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BUSINESS

Time for 'a new start'



JAMES M. PATTERSON / Valley News photographs

Brenda Cohen, 78, of Tunbridge, adds a bucket to the 30-yard dumpster she filled with the help of friends and family as they cleaned out RB's Deli over a ten-day period in South Royalton. Cohen, who owns the building, has a buyer for the business who hopes to reopen in April.

Owner prepares South Royalton deli for its next phase

By MARION UMPLEBY
Valley News Staff Writer

SOUTH ROYALTON — To the unknowing passerby walking down Chelsea Street last week, RB's Delicatessen may have looked like a business on its way out of town.

A large dumpster outside the store was filled to the brim with garbage and discarded odds and ends, while inside, Brenda Cohen, the building's owner and RB's original founder, was busy cleaning out the deli with the help of a handful of friends.

"This was overwhelming. There was no way we were going to let (Cohen) tackle it on her own," Mike Barnaby, a Tunbridge resident who's known Cohen since he was a kid, said while using a razor blade to scrape a Monster Energy decal off a store window.

But in spite of appearances, RB's isn't going anywhere. It is, however, getting a new owner. Daisey

SEE DELI A8



Carrie Russo, of South Royalton, right, talks with her son Logyn Cossette, 18, middle, and Jan Ledgard, of Levittown, Penn., as they clean out the deli.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Ayotte stands behind new zoning laws

Other bills proposed to address housing crisis

By ETHAN DEWITT
New Hampshire Bulletin

It has been months since Gov. Kelly Ayotte signed a suite of bills intended to help housing construction, but Matt Mayberry says he's already seeing results.

Mayberry, the outgoing president of the New Hampshire Home Builders Association, said Wednesday a slight uptick in the

number of new listings and homes sold in the past month suggests some of those reforms — like a bill creating a 90-day expedited state permitting process for large developers — are working.

"Housing inventory has gone up in New Hampshire, a little bit, and prices have come down a little," he said.

But despite the new laws, many of which prohibit cities and towns from zoning actions that might block new housing, the state's housing affordability cri-

sis continues. And the debate over how to alleviate it is far from settled.

In Concord this week, lawmakers in both parties have sparred over weighty, fundamental questions around who should dictate the pace of housing construction and whether limits should exist over local control.

On one side are those who say the state stepped too far into an arena that should be the purview of communities. On the other are those who think the state is holding back and should play a bigger

role in balancing the housing market.

Sailing through the middle of that divide is Ayotte, who has hailed the top-down deregulatory approach of last year's anti-zoning bills. With those now law, the state should sit back and watch how the laws that do exist affect the market, Ayotte argued.

"I think it's very important that we make sure that this legislation that was passed, that we're following up and seeing how it's working

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TOWN MEETING 2026

Hartford school budget climbs

Health insurance, salaries, facilities push up costs

By CLARE SHANAHAN
Valley News Staff Writer

HARTFORD — Voters will be asked to approve a \$58.7 million school budget for the next academic year.

The overall expenditure budget that will come to voters in March is up \$3.6 million, or 6.5%, over the current year, while revenues are also projected to increase by about \$1 million.

The budget is estimated to increase the homestead tax rate in Hartford by 10.6%, District Finance Administrator Jacob Vezina reported to the School Board last week. This would be a \$533.60 increase on a \$400,000 home.

The board voted unanimously to approve the proposed budget last Wednesday.

Hartford taxpayers are likely already facing high property taxes next year after the first town-wide reappraisal since 2017 brought property values up 84% on average this summer.

For the most part, the school district budget contains no major increases in staffing or programs over the current year, Superintendent Caty Sutton told the School Board at a budget meeting Jan. 7.

The Hartford School District's seven schools provide a "very robust experience" for its more than 1,300 students in terms of extracurricular activities and opportunities that are available to them, Sutton said. The proposed budget allows the district to "continue to offer what we are currently offering."

Many of the budget drivers are beyond the district's control, Vezina reported at the same meeting. For example, district health insurance costs are up 7.4% and contracted services are up 3.1%.

Another cost driver is work that is mandated but not funded by the state, Vezina and others said. For example, the budget has to account for keeping up with testing for PCBs and lead contamination, which the state requires but does not pay for. The Hartford School District has had PCB contamination issues in recent years which

SEE HARTFORD A8

BRADFORD, VT.

Town hires new fire chief

Move comes following turnover in the department

By SOFIA LANGLOIS
Valley News Staff Writer

BRADFORD, Vt. — The Selectboard has appointed a new fire chief after a period of turmoil within the department.

Nate Brooks, who has been

with the Bradford Fire Department for seven years, began a three-year term as chief on Jan. 1 after being recommended by other firefighters.

During his time with the department, Brooks has held every other position, including captain, assistant chief and deputy chief, he said. He previously served 11 years of service at the Woodsville and Newbury

Village fire departments.

The Selectboard started overseeing the fire department, which was previously a self-governed nonprofit, in the spring of 2025. The intention behind this change was to bring the department up to National Fire Association standards regarding training mandates and recordkeep-

SEE BRADFORD A8



JAMES M. PATTERSON / Valley News
Nate Brooks, center, of the Bradford Fire Department, talks with firefighters at a fire scene last month.

INSIDE



SPORTS

BOYS BASKETBALL

Two of the top five teams in NHIAA Division II boys basketball played against one another, with Hollis-Brookline beating the Bears. **Page B1**

WORLD & NATION

VOTERS STARTING TO LINE UP AGAINST ICE

Multiple polls show Americans find enforcement body abusive of civil rights, particularly in shooting of Renee Good **Page A5**



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