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—For section.....News  
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—Dateline.....North Westminster  
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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Nice work, Rob. Please note that I've fixed a few passive constructions by finding better active verbs. Almost anytime you can avoid any form of the verb "to be" you end up with more vigorous text.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Saving the North Westminster Community House

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Town meeting voters will decide fate of historic structure

####END SUBHED####

3 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

4 This spring, voters in Westminster will be asked once  
5 again to help decide the fate of one of the town's most interesting  
6 public buildings.

7 Article 20 states: "Shall the voters of the Town of  
8 Westminster allow the Selectboard to offer for public sale, the  
9 property known as the North Westminster Community House to  
10 be used exclusively as residential housing?"

11 This exact article was presented to voters at the Annual  
12 Town Meeting in 2025, but resident John Ewald asked that it be  
13 tabled for a year.

14 While there had been discussion for some time about  
15 what to do with the Community House building, this request last  
16 year for permission for the town to sell it to be converted to  
17 residential use “was kind of a surprise,” he said.

18 Ewald and an organized group of citizens — the Friends  
19 of the North Westminster Community House — are hoping voters  
20 say “no” to the article. They’d like to see the nearly 100-year-old  
21 used once again for community events.

22 Ewald, a town lister who lives in Westminster West, is a  
23 leader and spokesman for the group, which has been working  
24 since 2023 to develop a viable plan to keep the building active as  
25 a community center.

26 The group is working with volunteers in the community  
27 to come to the aid of this building that has served the town for so  
28 long. The first priority: bringing the building up to fire and  
29 occupancy codes.

30 For decades, North Westminster, known locally as  
31 Gageville, was an incorporated village within the town of  
32 Westminster. The village population peaked around 1950, with  
33 over 400 residents. With a dwindling population, down to 262 by  
34 the 2020 census, the village dissolved its charter in 2010 and  
35 merged with Westminster.

36 This ended the need for a separate administrative body,  
37 and the Westminster Selectboard took oversight of North  
38 Westminster. In 2012, town officials began discussing what to do  
39 with the building, which needed maintenance and upgrades.

40 Selectboard Chair Craig Allen said the board has made  
41 some needed improvements, including foundation work, a new  
42 metal roof, and in 2017, 13 new windows and pressure-treated  
43 sills.

44 “We’d like to keep the building in the community,” Allen  
45 said, “but we want somebody to do something with it.”

46 To that end, in 2020, then-Town Manager Russell  
47 Hodgkins notified the community that “the Selectboard is  
48 requesting that a committee be formed to investigate the possible  
49 uses for the North Westminster Community House on Route 121.  
50 This Committee will be looking into whether it’s feasible to  
51 renovate this building to a point of social need or the possibility  
52 that the Town lets the building be sold.”

53 He requested that any who were interested, to “please  
54 call the Town Hall and let us know.”

55 Ewald said that not much was done by the town after  
56 that, and he felt that he and other Westminster residents had been  
57 moving in a good direction for preserving the building as a  
58 community center. He said another citizens group he is part of  
59 had done the same thing years ago for a community center in  
60 Westminster West.

61 After Ewald formed the Friends of the North Westminster  
62 Community House group in 2023, members met with the fire  
63 marshall to see what would need to happen to reopen the  
64 building for community use. It had been closed for about a  
65 decade.

66 So when he was surprised with the 2025 Town Meeting  
67 request asking voters to give the town permission to sell the  
68 building, Ewald made the motion to defer the decision. Voters  
69 agreed, and the article will again be considered at Annual Town  
70 Meeting on Saturday, Feb. 28, at Bellows Falls Union High  
71 School.

## 72 **A \$25,000-to-\$30,000**

### 73 **proposition**

74 Ewald said the no public hearing addressed the matter  
75 and that most North Westminster residents were unaware of the  
76 town’s intentions. A group of volunteers was also working with a  
77 state fire marshal to render plans and drawings to get the building  
78 up and running.

79           At the Dec. 9, 2025, Selectboard meeting, Ewald and  
80 group member Brandon Sherwood presented an information  
81 packet from the Friends of the North Westminster Community  
82 House with a plan for the building. They asked for feedback from  
83 the board.

84           Ewald said that reactions were mixed but that overall, he  
85 felt the board was supportive.

86           Allen said he supported the move to keep the building in  
87 the community.

88           “It’s a solid building, and it would give the town another  
89 place to hold meetings,” he said.

90           Allen also noted that it is the only building in  
91 Westminster that is tied in to the Bellows Falls water and sewer  
92 system, which is another positive for the town.

93           Ewald told the board that the initial plan to upgrade the  
94 building would not cost the town any money and that it instead  
95 would rely on donations and volunteers.

96           The fire marshal requires a ramp, an accessible  
97 bathroom, and exit lights, and a stage curtain has been deemed a  
98 potential fire hazard. The plan also calls for closing off the  
99 downstairs area for the time being and installing drywall.

100           Ewald told the board that he estimates it will take  
101 \$25,000 to \$30,000 to bring the building up to occupancy  
102 compliance. He said he felt that local contractors and businesses  
103 would donate time and materials to help with the first phase.

104           Board member Stephen Major said at the meeting that if  
105 an organized plan is presented for the use of the building,  
106 including steps to complete a plan, there could be broader  
107 support for activity in the building.

108           Ewald said that his citizen’s group had contacted the  
109 Preservation Trust of Vermont, “and we met with them at the  
110 Community House.”

111           He said that representatives of the historic preservation  
112 nonprofit advised that “this building is really a gem and one

113 worthy of preservation and continued use,” and they offered  
114 assistance and support.

115 Ewald said that he had talked with people living in the  
116 neighborhood and found that they were “in favor of the  
117 renovation and believe that it is and should continue to be a  
118 valuable resource.”

119 “Open houses were conducted numerous times  
120 throughout the year to give residents an opportunity to view this  
121 beautiful historical structure and review our plans,” he said.

## 122 **School, town used the building**

123 In researching the Community House online, one might  
124 find a false narrative that the building was constructed in 1933.

125 That year, the Bellows Falls Civilian Conservation Corps  
126 (CCC) Camp was created, which despite its name, was located in  
127 North Westminster, about a mile from the Community  
128 House[“How ‘Roosevelt’s Tree Army’ remade Vermont,” News,  
129 *April 3, 2024*]. The newly formed CCC is credited with the  
130 construction of the Community House.

131 But it turns out that is not true.

132 Ewald said town records indicate that the building was  
133 constructed by community members in 1929, four years before  
134 the CCC emerged. There is some evidence, though, that CCC  
135 members helped paint the new structure in 1933.

136 The building sits on a concrete foundation and basement  
137 and includes a full commercial kitchen. The upstairs consists of a  
138 stage and an open area that includes a basketball hoop for  
139 games, with wooden frames protecting the windows.

140 The building remains unheated. Allen said that installing  
141 a heating system is an expensive proposition without the town  
142 knowing how the building will be used.

143 A four-room, eight-grade school operated in North  
144 Westminster not far from the Community House until 1964, and  
145 that school used the building as its auditorium and gymnasium.

146 School plays, Christmas pageants, graduations, and other school  
147 events took place there until the school closed.

148 Over nearly a century the building has also been used  
149 for public meetings, social events, dances, parties, wedding  
150 receptions, private events, and more. For decades, Town Meeting  
151 took place there every three years in a rotation with sites in  
152 Westminster and Westminster West.

153 Sherwood, who lives beside the Community House,  
154 described it as “a perfect place for community activities.”

155 “I’ll do whatever I can to help,” he said. “I’m all about  
156 preservation.”

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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160

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