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SENTINEL

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FY '16 tax rates set

Belchertown sees slight increase

By Aimee M. Henderson
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BELCHERTOWN – The town has set its tax rate for Fiscal Year 2016. Residents will see a slight increase in their bills, with the new rate set at \$17.97 per thousand valuation, versus last year's \$17.89.

Director of Assessments Jay Whelihan appeared before the Belchertown Board of Selectmen during the annual tax classification hearing, and provided selectmen with information and relevant data regarding the allocation of the property tax levy among residential and business taxpayers.

Whelihan told board members, since 1980 each municipality has had the option to apply a single, uniform tax rate to all properties

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Granby rate to increase by 3%

By Walter Hamilton
Correspondent

GRANBY – A property tax rate of \$18.87 per \$1,000 valuation, up 3 percent from last fiscal year's 18.31 rate, was approved by the select board Monday and will be submitted to the state for final approval.

The Board of Assessors presented the new rate for Fiscal Year 2016, which began July 1, 2015 and ends June 30, 2016, during a public hearing. Bills reflecting the taxes owed by property owners will be mailed out on Jan. 1.

Assessors reported that the average value of a home in Granby is now \$222,097, an increase of \$910 over last fiscal year. The median value of a home is \$207,600, up \$500 from the last fiscal year. The median value means half of all homes are worth more than that amount, and half are worth less.

Therefore, the taxes on an average home valued

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Handmade, DOG APPROVED



This dog tail toy was handmade by BARC volunteers.

BARC Secretary Jennifer Christian-Wright, right, receives a load of handmade toys for dogs from Laura Morley, left, and her daughter Sara Morley.

BARC raising funds for four-legged friends

By Aimee M. Henderson
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BELCHERTOWN – Volunteers with Belchertown Animal Relief Committee have taken old t-shirts and weaved in a little love, resulting in new toys for their four-legged friends.

Jennifer Christian-Wright, secretary of BARC, said she and two others – Laura Morley and her daughter, Sara – have worked for more than 100 hours creating "dog tails" from old t-shirts as part of a fundraiser for the organization.

Christian-Wright said it all started when she asked her friend Laura to craft something for the first-ever BARC Bazaar. Though the craft was not an original idea, it has certainly taken on a life of its own.

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Ringling in the holiday season

The Salvation Army asks for bell ringers

By Aimee M. Henderson
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BELCHERTOWN – The familiar sound of bells ringing outside stores during the Red Kettle campaign is a sure signal to the start of the holiday season. Without volunteers however, the bells are silent and the donations cease.

Though still relatively new in Belchertown, the local Salvation Army branch offers all the same great services provided state and countrywide. The donations raised through the Red Kettle campaign stay within the community they are collected, ensuring that neighbors are indeed, helping neighbors.

Emily Mew, Western Massachusetts field representative for The Salvation Army, said the Belchertown branch of the organization has been in place now for a couple of years, made up solely by volunteers from Country Bank.

"It's growing, and is made up of a very dedicated group," said Mew.

Mew said Belchertown has historically not had an incredible need, though she believes part of that is the lack of knowledge of the services that are available through The Salvation Army.

"We provide direct assistance to people in an emergency need," said Mew.

Some of the services offered include help with food, clothing, furniture, utility bills, fuel assistance, prescriptions and transporta-



She said people who find themselves in a tough situation, need

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Auction delayed

By Aimee M. Henderson
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BELCHERTOWN – An auction slated for Wednesday for the property at 47 State St. has been delayed, confirmed state Rep. Tom Petrolati Monday.

Efforts to stall the auction by the town seemed to fall to a stalemate last week. However, following a meeting with staff from Gov. Charlie Baker's administration, Petrolati said the decision was made to postpone the auction.

"I made a call to the governor's office liaison, and made them aware of the situation. I gave them the history of the property and the investment

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BARC I from Page 1

"Laura went on Pinterest and found the dog tail toy idea," she said.

Collecting t-shirts wasn't difficult either. Christian-Wright said shirts were donated by family, friends, co-workers, BARC friends and members of Simply Spin. The t-shirts were then turned into "durable and vibrant dog tail toys."

"Without knowing the exact number of t-shirts we have received, I would guess approximately 200 t-shirts [were donated]," said Christian-Wright.

To date, Christian-Wright, Laura and Sara have made close to 300 dog tails from the recycled t-shirts, having started in March.

"They are a hot ticket item at all of our events," said Christian-Wright.

BARC supporters have purchased the toys for their dogs – and even cats, said Christian-Wright, adding that BARC receives 100 percent of the proceeds from the sales.

"T-shirts are donated and the toys are handmade for free," she said.

Christian-Wright said approximately 165 toys have been sold so far, resulting in about \$420 for BARC.

"Those who have shared feedback with us absolutely love the toys," she said.

BARC continues to accept t-shirt donations, however at this time they are at capacity for white shirts. The dog tail toys are constantly being made.

Anyone interested in donating t-shirts can contact BARC at BARCFriends@gmail.com to coordinate pickup. T-shirts can also be dropped off at the Belchertown Animal Control donation locker located outside of the building at 290 Jackson St.



Laura Morley and her daughter Sara work on handmade dog toys from old t-shirts.

The group is also happy to take t-shirt donations at its monthly BARC meeting held on the second Thursday of each month, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at Belchertown Town Hall.

"We could not feel more grateful for the support we have been given by our community," said Christian-Wright.

Community members can continue to support BARC by participating in their events, which can be found on their Facebook page – Belchertown Animal Relief Committee aka BARC.

BARC promotional items, such as t-shirts, sweatshirts, bumper stickers, buttons and dog tail toys, are available for purchase at the Belchertown Town Clerk's Office during regular business hours.

TAX RATE I from Page 1

or adopt different rates for residential and commercial properties.

According to Department of Revenue guidelines, the maximum percentage shift that the commercial, industrial and personal property class (CIP) can bear is 150 percent. Last year, selectmen chose not to shift any of the tax burden from the residential to the commercial classes. The same will be true this year.

The DOR computation for Belchertown shows the residential class making up 92.5 percent of the tax base, while the commercial class makes up 7.5 percent.

This year's levy limit includes an increase in new growth, up by \$76,541 from last year. The overall levy limit is \$24,227,554, an increase of \$926,349, but after including a debt exclusion of \$439,194 (what's remaining on the Belchertown High School bond), the maximum allowable levy is \$24,666,748.

Whelihan said, however, the town has chosen not to set the rate based on the maximum allowable levy, which would have been \$18 per thousand. Whelihan also shared that the bond for Swift River Elementary School has come off the books this year.

Based on averages, owners of a single family home in Belchertown valued at \$251,096 will pay \$4,512 in taxes annually; owners of a two-or-three family home valued at \$231,426 will pay \$4,158; owners of a condo valued at \$166,337 will pay \$2,989; owners of commercial property valued at \$456,820 will pay \$8,209; and owners of industrial property valued at \$191,861 will pay \$3,447.

The increase per year for a single-family home, on average, will be \$68.

Last year, on a list of 12 area communities, Belchertown had the seventh highest tax rate. In order, those communities included: Wilbraham, Pelham, Amherst, Ware, Palmer, Granby, Belchertown, Ludlow, South Hadley, Southwick, Northampton and Hadley. The highest rate – in Wilbraham – was set at \$21.60, and the lowest – in Hadley – was set at \$10.86. Whelihan did not have those rates yet for this year's comparison.

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