case, he and Land Trust president Darby Bradley were aware that in the future they should take a different approach when consulting the towns involved.

BETHEL REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE (BRI)

On Wednesday evening, April 6, immediately after the close of the Bethel Business Association's annual meeting, almost twenty members of various Bethel committees, as well as interested residents, gathered to discuss the future of their town.

Bethel residents Peter Nikolaidis and Kirk White, who called the meeting, are denominating it the "Bethel Revitalization Initiative." It stems from their exchange of letters in the The Herald, followed by a discussion between them at a recent BBA meeting when they both agreed on the need to revitalize the many dormant committees that were established in the town over the years and have never been discontinued.



Whither Bethel? Citizens of The BRI

At the April 6 meeting, White suggested that their initiative should aim to encourage interaction, cooperation, and communication among the town's various organizations, businesses, clubs, individuals, and town government. Among the goals of such cooperation, White said would be 1) to identify the town's business, social, aesthetic, and cultural assets, 2) to assist the Town Planning Commission to define the community's vision and goals for the future, 3) to assist in implementing the goals and vision of the town plan, and 4) promote the growth and development of Bethel's business community, social organizations and activities, its cultural climate and aesthetic assets in a mutually inclusive and beneficial manner.

Those gathered seemed to agree with Davis Dimock, a member of the town's planning commission, on the need to come up with clearly delineated tasks. Ideas flowed freely, ranging from such projects as flowerbeds along Main Street, to ideas for the restoration of the town hall, to publicity regarding the availability of commercial real estate in the village, and other suggestions. All agreed that the new Bethel website will be an excellent clearinghouse for information.

At the end it was decided that all interested parties would convene regularly at the first of the BBA's two monthly meetings (the first Wednesday of the month) to further flesh out the Bethel Revitalization Initiative.

BBA LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST INCLUDED BRIDGE AND ROADS

At the Bethel Business Association's legislative breakfast on Monday, March 28, Windsor County senator Peter Welch said he intends to discuss with senator Richard Mazza the question of funding Bethel's new Church Street bridge. Mazza is chair of the senate transportation committee and Welch is vice-chair. Bethel selectmen intend to visit the senate committee on this issue.

Earlier in the month Bethel legislative representative Sandy Haas, who was also at the legislative breakfast, presented the town's case to the house transportation committee for a reduction of the town's portion of the costs for the new Church Street bridge. Haas gave the house committee various reasons why Bethel's contribution should be lower than the 10% (\$730,000) usually required. Any contribution over \$200,000 would be a real hardship for the town, she said.

At the breakfast, Haas discussed her sponsorship of an "ancient roads" bill that would discontinue all roads not listed on the state highway map, which are primarily class 4 roads. The Bethel selectboard opposes the bill. Haas recognizes that the bill will need extensive revisions, and noted that its purpose was to initiate a discussion of the problem. After the breakfast she visited the town office with selectman Eric Benson to inspect a map of the class 4 roads in Bethel and gauge the impact of her bill.

ANNUAL MEETING *(Continued from Front Page)*

Douglas also touched on his veto of a state retirement funds bill that would have combined the assets of the state teachers retirement system, the state employees retirement system, and the municipal employees retirement system. The governor noted that the members of the new investment committee for the combined fund would not be chosen by all the trustees of the existing funds, and might therefore not “properly safeguard” the legitimate interests of everyone.

The governor also announced to the gathering that the budget figures were just in for the recent quarter, and showed a surplus which, he said regretfully, would probably not lead to a tax cut in view of the shortfall in Medicaid funding. Douglas noted that Vermont has one of the oldest populations in the country, and that 84% of Medicaid expenditures is for chronic diseases. He would like to see a broader base for Medicaid funding. “If everyone is part of the solution we can make progress,” he said. Douglas added that the current proposals for health care reform in the legislature would result in a substantial increase in the income tax, and also include a payroll tax. Furthermore, for the first two years regular insurance premiums would continue on top of that.

A high point of the meeting was the presentation by governor Douglas and president Nikolaidis of certificates to Bethelites who are either in Iraq, going to Iraq, or have served in Iraq. Three of the honorees have already served in Iraq: Jim Bennett, a sergeant with the Army National Guard, Brian Ellstein a senior airman with the Air National Guard, and Rick Rhoades with the U.S. Army. Rhoades earned the Army Commendation with Valor Award for extraordinary achievement during combat operations. Ellstein got the Air Force commendation medal for his operation of an aircraft arresting system that allowed the recovery of a damaged F-16 aircraft. Bennett was involved in convoy security operations over dangerous territory.

Also honored were Brian Farnsworth, a specialist with the Army National guard, who will be going to Iraq shortly, and Kristine Bird, a U.S. Army sergeant who is in Kuwait at the moment supporting Iraq military operations.

As the last order of business at the annual meeting, the BBA unanimously reelected Nikolaidis as president, Bev Washburn as Vice President, Heidi Nikolaidis as secretary, and Carroll Ketchum as treasurer, in anticipation of another active year in the service of our town.



Sergeant Rhoades, Senior Airman Ellstein, Governor Douglas, Sergeant Bennett