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Mother Christine Gatchell hugs a friend at a Sunday candlelight vigil at Devereux Beach in memory of Savannah Gatchell, 13-year-old Marblehead girl who was killed in an Aug. 19 car crash.

Candlelight vigil for Marblehead teen

By Michael McHugh
» Staff Writer

MARBLEHEAD — At least 200 people gathered at Devereux Beach on Sunday night for a candlelight vigil honoring the life of 13-year-old Savannah Gatchell of Marblehead.

Marblehead students, parents, teachers, and community members came together in memory of Gatchell, an eighth-grade Marblehead Veterans Middle School student who was killed in a crash last week. The accident was in the early morning of Tuesday, Aug.

19 in the area of 352 Atlantic Avenue.

“As we begin the school year, we will continue to support one another with compassion and care,” Marblehead School Committee Chair Al Williams said in a prepared statement.

“Our strength as a community comes from how we stand together during challenging times, and we are committed to ensuring that no student or family feels alone in their grief.”

At Sunday night’s vigil, students, families, and school

Overcome with emotion at a candlelight vigil at Devereux Beach in memory of Savannah Gatchell, 13-year-old Marblehead girl who was killed in car crash on Aug. 19.

SEE VIGIL, PAGE 2

Staff: Retirement accounts used

By Caroline Enos
» Staff Writer

WENHAM — Former employees of the Academy at Penguin Hall say the school's president owes staff more than \$250,000 after taking money from their retirement accounts and allowing their checks to routinely bounce ahead of the school's sudden closure in June.

The former teachers told The Salem News that Penguin Hall President Molly Martins, also a member of the board of trustees, had been taking funds out of the accounts or not putting in their contractually promised match for months, and at times for years, before the school shut down.

Penguin Hall announced its closure on June 13 after filing for bankruptcy and losing its historic 48-acre estate at 36 Essex St. as a result of unpaid federal taxes. That property is scheduled to be auctioned off in September.

The academy opened in 2016 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, and had a “negative fund balance” of \$6.45 million for fiscal 2023, according to the school's latest publicly available IRS tax filings.

It was the last all-girls private school serving grades nine to 12 on the North Shore.

Missing money isn't all staff members they are dealing with. The school's health insurance was terminated March 31 because it failed to pay required premiums, according to an email sent to Penguin Hall staff by the insurance company in early June.

Martins did not notify staff of this change until June 16, after employees pressed her for the status of their health insurance, and

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The administrative building of the Academy at Penguin Hall at 36 Essex St. in Wenham.

CAROLINE ENOS/Staff photo

Bids sought for affordable housing development

Proposed 150-unit SHA project
By Michael McHugh
» Staff Writer

SALEM — The Salem Housing Authority is seeking bids to develop several acres of First Street land into 150 apartments for new affordable housing.

The Housing Authority recently released a Request for Proposals to select a developer to design, construct, operate and manage the project, as well as a commercial entity to potentially operate a community or daycare center on 8.3 acres at

17-27 First St. The plan is for affordable rental units at a range of incomes.

The vacant land is adjacent to an existing affordable housing development — Farrell Court — that's owned by the Housing Authority and consists of 12 units of affordable family housing. The site has frontage on First Street, is bound by residential properties to the north and southwest, and city-owned conservation land to the southwest, southeast, and northeast.

One of the primary factors that influenced the city's decision to advertise the site to interested developers was the need to increase

the city's affordable housing stock, according to Housing Authority Executive Director Cathy Hoog.

She noted that Gov. Maura Healey's administration is strongly focused on supporting the concept of utilizing free or vacant public land, such as this, to increase affordable housing opportunities throughout the state.

The Housing Authority identified the land as buildable through various feasibility studies funded through a grant from the MassHousing Partnership.

The land was acquired by the city by eminent domain in 1973 using state funds to

develop state-aided Chapter 705 family housing on site. The Housing Authority voted during its June 11 board meeting to make the land available for disposition to create affordable housing as the land was considered surplus.

The Housing Authority intends to enter into a land disposition agreement and a 99-year ground lease with the selected developer with affordability restrictions.

All the units will be required to be deed-restricted to households earning no more than 100% of the area median income, or

SEE BIDS, PAGE 2

State dangles new tax credits for housing projects

By Christian M. Wade
» Statehouse Reporter

BOSTON — The Healey administration is offering new tax credits for real estate developers to convert vacant commercial properties as part of broader efforts to build more affordable housing in the state.

The state Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities on Thursday rolled out the Commercial Conversion Tax Credit Initiative, a new tax credit to help convert underused commercial buildings into residential and mixed-use housing. At least \$10 million in tax credits will be available in the first round of funding, the agency said.

Healey administration

officials said the new tax breaks are aimed at addressing the housing shortage by revitalizing vacant buildings, creating new housing in existing structures, and bringing people back to main streets and downtowns.

“This is a targeted credit focused on jump-starting commercial conversion to residential use,” Housing Secretary Ed Augustus said. “A little help for these projects can have a big impact in creating the housing we need and revitalizing downtowns.”

Under the new program, the state agency will award up to \$10 million to qualifying applicants, with average credits worth \$2.5 million

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