

EDUCATION

Oxbow voters approve budget

Tuesday's vote followed rejection at annual meeting in April

By ALEX HANSON
Valley News Staff Writer

BRADFORD, Vt. — Voters in the Oxbow Unified Union School District approved a budget and decided at a meeting Tuesday night to conduct future annual meeting votes on budgets and officers by Australian ballot.

The budget passed by a count of 205-141 after it was amended to restore \$300,000 that the School Board had cut in an effort to win budget approval. It goes into effect July 1.

Voters at the annual meeting on April 28 rejected the budget, 145-119. "I think they presented a really responsible budget," Derek Williams, who moved to restore the original budget amount of \$23.3 million, said in an interview. The school system, which includes Bradford and Newbury elementary schools, Oxbow High School and Riverbend Career and Technical Center, doesn't offer as many opportunities for his two children as it did for him, said Williams, a Newbury resident. The successful vote in the high school gym Tuesday evening means the district will avoid the sort of prolonged battle over funding that it faced in 2020, when the district was the last in the state to approve a budget. Voters approved school spending in mid-January 2021 for the 2020-21 school year.

But it also means that residents of the district's two towns, Bradford and Newbury (except the village of Wells River, which is part of Blue Mountain Union School District) will see property tax rate increases of 15.5% and 18.6%, respectively. (Resident households that earn less than \$115,000 a year pay taxes on their homesteads based on a percentage of their income, rather than on their property value and rate.)

The property tax increase is only partially attributable to higher spending. The budget is 8.3% higher than the current year's, driven mainly by higher wages under new faculty and staff contracts and higher special education costs.

But the district also has been hit by a

SEE OXBOW A5

CHELSEA

Two die in overnight fire



JAMES M. PATTERSON / Valley News

Vermont State Police Det. Mengbei Wang, middle, looks on as staff from Boardway and Cilley Funeral Home prepare to remove the remains of two people who died in a house fire in Chelsea from the scene on Wednesday.

Front of building was fully involved early Wednesday when firefighters arrived

By CLARE SHANAHAN
Valley News Staff Writer

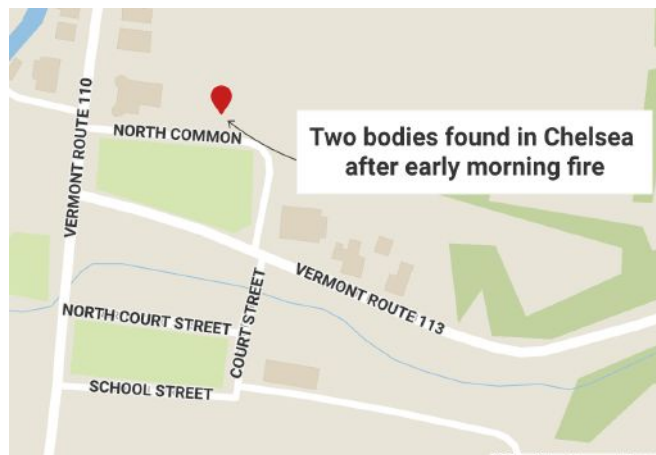
CHELSEA — Two people are dead after a fire in Chelsea early Wednesday morning, Vermont State Police reported.

Firefighters from multiple towns including Chelsea and Tunbridge responded to a fire at a single-family home on North Common in Chelsea around 3:15 a.m. Wednesday and extinguished the blaze in about three and a half hours, according to a news release from State Police. Investigators found the re-

mains of two people in the wreckage of the home at 7 North Common. The bodies will be brought to the Vermont Chief Medical Examiner's Office in Burlington for autopsies to determine their identities and cause and manner of death.

The Vermont State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigations, Troop B East is investigating the deaths while the Vermont Department of Public Safety Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit is looking into the cause of the fire.

SEE CHELSEA A5



Two bodies found in Chelsea after early morning fire

BRADFORD, VT.

Police still probing 2025 murder

Parts of victim's body yet to be found

By SOFIA LANGLOIS
Valley News Staff Writer

BRADFORD, Vt. — Earlier this month, Vermont State Police searched a South Main Street property that a 43-year-old is believed to have visited in the hours before he was murdered in January 2025.

The death of Corey Crooker, who grew up in Nashua, was initially treated as a missing persons case when his mother, Diane Cobb,

and other family members contacted police after about a week without hearing from Crooker.

"I was getting very worried, and I knew that he was around some really bad people," said Cobb. "I never expected what did happen."

Bradford residents James Nickles Jr., 43, and Lisa Akey, 42 remain in jail as they face charges related to Crooker's death and the burning of his body. Nickles ultimately confessed to shooting Crooker in an interview, but claimed it was out of self defense, court records indicate.

The recent state police search of a property Crooker frequented begs the question of whether there's more evidence tucked away in town. State police searched 804 South Main Street in Bradford on June 10, Sgt. David Shaffer of the Bradford Police Department confirmed by email.

Last year, police located parts of Crooker's body at the home on Old Post Road belonging to Nickles and Akey but the entirety of his remains have not been accounted for.

Crooker's murder was "the first one in

SEE BRADFORD A4

GRANTHAM

Police: Man found in pond died by suicide

By SOFIA LANGLOIS
Valley News Staff Writer

GRANTHAM — A death at Eastman Pond last week, which authorities had previously described as "suspicious," has been ruled a suicide.

Grantham Police an-

nounced in a Wednesday news release that the body discovered in the water last Friday belonged to an adult male who took his own life, but no further details, including the manner of death, were made public.

The Grantham Police De-

SEE GRANTHAM A5



CLOSE-UP, B1

SEASON PREVIEW

Veronica Richer, playing Clorinda, one of the stepsisters in Rossini's adaptation of the Cinderella story, reacts dramatically to the suggestion of marrying the servant of the show's prince during a rehearsal. Opera North will offer three performances of La Cenerentola.

JAMES M. PATTERSON
/ Valley News

INSIDE

SPORTS

LEBANON ATHLETE IS HONORED

Lebanon's Oscar Gullede was recently presented with the National Football Foundation's scholar-athlete status and a significant scholarship award.

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WORLD & NATION

TRUMP PRAISED

At the end of this week's G-7 summit, allies praised President Donald Trump for ending the war in Iran.

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