

## Board signs letter of commitment

### Sewer project to move forward

By Eileen Kennedy  
*Staff writer*

**HARDWICK** – At their Monday meeting, the SelectBoard agreed to sign a letter of their intentions to meet the conditions for a loan from the USDA and the town regarding the plans to revamp the town’s sewer system.

At the town’s Annual Town Meeting on June 29 voters approved the project, with \$17.01 million coming from the USDA, and the town borrowing \$5.86 million to revamp the town’s two wastewater treatment plants and the sewer line between Eagle Hill School and Gilbertville. The town has racked up fines from the EPA and the state Department of Environmental Protection for a number of years because the plants have violated environmental standards, including allowing sewage into the Ware River.

Many of the conditions were boilerplate language, according to Town Administrator Theresa Cofske. SelectBoard members Kelly Allen and Julie Quink wanted more time to review it but Cofske said there would be no negotiating any of the conditions with the USDA.

Many of the conditions included items like a sewer betterment plan for sewer users, an engineering agreement that must be in place as well as plans and specifications.

Cofske said USDA officials are not looking to make the betterments financially onerous. Real estate owners and sewer users will split the ongoing costs of the system.

One of the issues of discussion was a \$1.8 million payment to Eagle Hill School, which provided engineering money a number of years ago for the creation of the line from the school to Gilbertville. The school was also allowed credits for its use of the sewer system.

At Monday’s meeting, P.J. McDonald, head of Eagle Hill School, asked the SelectBoard if discussions of the payment could be done in executive session as it could be considered negotiating. Allen said she did not believe the discussions should be held in executive session, and Cofske also said it should probably be done in open session. Cofske said the amount owed the school can be rolled into the loans for the project.

The debt to the school was originally set at \$2.45 million, but McDonald and SelectBoard Chairman Kenan Young negotiated it to \$1.8 million in past sessions.

Cofske agreed to ask town counsel if the talks could be held in executive session and the topic will be added to the SelectBoard meeting scheduled for Monday, July 20.

### Accounting

SelectBoard members also approved a contract with Melanson Heath Professional Municipal Accounting Services for \$52,000 for fiscal 2021.

The company has helped the town get its financial house in order, along with other town employees. Coske said it was much easier to close out fiscal 2020 due to their services and she expects to be very confident with the town’s numbers walking into next year’s Annual Town Meeting.

For the last few years the town has been working on its financial procedures, which have been lacking, and its finances, which were faltering.

### School House #6

Selectmen have been asked to put an article on the next Special Town Meeting warrant to allow the town to sell School House #6 on Petersham Road to an unnamed entity so it will be restored and redone.

### Paige Memorial Library

Paige Memorial Library would like to enter into a \$2,000 contract with Warbasse Associates for a architectural services for the library’s cupola restoration project. The funds would come from the library’s endowment fund, according to Quink who attended a recent Library Trustees meeting.

### Other business

The SelectBoard made the following appointments: Maureen Tobin to a two-year term on the Hardwick/New Braintree Cultural Council; Jed Geary to a three-year term on the Recycling Commission; Ryan Witkos to a one-year-term as both a federal census liaison and an ethics liaison as well as an indefinite term as public records access officer; Paula Roberts as the municipal hearing officer, non-criminal disposition clerk and the parking clerk; and Joyce Power, Marilyn Shorrock, Gail Ashes, Nancy Roberts, Wendy Bolognesi, Joann O’Connell, Nancy Lemoine and Frank Hanson as election poll workers.

