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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Eight candidates in race for three Rockingham
2 Selectboard seats

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 Candidates forum at library on Saturday, Feb. 21

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 Eight candidates are in a race for three Rockingham
6 Selectboard vacancies, one three-year and two one-year seats,
7 with voting on Tuesday, March 3.
8 Selectboard Chair Peter Golec has decided to retire after
9 serving on the board for 17 years. Board Clerk Elijah Zimmer is
10 not running for another term, while Vice-Chair Bonnie North is
11 seeking re-election.

12 The Rockingham Annual Town and School District
13 meeting will take place at the Town Hall Main Theater in the
14 Bellows Falls Opera House on Saturday, Feb. 28, at 2 p.m. That
15 meeting will address several articles on the town budget.

16 Australian balloting for town offices and school budgets
17 will be held on Tuesday, March 3, from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., at the
18 Masonic Temple, 61 Westminster St.

19 Some voters have expressed concern that so many
20 candidates are running this year because they want to revisit the
21 voter-approved consolidation last year of the three volunteer fire
22 departments — Bellows Falls Village, Saxtons River, and
23 Rockingham — and town emergency services, into the
24 Rockingham Fire and Rescue Department (RFRD).

25 The merger plan, a hot-button issue last year, was the
26 result of a years-long process going back at least to 2023. It was
27 put to a vote at the March 5, 2025, Annual Town Meeting. With a
28 large voter turnout, citizens approved the consolidation by a
29 nearly 2-to-1 margin.

30 A candidates forum will give voters an opportunity to
31 hear from and question the candidates at the Rockingham Free
32 Public Library, 65 Westminster St., on Saturday, Feb. 21, from
33 2:30 to 4 p.m.

34 All candidates for Selectboard have been invited to
35 participate and to answer two questions: “What experience and
36 skills would you bring to the board?” and “What issues do you
37 feel most deserve the Selectboard’s attention?” Library Director
38 Ian Graham will moderate.

39 *The Commons* attempted to contact all the candidates
40 and allow them to answer a few questions about their reasons for
41 running, in their own words, prior to the forum.

42 All the candidates who could be contacted were asked
43 the same questions: What experience do you bring to this
44 position? Why do you feel you are a better choice over the other
45 candidates? Do you feel you can work cooperatively with other
46 board members? What do you feel are the biggest issues facing

47 the town or village? and What issues do you think voters are most
48 concerned about?

49 **Three-year Selectboard seat**

50 William Crowther and Amy Howlett are in a contest for a
51 three-year seat on the town Selectboard.

52 **Amy Howlett:** Howlett has local school and Windham
53 Northeast Supervisory Union board experience and nonprofit
54 board experience with Parks Place. Most recently, she served as a
55 trustee and chair on the Saxtons River Village Trustees.

56 “The give and take of a small group of caring, informed
57 people leads to good decision-making,” Howlett said. “My career
58 as a public librarian and state employee also provided valuable
59 lessons in meeting the public face to face and figuring out what
60 people need to be more effective.

61 “Last but not least, as a Vermont parent I have learned
62 how challenging raising children can be,” she continued. “We do
63 our best to prepare them for the imperfect world they will inherit.
64 Keeping Rockingham safe and affordable, making the town a
65 place people want to move to or stay in, is critical to our future.”

66 Howlett said she is confident that the voters in
67 Rockingham know what they want.

68 “I’ll do my best to listen carefully to the discussion at the
69 Selectboard and make strategic decisions that continue to move
70 Rockingham forward,” she said. “I expect to listen more than I
71 talk initially.”

72 Howlett said that the Selectboard members who are not
73 on the ballot this year, Rick Cowan and John Dunbar, “are strong
74 advocates for the town who have excellent experience and skills.
75 I look forward to learning from them. Rockingham has some big
76 problems; working effectively with current board members and
77 the newly elected is the best way forward.”

78 Howlett said that she feels the issue that overrides all
79 others is the feeling of instability and uncertainty in the country,

80 fueled by polarization, changing prices, and new ways of
81 operating.

82 “We deal with this problem locally by working together
83 transparently and paying attention to issues brought to the select
84 board,” she said. “With veteran members retiring and a new town
85 manager starting this spring, we’ll have plenty to work on.”

86 Howlett said that the voters she’s talked to are concerned
87 about increasing taxes, affordable housing, and the loss of
88 medical services with North Star’s departure.

89 “Some people have expressed fear that fire and rescue
90 will be diminished with the new municipal department. The
91 Selectboard will continue monitoring performance, I feel sure,”
92 she concluded.

93 Crowther ran for a one-year seat on the board in 2022,
94 coming in fourth in a field of four with 46 votes. Repeated
95 attempts to contact him for this article proved unsuccessful.

