

VERMONT EDUCATION

Redistricting plan causes concern



Rep. Rebecca Holcombe, D-Norwich, listens to a presentation during a meeting of the school district redistricting task force in Winooski, Vt., last Tuesday.

GLENN RUSSELL / VTDigger photographs



Jennifer Botzjorns makes a presentation during a school district redistricting task force meeting in Winooski.

Choice vexes task force

By COREY McDONALD
VtDigger

Protect Vermont's school choice system. That was the loud and clear message to the Vermont school redistricting task force during its Oct. 22 public forum at Rutland High School.

But some task force members see putting guardrails around school choice as one way to reduce costs for public education across the state.

At the same forum in Rutland, task force

SEE TASK FORCE A5

Mountain Views leaders lodge complaints about proposed map

By CLARE SHANAHAN
Valley News Staff Writer

WOODSTOCK — A regional high school map, one of three drafts under consideration by a statewide redistricting task force, has inspired concern from members of the Mountain Views Supervisory Union board.

The map in question would create districts centered on regional comprehensive high schools based primarily on drive time. Mountain Views Board Chairwoman Keri Bristow called it disturbing in a Monday night meeting held in the Woodstock middle high school's library and via Zoom.

The map "caused quite the fear" for MVSU board members because "our district was completely blown up," she said.

The proposal would divide MVSU among four new governance regions, sending students to comprehensive high schools in neighboring districts. Such schools are "large enough to offer a wide array of courses, electives, and co-curricular activities" and are often near career and technical centers.

Currently, MVSU includes the member towns of Barnard, Bridgewater, Pomfret, Woodstock and Killington Vt., Pittsfield, Vt., Plymouth, Vt. and Reading, Vt.

Under the comprehensive high school plan, Woodstock and Pomfret students would end up at Hartford High, while

Barnard students would be funneled into Randolph High and Bridgewater students would attend Rutland High.

"This model dismantles the MVSU current configuration, and while there is no statement in this presentation regarding closing schools, it is difficult to see where (Woodstock Union High School and Middle School) would be maintained," MVSU Superintendent Sherry Sousa wrote in a letter to families last week.

"How do you take apart one of the most successful Public Education programs in the State of Vermont in order to comply with a law that few citizens had the opportunity to weigh in on?" Sousa wrote in the letter.

After the map's release, the Mountain Views Supervisory Union, or MVSU, invited state Rep. Rebecca Holcombe, D-Norwich, who sits on the Vermont School Redistricting Task Force, to its meeting Monday night.

She sought to reassure those gathered at the district offices. The regional high school map is "not moving forward as is," Holcombe said Monday, and was more of a "thought exercise" than a viable map. In general, she said the maps will be flexible guidelines.

Holcombe said the two other maps presented by task force members, one that would create 13 districts around existing

SEE MAP A5

LEBANON

Manager pitches \$78M budget

As proposed, spending would drive up taxes 4%

By CLARE SHANAHAN
Valley News Staff Writer

LEBANON — The city manager has proposed a total municipal budget of \$78 million for next year.

The bottom line is almost \$16 million less than this year's budget largely due to cuts to the capital improvements fund.

The spending plan, released by new City Manager Andrew Hosmer on Halloween, includes \$46.5 million to be raised by property taxes.

In 2025, the city raised \$44.3 million through property taxes.

The remaining revenues will come from other sources such as fees for solid waste, water, wastewater and airport use, payment agreements with Dartmouth Health and other companies, and meals and rooms taxes.

The 2026 budget is expected to result in a roughly 4% increase to the municipal portion of property tax bills.

Because of a recent citywide revaluation, the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration has not set the 2025 tax rate. Tax bills with the new rate are expected to be mailed in early December, according to a Tuesday alert from the city.

The municipal portion of the 2024 tax rate, which was used to calculate the first tax bill of the year this spring, was \$9.66 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Last year's city budget process in Lebanon drew an unusual amount of public attention when a proposed 11.9% municipal tax rate increase caused sticker shock for many residents.

Then-City Manager Shaun Mulholland also projected double-digit tax rate increases for several years in a row.

Last year's increase was attributable to last minute changes to the city insurance policy, debt repayment for major projects and reduced use of the city's unassigned fund balance to offset tax rates.

The City Council ultimately approved a budget with a more typical 7.8% municipal tax increase after cutting items across the board including the cost of the energy and facilities manager position, a vacant position at the library, paving and infrastructure spending and fireworks.

The board also transferred \$300,000 in revenues from the downtown tax incremental financing district.

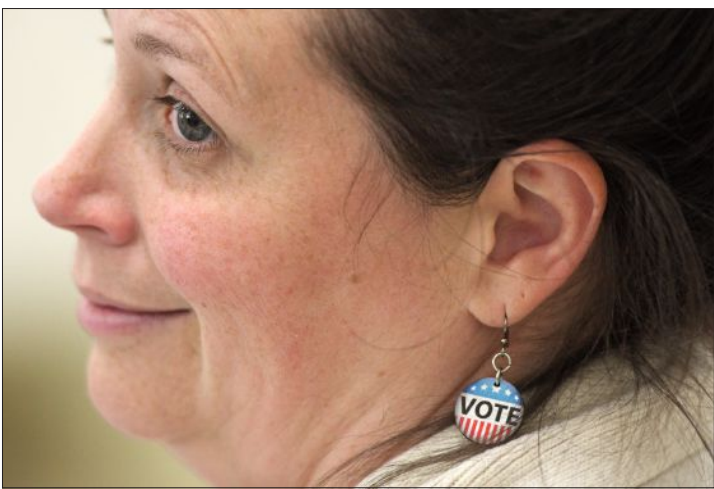
The City Council and city staff worked

SEE BUDGET A4

LOCAL & REGIONAL ELECTION DAY 2025

Ward Three Clerk Elyse Crossman chats with a voter while monitoring the voting machine at Disnard Elementary School in Claremont on Tuesday. It was the first time new voting machines and identification scanners by VotingWorks were used by the city. See results online and in Thursday's print edition.

JAMES M. PATTERSON / Valley News



BUSINESS

Drive-thru opens location in Lebanon

Chain also in Newport

By MARION UMPLEBY
Valley News Staff Writer

LEBANON — Regional beverage chain Aroma Joe's opened a drive-thru

location on the corner of Old Etna Road and Route 120 earlier this week.

News of the chain's arrival has created a buzz at Lebanon High School, said LHS junior Claire Kelly, who

SEE DRIVE-THRU A4

INSIDE



SPORTS

FAST START

The Dartmouth men's hockey won their first two games - on the road against Stonehill, 5-2, then a 6-1 rout of Yale in Thompsons Arena. **Page B1**

WORLD & NATION

DICK CHENEY DIES

Dick Cheney, the hard-charging conservative who became one of the most powerful and polarizing vice presidents in U.S. history and a leading advocate for the invasion of Iraq, has died at 84. **Page A8**



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