96 **One-year Selectboard seats**

97 In the one-year Selectboard race, six candidates —
98 David Barrett, Dalila Hall, Charlie Jarras, Bonnie North, Larry
99 White, and Deborah Wright — are vying for two seats. North is
100 the only candidate currently serving on the board.

101 **David Barrett:** Barrett grew up in Bellows Falls, returning
102 to the area in 2007, following a career in the U.S. Air Force
103 (USAF) and in the Federal Aviation Administration. He was a
104 volunteer with the former Rockingham Volunteer Fire
105 Department. He is the treasurer and board member for Vermont
106 EMS District 11.

107 “I have managed a radio SATCOM [satellite
108 communication] office in the USAF,” he said, and was a shift
109 supervisor for the Columbus County Sheriff’s Office in Whiteville,
110 North Carolina.

111 While Barrett said he stands out as a candidate because
112 of “my honesty — most of the current board members have been
113 untruthful to me and other town residents,” he feels he can work

114 cooperatively with other board members. His main concern for
115 the town is “bringing the budget in line with the needs of the
116 town.”

117 He believes voters are most concerned about “fire
118 protection in the outlying areas of the town.”

119 **Dalila Hall:** Since joining Rockingham’s Planning
120 Commission in 2023 and serving as chair since 2025, Hall says
121 she has “focused on making local government work better for
122 everyone. With over 20 years in municipal planning, including
123 roles as zoning administrator for South Burlington and with the
124 New York City Department of Transportation, I specialize in
125 translating complex systems into accessible tools for the public.”

126 Hall said she applied this “user-first” approach locally by
127 focusing on the 2024 Town Plan and the 2025 Zoning Bylaw
128 updates.

129 “These aren’t just documents; they are actionable road
130 maps and simplified tools that empower residents and developers
131 alike to invest in Rockingham’s future,” she said.

132 Hall said that her background in municipal planning
133 gives her the “how-to” experience Rockingham needs, but said
134 her focus is on the “who.”

135 “I am running to bring a fresh perspective and greater
136 diversity to our leadership,” she said. “I believe in a government
137 that listens before it acts. As an advocate for all residents, I am
138 committed to making sure every viewpoint is heard and that our
139 municipal systems serve the entire community, not just those
140 already familiar with the process.”

141 When asked about her ability to work with others, Hall
142 wrote that she likes “to work together with people to craft
143 positive outcomes.”

144 “That said, I am never afraid to offer a differing opinion if
145 it leads to a better outcome for Rockingham,” Hall said.

146 Hall added that she believes that everyone needs to be
147 treated with respect and dignity. Even if during disagreements,
148 civility and respect are the best approaches to getting things

149 done, she said: “At the end of the day we all want the same thing,
150 a safe and prosperous community.”

151 Hall said that the biggest challenge facing Rockingham is
152 the interconnected squeeze on the residents and economy. High
153 housing costs and rising municipal-service expenses are putting a
154 strain on the families and small businesses that keep the village
155 vibrant.

156 “To address this, we need a culture of transparency and
157 active participation, so residents feel their voices shape our
158 priorities,” Hall said.

159 Central to this strategy? Hiring a new municipal manager,
160 she said.

161 “We need to find one who can balance these competing
162 financial interests while fostering a professional environment that
163 attracts and retains the talented staff necessary to keep
164 Rockingham a premier place to live and work,” Hall said.

165 Voters are deeply concerned about the affordability
166 crisis, she said.

167 “For many in Rockingham, the margin for error has
168 disappeared — one missed mortgage payment or an unexpected
169 medical bill can lead to financial disaster,” Hall said. “As livable-
170 wage jobs become harder to find, it is vital that town government
171 maintains a ‘top of mind’ awareness of this struggle in every
172 budgetary decision.”

173 She said she is committed to guiding the ongoing
174 economic development initiatives, such as the rehabilitation of
175 the train station, ensuring these projects aren’t just line items but
176 real engines for local jobs and long-term stability.

177 **Charlie Jarras:** Jarras has served as village president and
178 on the Bellows Falls Board of Trustees, among other positions.

179 “I have been on many boards in the 40-plus years I have
180 lived in Rockingham,” Jarras wrote. “I have seen what works and
181 what does not work for Rockingham.”

182 As far as cooperation with others, Jarras said that “being
183 able to work with board members is a must to get things done.”

184 He said he feels that bringing “new people to
185 Rockingham and getting the people of Rockingham involved,”
186 along with “housing for working people,” are the most important
187 issues for the town.

188 Among the issues he feels the community sees as
189 priorities are “taxes, the cost of housing, and the cost of schools
190 K-12.”

191 “There is nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer,”
192 Jarras added.

193 **Bonnie North: North brings years of experience in local**
194 **government to her candidacy for re-election to the Rockingham**
195 **Selectboard, where she has served for the past four years.**

196 Previously, she chaired the Rockingham Planning
197 Commission for three years. For eight years, she has also served
198 on the Windham Regional Commission, where she is vice chair
199 of the executive board and chair of the planning agency’s
200 Brownfields Committee.

201 “I am also a trustee of the Rockingham [Free Public]
202 Library and treasurer of the Bellows Falls Historical Society,” the
203 retired journalist and publisher wrote. “Prior to public service I
204 was treasurer of both the Walpole Artisans Cooperative and the
205 River Artisans Cooperative, president of Rockingham for Progress,
206 and president of Sandglass Theater in Putney.”

207 In looking at the slate of candidates, North said that she
208 was “sure all this year’s candidates have their own qualifications.”

209 “I do have more immediate experience in the position,
210 however, and a deep understanding of the issues currently on
211 hand,” she said. “I trust our voters to make the best choices.”

212 Regarding being able to work with other board members,
213 North said she understands “the importance of honest, informed,
214 well-articulated, and healthy debate in discussions, and
215 ultimately, trust in the democratic decisions of the board.”

216 North listed some of the big issues facing Rockingham:
217 flooding in the Industrial Park and other regions, the affordable
218 housing crisis, dealing with the dangerous condition of the

219 Saxtons River fire station, repairing/replacing the Depot Street
220 bridge and the Bridge Street bridge, reopening the Vilas Bridge,
221 completing the restoration of the historic Bellows Falls train
222 station, and completing the restoration of the historic
223 Rockingham Meeting House.

224 "I could go on," she wrote. "However, in the current
225 political climate I think the issue we need to keep foremost in
226 mind this year is controlling costs!

227 "Federal funds are evaporating, and although we'd all
228 love to see many important projects accomplished quickly, we
229 need to pay strict attention to our budget and go easy on our
230 taxpayers at this time," North said.

231 "I think most voters would agree that controlling costs is
232 paramount," she added.

233 **Larry White:** White is a longtime town highway
234 department employee, serving for several years as director of the
235 Rockingham Recycling Center. He was also a captain with the
236 former Rockingham Fire Department.

237 White had not responded to The Commons' questions by
238 press time.

239 **Deborah Wright:** Wright said that her municipal
240 experience is extensive: Bellows Falls Village Trustee Board, as
241 both president and trustee, the Rockingham Planning
242 Commission, as both planning chair and commissioner, along
243 with many appointments to committees and subcommittees,
244 since 2011.

245 "As a 20-plus year business owner in the utility-
246 construction industry in Rockingham, my business expertise
247 provides background in finance, attracting candidates,
248 negotiating, and road safety, unmatched by the other candidates,"
249 Wright said. "I do my homework and honor my oaths for my
250 community, in every instance."

251 Wright is also a Rockingham justice of the peace, a
252 member of Rockingham's Thermal Energy Network, an active

253 voting member of both VLCT's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
254 Committee, and the Vermont Opioid Settlement Committee.

255 "I listen to every citizen in Rockingham and its villages to
256 understand their concerns, allowing me to formulate clearly what
257 next steps are to provide a stronger, safer future for our residents,"
258 she said. "Above all else, my love for Rockingham and its
259 villages."

260 Wright added that she possesses more years of
261 experience than the other candidates, has a better understanding
262 of the challenges the town faces, and has the vision to find
263 solutions to these challenges, all while reducing the burden on
264 taxpayers by eliminating waste and redundancies.

265 "If your home needed improvements," she said, "would
266 you simply go to your bank and ask for more money? Or would
267 you first determine what frugalities and course corrections could
268 be made to achieve your goals and then create a path to
269 accomplishing them with the least resources needed?"

270 Wright said she feels her record shows she works well
271 with others.

272 She listed three main concerns for the future of the town:
273 property taxes, housing, and safety.

274 "The current board is out of touch with the entire
275 community, and listens only to a small siloed area of its
276 population," Wright said.

277 She described it as "self-aggrandizing to consider only
278 what the board wants, without consideration of the other taxes
279 impacting our residents — education, state, villages, etc. Also,
280 we cannot and must not build more housing for the unknown
281 while displacing our current neighbors."

282 Wright said that policing will continue to be a concern
283 to the outlying communities beyond the Bellows Falls Police
284 Department.

285 "And while I say this, many residents have expressed
286 their growing concerns about the area within BF as it pertains to
287 our homeless population, vandalism, and the lack of attention to

288 some basic community policing. I say this knowing many of them
289 are afraid to come forward but wish more could and should be
290 done.

291 "As to the new Rockingham Municipal Fire Departments,
292 there are certainly many concerns about how this will work going
293 forward, and complaints from rural Rockingham residents about
294 higher taxes to support this."

295 Their tax burden is what Wright said voters are most
296 concerned about.

297 "Safety in their community. What the future holds for
298 them. Many older taxpayers worry they may be priced out or
299 forced out of their beloved homes to accommodate newer
300 residents," she said.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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